

Yi Geuk-ro's Position in the History of Korean Language Studies

Ko Yong-kun

Yi Geuk-ro studied economics at the University of Berlin during the Japanese colonial period, but nonetheless, after returning to Korea he developed the movement to protect the Korean language, which was suffering because of Japan's oppressive policies. On the one hand, Yi Geuk-ro was actively involved in numerous ways on the cultural nationalist front. On the other hand, Yi studied important subjects such as phonetic and grammatical phenomena in order to lend theoretical support to the 'national language movement'. After Liberation in 1945, Yi went to North Korea and continued to conduct linguistic studies and to participate in the 'cultured language' movement. His most remarkable academic achievement was made in the field of phonetics. In particular, his experimental phonetic studies on accent and intonation should be considered as a pioneering significance in both North and South Korea in his time. With respect to grammatical studies, his establishment of a 'pakkwum tho' (inversion particle), animation marker, and his work on particle combinations and relative tenses have exerted a lasting influence on North Korean grammar, and can also be connected with grammatical studies in South Korea. Deeper study and appreciation of Yi Geuk-ro's contributions to the 'national language movement' and Korean language studies can help integrate North- and South Korean 'national language studies' as well as cooperation in the 'national language movement' between North and South Korea.