CALICO Software Review

Beginning and Continuing Korean

Jeong-Bae Son - The University of Southern Queensland

Product at a glance

Product type	Multimedia language learning software
Language	**Korean** **- Level: Beginning to intermediate** **- Activity: Readings, dialogues and exercises designed to develop reading, listening and speaking skills**
Media format	**2 CD-ROMs**
Computer platform	**Windows 95/98 or Windows NT 3.51/4.0**
Hardware requirements	**PC: 486 +** **RAM: 16MB (minimum)** **Hard disk space: 9MB** **CD-ROM (2x speed)** **SVGA or better; sound card; speaker; microphone (recommended)**
Price	**Individual copy: $69.95 US** **Site license: The distributor does not currently offer site licenses for the Critical Languages Series including this program.**

General Description

Beginning and continuing Korean (1999) is an interactive learning program developed as part of the University of Arizona Critical Languages Series CD-ROM courseware for less-commonly taught languages, including Brazilian-Portuguese (see, for the discussion of this language program, Silva, 1999), Cantonese, Kazakh, Mandarin-Chinese and Turkish. Like other Critical Language Series CD-ROMs, *MaxAuthor* [1], a multimedia authoring system for language instruction, was used in creating this program.

It consists of two CD-ROMs which contain twenty lessons for beginning and continuing learners of Korean comprised of 45 video clips of dialogues and readings by two native speakers, audio recordings, graphics, footnotes, and exercises. Topics of the lessons include: First words; Hello; An introduction; Today I'm busy; Our classroom; The weekend; Shopping practice; Shopping; My daily schedule; The Korean folk village; Food; Our family; Travel; The four seasons; Too much to drink; The rainy season; Touring visitors; Future thoughts; On the way to school; Life with the in-laws.

The program makes use of digitally recorded speech and highlights words and sentences that learners can click on to hear them spoken. Learners can hear the native language by clicking the left mouse button and the English translation by clicking the right mouse button where available. Learners with microphone-equipped computers can compare their pronunciation with the native speakers' pronunciation after recording their own voice into the computer. Each unit contains four main sections: instructions, video (monolog and dialog), text with audio, and exercises (Figure 1).

Figure 1 (Typical Unit Menu in the Program)

The developers claim that these two CD-ROMs are the equivalent of a beginning and continuing Korean textbook, workbook, audio and video. Manuals are located on the CDs and on-line help is provided throughout the lessons.

Evaluation
Technological Features
The speed of the program was generally good, though the loading of the main contents of the program seemed a little slow at start-up. The screens were designed in a simple and clear way, but it is a pity that all navigation menus were presented in words on the start-up screen of each unit (Figure 1). In terms of the effective use of user-friendly graphical interfaces, intuitive icons or buttons would be better than direct command language presented somewhat clumsy fonts.

The program also has a limitation in the presentation of Korean characters. It uses only one Korean font presented in the same size throughout the lessons. Although the reviewer understands the difficulty of using many different kinds of Korean fonts on the computer, which does not have a Korean operating system, it should be noted that Korean program developers need to solve the Korean font problems by exploiting the potential of current multimedia technology (Son, 1996).

As part of the software package, a text processor, which allows users to type in Korean characters on the screen, is provided and installed into the hard drive. This Korean word processing function is a very useful feature, though beginning learners might find difficult to use the Korean language keyboard at first.

The capability of the computer for presenting audio and visual materials has not been fully exploited in the program. The video screens are presented with only one control button for playing and stopping the video scenes. The level of audio quality is satisfactory, but the volume of the two native speakers is somewhat different in some cases. Also, sounds are not sufficiently provided in words, phrases or sentences in several pages (e.g., the pages of Verb Tenses and Relative Clauses in the Supplementary Materials section). In addition, the screens are not supported by attractive and meaningful colour and graphics. Photos presented in each unit show rather dated images of Korea and do not provide appropriate cultural information or visual cues for the context of each unit.

Each monologue is presented in a video clip, with a person facing into the camera, but somewhat awkwardly looking slightly to the left or right. The reviewer assumes that the speakers had to read the script of the text in front of the camera. Since the speakers seem not to speak directly to listeners, it may be difficult to pay attention to the speaker's facial expressions. In video clips for dialogues, similarly, each person appears on the same video window in order and faces into the camera, but looking slightly off the camera, as if addressing each other. The program author argues that learners will have a model of how learners can use Korean to communicate with others through the dialogues, but there seems no way to see authentic interactions between two speakers in contextualised situations. For example, it seems awkward to see an actor saying, "This person is David Smith." with no gesture to point out a person who is supposed to be on the screen.

Activities (Procedure)
For navigation through the activities available on the CDs, the program author recommends exploring the 'Text with Audio' page (Figure 2) first and then moving on to the exercises.

Figure 2 (Text with Audio)

The program has five types of instructional exercises: multiple choice, fill-in-the blank, audio flashcard, pronunciation, and listening dictation. Multiple choice exercises ask the meaning of a series of target words or phrases. In each exercise, a score is kept to let learners know how they are doing. Fill-in-the blank exercises, or cloze tests, ask learners to fill in the materials that have blanked out passages. Blanks can be multiple choice or direct type-in (from Unit 12). The learners' task in flashcard exercises is to browse through a deck of flash cards to try to think of the meaning of each word. When learners know the word well enough, the flash card can be discarded so the word will not appear again. Through pronunciation drills, learners are required to play the native voice and record their own voice. Then, the learners' voice and the native voice are played back. In dictation exercises, learners are asked to listen to a series of recorded sentences and then pick characters from a list of possible characters (Figure 3).

Figure 3 (Dictation Exercise)

A printing function is available on multiple choice, fill-in-the blank and dictation exercises screens as well as on each main text screen. Through this printing feature, learners can print out logs of their responses as well as transcriptions of the answers to the exercise questions.

While the exercises provide a range of activities, there are some problems relating to activity presentation, response handling and feedback. Due to the lack of contextual information, for example, learners might raise questions about other possible answers than those given in the fill-in the blank exercises. In addition, the multiple choice and dictation exercises give immediate feedback by showing short messages: "Correct!" for correct answers and "The correct answer is:" for incorrect answers. This sort of feedback to learner responses seems too simple to encourage interactive learning of the language. It needs to be more constructive and encouraging to let learners interact effectively with the program (cf. Curtin & Shinall, 1987; Hubbard, 1987).

Teacher Fit (Approach)
Although the program author emphasises "adaptive learning" in using the program, it seems difficult to adapt the fictional situations of the program to real-world contexts because the program is limited to providing conversational exchanges between two university teachers. The link between the conversations given in the program and conversational contexts in which learners would practise the conversations meaningfully is tenuous. The screens do not give sufficient conversational contexts or support for meaning. The use of talking heads in video clips would have lent itself to better visuals to support the language and provide meaning more directly. Without the provision of meaningful contextual information, the target language will not be sufficiently learned and able to be re-used in communication. In this regard, proponents of communicative language teaching underscore the importance of social context and encourage learners to participate in communicative events (Savignon, 1991).

Grammatical explanations follow a structural approach and are presented in footnotes (Figure 4). Other useful footnotes include review points and suggested practice lists. Also, English translations are provided for selected words and sentences in the form of speech. These footnotes and translations would be beneficial particularly to English-speaking adult learners.

Figure 4 (Text with Footnote)

In relation to accuracy, the reviewer found several errors in the program (see Table 1). For example, some answers to multiple choice questions are incorrect (e.g., Question 8 in Unit 1 and Question 6 in the Sino-Korean Numbers page of the Supplementary Materials section) and some words in the texts are misspelled (e.g., The first word of the text in Unit 20 and a Korean food name presented in the Korean Food page of the Supplementary Materials section). It is also a bit odd to see that punctuation marks are placed in the beginning of two new sentences in the Units 9 and 10 texts. In addition,

Korean sentences are not presented with appropriate spacing in the dictation and pronunciation exercises in all units.

Table 1 (Example Errors)

For some topics cultural information is provided in the form of text. While this information is useful to some extent, there is a need to provide learners with many more socio-cultural explanations accompanied by visuals that convey meaning. It would be helpful if cultural notes for teachers were available in each unit.

Learner Fit (Design)
The linguistic level of the program seems somewhat complicated. The reviewer notices that the inside title of the program is different from the title printed on the CD cover, and assumes that the original title of the program was changed at the final stage of the CD production because of the linguistic difficulty level of the actual program contents. In fact, many phrases (particularly after Unit 5) are long and complex for beginners and many vocabulary items are provided without relevant contextual information. As a result, it is unlikely that learners with low proficiency in Korean could find their way to use the difficult expressions presented in the monologues and dialogues of the units appropriately. It would be interesting to check high-frequency vocabulary and grammar items of Korean language textbooks being used for beginners and intermediate learners and see the degree to which such items are used in the program.

As the program author argues, there is flexibility in using the program to study Korean. Considering that learner-controlled learning is more effective than program-controlled learning (cf. Higgins, 1983; Stevens, 1984), the program gives learners choice of content, exercise type, sequence and learning pace. To accommodate individual learner differences and respond to learning strategies more effectively, however, more implicit and explicit guidance is required throughout the lessons. Instead of presenting exactly the same instructions at the beginning of each unit, a special introduction to each unit, reflecting the different objectives and main points and providing background information on the unit contents, would be more helpful for learners and give them greater control over their own learning.

Summary
It is good to see this kind of multimedia-assisted self-instructed program being developed for the learning of Korean. There is no doubt that the program would be useful for learners of Korean in some way. The reviewer, however, feels that more careful attention should have been paid to the pedagogical aspects of the program and the multimedia functions could have been more fully exploited. It is unfortunate that the program tends to limit learners to using the language on the screen with the main focus on presenting language rather than on allowing the learners to use it and engage in more creative language use. There is a further need to consider how the important communicative elements of language learning can be taken into account more effectively in the program. The reviewer wishes to see much more encouragement to the learners to use the language meaningfully and purposefully in various ways.

Scaled Rating (1 low - 5 high)
Implementation possibilities: 3.5
Pedagogical features: 3
Socio-Linguistic accuracy: 3
Use of computer capabilities: 3.5
Ease of use: 3.5
Over-all evaluation: 3.5
Value for money: 3.5

Notes
1. For more information see http://cali.arizona.edu/docs/wmaxa/

Producer Details
Developed by:
Author: David J. Silva
Software Design: University of Arizona Computer Aided Language Instruction Group

Produced by:
University of Arizona Critical Languages Program
1717 E. Speedway Blvd., Suite 3312
Tucson, Arizona 85721-0151, USA

Phone: (520) 626-9209
Fax: (520) 621-3386
WWW: http://clp.arizona.edu/cls/

Distributed by:
University of Arizona Press
1230 N. Park Ave., Suite 102
Tucson, AZ 85719

Phone: (800) 426-3797, (520) 626-4218 in Arizona and outside the US
Fax: (800) 426-3797
Email: orders@uapress.arizona.edu
WWW: http://www.uapress.arizona.edu/

ISBN: 1-929986-01-7

Reviewer Information
Jeong-Bae Son (Ph.D., Griffith University) is a lecturer in the Centre for Language Learning and Teaching, the University of Southern Queensland, Australia. He teaches post-graduate courses in applied linguistics and supervises M.A. and Ph.D. candidates in CALL.

Reviewer Contact
Centre for Language Learning and Teaching
The University of Southern Queensland
Toowoomba, QLD 4350, Australia

Phone: 61-7-4631-2235
Fax: 61-7-4631-2407
Email: sonjb@usq.edu.au
WWW: http://www.usq.edu.au/opacs/cllt/sonjb/

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