

Education, International Understanding and Foreign Language

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Abstract

It is time to think over this language issue in relation to the task for international understanding. Once we accept the globalization is the reality of our time, we have the task to communicate with others who speak with different languages. The English debate in Korean society has been catching fire nation widely in 2008 with the new Government policy of school English enhancement plan. This essay is to approach this English issue from the point of international understanding and English as the contemporary *Lingua-franca* or the World Language.

The most difficult obstacle to overcome is a Korean trauma for foreign evil conveyed by English. Without overcoming this trauma,

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English learning will not be tackled easily. Accepting the premise of the nature of education for freedom discussed in this essay, education is itself the process of creating a free human being who can create one's own world regardless of race, color, language, and even culture. As lingua-franca was invented any time when necessary, English can be chosen as the lingua-franca for everybody.

Key words: international understanding, foreign language education, communication, history, globalization

I. Education and International Understanding

Education is the changing process from 'un-human being' to 'human being'. 'Un-human being' is called a child, while 'human being' an adult(*oereun* 어른 in Korean). The difference between them is whether one knows others or not. There are many 'others' whom one must know to become a human being.

The first other to be met by a child is its mother, when it gets birth. Immediately it becomes to know the mother who is almost sharing many things with and almost unified with itself. In fact the child and the mother is genetically integrated and assembled with each other, which make them united almost into one entity.

The second other is every thing other than the mother. Star, sun,

water, air and all other creatures of God come to the child one by one to know as subjects to study and learn. The child becomes to know and differentiate one from another as well as to relate with each other.

The third others are being added one and one, which becomes a small group and a big group of those similar entities of 'human being'. The group is identified as a community, a society, and many other names such as a region, a nation, a world and on and on. Aristotle calls this character of human being as a 'social animal.' Being a social animal and being a member of a community is thus the nature of human being; that is, the human being is born natured to be social.

One last group is the group of other countries in our modern term. As a matter of fact, the country itself was not known to us before we began to name and call. For some reason, we began to call it country and distinct our country from your and their countries. Now there are many countries, the grouped status of which we call international society or world.

Back to education as a process of learning others, human being is thus born to know the international society and world. Unless knowing, it can't be human being. Therefore education is the international understanding process itself.¹

¹ As 'nation' is a constructed polity in modern time, so is 'international society.' Therefore, international understanding may be restricted to be defined as a time-

Knowing mother, things and others can be possible to communicate with them. Once education can be defined as a process of becoming human being through a planned behavior both at the individual and social levels, the essential activity in the process is the communication through which the educator takes an initiative role in communication with the learner. Here the educator is generally supposed to be the adult who is already a human being, while the learner is to be the child who is to be a human being. The best example of this line of educational concept is found in the famous one by R. Peters, education as an initiation. It is the process or event through which the adult or the society teaches or transmits children and individuals the elements of living skills in a form of social rituals.

By the way this initiation is possible to be taken place only by the communication between the educator and the learner, whatever its tools and means are; languages, sounds, body motions or any else. We know the language, the advanced language with letters we know, is the very communication method of such these human beings.

It is said that there are about 5,000 different languages in our contemporary world. They have been being born, living, and dying. As the Bible said that there was only one language without any barriers of communication among different nations before the Babel tower collapse, the tension between the one universal language like

limited understanding; that is, knowing or understanding others, here other countries and nations, in such a distinct way of modern and political construct.

lingua-franca and the multi-lingual has been long lasted till now from the first day of the History. In the globalized world, the English is said to enthrone as the second Babel time *lingua-franca*. Andrew Dalby(2002), in the book titled "*Language in Danger*," warns this enthronement of English will kill all other languages, which would eventually kill the cultural diversity which is the root of the opulence of human civilization.

However we don't know whether Dalby's worry will be the reality in the future. At least, we may be at ease since it wouldn't be the near future. Rather than that, we may even welcome the time when we may not have troubles with foreign language to communicate with foreigners, overcoming by possessing the universal *lingua-franca*. We have so hard times to learn English nowadays.

It is time to think over this language issue in relation to the task for international understanding. Once we accept the globalization is the reality of our time, we have the task to communicate with others who speak with different languages. The English debate in Korean society has been catching fire nation widely in 2008 with the new Government policy of school English enhancement plan. There is such a wide spectrum of this debate between the two extremes to welcome and protest.

In this essay, I would like to approach this English issue from the point of international understanding and English as the contemporary *Lingua-franca* or the World Language.

II. Conflicts between National Education and Foreign Language

One of the key issue in our days of education is the language of English. To tell the fact, English is not only a language but a communication skill no matter what its skill type is. The most salient language today used to the widest is English. Any one who is not mother-tongued English has difficulty to learn it. We know that the most militant challenger French even tired to keep the power and at last couldn't help with accepting it as a money language, rather frankly a survival language. More than 90 percent of transnational education participants are enrolling in various forms of intensive English training programs.

However this issue of foreign language learning is always raising the question about the preservation of national identity. This national identity is shaped and transmitted in the form of socio-cultural wisdoms which the teachers, adults and the parents transmit to the learners and children. The methods of shaping and transmitting of such a national identity is called the instruction media, which in the history is known to us as the language. Therefore the choice of instruction language becomes the most important task in any society.

Since the modernization begun together with the trivium of industrial, religious and civil revolution, the salient form of human grouping has been formed as 'the nation state.' Although the nation state is

only one form of many social groupings or organizations as M. Weber categorized, we in the contemporary world began to recognize it as the absolute and eternal form of human grouping. In fact 'nation state' is the youngest and most recently born one in our history, compare to such as families, tribes and kingdoms. Even we have to remember that the legitimization of one nation state had been possible only by war in the Westpalen system established by Westpalen treaty(1648) of the Thirty-years War in Europe.

Since the birth of nation state, the old populace or subjects of the kingdom were transformed into 'nation people.' National identity then became the last criteria by which any one can live in the national territory. The identity again was created and cultivated through the national education system. The best example of this process can be found in the American Made in America.

The Made in America has been and is regarded as the people of America, precisely The United States of America. They are "made" in America, practically in American schools, which is called "Americanization." The people in U.S.A are in that sense very unique in comparison with other people in all over the countries in the world. The concept or meaning of people except in U.S.A is naturally accepted to be closely related to same blood, same history, same culture, same regions and so on. It is quite true that the nationalism has been born in the time of modern politics when those feudal lords in Europe under the auspices of the Roman Catholic Divinity were reintegrated

into the absolute monarchies, which were transformed later, through the bloody civil revolution, into the modern nation state established on the basis of democracy. There was no more religious superpower which deserved to legitimize the kings on earth.

New ideology was necessary; the nationalism was chosen. However long time and debates were necessary to establish the nationalism as the basis of a polity under which people in a certain geographical or economical boundary could obey. The language was the most salient factor among so many others to construct the nation, as Fichte claimed for German people in "Reden an die deutschen Nation."

New immigrants into America have been always having so hard time to learn the new language which the existing people use and communicate; picking up English as their survival tool of life while throwing away their mother tongue. The key finding of Olsen's research(1997) is that: the misery of new immigrants in America is the struggle for learning English. Race and color are not the exceptions, as well known. However, race and color cannot be overcome ever, so they can endure for the time being. Unless they use English fluently enough, they are always separated from "American people." Although the race and color are same among Hispanics and Asians, they cannot be mixed together with those who cannot communicate well. Then all the divisions come in:

"The message immigrant students receive from the "Americans" is clear:

“stay out of our way if you’re going to be different stay separate in your corner. If you’re going to be around us, be like us.” (Olsen, 1997: 52)

“Response we immigrated: To find work, There was a coup, Wages too low in my country, Escape War, To get a better education, Political freedom, Not enough opportunity in our land, To be with mother, To have a better future, There were political problems, No jobs in our country, Economic opportunities;

Things we think they think about why we’re here: To take over, We’re taking their jobs, Think we want to be American, We bring diseases, Think I’m a communist, We’re nerds, We’re trying to be better in school than they are, Fear we choose to come—we didn’t, we had to, They think US is better than our countries” (Olsen, 1997: 57)

“Made in America” has been the history of U.S.A. It has been successful only when new immigrants regardless of color, race, religion, language and culture can be integrated into the American culture, not separated with the causes of such ascriptions. In the first tide of immigration from Northern Europe, America endured them to have enough time to learn America, made in America, while in this second tide of Hispanics not. As a matter of fact, Asians have a longer history of immigration though not such a big size. They could have managed to learn English although they have more barriers than Hispanics and cultivated themselves little by little into American, made in America. People say Asians are very much eager to learn language and everything about America, although they seemed to

have no choice because they were small in terms of size compare to Hispanics.

However this comparison implies the importance of English in the process of "Made in America." There is an alternative view about this: multiculturalism and diversity in the 21st century and in the age of globalization. They have been already picked up as the new paradigm of national identity and culture since 1980s when U.S.A countered with enormous challenges from the third world countries, though the practice has not yet been true as proclaimed or even criticized as an unrealistic propaganda. However the new challenge in front of American society, correctly saying U.S.A, is calling for a fundamental reexamination to accept it, otherwise no way to sustain the social cohesion. The proposal becomes a reality: U.S.A and American society had better and have to accept truly multiculturalism and diversity, including the bilingual or multi-lingual policy. The sign is coming from the ironical situation that some states proclaimed English as "the official language", not the national language, which was silly enough compare to so natural in the past without mentioning and even thinking.

"Students developed a theory that the more diversity there is, the safer the students are because of two reasons? there is not any one dominant group that can get away with "getting down" on others very easily(Olsen, 1997: 76)Spanish is our language, man. You got to have some pride in it. Don't let anyone tell you it's no good.(Olsen, 1997:104) I believe in diversity

and I believe that's the way people need to learn to live. because they want to raise their children in the real world, because they want their children to think of values that are more important than how fancy your house looks and what neighborhood it is in. People chose to live in Bayview because it is diverse." (Olsen, 1997:179)

The story of *Made in America* instructs us how closely related the language and the educational ideology with each other. The lesson from the story is that English has been firmly believed as the key vehicle to unite different individuals into one America. Under this paradigm all the immigrants struggled for learning English, though they knew very well but to wait for their children's time.

However, the misery did not stop. Their children mastered English, but they were not yet the American. Even they did not accept their home country and eventually marginalized themselves (Wong, 2006). The misery was clearly exposed when President Bush signed on the plan of *700 miles fencing of Mexico-U.S.A border* on the 27th, October 2006 (Dobbs, 2006).

Where is the middle ground?

The middle ground is here!

Hispanics may not struggle for learning English, while Koreans must. Those Hispanics who want to communicate with Americans, they must. Americans who want to communicate with Hispanics and Koreans, they must learn Hispanic and Korean. Everybody is free to learn. Any ideology hindering us from learning languages, whichever

national, official, foreign or English, must be cast away.

III. Korean Struggle with Foreign Languages

Koreans are reported to have been struggling even outrageously with learning English today. According to the announcement by Institute of International Education (IIE) in its Open Doors 2006, out of 564,766 foreign students, 58,847 Korean students(10.4%) are enrolled in schools in the U.S.A. for 2005/2006 academic year, next to 62,582 Chinese(11.1%) and 76,503 Indian(13.5%) ranking the top. More strikingly, the increasing rate from 2004/05 is 10.3%, the real top except the special case of Nepal's 24.7% increase making her number of 6,061 students, while the total number decreased slightly by 0.05%. Over the recent years the stiff increase of Korean students is a sign of reaching the top seed over China on the steady around 60,000 and India on the declining since 2003/04. Comparing the ratios against the total population of these three active countries in transnational education, as shown below, South Korea is sending the largest portion of the children abroad. South Korea is sending 20 times more than China and India.

This big numbers of students are not only into the U.S.A but also to the countries all over the world. Why are they coming in a rush? There may be many answers so far; such as, lost confidence in

Table 1 Comparison of the number of international students
from China, India and Korea in the U.S.A

Country	Total population	Students in America	Ratio(%)
China	1,313,973,713	76,503	0.006%
India	1,095,351,995	62,582	0.006%
South Korea	48,846,823	58,847	0.120%

Source: IIE, Open Door, 2007.

Korean education, selfish hunting for the most competitive education in the world and etc. Although they have their own different aspects from each other, they have one common character that is negative orientation toward Korean education.

One of the essential and inevitable needs is definitely learning English. Yet there is one reserve what it means to learn English; there must be some other aspects in English beyond the simple approach in a way in which they want to speak and write to communicate with English speakers who are the majority in the world. English may not be a necessary tool to get them upgraded in the social power and position, although they might have experienced with such evidences throughout the recent history of the country and decided in their minds not to be oppressed anymore just by the reason of not speaking English.

The fundamental motive to learn English is the only way to get into the center of the contemporary world of human civilization. No matter how those people living in other countries than English-speaking country tend to disagree with that, it is the undeniable fact

that English has become the orthodox language being used in every field of the modern society from religion to arts and sciences to sports and mass communications. Chinese, Spanish, Arabic and others used to be powerful language can defend in some ways for their superiorities, contributions and functions in our human civilizations. However, they are only minors and supplements to English.

English in this sense is the way into the center of our world, without which any human being cannot really access to the center, whirling in the marginal circle. Therefore, studying abroad is a key to the center with a clear objective to expose him or herself to the world. It is much more than a simple mastery of English. This is the inevitable motive to leave home and get into the adventure of the unknown world which might be very dangerous enough to lead sometime to the death. Learning English is the education itself.

Now let me come back to the beginning premises of this essay.

Education is the process of international understanding eventually.

International understanding is accomplished by foreign language.

If we accept these premises, we may define education as language acquisition. Back to our ancestors' struggle with Chinese letters and classics, we may be able to recognize that the history of Korean education was started by importing the Chinese characters even from the Old-Chosun time. We know the Chinese letters were officially used until the last day of the Chosun dynasty. Whichever it was Chinese language or only letters, our ancestors had so hard time to learn it just

like us learning English today. Although our *Great King Sejong* invented *the Great Hangeul*, our ancestors used the Chinese as the official letters.

What did they learn and understand?

They did not learn Chinese culture, neither understand Chinese. They were not cultivated as a Chinese national identity. They were still Koreans over the five thousand years, never losing 'national' identity. They learned and understood the World(中華), lest they lose and isolate from the center of the world. International understanding is such a learning process to live in the center of the world, not marginalized and excluded. Our ancestors had such a open tradition to accept foreign language as the world to understand.

The Korean trauma for English became pregnant since Japanese colonialism. It was the denial of 'our history' which was accused as the cause of losing country. Korean history was totally trivialized and despised as such a shameful flunkeyism, toadyism, and worship of the powerful. We have been educated even after the liberation in 1945 to deny ourselves with the slogan of overcome. Ironically this denial of China worship was succeeded to the denial of America and English language. Korean people have gotten certain trauma of flunkeyism. Those who speak English well were sneered at; In fact, they were envied and some time alert not to be 'colonized again.'

Foreign language learning was thus introduced as the least necessary evil. The tension between South and North added fuel to the

stupid fire of competition of pretending not to be related to any 'foreign power.'

New Korean government sailed this year pronounced a ambitious plan to enhance school English learning. There are many debates about; pros and cons, so naturally. However the most difficult obstacle to overcome is such a Korean trauma as discussed in this essay. Other matters could be revised and elaborated as much as possible. Testing methods, teacher training and supply, text development and all other matters could be solved gradually, though there must be a lot of malfunctions caused by such a complexity of policy implementation. One last difficulty is the unseen trauma. English is not the foreign evil. Romans competed to invite Greek pedagogue for their children's Greek learning. Later Latin was replaced for the Greek, and later for English. Which will be next winner? If Koreans would master English and World, then?

Friedman(2006) is teaching us that there is no strong state on the flat world today, but a strong individual. Neither the strong nation state! Education is itself the process of creating a free human being who can create one's own world regardless of race, color, language, and even culture. He or she is free to choose to learn, live and construct the world. As lingua-franca was invented any time when necessary, English can be chosen as the lingua-franca for every body. When such a freedom is secured, the international understanding will create the world without war as proclaimed in the Unesco Constitution.

declare:

That since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed;

That ignorance of each other's ways and lives has been a common cause, throughout the history of mankind, of that suspicion and mistrust between the peoples of the world through which their differences have all too often broken into war;

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국문초록

국제이해교육 관점에서 본 외국어 교육 문제

천세영

(충남대 교수)

언어교육 문제는 국제이해교육의 관점에서 접근할 필요가 있다. 세계화가 현상적 실제로 진행되고 있는 상황에서 서로 다른 언어로 의사소통해야 하는 것은 당위적 현실이기도 하다. 한국의 새 정부가 제기한 영어교육 문제는 세계어의 습득, 국제이해교육, 그리고 교육의 관점에서 재해석될 필요가 있다.

한국에서 영어교육과 관련해서 가장 심각한 장애는 영어를 통해 전달된다고 믿는 외세에 대한 두려움증이다. 그러나 교육의 본질에 자유가 내재되어 있다는 본 논문의 가정을 전제로 할 때, 교육은 인종, 종교, 문화 등 그 어떤 차이에도 불구하고 개인만이 그 자신의 세계를 창조하는 과정이라고 보아야 한다. 그러한 자유에 근거할 때 영어는 모든 개인의 절대적 자유선택 영역에 속해야 한다.

주제어: 국제이해, 외국어교육, 의사소통, 역사, 세계화