Title: English as an International Language

Assessment Task Number: Sociolinguistics   5

Assessment Task:

The following quotations may be seen as representing a range of opinion in a debate about the role of English as an international language:

"since no cultural requirements are tied to the learning of English, you can learn it and use it without having to subscribe to another set of values […] English is the least localized of all languages in the world today. Spoken almost everywhere in the world to some degree, and tied to no particular social, political, economic or religions system, or to a specific racial or cultural group, English belongs to everyone or to no one, or it at least is quite often regarded as having this property."   Wardaugh, R. (1987) *Languages in Competition* Blackwell

"What is at stake when English spreads is not merely the substitution or displacement of one language by another but the imposition of new 'mental structures' through English. This is in fact an intrinsic part of 'modernization' and 'nation-building', a logical consequence of ELT. Yet the implications of this have scarcely penetrated into ELT research or teaching methodology. Cross-cultural studies have never formed part of the core of ELT as an academic discipline, nor even any principled consideration of what educational implications might follow from an awareness of this aspect of English linguistic imperialism." Phillipson, R. (1992) *Linguistic Imperialism*   OUP

"there have been comments made about other structural aspects, too, such as the absence in English grammar of a system of coding social class differences, which make the language appear more 'democratic' to those who speak a language (e.g. Javanese) that does express an intricate system of class relationships." Crystal, D. (1997) *English as a Global Language*   CUP

Where do you stand on this issue? Discuss, with reference to the roles played by language in the development and maintenance of 'society' and of 'culture'. You may refer to any

non-English speaking society with which you are familiar, in order to exemplify your points.

This assignment consists of approximately 4,300 words excluding appendices and references.

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I   Introduction

English as an international language (EIL) has become a controversial subject with opinions ranging from scathing accusations of linguistic imperialism to vapid assertions of English being a neutral, value free language. This writer's opinion lies between these two extremes: it is not possible to teach English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) without imparting some of the values and culture of the teacher; however, it is not necessary that the acquisition of the language come at the cost of the learner's social, political, economic, or religious beliefs. An excerpt from the Sociolinguistics course book expresses a very pertinent point regarding the role of EIL as it affirms we have to look at the social realities of a world in English, and "see how English is used in a society and the attitudes of the users towards it before making generalizations about its harmful or beneficial effects" (Kennedy et al., 100). To date there have been many generalizations made about EIL, but it is necessary to carefully examine the motives and rationalizations for the study of ESL/EFL in each country individually. It is incorrect to make 'global' statements about English as the reasons for studying it are as varied as the population of the world itself.

Thus, while examining the conditions of linguistic imperialism and its effect on ESL/EFL learning in Korea, this paper will discuss EIL with reference to the roles played by language in the development and maintenance of 'society' and of 'culture'. Initially, a working definition of both these terms as well as 'language' itself will be discussed. Secondly, a review of the literature available will be used to present and support the hypothesis that linguistic imperialism is not a major factor of EIL education and that it has

not had a major impact on the development and maintenance of society and culture in Korea. Finally, a discussion of the role of English native speaker ESL/EFL teachers in Korea and important aspects of their role in the dissemination of EIL will close this paper.

2   Definitions of terms

2.1   What is 'society'?

Kramsch writes that a society is a group of people who identify themselves as "members of a social group [who] acquire common ways of viewing the world through their interactions with other members of the same group" (1998; 6). In this social group, what and how the people say something would reflect the beliefs, values, and attitudes that the group holds in common. It is this commonality that creates a society. Wardaugh lists four possible relationships between language and society. The first is that the social structure of the society "may either influence or determine the linguistic structure and/or behavior" (1996; 10). In this situation, people would make language choices based on the acquisition of power. An example of this would be the learning of English by the native peoples of North America whose own languages did not allow them access to education or employment outside the geographic areas allocated by the ruling governments.

Conversely, the second possible relationship states that the "linguistic structure and/or behavior may either influence or determine the social structure" (Wardaugh, 1996: 11). This theory follows the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis which claims "the structure of the language one habitually uses influences the manner in which one thinks and behaves" (Kramsch, 1998; 11). This means that people from different areas of the world speak

differently than others because they think differently. The reason they think differently is because the different languages provide different ways of expressing how they perceive the world. They cannot express a concept that does not exist in their language, such as a blizzard in Tahiti, or a sandstorm in Nunavit.

The final two theories are more neutral. The third possible relationship is one with both language and society having a more or less equal influence on each other and the fourth possibility is that language and society exist independently of each other and that there is no relationship between them at all (Wardaugh, 1996). Both of these would have the end result being that the cultural meanings of our languages do not constrain us, but we can enrich or change them as usage requires.

2.2 What is 'culture'?

Simply put, culture defines the way a group of people see their place in a society. However, this is very simplistic as "even within the explorations and teachings of language, culture has diverse and disparate definitions that deal with forms of speech acts, rhetorical structure of text, social organizations, and knowledge constructs. Culture is sometimes identified with notions of personal space, appropriate gestures, time, and so forth" (Hinkel, 1999; 1). Culture thus, has a controlling aspect as it imposes structure and rules on society.

However, through all of these facets of culture, it must be remembered that the analysis of culture requires that one accept that all knowledge is affected by the social and historical context in which it was acquired and decimated. How we perceive culture must cause us to question and recognize the effect of our own culture on how we perceive any

other. Gumperz and Levinson provide support for this theory as they write, "Every student of language or society should be familiar with the essential idea of linguistic relativity, the idea that culture, *through* language, affects the way we think, especially perhaps our classification of the experienced world" (1996; 1, emphasis in original).

2.3   What is language?

Starting from the early 60's until the present, there are a variety of definitions of 'language' from experts on the subject. According to Sapir, language can be described as having two forms: "patterns of reference and patterns of expression" (1961; 11). According to Whorf, language and the way it is used reflect the user's perception of reality and the world. Montgomery writes that "language ... is merely a vehicle for expressing the conceptual system which exists independently of it" (1995; 224). Wardaugh defines language as "some unitary system of linguistic communication which subsumes a number of mutually intelligible varieties" (1996; 29), and Kramsch writes that "language expresses cultural reality, [it] symbolizes cultural reality, [and] through all its verbal and non-verbal aspects, language embodies cultural reality" (1998; 3). Finally, Crystal writes "Language has no independent existence, living in some sort of mystical space apart from the people

who speak it. Language exists only in the brains and mouth and ears and hands and eyes of its users" (2000a; 5).

Through an analysis of these, a summary could state that language is not distinct from culture, the cognitive processes, nor the behavior of its users. It cannot be neutral

because it both influences and is influenced by the culture of its users in the way that its users understand and represent the world around them. Thus, language is a system that reflects the values, experiences, and feelings of the people who use it, and how they view themselves and the world.

3   The Relationship Between Culture and Language in Korea

"The working definition of English linguistic imperialism attempts to capture the way one language dominates others, with anglocentricity and professionalism as the central ELT mechanisms operating with a structure in which unequal power and resource allocation is effected and legitimated" (Phillipson, 2000; 54). However, this does not seem to describe the situation in Korea where the drive to learn English cuts across all strata of society.

3.1   EFL Education in Korea

All students from middle school through high school study English and most universities require first-year students to take further ESL classes. The middle and high school courses are standardized with nationally approved textbooks for each grade. Of course teacher qualifications vary, but through national examinations, the attempt is made to ensure that all students receive the same basic instruction. Additionally, most language teachers in elementary and secondary schools in Korea are native Korean teachers who have never been to an English speaking country or have had little contact with the target language culture. It is practically impossible, in this situation for them to disseminate any cultural attitudes from the target language. Instead, they would be showing and reinforcing

Korean culture rather than any imperial concepts.

Ultimately, it is impossible for English to dominate Korean in Korea as "even with good-quality curriculum and trained teachers, successful formal second language study may not bring about full bilingualism if the larger social context renders it irrelevant in many important daily contexts..." (McKay and Hornberger, 2001; 28). Although all students receive instruction, the language of use in daily life, in newspapers, on television, magazines, and other media is Korean. The people are proud of their heritage and although they may have studied English in school for several years, many Koreans are very uncomfortable and seemingly unable to converse in English. This is supported by Morrow who writes that, "the majority of Koreans are unable to carry out even simple communicative functions such as ordering food or exchanging greetings in English" (1987: 55).

Another point to be raised regarding ESL education in Korea is addressed by Bisong who writes that, "those in the Periphery who opt for education in English do so for pragmatic reasons to do with maximizing their chances of success in a multilingual and multicultural society" (1995; 126). This would appear to be the case in Korea where the desire to engage in trade with other countries of the world is a major force behind the economy. In view of the status of English as a major language of trade and commerce, these reasons are valid without compromising the integrity of the Korean language and society and help explain the drive to learn English by members of its society.

3.2   Other Sources of English Influence

Other factors affect the dissemination of English around the world and the formal education system is not the only way to learn English. As Modiano points out, "with globalization, the English language is making inroads into the consciousness of non-native English speakers in a manner which is securely cut off from the influences of education authorities" (2001; 342). No matter how much legislation and standardization there is, nonnative speakers will learn English in ways that are relevant for them. Music, mass media, and movies are perhaps the most popular sources. Some students travel or study abroad, and the private EFL tutor is ubiquitous in Korea. "Linguistic imperialism presupposes that the actors in question are supported by an imperialist structure of exploitation of one society or collectively by another" (Phillipson, 2000; 55). This does not appear to be the situation in Korea, as no one country supplies all the native English speakers, nor appears to exploit the EFL market. Neither does it mean that English dominates Korean; it is simply another manifestation of the growth of EIL.

3.3   Resistance to English

One of the reasons that the educational system seems to have failed in the teaching of English may be due to a feeling of identity and national pride. As Kramsch points out, "besides being used as a means of excluding outsiders, the use of one, and only one, language is often perceived as a sign of political allegiance. The remark 'I had ten years of French and I still can't …' may be the expression not so much of bilingual failure as of monolingual pride" (1998; 74). This may assist in explaining the seeming inability of Koreans to communicate effectively in English despite several years of study in school.

However, it must be admitted that until recently, most of the methodology used in Korea was based on the grammar-translation method.

Additionally, Koreans take pride in their 4000-year history. The Korean Overseas Information Service writes that the "beginning of Korean history is often dated to 2333 B.C. when King Tan-gun … established the first kingdom named Choson, literally meaning the 'Land of the Morning Calm'" (1995; 13). The Korean alphabet was developed under King Sejong in the early 15th century, and this system, known as Han'gul (한굴), "is considered one of the most scientific writing systems in use in the world" (ibid; 12). Koreans are justifiably proud of it and its inventor. It seems doubtful that English will dominate their national language in any way, in the foreseeable future.

4   The role of EIL in Korea

There are several facets of the role of EIL in the Korean context however, only the three most important concepts will be addressed in this paper due to size constraints.

4.1   English loanwords

The use of loanwords in the Korean language has a long history. In the past, the strongest influence came from Chinese; currently however, the source of influence appears to have changed to English. Interestingly, many of these loanwords and influences are

apparently not coming directly from inner-circle countries. Song (1998), Tranter (1997), as well as Baik and Shim provide evidence to support the statement that English loanwords used in Korean "may well have been introduced into Korea not directly from English but via Japanese" (1998; 274). Some examples of these are "*syup ho* [슈퍼] 'super(market)', *apat hu* [아파트] 'apart(ment)', *ppansu* [판츠] (<pants) 'underwear', *thalentu* [탤런트] (<talent) 'TV star', etc." (Song, 1998; 265). These examples seem to demonstrate that some of these loanwords do not carry the same pronunciation, semantic weight or meaning in Korea as they did originally. In fact, Song explains that "As with other Englishized languages of the world, the features of Englishization in Korean can be found in the realms of lexical borrowing, phonological and morphosyntactic changes, semantic shifts, and so forth" (1998; 263). Simply put, this means that the language is not being used in the same way in Korea as it is in the inner-circle countries as Koreans borrow the words and then adapt them to suit their own language structure and the meaning most apt for their purposes.

4.2   Inadequacies of the English language in the Korean context

One example of the way that English is not adequate to the culture and society of Korea is in the area of intersocial relationships. Korean society is stratified and social position within this culture is not based on merit as it is in most inner-circle countries. Age and social status are revered and the language has various registers that are used depending on whether the person's interlocutor is younger, the same age, slightly older, or much older. The forms of address used reflect the relative status of both individuals. The egalitarian forms of address used by native English speakers can inadvertently and unintentionally insult or offend Korean interlocutors who live in a very stratified culture. Conversely, Koreans find it difficult to accept that there are no terms to describe a hierarchical

relationship in the English language. As an example, students often request an English translation for the specific term in Korean describing the relationship between freshman and senior students studying in the same major. In Korean, these terms depend on the other person's relationship to the speaker and are *sonbae* (선배) to describe a student who is senior to the speaker and *hubae* (후배) for a student who started university after the speaker.

However, this is not the only instance where the English language is inadequate to satisfy the needs of its users in Korea. Another important area is in the use of kinship terms, which are used as forms of address.

> "Vietnamese [and Korean] make extensive use of kinship terms as forms of address. Such terms are non-reciprocal, i.e., they are not like English brother, sister, or cousin. The kinship system itself is generation and age-oriented with terms for both the paternal and maternal sides. It also gives more weight to males than females. Children are also ordered ... [so that] the bare English translation falls far short of Vietnamese [and Korean] understanding of social relationships" (Wardaugh, 1996; 269).

This demonstrates that because of the social structure of Korea, the language being taught in EFL classes is inadequate for the cultural needs of its new users. Korean uses different terms to describe whether grandparents, aunts, and uncles are paternal or maternal, and whether siblings are older or younger. Status and relationship also justify different terms as the example for parents-in law demonstrates: for the groom, *jang mo* (장모) is the wife's mother and *jang in* (장인) her father; while for the bride, *shi ahmahni* (시어머니) is the husband's mother and *shi ahpadji* (시아버지) is his father.

This is not to say that the English language and influence are not affecting social changes in the various levels of Korea. Park writes that:

"In cities and even rural areas, many social changes are happening in all levels of society. … The old ways of thinking, however, remain strong in the minds of most people, regardless of their education and foreign influence. It is not because of the overlay of Western dress and manners that the inner man has changed. A mere superficial overlay of Western thought patterns has changed the *outward* appearance of many" (1997; 69, emphasis added);

however, the thought patterns are still unchanged. Furthermore, "it is not possible to train the entire English using population of the world to the way of thinking and writing in American, British, or any other variety of English" (Kachru, 1999; 84). The Korean people will retain their own social and cultural identity despite the surface changes.

4.3   English Communicative Purposes in Korea

It must be remembered that the Korean language is still virtually the only language used among Koreans. The use of English in a conversation by two native speaking Koreans would not likely occur frequently as "English as an international language is used primarily for communication outside the country with other groups who do not share a common language" (Kennedy et al, 2000; 83). Koreans all share a common language of which they are very proud. Except in cases of language study or practice, this writer feels that English would almost never be used for communicative purposes within the society.

One place where English influence is appearing is in Korean pop culture. Many songs now have English titles and a few English catch phrases but are otherwise in Korean. There is also a trend to have entertainment businesses such as cafes, bars, and nightclubs with English names and English writing on the outside of the establishment.

'Woodstock' is a popular name for bars and cafes and Seoul has four that this writer is aware of, all bearing the same name. In Chonan City, 'Herbs' is the name of a new boutique selling body care products, 'Rosebud' has become a chain of coffee shops, 'Richard's' is the name of a popular hair salon, and 'Galleria' is the only department store.

In view of the above, it would appear that EIL is not being imposed on the Korean culture as much as Korean society is choosing those aspects of English that are useful and amenable to it. Of course, such a paper only touches on the surface of the issue however, it appears that there are choices being made to adapt the English being adopted into the country into a fashion that suits the people who are now using it.

5 The role of English native speaker language teachers in Korea

There are teachers who feel very strongly that they need to teach students the culture of their native English speaking country along with the language. Additionally, there are teachers who expend much effort to assist students to be culturally aware of both cultures. Finally, there are teachers who strive very hard to keep the English language they teach neutral. These different kinds of teachers are crucial as regards the question of the role of neutrality or imperialism in EIL in Korea. Through recent discussion and publications, "applied linguists and language teachers have become increasingly aware that a second or foreign language can rarely be learned or taught without addressing the culture of the community in which it is used" (Hinkel, 1999; 2). This is particularly important in the Korean situation as the culture is very different from Western ones. However, there are also

"many native-speaker teachers which lack awareness of their language and indeed of the different subcultures represented within their language…" (Kennedy et al., 2000; 98). Additionally, since "preparation clearly involves language-focused teaching with a greater awareness of the implicit as well as explicit connection with culture" (Byram and Esarte-Sarries, 1991; 199), the importance of cultural preparation to adjust to a target culture is crucial. An in-press article by Kim discusses native English speaking EFL teachers from the United States and their general teaching behaviour. From his survey of 69 EFL teachers, "one of the most important problems is that the teachers are not qualified to teach in Korea as most of their majors are not specifically related to teaching EFL/ESL. He describes how "without understanding the attitudes and behaviors of their students that are inherited from the Korean cultural background in the EFL classroom, EFL teachers may have difficulties in creating better teaching activities and methods" (Kim, in press) as they come here completely unaware of Korean culture and have strong assumptions that they can teach in the same way they did at home. In his survey, he has tried to document the problem of teachers using the techniques of ESL countries and attempting to adapt them to EFL countries with different educational traditions.

English native speaker teachers need to be more attentive so that cultural assumptions in the teaching materials do not lead to misunderstandings between them and their Korean students arising from their different cultural heritages. These teachers also need to be aware of the characteristics of Korean culture and apply them to the development of curriculum and the process of instruction. They also must remember that language does not exist in and of itself; it is a reflection and a representation of the culture it originates

from. Native speaker teachers will necessarily impart some of their cultural norms and expectations in their teaching however, they must remain aware of this at all times and try to minimize the impact this may have on their students.

5.1   Awareness of values

It is very important that EFL teachers learn about and understand the differences between the values of their native culture and those of Korea. Realizing that there is "no such thing as value-free, disinterested, or contextual teaching" (Canagarajah, 1999; 19) they must do their best to resolve this conflict. It is imperative that the awareness of ESL/EFL teachers be raised in order to ensure that one culture is not promoted to the detriment of the other. Edge puts this very succinctly as he writes, "This is not to say that I have the right, as I cross national and cultural borders, to insist that other people accept this [my] set of values" (1996; 12). Awareness and delicacy in dealing with the values of students must constantly buffer the effect English language teaching may have upon them and their sense of identity.

5.2   Awareness of cultural differences

English native speaker teachers must remember that it is not possible to teach a language without teaching some part of the culture that lies behind that language; the question is how to do so without damaging the learners' own sense of identity and culture. It is equally important that EIL teachers are aware that

"the teaching and learning of a geographically, politically, and culturally 'neutral' form of English, which is perceived as a language of wider communication and not as the possession of native speakers, is one of the few options we have at hand if we want to continue to promote English language learning while at the same time attempting to somehow 'neutralize' the impact which the spread of English has on the cultural integrity of the learner" (Modiano, 2001; 344).

EIL in Korea must be taught in such a way as to allow Koreans to retain their distinctive culture while acquiring a language that may be used for wider international communication. There does not need to be "confrontation between this new language and the old. The pride which everyone feels when they succeed in acquiring a new language should not make them any less proud of the language they already have" (Crystal, 2000b: 88).

Allowing a range of acceptable local variants and standards that do not discourage the users but empower them to develop phonology, lexis, grammar, and discourse strategies that reflect their cultural heritage and social structure will have a more positive impact on Korean students. Using a variety of teaching practices and promoting the concept that EIL belongs to the world, and not simply the core countries can encourage this cultural equality. Specifically, in relation to the Korean context, Kim asserts that "if EFL teachers acknowledge the influence that culture has on the English classroom and make the effort to understand how the cultural assumptions of teachers and students differ, they can make adjustments that permit a more rewarding and enjoyable EFL classroom atmosphere" (in press). This shows the importance of the need for EFL teachers to understand Korean cultural values and to apply this knowledge to their teaching.

5.3   Awareness of methodology and materials

English language teachers in Korea must also "develop ... a thinking on language, culture, and pedagogy that is motivated by the lived reality and everyday experience of [the] periphery subjects" (Canagarajah, 1999; 5). They must adapt their methodologies and materials to reflect a context-sensitive and culture-specific approach to language teaching in Korea. The use of textbooks that have been developed and written for Korean students would, hopefully, be less likely to carry the values and policies of inner circle countries. Four examples of these are: *Speak Your Mind*, which is a conversational course for false beginners; *English conversation for Korean Students* for low-intermediate to high-intermediate students; *Small Group Discussion topics for Korean Students* for those of a more advanced level of English ability; and *World Class English* developed by Korea Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (KOTESOL) for first year university students. All four of these books present subjects and issues that are relevant to the lives and culture of Korean students ranging from directions on how to find your way around the Seoul subway system, to discussions of issues such as the merits of different universities in Korea, to the mandatory military service for all young men in Korea. These subjects are in direct contrast to directions around New York City or questions comparing customs in your 'home' country to those of your partner's. These are for classes of multinational students living in the United States, not homogeneous classes still in their home countries.

6   Conclusion

EIL will remain a controversial subject for many years to come. People who

choose to learn and speak ESL/EFL will soon outnumber those who speak it as a first language. Additionally, the population of the world is creating "new Englishes … on an international scale, applying [them] to whole countries or regions" (Crystal, 2000a; 133), and these Englishes are not necessarily "tainted by [their] colonial provenance" (Rushdie in Crystal, 2000a; 136). In this scenario, the concept of linguistic imperialism will become less predominant as more international varieties of English will be spoken. However, at this point, there continues to be issues of input and identity with the "models and standards of English for users in (Outer and Expanding circle) countries. It may be seen as bound up with another issue, that of identity" (McKay and Hornberger, 2001; 89). Language has a very symbolic value and is a sign of cultural identity as it defines the social structure, values, and life of the users. This concept should be understood and respected by all English language teachers, who must ensure that they do not impose western values and culture on the Korean society that has chosen to learn EIL. New teaching strategies should be used to support ESL/EFL learners as they attempt to join the global movement and at the same time, work to preserve their own cultural identity. "The ELT practitioner can be actively involved in this 'ecology of language' mindset, and attempt to implement language teaching and learning practices which support the cultural and linguistic integrity of the non-native speaker …" (Modiano, 2001; 345). Personally, 'can' is not enough, we MUST.

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