

# Differences in The Meanings of The Terms 표준어, 방언 and 사투리

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**Abstract:** This research aims to explain the distinctions between the Korean linguistic terms 표준어 (standard language), 방언 (dialect), and 사투리 (regional dialectal speech). Many people are not clearly aware of the differences among these three concepts. Therefore, I will attempt to present a scientifically grounded analysis.

**Keywords:** Standard language, dialect, regional speech.

**Introduction:** This study particularly focuses on the misconceptions held by Uzbek students regarding the terms 방언, 사투리, 표준어.

방언 refers to a regional or social language variety used by people living in a specific area. It is a structured form of language that constitutes a variant within a larger linguistic system. Each dialect possesses its own distinctive linguistic system and is used by a particular region or social group. The term 방언 should be understood more broadly, encompassing a wider meaning as a general concept for dialects. Moreover, it is a more formal term, often employed in academic contexts. According to the 우리말샘 dictionary, 방언 is defined as:

1. "A speech system that differs within the same language depending on region or social class";
2. "Words or speech used only in specific regions that are not part of the standard language".

표준어, as previously discussed, is the standardized form of a language established to reduce communication difficulties. In Korea, the standard language is based on the Seoul dialect, which represents the current form of the standard language. From a social class perspective, it is the language used

by the so-called "cultural class." It serves as the linguistic norm in literary and official contexts. As summarized earlier, the standard language, though functionally distinct, technically belongs to the category of dialects. Thus, in a broader linguistic sense, even standard language is a form of dialect.

사투리 refers not to the standard literary language, but specifically to regional dialects. When the spoken language used is not standard, but regional, the term 사투리 is more appropriate. Among the trio of 방언, 사투리, and 지역어 (regional language), 사투리 is the most commonly used term referring to a non-standard, regionally spoken variety.

There are various phonetic variations of this word—사투리, 사토리, 싸투리, 사트리—depending on region, but 사투리 is the most widely accepted and earliest documented form. Historical records support this, showing that the term 사투리 first appeared in written texts in the late 19th century. For instance, the earliest appearance is found in the 1895 publication 국한회어. That text also includes the variant 사토리. Based on such historical evidence, it is reasonable to conclude that the term 사투리 has been in use since the late 19th century.

## The Difference Between the Standard Language and Dialect

According to the book Korean Dialectology, the relationship between standard language and dialect can be summarized in ten key points:

1. The standard language is an artificial construct developed to prevent linguistic fragmentation and promote national unity, while dialects are naturally and freely distributed among the populace.
2. Standard languages are governed by systematic regulations, rules, and official documents, whereas dialects lack such formal structuring.
3. The standard language tends to be stable and fixed, while dialects are not always consistent or stable.
4. The standard language is widely used across regions and social classes within a linguistic community. In contrast, dialects are limited to specific regions or social groups.
5. The standard language is a product of governmental linguistic policy, whereas dialects are more organic expressions of the people's local feelings and emotions. While dialects may lack the precision and complexity of standard language, they are distinct in their emotional richness and sense of community connection.
6. The standard language usually originates from the language spoken in the political, economic, social, and cultural center of a nation. In the case of Korea, the standard language is based on the dialect of Seoul, the political and social capital.
7. The standard language has specifically established rules for both written and spoken forms. Dialects, on the other hand, do not follow set rules and are rarely used in written form in broader society.
8. Standard languages possess greater communicative power than dialects due to their broader social and geographical reach.
9. For speakers who use their regional dialects, those dialects reflect the emotions and cultural identity of their specific region. However, the standard language is characterized by its formal and regulated nature, setting it apart from dialects in this regard.
10. The standard language is an artificially developed linguistic form subject to orthographic rules. In contrast, dialects have evolved naturally, shaped by local customs and traditions, and represent a more organic form of language.

**Distinction Between 방언 and 사투리. Many people struggle to distinguish between these two terms. Let us explore the differences:**

1. 방언 is the older term historically. The term 사투리

began appearing in written records from the late 19th century and, by the 1930s, was being used in contrast to the standard language. In early 20th-century newspaper articles, both terms were often presented with negative connotations, implying they were linguistic forms that needed to be eradicated. Over time, however, more positive views began to emerge.

2. In terms of contextual usage, 방언 is primarily used in academic settings, while 사투리 is more commonly found in everyday, casual contexts. A study by Ahn Juhyun and Ahn Mi-ae (2021) analyzing articles from 2004 to 2021 found that titles using 방언 often included personal or place names and nouns, reflecting a more formal and structured context (e.g. Gyeongsang 방언, Seobuk 방언, Jeju 방언). In contrast, 사투리 appeared more often in headlines using verbs and full sentences, expressing natural and lively everyday speech. Examples include:

- “니 내 좋아하나?... 영화 ‘기적’ 당돌한 첫사랑 윤아 저 같대요” (Dong-A Ilbo, Sept. 15, 2021)
- “영파이다? 쉬도 몬하고? 1000만 원 걸었다 경북 사투리 시험” (JoongAng Ilbo, Sept. 21, 2021).

These examples show that 방언 tends to appear in nominal or descriptive sentence structures, while 사투리 reflects colloquial, verb-centered expressions typical of casual speech.

3. 방언 is frequently used in academic publications and scholarly discourse, whereas 사투리 is widely used in news media, daily conversation, and on the internet. According to a study by Ahn Juhyun and Ahn Mi-ae analyzing newspaper articles published from 1920 to 1999, the term 사투리 appeared a total of 4,612 times. Of these, 2,121 instances were in contexts related to everyday life, culture, or literature (e.g. 사투리 competitions, 사투리 performances, references to public figures). In contrast, it was used only 22 times in the fields of IT and science, showing its limited presence in technical domains.

4. 방언 is a broad concept that can also include the standard language (표준어) as a form of official dialect. 사투리, however, specifically refers to local dialects that are not part of the standard language. Linguist Ma Hakbong, in his study “A Study on Effective Rhythm Acquisition for Performing in Dialects”, clarifies: “Since the language examined in this research is not the

standard language but a local dialect, it is more accurate to refer to it as 사투리” .

5. In English, 방언 is most often translated as “dialect.” 사투리, on the other hand, is typically translated as “vernacular”. The term vernacular denotes the everyday language spoken in a specific region, especially as distinguished from a refined or literary language . The Oxford English Dictionary defines vernacular as “the language or dialect spoken by the ordinary people in a particular country or region,” which corresponds closely with the Korean concept of 사투리.

6. Some sources treat bang-eon and 사투리 as synonyms, although their usage, context, and connotation differ significantly.

This study has explored the nuanced differences between the terms 표준어 (standard language), 방언 (dialect), and 사투리 (vernacular) within the context of the Korean language. While 방언 and 사투리 are often used interchangeably, they differ in historical origin, usage context, and connotation. Bang-eon is primarily employed in academic and formal discourse, encompassing both standard and regional forms of the language, whereas 사투리 refers specifically to non-standard, regionally spoken varieties and is widely used in everyday, informal contexts. The standard language (표준어), by contrast, serves as a regulated, codified linguistic system developed for national communication and unity. Understanding these distinctions is crucial, especially for learners and researchers of Korean, to avoid misinterpretations and to appreciate the sociolinguistic richness embedded in the language’s regional varieties.

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