Localizing and Globalizing English Education:
Its Challenges and Opportunities

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Comics in Class?: Introducing Cultures to Korean Learners Through Global Graphic Novels

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I. INTRODUCTION

South Korean society is quickly becoming more diverse and globally connected. These changes are happening with a rapidity which demands English-language classrooms also adapt. Today's Korean English language learners will need to participate in a global marketplace and, as such, need to be exposed to the vastness of human culture. Trite English primers containing unhelpful generalizations such as "Koreans use chopsticks and foreigners use forks" are no longer helpful. If, indeed, they ever were. This paper, then, presents a unit designed as a task-centered English learning experience. It is an English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) course with the goal of introducing global culture to South Korean college students through worldwide graphic novels. Though this unit can (and should) be adapted to a specific needs-analysis of a particular group, this paper will describe a generalized concept unit. Each lesson will consist of analysis and discussion of graphic novel readings completed largely out of class. Each lesson will center on tasks specifically geared towards a culminating project in which the students collaboratively create their own graphic novel.

This unit will be largely based on the pedagogies linked with Content-based Instruction (CBI). The rigorous focus on grammar and "correct" pronunciation associated with the linguistic proficiency stressed in many academic contexts (Snow, Met, & Genesee, 1989, p. 202) is not appropriate for this unit. Quality of content rather as well as "target language proficiency" (Lyster & Ballinger, 2011, p. 280) is the goal. Using CBI allows English-language acquisition in a flexible way often not found in classrooms dedicated to more traditional pedagogies (Wesche & Snow, 2003).

II. STUDENTS

This unit was designed with the specific goal of implementation at the collegiate level in South Korea. Though it would be problematic to state definitively what the demographics of any given class might be, it is presumed the students would be ethnically, culturally, and linguistically Korean. More than 80% of Korean students seek some form of tertiary education (Power, 2012), so class membership may represent a wide-swath of society, with the majority being in the Korean middle-class. Though it varies widely by school, college demographics are roughly evenly divided by gender; age skews slightly higher for men due to a two-year military proscription. It is anticipated the ages of this group would be 18 to 23 (or, 19 to 24, using the Korean *Sal* age system). Students would have completed nine years of mandatory English language training in public schools and likely have participated in extra-curricula English training.

There is a slim chance international students from China (or, far less likely, Japan) might appear in any given class. This seems unlikely, however, as the numbers of international students in Korean colleges are a mere fraction of the total (Kim H. S., 2012). In any event, this lesson was planned with an ethnically Korean population in mind. Moreover, the students will likely speak the standard Gyeonggi Dialect of Korean found throughout the majority of the country (as opposed to the far less common provincial dialects, such as the Gyeongsang Dialect. It should be noted there are few semantic differences within most Korean dialects).

III. UNIT GOALS

The primary goals of this unit are two-fold. As with any English class, an increase in learners' English communicative competence is the main target. Additionally, this unit hopes to fulfill the third aim of the English program of the Korean government: "Understand foreign customs and cultures through English education" (Ministry of Education, 2008).

As recognized by the Ministry of Education, it has become more important for the globalized workforce to understand other cultures. Though there are very few college students around the globe who would not in some way benefit from a global curriculum, South Korea is a particularly homogenous nation whose students need access to information about different cultures. Those depictions of other cultures to which Koreans are exposed, are often of a

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very polemical or fanciful nature—politically motivated school curricula, Hollywood television/films, and so on. While this may have sufficed for previous generations of Koreans who had less interaction with the outside world, it behooves younger Koreans to begin to appreciate both the diversity of culture and the uniformity of different peoples.

Korea has become a nation admitting immigrants and with the trans-Pacific ratification of the U.S.–Korea Free Trade Agreement in 2011 and an expressed interest in joining the Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership, South Korea's global participation in set to expand. South Korean college students must not be versed in English for testing purposes only, but must also develop an appreciation for and exposure to other cultures. Of course, social studies and history classes have always been concerned with worldwide examinations. This class will complement these studies by eschewing textbooks and debate books and adopting a practice of including graphic novels that will introduce learners to other cultures.

Despite the tendency to replicate the reading lists of traditional Language Arts classrooms in dominant Anglophone counties, it is better the students be exposed to literature they will have a higher likelihood of enjoying. For the goal of increased language acquisition, the use of modern graphic novels will likely be more beneficial. Teaching reading skills has always been an emphasis of English language educators, and rightly so. A recurring concern, however, is how to turn the pedagogical-dominated reading skills of the classroom into, minimally, increased English proficiency and, hopefully, lifelong English literacy. Over the last several decades educators have grappled with the notion, "curriculum needs to rethought in order to foster students' entry into living traditions of knowledge-in-action rather than static traditions of knowledge-out-of-context" (Applebee, 1996, p. 5). Part of this rethinking has been seen as classrooms move away from teaching classic works originally aimed at bygone generations and the adoption of contemporary literature aimed at modern audiences. This lesson will focus on graphic novels as they often have, "the added advantage of being more relevant to the lives" to students. They are therefore more likely to overcome students' general resistance to "school books" (Crowe, 1998, p. 122).

More importantly, working with globalized literature about different populaces will allow students to become intimately familiar with a small facet of far-away peoples. Far from merely helping this course's students develop English language skills, graphic novels can, if properly used, be a tool to help learners participate in a cultural experience. Nonfiction, of course, provides wonderful opportunities for students to learn specific descriptions of historical persons and places, and current cultural practices. Literature, however, and specifically the graphic novels suggested for this course, will allow "access to a vast spectrum of ways of being human" (Nodelman, 1996, p. 129). As students learn about and begin to appreciate cultural diversity, they will also develop a greater positive reception to the multiculturalism which is expanding in South Korea.

IV. CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION

This unit, though obviously needing to be adapted to specific contexts, is anticipated as having individual lessons broken into six generalized portions:
1) Class will commence with a quiz of vocabulary introduced in the *previous* session.
2) A class discussion, centering on the assigned text, will be facilitated by the teacher.
3) The teacher will introduce the task and associated vocabulary for the day.
4) Students, working in a collaborative group, will accomplish that task.
5) Student groups will present their completed tasks to the class.
6) The teacher will offer generalized feedback to the class

The central task for each class ought to be designed to facilitate the end-of-unit project, an original graphic novel. Each task should focus primarily on content, following Skehan's definition of a language class endeavor which is 1) meaning driven, 2) assessed by content, 3) concerned with the resolution of a communication problem, and 4) related to real-world problem (Skehan, 1998, p. 95).[12]

Descriptions of Class

1) Quiz (Teacher (T) < > Students (Ss) Interaction):
The class will commence with a brief quiz designed solely to assess the student's retention of previously assigned vocabulary. This quiz should be very limited in nature and designed solely for assessment.

2) Class Discussion (primarily T < > Ss Interaction):
Class discussions will be led by the teacher on the previous readings. Though it would be preferable to have the students dominate the class discussion, it will likely consist of the teacher asking probing questions and interacting with the students.

3) Warm-up/Pre-task (primarily T < > Ss Interaction):
The teacher will introduce the specific task to be completed in the class session and three or four associated vocabulary words.

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[12] Objections might be raised to using graphic novels to accomplish the last point. Yasuhiko clearly notes these—the task need not have real-life applications for every student (p. 22).

4) Task (primarily Ss < >Ss Interaction; T < > Ss only as necessary):

This will form the central portion of the class; language skills utilized during the task will be speaking, listening, and writing. When the students have been trained on the desired outcome of the task, they will be divided into groups to accomplish the task. To increase communicative abilities, it is important students work in groups instead of individually. This will allow collaborative L2 discussions instead of silent composition. Though the students will have spoken (both in and out of class) in the L2, they will likely have had little opportunity to plan and execute a formal, graded project using the L2 to facilitate the group dynamic. The group work should be peer dominated, allowing for feedback from other students.

5) Post-task (Ss < > Class Interaction; T < > Ss):

Following the task, the student groups will collaboratively present their completed task or describe the process they went through. Each student will participate in this presentation; i.e., there will be no "spokesperson" for the group. The vocabulary introduced earlier in the class will be incorporated into the presentation. This will allow the students to use the target vocabulary soon after learning it—boosting vocabulary retention. The class presentation will allow for the practice of a more formalized, academic discourse.

6) Feedback (T < >Ss Interaction):

The end of the class affords an opportunity for the instructor to provide generalized feedback. It is expected the majority of this will come as recasting (negative evidence) and confirmation checks (positive evidence). The students will be proficient in English and feedback does not need to be explicit—that is, errors can be recast instead of corrected in an overt error correction manner. Also, important to a Korean class, recasting and confirmation checks are far less face-threatening. If the instructor is not Korean, this might necessitate a pragmatics shift; Korean culture employs correctives which are often "more accommodating to face needs." Corrections appropriate in other contexts may be seen as "highly face-threatening" (Da Silva, 2003, p. 61). This is perhaps even more important if, as is the case, the teacher is not Korean (Bardovi-Harlig, 2009). Due to Korea's continually evolving attitude towards English (Hall, 2011, p. 184), non-Korean teachers should be especially willing to adapt to a Korean context of feedback. This is central to any lesson as he teacher's genuine feedback remains an imperative (Hermer, 2001, p. 150).

V. CONCLUSION

As noted earlier, almost all people could benefit from a more global perspective. Instructors in ELF classrooms in Korea have a unique opportunity to use their classes to teach English and global appreciation. By using graphic novels from around the globe, students can gain new insights into close neighbors and far-off communities. The use of global literature allows a far more universal approach than simply using works from Anglophone countries such as the United States or the United Kingdom. While students are reading global graphic novels and completing assigned tasks, they will also be fostering the communicative skills necessary for global discourse.

The outline presented above is, just that, an outline. The linguistic and communicative skills and goals of each learner and each classroom will be different. This will require the instructor to analyze and adapt the unit for disparate classes. It is hoped, however, this paper will still be of use to English educators. By emphasizing communicative skills through the use of global graphic novel literature, an ELF classroom will be able to facilitate students' acquisition of English and, perhaps more importantly, help to produce learners capable of interacting with a diverse population.

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