

# **NORTH KOREAN ACADEMIC WRITING: ENGLISH LANGUAGE TRANSLATIONS OF THE JOURNAL OF KIM IL SUNG UNIVERSITY**

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This paper assesses the structure of publications in the Journal of Kim Il Sung University, an academic journal published by the leading university of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The particular writing style of this journal may be seen as setting the standard for North Korean academic writing given that effort was taken to translate several volumes of the journal into English, purportedly for the convenience of a foreign audience. The structure of the articles differs from that seen in mainstream English language academic publications. Evaluating the structure of the texts leads to the conclusion that the structure itself is a reflection of the priorities of the state and its approach to scientific research: a requirement that research publications justify state policy, rather than having as their primary motive a contribution to knowledge.

As part of the opening up of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea after 2011, North Korea increased its output of content accessible to the outside world. Indeed, the contemporary DPRK seems to pursue a very thorough agenda when it comes to communicating with international society and the global public. [1, p. 631] This is seen in the effort made to translate scholarly materials and make them publically accessible internationally online. The articles quoted in this paper come from translations from the English language version of the Journal of Kim Il Sung University found on the website of King Il Sung University.

A review of the tables of contents of the Journal of Kim Il Sung University shows a prioritization of articles about policies of North Korean leadership: articles directly commenting on policies of the state and its leader are placed first in the journal. Non-policy articles, which nonetheless, all have a connection of

some sort to the realization of set policies, follow. These can be classified as priority articles.

Volume 60, Number 1 begins with articles such as “Immortal Exploits of the Great Generalissimo Kim Il Sung in Developing the Non-Aligned Movement” and “Immortal Exploits of the Great Comrade Kim Jong Il Who Displayed the Vitality of the Juche Idea to the Full While Carrying Out the Cause of Building a Prosperous Society” and contains six such priority articles out of a total of 26. Just as the table of contents is structured to reflect leading position of the North Korean leadership, so do the articles themselves. The structure of each article, with few exceptions, begins with a statement by a North Korean leader.

For example, Kim Jun Su’s philosophical exploration entitled “Role of Intellectuals in Understanding and Transformation of the World” begins with the following statement: It is the creative activities of intellectuals that give a scientific account of the law of the development of nature and society, as well as the means and ways of transforming the world. The role of intellectuals in the cognition and transformation of the world cannot be played by any other social classes or strata. (“KIM JONG IL SELECTED WORKS” Vol. 10 P. 185.) [2, p. 32].

Kim Jun Su then proceeds to connect the quote to his own words: As said, the role intellectuals play in cognizing and transforming the world finds expression in giving a scientific explanation of the essence of things and phenomena and the laws of their movements and the ways and means to reshape the world [2, p. 32].

Not all authors are so astute, however, and sometimes this leading quote fails to logically connect with the text that follows.

In articles on social policy, economics, history, linguistics, even English, no specific citation format is used. No page numbers are generally used, with the notable exception of the leading quote from the North Korean leader, which is almost always cited with a page number. For other authors, not so. Nor is text from cited materials quoted. For example, an article entitled “The Understanding

of the classification of part of English Sentences” by Ri Jong Suk, contains an in-line reference to Chomsky and to Nida’s “Theory of Semantic Analysis” as follows: The theory of semantic component classification was basically formulated in Nida’s “Theories of Semantic Analysis” in 1973 after its earlier presentation in generative semantics helped by the first standard theory and analytic semantics started by Chomsky’s early standard theory. [3, p. 114]

Although articles in the Journal of Kim Il Sung University may contain scholarly, scientific content, with logical explanations of research, the conclusion are most often bold statements which read like policy recommendation, rather than research outcomes: “We should study the theory of classification of the parts of sentence more profoundly to contribute to the English education such as understanding and translation of the English sentences in theoretical and practical way” concludes Suk.

Couched in such language, the research itself may be seen as secondary: it is merely supportive of the statements of a leader. Each element serves to justify the correctness of the initial quote, and the conclusion shines light on the path that is to be taken in the implementation of the intent of the leader.

North Korean science, as illustrated in the structure of the journal articles, therefore serves primarily as a mechanism to justify policy, rather than having as its primary motive a contribution to knowledge itself.

### **References**

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