

# Winter Olympics: Linguistic divide poses problem to Korea hockey team

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(Photo: Rob Schumacher, USA TODAY Sports)

GANGNEUNG, South Korea (AP) — North and South Korea face a widening linguistic divide after 70 years of division, and that is a challenge for the rivals' first-ever joint Olympic team as it prepares for the Pyeongchang Winter Games.

The Canadian coach of the joint women's hockey team said Monday her squad has made a three-page dictionary that translates key hockey terms from English into South Korean and then into North Korean for better communication among the players and herself.

"In North Korean, there are no English words so everything is totally different. So we actually made like a dictionary, English to Korean to North Korean. So we can communicate and hopefully learn how to speak each other's languages," Sarah Murray told reporters following her team's first practice after arriving at the Gangneung athletes' village earlier Monday.

Murray's Team Korea was formed only 11 days ago as a result of the Koreans' abrupt decision to cooperate in the Olympics, which start Friday.

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South Korea has incorporated many English words and phrases into its language, while North Korea has eliminated words with foreign origins and created homegrown substitutes, which many South Koreans feel sound funny. Experts say about a third of the everyday words used in the two countries are different.

Still, Koreans from the two countries are generally able to understand each other because most words and the grammar remain the same, but the gap is wider with specialized medical, sports and other technical terms.

According to Murray's dictionary, South Korean players use the English loan word "pass," but their North Korean teammates say "yeol lak" or "communication." South Koreans call a "winger" a "wing," but North Koreans say "nahl gay soo" or "wing player." South Koreans say "block shot" while North Koreans say "buhduh make," or "stretching to block."

Murray acknowledged there are still some problems in communications despite the dictionary, and said her South Korean assistant coach plays an important role in bridging the gap. "We're catching on quickly ... but when it's a majority of North Korean players, it's hard to coach in English."

The joint team's formation triggered a strong backlash in South Korea, with 12 North Korean players added to Murray's existing 23-member South Korean team. Critics worried the deal would deprive South Korean players of playing time, and a survey showed about 70 percent of South Koreans opposed the joint team. Murray also expressed initial frustration.

The criticism has declined gradually as the Olympics near. On Sunday, the joint Korean team had its first match with world No. 5 Sweden in front of a capacity crowd of 3,000 at Seonhak International Ice Rink in Incheon, just west of Seoul. It lost 3-1 but many believe it was a decent result given that both Koreas are ranked out of the world top 20.

They wore the same uniforms with a "unification flag" depicting the peninsula, and stood to the Korean folk song "Arirang" instead of their respective national anthems. But when they arrived at the Gangneung athletes' village, they were separated into different apartment buildings.

A total of 22 North Korean athletes are to participate in the games, thanks to special entries granted by the International Olympic Committee, and they plan to march with South Korean athletes under the "unification flag" during the opening ceremony.

Many experts say North Korea wants to use its improved ties with South Korea to weaken U.S.-led international sanctions, and that tensions could easily flare again after the games.

Murray said the North and South Korean players are getting along "way better than I expected," and that she is enjoying having North Koreans who "are absorbing everything like sponges."

When the players were first paired together, Murray said they sat at different lunch tables. She asked them to sit together in the future.

"We sat together at the next meal and the players were laughing. They are just girls ... you know ... they are just hockey players. They are all wearing the same jersey and we are on the same team now," she said. "Hockey really does bring people together."

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