

## Korean in NSW: Is it sinking? or diving?

**Author/Contributor:**

Shin, Seong-Chul

**Publication details:**

The future of Korean language education in Australia: An ecological perspective  
pp. 24-30  
0733420214 (ISBN)

**Event details:**

Korean language education conference  
Sydney

**Publication Date:**

2002

**DOI:**

<https://doi.org/10.26190/unsworks/452>

**License:**

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/au/>

Link to license to see what you are allowed to do with this resource.

Downloaded from <http://hdl.handle.net/1959.4/39407> in <https://unsworks.unsw.edu.au> on 2022-12-08

## Korean in NSW: Is it sinking? or diving?

**Seong-Chul Shin**

*Korean Studies Program, School of Languages and Linguistics,  
University of New South Wales, Sydney, 2052. [s.shin@unsw.edu.au](mailto:s.shin@unsw.edu.au)*

This paper intends to examine the enrolment numbers in Korean in New South Wales (NSW) schools and universities to identify the long-term pattern and to make suggestions. The focus will be on the enrolment pattern in HSC<sup>1</sup> Korean, which will be compared with other key Asian languages (Chinese, Indonesian and Japanese)<sup>2</sup>. The tertiary enrolments will also be discussed, if only briefly, in connection with problems of Secondary enrolments.

Is Korean sinking or diving? By ‘sinking’ I mean a long-term fall. In this pattern, there is not much chance to rise again to the ‘surface’. By ‘diving’ I mean a temporary dip. In this pattern, there is a good chance to rise to former levels and perhaps rise even higher. This paper might give clues about where Korean stands as reflected in enrolment numbers and patterns.

### 1. Number of Matriculation Students in HSC: 4 Asian Languages (1994 – 2002)

See Table 1 below. If we look at the enrolment numbers of the four Asian languages for the past 9 years (1994-2002) since Korean was first chosen in the HSC examination, Japanese clearly topped the rank with an average 1,675 enrolments per year, followed by Chinese (730) and Indonesian (341). Only 161 students per year, which is about a tenth the Japanese enrolment number, chose Korean as their HSC language.

- Japanese: average 1,675; Chinese: average 730; Indonesian: average 341; Korean: average 161

Table 1. Number of HSC Students: 4 Asian Languages

	'94	'95	'96	'97	'98	'99	'00	'01	'02
Chinese	679	758	686	702	656	622	718	796	960
Indonesian	256	364	356	423	402	368	298	297	305
Japanese	1,982	1,929	1,746	1,734	1,654	1,603	1,402	1,525	1,505
<b>Korean</b>	156	147	171	174	190	215	159	121	118

(Source: [www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au](http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au))

### 2. Rates of Increase or Decrease: '94 vs '02

<sup>1</sup>Higher School Certificate, a term for NSW matriculation examination courses (Years 11-12)

<sup>2</sup>These are four Asian priority languages designated by the NSW government.

When we compare the enrolment number of the first year ('94) with that of the current year ('02), we can see that Chinese has increased by over 41% and Indonesian over 19%, while Japanese and Korean have decreased by 24% or more. Korean in this comparison has been the language with the biggest decrease rate, and if we consider this decrease along with the impressive increase in Chinese, the developmental gap is even wider.

- Chinese: 41.3% increase; Indonesian: 19.1% increase; Japanese: 24.0% decrease; Korean: 24.4% decrease

### 3. Highest Enrolments vs Current Enrolments

If we examine the year of the highest enrolment and the year of the lowest enrolment in each of the four languages, we can clearly see that only Chinese enjoys the highest enrolment at the present time, while the three other languages have been going through unpleasant times, with over 24% decrease in Japanese since 1994, over 29% decrease in Indonesian since 1997 and a massive 45% decrease in Korean since 1999. Again, Korean has been suffering from the most severe rate of decrease and currently has about one half the enrolments of 1999, which was the strongest year.

- Chinese: currently highest ('02); Japanese: 24.1% decrease ('94 vs '02); Indonesian: 29.4% decrease ('97 vs '02); Korean: 45.1% decrease ('99 vs '02)

### 4. Lowest Enrolments vs Current Enrolments

Let us now compare the lowest enrolment year with the current enrolment. This comparison also clearly shows that enrolment numbers in all three languages have increased since the lowest enrolment year for each language: Chinese has increased by over 54%, followed by Indonesian (19.1%) and Japanese (7.3). Unfortunately, this year records the lowest enrolment year for Korean.

- Chinese: 54.3% increase ('99 vs '02); Indonesian: 19.1% increase ('94 vs '02); Japanese: 7.3% increase ('00 vs '02); Korean: currently lowest ('02)

### 5. General Trend

Generally speaking, Chinese was fluctuating in enrolment for some years ('94 -'98), after which it has been substantially increasing. Indonesian increased for some years ('94-'97) then suffered a decrease, though now it seems to have stabilised. Japanese has been gradually decreasing ('94 - '00) and it is now stabilising. Korean was gradually increasing ('94 - '99), but it has been rapidly decreasing since 1999.

### 6. Number of Enrolments in HSC by Course: 4 Asian Languages (1994 – 2002)

Now, we are going to examine the enrolment numbers by Course in each of the four languages. For the purpose of this paper, the Courses are grouped into three:

Background, Beginners and Continuers<sup>3</sup>. See Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5 below. In Table 2, the great majority of students of Chinese come from Background Speakers, followed by relatively small number of Continuers. Those who chose Chinese at Beginner level were minimal. In Table 3, Continuers made up the larger number of Indonesian enrolments, followed by Background Speakers. The portion of Beginner students was small in Indonesian as well. Now, observe Japanese in Table 4. The great majority of students doing Japanese was non-background Continuers and Beginners. Japanese Background students were relatively minimal. However, if we look at Korean in Table 5, the pattern is exactly opposite to the Japanese pattern. Background Speakers formed the great majority of Korean enrolments in HSC. There were only a few non-background enrolments in Continuers and Beginners Courses. In fact, there was no enrolment in Beginners Korean over the past three years.

Table 2. Number of HSC Enrolments by Course: Chinese

	'94	'95	'96	'97	'98	'99	'00	'01	'02
B.Spkr 2U	287	352	246	220	225	171	172	714	831
B.Spkr 3U	361	344	376	410	374	368	491	NA	NA
Begnr 2U	10	24	32	25	8	8	0	11	7
Contnr 2U	4	20	19	26	25	48	21	56	87
Contnr 3U	17	18	13	21	24	27	34	15	35

Table 3. Number of HSC Enrolments by Course: Indonesian

	'94	'95	'96	'97	'98	'99	'00	'01	'02
B.Spkr 2U	NA	51	57	82	45	60	48	100	85
B.Spkr 3U	NA	39	40	40	26	14	11	NA	NA
Begnr 2U	90	123	105	119	135	113	72	47	48
Contnr 2U	89	83	102	119	147	132	136	115	144
Contnr 3U	77	68	52	63	49	49	31	35	28

Table 4. Number of HSC Enrolments by Course: Japanese

	'94	'95	'96	'97	'98	'99	'00	'01	'02
B.Spkr 2U	78	84	76	92	97	83	66	49	56
B.Spkr 3U	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Begnr 2U	904	842	586	489	451	409	333	326	333
Contnr 2U	702	725	770	842	807	779	724	918	871
Contnr 3U	298	278	314	311	299	332	279	232	245

Table 5. Number of HSC Enrolments by Course: Korean

	'94	'95	'96	'97	'98	'99	'00	'01	'02

<sup>3</sup> Background: Korean Background Speakers (often termed as "Heritage" students by American educators); Beginners: non-background beginner students; Continuers: those who have studied Korean at Junior level (Years 7-10) and continue at Senior (HSC) level.

B.Spkr 2U	88	77	67	38	27	28	22	114	105
B.Spkr 3U	68	63	97	134	149	183	128	NA	NA
Begnr 2U	0	7	7	2	14	4	NA	NA	NA
Contnr 2U	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	9	7	13

(Source: [www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au](http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au))

### 7. Enrolment Pattern (recent 3 years: '00 – '02)

To look at the recent trend, we now closely examine the enrolment pattern in the past three years (2000-02). We can see that the 3-year pattern clearly reflects the 9-year pattern mentioned above. More than 89% of Chinese enrolments were Chinese Background Speakers. Indonesian maintained relatively good balance between Continuers (54%), Background Speakers (27%) and Beginners (19%). More than 95% of Japanese total enrolments were non-background Continuers and Beginners, while about 93% of students enrolled in Korean were Korean Background Speakers. See the details below.

- Chinese: B Speakers (89.2%), Continuers (10.0%), Beginners (0.7%)
- Indonesian: Continuers (54.3%), B Speakers (27.1%), Beginners (18.6%)
- Japanese: Continuers (73.8%), Beginners (22.4%), B Speakers (3.9%)
- Korean: B Speakers (92.7%), Continuers (7.3%), Beginners (nil/NA)

### 8. Non-Background Speakers' Enrolments (9-year average)

To further ascertain the degree of interest by non-Background students in the four Asian languages, we now intend to analyse 9-year enrolments by the non-Background Speakers in each language<sup>4</sup>. Non-Background students doing Chinese averaged 73 (10%) per year, while 263 (77%) non-Background students per year were studying Indonesian. As shown above, the most popular language by non-Background Speakers was Japanese, with 1,600 (96%) enrolled per year. This massive non-Background enrolment is in sharp contrast to Korean, which averaged only 7 (4%) non-Background students per year.

- Chinese: 72.5 (9.9% of total enrolment); Indonesian: 263.4 (77.2%); Japanese: 1,599.8 (95.5%); Korean: 7.0 (4.3%)

### 9. Problems with Korean

The above figures clearly show that there are problems in enrolment pattern in Korean. Above all, I would like to point out three problems. First, there is a problem of fundamental low enrolments in Korean. The total enrolment in Korean is only a tenth of Japanese enrolments, a fifth of Chinese enrolments and half of Indonesian enrolments. Secondly, there is an extreme low intake in Continuers and Beginners Courses. The enrolment numbers in these Courses are so small that one might even doubt the ground or purpose of these Courses. Thirdly, there is an extreme

<sup>4</sup> For the purpose of this study, it is assumed that those who were enrolled in Continuers and Beginners Courses were non-Background Speakers. The Eligibility rules set out by the NSW Board of Studies also largely assumes this division.

imbalance between Background and Non-background Courses in Korean. The extreme concentration in the Background courses might have hindered Korean from stepping into ‘main stream’ language programs in NSW schools.

#### 10. Tertiary Enrolments in Korean (recent 3 years: '00 - '02)

Now we turn to tertiary enrolments. We will look at the enrolment numbers at two NSW universities offering Korean as a major sequence. See Table 6 below. At the University of Sydney, an average of 217 students per year have been enrolled in Korean in the past three years, and this figure includes 132 Background students, which is about 61% of the total enrolment. Students enrolled in Korean at the University of New South Wales have averaged 172 students per year, including 104 Background students (61%). The general trend is that the enrolment number at Sydney University steadily increased until the year 2000, after which it has decreased or stabilised, while the number slowly increased at UNSW, with some fluctuations until the year 2001, after which it dropped sharply. It is hard to tell at this stage whether this dip was temporary or part of the ‘pipeline’ effect from the Secondary programs.

Table 6. Tertiary Enrolments in Korean: USyd and UNSW

	'00	'01	'02	Average
USyd	226 (154)	Not available	208 (109)	217 (131.5)
UNSW	167 (116)	194 (111)	155 (86)	172 (104.3)
Total				194.5 (117.9)

#### 11. Problems with Low Enrolments in Tertiary Korean

I would like to present some points that I have found from my observation and analysis regarding tertiary enrolments. First, students stick to the language they have learned at school and tend not to choose other languages at university. It is hard to expect students who have done other languages at school, for instance, Japanese, to switch to Korean.

Secondly, non-background Beginner students tend to choose a language that is more familiar to them and that sounds more attractive among competing languages. If students choose to learn a second language for the first time at university, it is likely that their choice is based on what they heard and saw in the past (i.e. “familiar”) and the impressions they have (i.e. “sounds good”). Unfortunately, Korean was not powerful enough to match competing languages, particularly Japanese, in that regard.

Thirdly, Background students tend to choose languages other than Korean (e.g. Japanese). Background speaker students who have considerable or substantial proficiency in Korean wish to learn other languages, rather than to develop Korean in depth, so that they can add other languages to their CV.

Fourthly, it is often difficult for Background (especially Beginner Background) students to find courses that suit their needs due to a wide range of proficiency among Background learners and the imbalance of the individual learner’s language skills.

This is a challenge particularly for the two universities, which offer two different major streams (i.e. Non-Background and Background). Beginner Background students often find it difficult to enrol in a course to develop their unbalanced language skills (e.g. written vs spoken language skills) and often feel frustrated in competing in the same class with other Background students whose Korean is better.

## 12. What went wrong? And what should be done?

In conclusion, I would like to draw attention to broad but fundamental aspects regarding the source of problems and make suggestions, which I believe are important to ensure the survival and growth of Korean language programs in the coming ten years.

First, there is a lack of systematic long-term plans or policies to promote Korean language programs in schools, including the lack of Korean government policy. The Korean government needs to make provisions for a policy that addresses the issue of secondary Korean language programs in overseas school systems. With governmental support, the Korean language teaching community needs to conduct generic promotion activities targeting secondary and tertiary students (and decision makers, e.g. school principals).

Secondly, it is often pointed out that there was inadequate direction in introducing and delivering Korean to schools and that special funds (e.g. technology project) were ineffectively used, failing to bring satisfactory results in student enrolments. The NSW Department of Education and the Korean teaching community need to make strategic plans to increase the intake of Continuers at secondary level. There is a need to make a solid long-term plan (not a short-term bandage) to 'plant' Korean in Primary, Junior (Yrs 7-10) and/or Senior language programs, even in a few schools in Sydney and the surrounding suburbs. It is better not to "spread out" Korean in every corner of country NSW using fancy methods (e.g. technology) but to strategically select and concentrate on schools in the greater Sydney area by using a solid realistic plan (e.g. a model school).

Thirdly, there is a lack of plans for teacher education / training. It is important for both Korean and Australian government authorities to make a long-term, solid commitment to produce well-trained bilingual and/or non-background Australian teachers in a systematic way, e.g. tertiary major study plus in-country training with scholarships.

Lastly, there are needs for Background Speaker students at university, and it is necessary and desirable to make provisions for the tertiary Courses that suit the needs of Background Speaker students. Two suggestions might be offering language skill-based remedial class at the beginners level and content-based courses that require special or professional skills at advanced levels.