

The Australian curriculum and the Korean language syllabus in Victoria and Western Australia

Nicola Frascini (University of Melbourne)
Hyun Mi Kim (University of Melbourne)

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1. Introduction

It is safe to affirm that the popularity of the Korean language is a global reality (Frascini & Kiaer, 2025). However, what is often in the spotlight in most academic outlets is the student growth at the tertiary level, accompanied by research focused on adult learners. In this context, the learning of the Korean language at the primary and secondary levels deserves much more attention because of the multiple advantages that language learning brings to individuals and multicultural/multilingual societies. From a bottom-up perspective, early language learning provides numerous cognitive and developmental benefits to children (Kiaer, 2025), and in these current times it can take advantage of the Korean Wave attracting the interest of large cohorts of young learners. From a top-down perspective, during the past few decades South Korea became one of the top trading partners for several countries, and therefore supporting Korean language education may turn into an investment in the national interest.

Despite the global growth of Korean language learners and the importance attached to learning Korean in many national contexts, only a few countries have engaged with the development of a Korean language curriculum or syllabus aimed at students at the primary or secondary levels. While some countries have introduced

curricula developed in South Korea, or have developed their own with the support of experts and funding from South Korea, Australia represents an almost unique case since Korean language syllabi have been developed and introduced independently in three different states and one territory, and the development has happened entirely locally, i.e., without any funding, expertise, or other form of support from Korean institutions. This paper examines the Korean language syllabus developed and introduced in two states, Victoria and Western Australia. However, to this end, the following important aspects need to be considered first.

Firstly, as Hajek and Rubino (2024) have recently demonstrated, the uptake of languages in Australia in primary and secondary schools is heavily influenced by different language education policies introduced at the state level. This consideration is important because it indicates the need to consider how Korean is taught in different states to observe more subtle nuances and avoid the risk of a partial understanding. Secondly, Korean language education in Australia cannot be seen in a vacuum. For example, in the state of Victoria, the VSL (Victorian School of Languages)¹⁾ offer courses in 54 languages, while the VCE (Victorian Certificate of Education)²⁾ assess competence in 35 languages, including Aboriginal languages and Australian Sign Language. Consequently, a meaningful consideration of the Korean syllabi developed in Australia must be seen in the broader context surrounding the Australian curriculum and the curriculum of single states.

The following sections will first provide an overview of the language education context in Australia before examining the Korean language syllabus developed and introduced in Victoria and in Western Australia.

2. Language and language education policies in Australia

2.1. The context of languages education

The only national language policy existing in Australia and drafted by Joseph Lo Bianco in 1987 (Lo Bianco, 1987) identified three protagonists of the languages ecosystem: English, Aboriginal languages, and community languages. The relationship among these three protagonists is complex and dynamic. English is the colonial language, the language most widely spoken in the society, and the language that first

1) The VSL is a multi-campus state government school that offers language courses to students who would not be otherwise able to learn those languages at their school. For some languages, the VSL also offer distance education for students in regional Victoria.

2) The VCE is the examination students in Victoria take at the end of their secondary studies. The results of the VCE contribute to the student's ATAR score, which is used for university entrance purposes,

was imposed upon Aboriginal people. Aboriginal languages, meanwhile, have been in many cases unfortunately lost, in a few cases successfully revitalized, and in some cases survive in the form of pidgins and creoles (Lo Bianco & Slaughter, 2017). Community languages, which started getting prominence with the high influx of migrants after WWII, shifted in terms of speakers from the European languages of the 1960s-1980s to the Asian languages of the past few decades (Lo Bianco & Aliani, 2013).

This complex tapestry, against which Korean language education in Australia must be considered, has several educational repercussions. The National Policy on Languages (Lo Bianco, 1987) already advocated not just for English for all but also for an additional language for all Australians, while the 2024 report prepared by the Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations (AFMLTA) (Scrimgeour et al., 2024a) called for the learning of at least two additional languages beyond the language spoken at home. These suggestions would resonate in an ideal language education policy, still missing at the national level. Such a policy, according to Lo Bianco and Slaughter (2017), should aim at guaranteeing access to English, guaranteeing the maintenance of one's background language, and providing opportunities for additional language learning. Because of the complex language learning ecology and the national multilingual and multicultural landscape, Lo Bianco (2022) suggested a new conceptualization of "literacy", a non-English based one, a conceptualization that suits the Australian context by encompassing multi/plurilingual, language revitalizing, and indigenous perspectives.

Unfortunately, as Hajek and Rubino (2024) remarked, from a linguistic point of view Australia represents a paradox: a country where 24.8% of the families speak a language other than English at home (ABS, 2021), but where only a minority of the population learn an additional language in schools. In many cases, there have been more or less appropriate references to a language learning crisis (for details see Kinder et al., 2024), but the harsh reality is that currently less than 9% of students have studied a language in the last years of their secondary education (Hajek & Rubino, 1994).

Much has been attempted to try to reverse the negative trend and foster languages, particularly Asian languages. An example is the 2008 *Melbourne Declaration of Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008), an important document to frame the context surrounding languages teaching in Australia. Through this declaration, the education ministers of all states and territories, together with the federal minister for education, indicated languages as one of the eight learning areas³⁾ to be featured in the Australian curriculum. Additionally, the declaration individuated three cross-curriculum priorities⁴⁾, among which one is Asia and Australia's engagement with

3) English, Mathematics, Sciences, Health and Physical Education, HASS, Arts, Technologies, Languages.

Asia.

All eight learning areas and three cross-curriculum priorities are included in the Australian Curriculum compiled by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) (ACARA, n.d.). However, each state's curriculum, although still reflecting the eight learning areas and the three cross-curricular priorities, is an independent and often different implementation of the ACARA guidelines. At this point, it is important to note that Australian education is mostly the responsibility of single states and territories, i.e. each is responsible for formulating and implementing its own policies and curricula (Hajek & Rubino, 2024). With regard to languages, it is the responsibility of the department of education of each state to decide how many and which languages to teach, whether to make languages compulsory or not, and whether to develop and introduce a syllabus for a specific language.

Even if the ACARA Curriculum guarantees some consistency despite the lack of a national language education policy (Kholer, 2017), considerable discrepancies in policy and curriculum exist across states. Hajek and Rubino (2024) confirmed diverges regarding the number of language learners, the number of languages offered, and the attrition rate, concluding that access to language education depends first and foremost on the language policy implemented in each single state.

Paraphrasing Lo Bianco (2024), learners of Korean can be represented by a wide spectrum of motivation and proficiency levels, from learners in their teens migrating from Korea to Australia with their families, to non-background Australia-born students attracted by the latest K-culture trend. Lo Bianco (2024) pointed out that whatever lies within the two ends of the spectrum can be defined by a range of sociocultural settings of communication, and it is how policymakers understand and classify these different sociocultural settings of communication that influences the structure of the local policy and of the language curriculum.

2.2. Asian language learning

The Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia cross-curriculum priority is a manifestation of what Lo Bianco and Slaughter (2017) labelled the 'Australia Asia Project', a term they use to indicate the shared commitment across political parties, major institutions, the general public, education and economic sectors to use mainstream education to improve communication with Asia, in the national interest. Since before the 1980s, Australia has produced an astonishing amount of plans, policies, declarations, reports, white papers, etc., about the importance of teaching Asian languages. Some of

4) Aboriginal histories and cultures, Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia, Sustainability.

the most relevant initiatives, also of interest for Korean language teaching, are the National Asian Languages and Studies in Australia Strategy (NALSAS), the National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program (NALSSP), and the New Colombo Plan (NCP). If the NCP, launched in 2014 and still active, is aimed at tertiary level students, the NALSAS (launched in 1995 and terminated in 2002, with a total investment of almost AUD 400M) and the NALSPP (launched in 2008 and concluded in 2012, with a total investment of about AUD 62M) were specifically aimed at fostering Asian languages in Australian schools. However, as Lo Bianco and Aliani (2013) remarked, these initiatives have often been driven mainly by political and economic interests. For example, the Rudd Report (COAG, 1994), a document that paved the way for the introduction of NALSAS (Henderson, 2007), defines its scope as follows.

The report has been prepared in the context of a concerted national policy effort over recent years involving all levels of government aimed at the internationalisation of the Australian economy. [...] Australia requires an export culture which is “Asia literate”, i.e. one which possess the range of linguistic and culture competencies required by Australians to operate effectively at different levels in their various dealings with the region – as individuals, organisations and as a nation. (COAG, 1994, pp. ii)

The report, following an analysis of Australia’s export markets, also recommended:

That the four priority Asian languages for future expansion through the Australian school system be Japanese, Chinese (Mandarin), Indonesian and Korean. (COAG, 1994, pp. v)

Similar political and economic reasons are also behind the substitution of Korean with Hindi among the four priority Asian languages in the 2012 Australia in the Asia Century White Paper (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012). The Rudd Report established very ambitious quantitative targets, for example, a target of 25% of Year 12 students studying a second language by 2006, a target of 15% of Year 12 students studying a priority Asian language, and a target of 60% of Year 10 students studying one of the priority Asian languages.

None of the above targets was met. Moreover, if we consider the commercial

and economic importance attached to the Korean language, along with its current status within Australian education, it is clear that it failed to capitalize on the investment provided by the Australian government in 1994 (NALSAS) and in 2008 (NALSP). Reasons for this failure can be found in the specific circumstances of those years (for details see Fraschini, Elfving-Hwang, & Tao, 2024), and also in the wider context of Australian languages education. Within the Australian context, there are at least two reasons. Lo Bianco and Slaughter (2017, p. 304) observed that “the uptake of Asian language study could indeed be construed as a failure, if measured by the overreaching targets of Asia-specific language policy documents”, indicating as one of the main issues the overly ambitious goals set by the policies/initiatives themselves. Additionally, they also remarked that “the Australian model of Asian language promotion can be described as consisting of externally established targets, imposed timelines and discretionary funding accompanied by a strong top-down rhetoric of ‘national survival’” (Lo Bianco & Slaughter, 2017, p. 311), therefore criticizing the lack of consideration of the perspective of students and communities. In other words, the policies, driven by economic interests, so far have failed to recognize the importance of language learning for the individual.

A further challenge is the high level of authority that states and territories have with regard to education. In Australia, there are six states, two territories and about 27 educational jurisdictions with different levels of autonomy because each state has government, private, and catholic schools (Lo Bianco & Slaughter, 2017). The ACARA national curriculum offers a guideline to the departments of education of each state to draft their own curriculum, but each state is free to decide how much to adhere to it. Moreover, the ACARA curriculum does not cover Year 11 and 12 because the university entrance examination is a different exam prepared independently by each state curriculum and assessment authority. For this reason, different states have independently developed and introduced their own Korean language syllabus integrated in the state curriculum. A Korean language syllabus, beyond the national ACARA one, has been developed in New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia.

The next section will closely examine the Victorian and Western Australian Korean language syllabi. There are multiple reasons for focusing on the syllabi of these two states. As already mentioned in Fraschini (2024), these two syllabi well represent the traditional focus of Korean language education aimed mostly at heritage learners (the Victorian syllabus) and the new focus of Korean language education aimed at non-heritage learners (the Western Australian syllabus). Both syllabi have two streams that try to cater for learners from different backgrounds. These characteristics reflect the structure of other language syllabi developed in the same states, but at the same time are also symbolically representative of the temporal shift in focus undergone by the Korean language in Australia, with the Victorian syllabus having been in place for more

than a decade, and the Western Australian syllabus having been introduced more recently.

3. The Korean language syllabi within the Australian curriculum

3.1. Languages education in Victoria and Western Australia

In both Victoria and Western Australia, languages are among the eight curricular learning areas, and in both states the curriculum individuates a strong rationale for languages education. In Victoria, the state curriculum recognizes that:

Language learning provides students with opportunities to engage with the linguistic and cultural diversity of the world and its peoples. It prompts students to reflect on their experience in various aspects of social life, including their own participation and ways of being in the world. Learning one or more languages broadens students' horizons in relation to their personal, social and cultural worlds. It can expand opportunities for employment in an increasingly interconnected world. (VCAA, n.d.)

In Western Australia, the curriculum presents a similar rationale:

Language learning broadens students' horizons to include the personal, social, and employment opportunities that an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world presents. [...] It has also brought the realisation that, despite its status as a world language, a capability only in English is not sufficient, and a bilingual or plurilingual capability is the norm in most parts of the world. (SCSA, n.d.)

Despite similar rationale and aims, the two states introduced quite different language policies. Victoria is characterized by the strongest language policy in the country (Hajek & Rubino, 2024), which mandates that “schools must provide a language program for students from Foundation to Year 10” (Department of Education of Victoria, 2024). Data provided by Hajek and Rubino (2024) show that such an approach has positive repercussions also after Year 10 since 18% of Victorian high school leavers have learned a foreign language at any point in their upper secondary school years, the

highest percentage of any state in Australia. The Victorian policy also clarifies further aspects of the delivery of language programs, such as the class time, which is recommended to be a minimum of 150 minutes/week for secondary schools. In reality, the 2024 AMFLTA report (Scrimgeour et al., 2024b) found that most schools in Victoria offer about 120 minutes/week, not as much as recommended but still more than what is offered on average in other states.

In Western Australia the language education policy is not as strong as in Victoria, and it mandates languages education only from Year 3 to Year 8 (SCSA, n.d.). Furthermore, if 35 languages are assessed through the VCE, as previously noted, only nine languages are assessed through the WACE (Western Australian Certificate of Education), the corresponding examination in Western Australia. Among these nine, Korean, Hindi, and Tamil have been added in 2023. Further eighth languages are offered at the primary level through the ACARA syllabus, and examination papers for the Year 12 WACE of these languages are borrowed from interstate, i.e. from other states where the exam for that language is developed. The weaker Western Australian policy, compared to Victoria, means that enrolment in languages abruptly drops after Year 8 and that most language education at the primary level is limited to 60 minutes/week, which increases to about 1.5 hours/week from Year 7 (Scrimgeour et al., 2024b). The negative effect of such a limited language provision means that only a minority of students in Western Australia continue to study a language through to Year 12 or elect a language among their WACE subjects.

3.2. The Korean language syllabus in Victoria and in Western Australia

Victoria and Western Australia independently developed and introduced their Korean language syllabus. If Korean was introduced in Victoria in the 1990s, its introduction in Western Australia is much more recent, with Korean language courses starting in schools in the mid-2010s and the syllabus eventually introduced in 2023.

As already pointed out, all language syllabi of the same state follow a similar structure. In Victoria, at the upper secondary level, Korean is one of the five languages (together with Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese, and Vietnamese) to be offered through two streams, Korean First language and Korean Second language. In Western Australia, all nine languages are offered through two streams, called Korean Background Language and Korean Second Language. However, the criteria for assigning a student to a stream and, therefore, deciding which exam a student will have to take at the end of Year 12 are different in the two states.

In Western Australia, the criteria are educational background, time spent in the country, and use of the language outside of the classroom. In other words, only

students who have less than one year of schooling in Korea, less than two years of residency in Korea, and do not speak Korean outside of the classroom are admitted to the Korean Second Language stream (SCSA, n.d.). By contrast, in Victoria, the only criterion is to “have had no more than seven years of education in a school where Korean is the medium of instruction” (VCAA, n.d.). As noted in Frascini (2024), applying different criteria has important repercussions on the student population. In Western Australia, heritage students with no schooling experience in Korea may be placed in the same stream as other heritage students who have completed their primary schooling in Korea. Almost the opposite happens in Victoria, where non-heritage students may be assigned to the Korean Second Language stream together with heritage students who have completed all their primary schooling in Korea. If the Western Australian structure is a disadvantage for heritage learners, the Victorian curriculum is a disadvantage for non-heritage learners.

3.3. The content of the Korean Second Language syllabus in Victoria and in Western Australia

This section will provide a snapshot of the main features of the Korean language syllabus developed in Victoria and in Australia. Since a detailed analysis of the content of both syllabi from Year 1 to Year 12 is outside of the scope of this presentation, the discussion below is limited, for illustrational purposes, to the Victorian Year 12 Korean Second Language syllabus (VCAA, 2018) and the Western Australian Year 12 Korean Second Language syllabus (SCSA, 2023).

Rationale

Both the Victorian and Western Australian syllabus documents are opened with a rationale of the benefits of learning Korean at the secondary level. The Victorian syllabus states that:

The study of Korean contributes to student personal development in a range of areas including communication skills, intercultural understanding, cognitive development, literacy and general knowledge. Learning and using an additional language encourages students to examine the influences on their perspectives and society, and to consider issues important for effective personal, social and international communication. [...] The study of Korean develops the student’s ability to understand and use a language which is widely learned internationally. [...] In Australia, Korean is spoken by more than 120,000 people, and the

presence of the Korean culture and language is increasingly evident in various sectors of society. (VCAA, 2018, p. 5)

The Western Australian syllabus also presents a similar rationale:

Students who study Korean in the senior secondary years build on a diverse range of language and intercultural knowledge, understanding and skills gained through previous experiences at school and in the community. The study of Korean enables students to engage with a language spoken by around eighty million people in the Korean Peninsula and worldwide. [...] In Australia, Korean is spoken by more than 120,000 people, and the presence of Korean culture and language is increasingly evident in various sectors of society. Many opportunities exist to hear and use the language in real-life situations as well as through Korean media in Australia and actual and virtual connections with Korean communities in the rest of the world. (SCSA, 2023, p. 1)

Both documents stress that learning a language, such as Korean, brings benefits to the individual, from increased intercultural and communication competencies to cognitive benefits. However, what is remarkable is that Korean is not presented as a *foreign* language. Instead, the rationale for learning Korean is that the language is used within Australia, within Korean communities, and through Australian media in the Korean language.

What make the Western Australian syllabus stand apart is the clear indication of the student target of the syllabus itself: “The Korean: Second Language ATAR course is designed for students for whom Korean is a second, or subsequent, language. These students have not been exposed to, or interacted in, the language outside of the language classroom” (SCSA, 2023, p. 1). This is a considerable difference from the Victoria syllabus, which is targeted, as seen above, to any students who have received less than seven years of instruction in the Korean language, whoever such a target is only specified in the policy, but not in the syllabus document.

Aims

The Korean language syllabus, in both states, presents only general aims. These aims are not specific learning objectives but loosely describe what the student will be able to do at the end of the study prescribed in the syllabus. The aims of the Victoria syllabus

are reported as:

- communicate with others in Korean in interpersonal, interpretive and presentational contexts
- understand the relationship between language and culture
- compare cultures and languages and enhance intercultural awareness
- understand and appreciate the cultural contexts in which Korean is spoken
- learn about language as a system and themselves as language learners
- make connections between different languages, knowledge and ways of thinking
- become part of multilingual communities by applying language learning to social and leisure activities, life-long learning and the world of work

(VCAA, 2018, p. 6)

Some of the same aims also overlap with the Western Australian syllabus:

- interact with others to exchange information, ideas, opinions and experiences in Korean
- analyse a range of texts in Korean to comprehend and interpret meaning
- apply the skills they have acquired to produce texts in Korean to convey information and express ideas, opinions and experiences for specific audiences, purposes and contexts
- demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of language as a system
- reflect on the relationship between language and culture.

(SCSA, 2023, p. 2)

A difference between the two syllabi is that the Victorian syllabus repeatedly stresses the importance of culture, intercultural competence, and comparing cultures, adding also to the aims that of becoming part of a multilingual community of speakers. The Western Australian syllabus mentions less the cultural aims of language learning, instead it stresses the ability to produce and understand meaning and texts and to interact in

the Korean language.

Structure

Each school year is divided into four terms of ten weeks each. Students study two units (Unit 1 and 2) in Year 11 and two units (Unit 3 & 4) in Year 12. A unit is covered during two terms, or 20 weeks. This structure, around which the syllabus is designed, is the same for both Victoria and Western Australia; however, the Victorian syllabus additionally recommends one unit to be covered in 50 hours, which is roughly equivalent to 2.5 hours/week. The Western Australian syllabus does not report any information regarding recommended contact hours. This reflects the Victorian language education policy being more rigid compared to the other states.

Communication and language skills

The Victorian and Western Australian syllabi are different in the way they represent the concept of communication and the skills associated with learning an additional language. The Victorian syllabus presents interpersonal, interpretative, and presentational modes of communication intersecting with language skills and with an understanding of how languages and cultures work.

VCE language study is underpinned by the concepts of communicating and understanding languages and cultures. There are five macro skills that inform all language use: listening, speaking, reading, writing and viewing. Connections, comparisons and communities provide the context for learning each specific language while the interpersonal, interpretive and presentational contexts define the ways in which students use the language they are studying. The integration of these contexts through the teaching and learning program enables students to develop their understanding and skills in the language. (VCAA, 2018, p. 9)

The Western Australian syllabus covers similar content by describing what is intended by linguistic resources, intercultural understanding, language learning and communication strategies, and literacy.

Intercultural understandings involve developing knowledge, awareness and understanding of one's own culture/s and language/s, as well as that of the

Korean-speaking world. The study of the perspectives and topics, text types and styles of writing and linguistic resources will enable the development of intercultural understandings which enhance the ability to communicate, interact and negotiate within and across languages and cultures, and understand oneself and others. (SCSA, 2023, p. 4)

The Korean: Second Language ATAR course develops students' ability to listen to, read, view, create, and perform a range of spoken, written and multimodal texts in Korean. (SCSA, 2023, p. 5)

It is notable that both documents move beyond the classic division of language skills into four (reading, speaking, listening, and writing) and add a fifth, viewing. In relation to this, the Western Australian syllabus specifically mentions the ability to perform multimodal texts. The attention to multimodal aspects of communication is a careful reflection of the multiple and different communication modes available in the 21st century.

Topics

A main difference between the two syllabi is the recommendation about topics to be learned. In this respect, the Western Australian syllabus is more prescriptive, while the Victorian syllabus leaves more freedom to individual teachers.

The Western Australian syllabus indicates a broad topic for each study unit. For example, the topic for Unit 3 is Travel, which is further divided into the sub-topics of Travel Plans, Cultural Heritage, and Travelling Today. The topic for Unit 4, the last unit students learn before heading to university, is Life after School, further divided into Planning my future, Studying and Working in Korea, and Future plans. These topics are specific to the Korean language syllabus, different from the topics of other languages, and also different from those of the Korean First Language syllabus. The Western Australian syllabus advises that these topics need to be covered from the three perspectives personal, community, and global. For example, in Unit 3, the topic of Travel Plans is to be covered from the personal perspective, the topic of Cultural Heritage from the community perspective, and the topic of Travelling Today from the global perspective.

The Victoria syllabus does not mandate sub-topics for each specific unit, but lists recommended sub-topics that individual teachers may want to address in their Year

11 and 12 classes. These topics are also divided into three themes related respectively to the individual, Korean speaking communities and the World around us, roughly corresponding to the three perspectives of the Western Australian syllabus. For example, for the individual theme, the main topics teachers must address are personal identity, personal relations, and aspiration. However, within the topic of personal identity, teachers can decide among the suggested sub-topics of personal opinions and values, generational differences, health and wellbeing, etc.

Text types, vocabulary, and grammar

The text types to be used in class by the teacher to illustrate the language material are similar across the two syllabi. The difference is that the Victorian syllabus specifies a range of text types to be used across all units in Year 11 and 12, while the Western Australian syllabus reports specific text types within the description of each unit. For example, for Unit 4, the Western Australian syllabus indicates reports, notes, emails, blog posts, articles, interviews, and invitations. Additional text types included in the Victorian syllabus are journal entries, letters, role-plays, articles, and stories.

Regarding vocabulary, neither syllabus provides a vocabulary list. The Victoria syllabus simply states that “there is no prescribed vocabulary list for VCE Korean Second Language. Students are expected to be familiar with a range of vocabulary and idioms relevant to the themes and topics prescribed in the study design” (VCAA, 2018, p. 12). The Western Australian syllabus, in the main document, similarly says that vocabulary learning should include “vocabulary, phrases and expressions associated with the unit content” (SCSA, 2023, p. 10). However, the Western Australian syllabus provides, as additional material, samples of course outlines and assessment tasks. These additional documents, even still without providing a vocabulary list, nevertheless give more detailed indications of the range and topics of the vocabulary to be covered within each unit. Such additional material is not provided in the Victorian syllabus.

Regarding grammar items, both syllabi provide a list; however, in this case, again, the degree of detail is different. The Victorian syllabus gives a unique list of all items to be covered across Year 11 and 12. The items are not divided by frequency or difficulty but only by part of speech, with sub-categories individuated for each part. For example, the category of ‘verbs’ is further divided into sub-categories such as active voice, infinitive, past tense, future tense, irregular conjugations, interrogative, honorifics, etc. A short general example of each item is then provided, along with its English translation. The range of grammar items roughly covers what is expected from low-intermediate/intermediate level students. The Western Australian syllabus provides a list of grammar items within the description of each unit; therefore, grammar forms are

more sequenced through the learning structure. The list is still presented by parts of speech; however, instead of a short example to accompany each grammar item, the Western Australian syllabus gives an ‘elaboration’, which consists in most cases of multiple examples illustrating at the same time, not just the grammar item, but also the vocabulary that can be used in the unit, providing additional information regarding the vocabulary to teach. As a further resource, the Western Australian syllabus provides a table of items considered ‘assumed learning’, i.e., items that the teacher can assume the learners already know when starting the relevant unit.

Outcomes and assessment

Both syllabi share the peculiarity that objectives for each learning level or unit are not clearly defined. The Victorian syllabus, within each unit, reports three outcomes. The outcomes are linked respectively to interpersonal, interpretative, and presentational communication. However, the outcomes are expressed in general terms since no sub-topic is mandated a priori. For example, the outcomes for Unit 4 are:

Outcome 1: On completion of this unit the student should be able to share information, ideas and opinions in a spoken exchange in Korean. (VCAA, 2018, p. 31)

Outcome 2: On completion of this unit the student should be able to analyse information from written, spoken and viewed texts for use in a written response in Korean. (VCAA, 2018, p. 32)

Outcome 3: On completion of this unit the student should be able to present information, concepts and ideas in evaluative or persuasive writing on an issue in Korean. (VCAA, 2018, p. 33)

Each outcome is then followed by a list of key knowledge and key skills. For example, for outcome 1 above, the list reports five key knowledges (such as ‘vocabulary related to cultural product and practice’, or ‘vocabulary and grammar suitable to convey information’) and nine key skills (such as ‘link ideas logically’, ‘self-correct language use as appropriate’, or ‘exchange and justify opinions and ideas’).

The Western Australian document does not report similar outcomes. Instead, it details assessments in the supporting materials. The sample assessment tasks provide teachers with a sample exam and a detailed marking rubric, which includes a grading scale for the overall response and grading scales for language accuracy, language range, pronunciation, and fluency.

4. Considerations and final remarks

As mentioned in the introduction, an overview of languages education in Australia is necessary to understand correctly the location, the content, and the structure of the Korean syllabus without the broader national and state curriculum. The Australian languages landscape, with its ongoing struggles surrounding the preservation and transmission of aboriginal and community languages, provides a framework to understand, in a first instance, why the Korean language syllabi presented in this chapter do not categorize Korean as a *foreign* language, but simply as a language, going as far as recognizing the use of the Korean language within Australian communities as one of the rationale to learn Korean.

The inclusion of a Korean syllabus in several state curricula is also a natural consequence of the narrative surrounding the so-called ‘Australia Asia Project’ (Lo Bianco & Slaughter, 2017). Nevertheless, while several governmental documents such as the Rudd Report (COAG, 1994) or the Australia in the Asia Century White Paper (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012) promote the learning of Asian languages within a framework of national economic interest, the rationale provided in the Korean language syllabi produced in Victoria and in Western Australia frames the learning of the Korean language mostly from the perspective of the learners, stressing the benefits at the personal and community levels.

The Korean language syllabi examined in this chapter present some degree of consistency despite some striking differences. The two syllabi are similar with respect to the absence of reference to proficiency indicators and levels of attainment. Instead, the Victorian syllabus presents general outcomes, while the Western Australian syllabus reports a rubric attached to single pieces of assessment samples. This allows both states to exercise a certain degree of freedom in assessing students, adjusting assessments to the characteristics of each year cohort. While the two syllabi have different degrees of prescriptivism, they give individual teachers considerable freedom regarding which language material to use in class. Additionally, considering that in both syllabi there is not a vocabulary list and that, at the best, there are just loose indications of the vocabulary range by broad topics, exam developers can in theory leverage on the vocabulary to adjust the level of difficulty of the exam.

A further similarity is the recognition of language skills that go beyond the traditional four and include multimodal modes of communication as well as the ability to conduct exchanges as separate abilities. These aspects are in line, for example, with the most recent update of the *Common European Framework of Reference* (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2020).

The main differences between the two syllabi can be summarised, as already mentioned, as different degrees of prescriptivism and different amounts of detail. In this respect, the Western Australian syllabus provides much more details to teachers, parents, and students. This detail is achieved, for example, by providing themes and grammar items by unit instead of a unique general list to be covered in Year 11 and 12, and by important additional supporting documents such as the outline and assessment samples. In a school environment where textbooks attached to the curriculum are missing, such a level of detail is of incredible support to teachers to prepare their class material and their teaching sequence and to students and parents to understand what to study and how the assessments will be conducted in light of the university entrance examination.

With reference to the university entrance examination and considering that the two syllabi are at the basis of the Korean language examination prepared every year respectively, in Victoria and in Western Australia, it should be noted that the Victoria syllabus offers more freedom in adjusting the level of difficulty of the examination. Since the Victorian policy assign to the Korean Second Language examination all students with less than seven years of schooling in the Korean language, this broad category can include anybody from the continuum, starting with Australia-born non-background learners and ending with students who have completed all their primary schooling in Korea.

Within the Korean language teaching community in Australia, there is debate surrounding the Korean language syllabi and the related university entrance examination (for details, see Frascini, Cho and Kim 2024). However, any language-specific change is constrained by the fact the syllabi are the way they are because of the background of (Asian) language teaching in Australia and the necessity to align the Korean language syllabus to both the state curriculum and the syllabus of the other numerous languages taught in Australia.

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