

Globalization and the necessity of new local tests for Koreans

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1. Introduction

Globalization has increased worldwide social relations and strongly influenced Korean education. Korean educators have had to prepare students for the world in which they must live, work and function as members of a global community, and one of their key concerns has been the improvement of students ability with the English language. This is essential if students are to learn how to communicate and interact with people in an international community dominated by English. Through English language education they have also attempted to teach students Korean cultures and values to foster a sense of national pride and identity, as well as helping them to understand the many different cultures within the global community.

However, they seem to have paid insufficient attention to the development of English tests despite the fact that testing and teaching are impossible to separate from one another. Teachers and learners are likely to suffer from harmful backwash effects when teaching is good and appropriate, and testing is not (Hughes, 1989).

As the demand of English increases, Korea has imported a number of EFL textbooks, cassettes and examinations - mostly from America - and two of them are the TOEFL and the TOEIC. These tests seem to have been accepted without much consideration or criticism, and have been foisted on Korean learners (regardless of their specific language learning purposes) by universities and colleges eager to select students with outstanding English ability and measure students progress by teachers, as well as tracking various individuals

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progress in English, and so on. They have often been used incorrectly in Korea. Furthermore, they do not seem to be beneficial to Korean examinees, and are inappropriate for Koreans in the sense that they do not foster the type of understanding of the world's cultures required in this era of globalization.

It is certainly believed that there is a need to examine these American standardized tests critically. In examining them, the general definitions of globalization will be first addressed. Then the manner in which English has developed as a lingua franca will be discussed. Following that the use of American tests in Korea and some key criticisms involving them will be discussed. Finally some suggestions will be given for the development of English tests for Koreans.

2. Globalization and language

The worldwide phenomenon, globalization, is defined as a consolidation of varied transnational processes and domestic structures, allowing the culture, economy, politics, and ideology of one country to penetrate another (Mittelman, 1997). This process of globalization seems to be part of an ever more interdependent world where political, economic, social, and cultural relationships are not restricted to territorial boundaries (McCorquodale & Fairbrother, 1999). No state seems to be unaffected by activities outside its direct control. David Rothkopf, a Columbia University Professor, writes that:

It is the first time in history that virtually every individual at every level of society can sense the impact of international changes. They can see it and hear it in their media, taste it in their food, and sense it in the product they buy.

Individuals, households, and rural communities become directly involved in global processes.

Many factors are associated with globalization. These include the rise of transnational corporations and the accompanying challenge to the autonomy of the nation-state, increasing interconnectedness which transcends national boundaries, and technological developments which condense time and space and make communication instantaneous (Block & Cameron, 2002). This rapid globalization process has strongly influenced foreign language learning and

teaching because a foreign language is essential - for the economy, for national communications, for exchange of politics and cultures, and even on the level of individual couples being able to communicate in the global community.

Various teaching materials and methods have been produced and suggested for improving Korean students language ability to communicate in a global society. Through a foreign language education, teachers also attempt to provide students with information and perspectives on diverse countries and cultures so that students are knowledgeable and responsible members of the world community (Sutton & Hutton, 2001).

Today it is crucial that acquisition of a foreign language be introduced as one of the requirements for integration into the global community. Now every individual learns a foreign language in order to become part of the global community.

3. The spread of English

A foreign language has become a crucial factor in fostering the ability of people to express themselves logically and to interact with others in the global community. In this community, English is regarded as the worlds *lingua franca*. It is, as many have said, the language of commerce, science and technology and the international language of communication. Troike (1977) explains how English has developed as a *lingua franca*:

From a minor language in 1600, English has in less than four centuries come to be the leading language of international communication in the world today. This remarkable development is ultimately the results of 17th, 18th, and 19th century British successes in conquest, colonization, and trade, but it was enormously accelerated by the emergence of the United States as the major military world power and technological leader in the aftermath of World War II. The process was also greatly abetted by the expenditure of large amounts of governments and private foundation funds in the period 1950-1970, perhaps the most ever spent in history in support of the propagation of a language.

(Troike 1977:2)

English seems to have been successfully promoted, and has been eagerly

adopted in the global linguistic marketplace. Hindmarsh (1978: 42) states that the world has opted for English, and the world know what it wants, what will satisfy its needs. The spread of English today is commonly justified by recourse to a functionalist perspective, which stresses the choice and usefulness of English, and suggests that the global spread of English is natural, neutral and beneficial (Pennycook, 2001).

Naysmith (1987) argues that, contrary to Hindmarsh's assertion, English is part of the process by which one part of the world becomes politically, economically and culturally dominated by another. According to Phillipson (1992),

Teaching the world English may appear not unlike an extension of the task which America faced in establishing English as a common national language among its own immigrant population.

Such views seem to be by no means confined to the early 1960s, but still reflect current thinking:

The British Council continues to be untiring in its efforts to keep the world speaking English. In this regard, teaching English as a second or foreign language is not only good business, in terms of the production of teaching materials of all kinds, but also it is good politics (Pennycook, 1994)

Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (1983, in Phillipson) insist that it has been British and American government policy since the mid-1950s to establish English as a universal second language, so as to protect and promote capitalist interests.

How English has come to establish itself as the world's *lingua franca* may be contentious, but what is not open to argument is that there is a huge and growing demand for English language learning and teaching. The demand for English is being articulated not only by Anglo-Americans but also by leaders in all parts of the world (Phillipson, 1992). There is no reason to expect that any other language will appear in the near future to replace English as the global *lingua franca*. The effect of globalization has heightened interest in learning English.

Under the influence of globalization, English has become one of the primary concerns in Korean Education. Korean educators have studied and suggested various English teaching methods, approaches and curricula to improve Koreans

English ability. They realize that proficiency in the English language is an asset in the highly competitive global market. The English language has been added to the curriculum for the third grade of primary schools. Instruction has focused more on speaking skills than grammar, and English language teachers have been encouraged to conduct classes only in English.

In spite of those efforts, English teaching in Korea has still produced unsatisfactory results. After having studied hard for six or ten years, students' English levels have been far below expectations, with many unable to hold even a simple conversation in English after graduation from secondary schools and colleges/universities. The failure of English teaching in Korea seems to have resulted from unimproved English tests.

Testing and teaching are so closely interrelated to each other that it is virtually impossible to separate one from the other (Heaton, 1975). Baker (1989) pointed out that:

by changing the exam which the students must pass at the end of their courses one may influence course content and methodology more effectively than by issuing ministerial directives to administrators and teachers.

Korean educators seem to have paid insufficient attention to language testing even though it is essential to improving Koreans' English ability. They tend to neglect the need for local tests and instead simply apply standardized English tests (mostly from America) to assess Koreans.

Globalization includes the speedy exchange of commodities and information, but accepting Western commodities and information without criticism or the consideration of local needs may undermine the national identity and lead to the kind of cultural homogenization associated with the concept of Americanization.

It is believed that there is a need to examine critically those American standardized tests which have long been used for assessing Korean students.

English tests in Korea will be discussed in the next section before examining the tests critically.

4. English Testing in Korea

As English is a commodity in great demand all over the world, ELT has become a profitable business. Within the ELT market all of the English

speaking countries compete with one another through their agencies for international development e.g.,

Britains Overseas Development Administration [ODA] and the Australian Agency for International Development [AusAID], etc by investing to varying degrees in development projects in less developed nations around the world. Such development initiatives almost always carry a component in teaching English as a foreign language (Kaplan, 1998).

Of those markets the American market is dominated by its internal and external EFL requirements and the concomitantly large EFL textbook and other EFL material sales. The money from overseas students has also contributed much to this market. One of the top ten countries contributing to the market has been South Korea.

The American market seems to have influenced South Korea more than any other markets. Most Koreans desire to learn American English and almost all the textbooks and cassettes used in schools are in American English (Hwang, 2000). Thus most Korean people prefer American teachers. When a foreigner walks down the street, the first question that he or she is most likely to hear is Are you an American? This may illustrate how influenced Koreans are by Americans and American English. They seem to think that American English is the Standard English.

The American EFL examination market has also influenced Korea, and most Koreans use American standardized tests such as the TOEFL (the test of English as a Foreign Language) and TOEIC (the Test of English for International Communication) to measure their English ability. The TOEFL was constructed to determine if a student is capable of academic study in American countries, and the TOEIC was used to measure the everyday English skills of people working in an international environment.

There is a great demand for the TOEFL and the TOEIC, and most language institutes offer courses in the TOEFL and the TOEIC. Every year in Korea, approximately 150,000 people take the TOEFL and one million people take the TOEIC (Hwang, 2000).

Now within Korea, the American standardized tests are widely used for a variety of purposes: to select students with outstanding English ability by universities and colleges (a limited number of students are selected on the basis

of TOEFL or TOEIC scores only); to assess employees by corporations and governments agencies; to measure students progress by teachers or to track the progress in English improvement by individuals; etc. Even many elementary and secondary school students work on preparing for those tests.

The TOEFL and the TOEIC are very important tests for Korean learners. Their results have far-reaching effects, since they are used as criteria to measure achievement and to predict future success by College Admission Boards, employers, and teachers.

The widespread use of American ready-made tests should, however, be carefully examined in terms of the influence on learning and teaching. They seem inadequate for Koreans who want to become part of the global community, and it could be argued that they result in some harmful effects.

5. Criticisms of American tests

There are some criticisms Korean language educators should consider.

The first criticism is that the TOEFL and the TOEIC have strong cultural bias. According to Traynor (1985), the tests seem to be prepared by Americans for Americans because the items in the TOEFL and the TOEIC draw their contexts only from Americanae.g., American individuals, places, events, objects, regions, customs, etc.

Koreans may learn only American culture preparing for those tests, since learners who have knowledge of American history, American geography, American sport, etc., have an advantage, both practically and psychologically (Traynor, 1985). According to schema theory, learners background knowledge influences their test performance. Thus familiarity with the persons, places, institutions, and concepts mentioned in items place them in a more easily understood context.

American tests such as the TOEFL and the TOEIC seem to ignore the students local community as well as the knowledge of other cultures. Test items focus heavily on the essentially white middle-class English and American culture rather than including not only the students local community but other cultures in the world (Traynor, 1985). Learning only American culture may influence Koreans identity and their views of other cultures.

Wada (1999) insists the need for cross-cultural knowledge in English testing. She says that Japanese universities should include English reading comprehension passages on culture in their tests in order to provide students preparing for English tests with basic knowledge on cultures of the local community and the world.

Education for the age of globalization should aim to develop the ability to coexist and interact without prejudice among people who have different cultures and customs (Kubota, 2002). Thus it is necessary to include a variety of the global community's cultures together with the local culture – in the test items.

Another criticism Korean educators should consider is that the American standardized tests do not properly assess the proficiency of the learners who need to use the language in specific, real-life sociolinguistic contexts (Chalhoub-Deveille & Tarone, 1996).

Many Korean teachers rely on standardized or off-the-shelf tests such as the TOEFL and the TOEIC to assess Korean learners' proficiency regardless of their particular learning purposes. They simply use the tests because they are readily available.

However, commercial and standardized proficiency tests usually focus on generic proficiency that is supposedly transferable to all contexts (Chalhoub-Deveille & Tarone, 1996). They are based on a fixed, or standard content, which does not vary from one form of the test to another (Bachman, 1990). They do not recognize or necessarily accommodate the specific local social situations where learners must function in English. Alderson, Clapham & Wall (1995) argued that:

tests should be designed to show whether students have sufficient ability to be able to use a language in some specific area such as medicine, tourism or academic study.

In other words, the content of tests should be generally based on a needs analysis of the kinds of language that are required for the given purpose. For example, for the employee who needs to use English in his job, language performance objectives should be based on job tasks, which require varying levels of language proficiency.

The other weak point of the standardized tests is that they may be harmful to the curriculum. Madaus (1988), Mehrens and Kaminski (1989), and Smith

(1991) examine the impact of standardized testing on the curriculum and report that often the curriculum is geared to the test rather than the test being geared to the curriculum. The tests define the objectives of the teaching/learning situation and force classroom teachers to subjugate their lesson plans to test preparation (Madaus et al, 1988). Smith (1991) maintains that:

Standardized tests substantially reduce the time available for instruction, narrow curricular offerings and modes of instruction, and potentially reduce the capacities of teachers to teach content and to use methods and materials that are incompatible with standardized testing formats.

Teachers are typically anxious to prepare students for the tests because test results are often used as indicators of the quality of their teaching.

Korean language teachers and educators should recognize that the TOEFL and the TOEIC may disturb efforts to meet learners needs. Such tests tend to discourage innovative or creative approaches to teaching. In addition, they are not usually allowed to focus on the testing that the language learners are expected to use.

The last criticism is that the tests do not cover all four language areas: reading, listening, writing, and speaking. They usually cover only two (reading, listening) or three (reading, listening and writing) areas.

Oral communication proficiency has become important for anyone working in global markets which depend on the rapid information flows made possible by information and communication technologies. A survey reported in *People Management* in November 1997 found that oral proficiency was cited by employers as the most important skill but was perceived to be sorely lacking in recruits coming straight from further or higher education (Cameron, 2002). Oral communication skills are essential if the employee is to be pleasant and attentive to customers and clients in face-to-face conversations or on the telephone. This means that individuals need a relatively high level of oral proficiency if they are to participate in competitive global markets. Therefore, today oral skills seem to be not just something workers are required to do, but something they are expected to be, or become, good at (Cameron, 2002).

Such an important oral skill is not tested in the TOEFL and the TOEIC. The answer to this criticism may be that any students who have developed listening and reading skills will have developed corresponding speaking or writing skills.

This might be so. If a student works equally at the four main language skills and is then tested on only two or three of them, there may well be a close correspondence between the scores on the tested skills and ability in the untested skills (Traynor, 1985).

But many teachers experiences show that once a test is established, they very often have the situation where the tail wags the dog (Traynor 1985). This seems to be true in the case of the TOEFL and the TOEIC. Because oral proficiency is not tested, it is often neglected in teaching. Students also would not want to waste time on skills which do not feature in the tests.

Some of the reasons for not testing speaking (and writing) may be sound. But they are for administrative convenience, or because of financial constraints; they are not pedagogical.

Korean language teachers and educators should realize that the tests are being used recklessly regardless of learners purposes, and they are not suitable for Koreans in some ways as criticized above. Therefore it is believed that there is a need to make Koreans own local tests which fit Koreans better and bring some beneficial effects to teaching and learning. Some suggestions will be made in the next section.

6. Suggestions

For the development of the tests for Koreans, the first suggestion is the inclusion of the local community in terms of characters, place names and references. Koreans learn English in order to become part of the global community. The global outlook involves a new awareness not just of global cultures, but of Koreans own culture as well. The more they know about their own culture, the more they would be able to appreciate another culture. Thus contexts of the items should primarily be based upon the local environment and include cultures from all over the world, and tests should be as natural and authentic as possible (Brown, 1994). Thus including items of not only American or British culture but also diverse cultures of the global community would make the test more authentic, since Koreans today are welcomed into a much larger world than America or Britain.

By including the local culture, it would allow Korean examinees to feel much

familiarity with the items of the test and to perform better. Examinees who are confronted with a familiar item context will approach the item with the confidence that they can deal with it successfully (Melendez & Prichard, 1985). Hence, it is also suggested that local examiners with specific local knowledge should make the tests because examiners should be aware of examinees familiarity or unfamiliarity with particular cultural aspects.

Another suggestion is to make highly localized forms of tests which are descriptive of the language practices of specific individuals functioning in specific social contexts (e.g. the ESL test for learners ability to perform in academic settings or for professional certification) (Chalhoub-Deville & Tarone, 1996).

English teaching has to start and end with specific learners who must function in specific social situations. In those situations, the learners do not need to draw equally on their proficiency in all aspects of the English language; rather each situation seems to call for differential use of different registers, skills, and grammatical structures of English (Chalhoub-Deville & Tarone, 1996). Thus, language teachers and educators will be better served and the validity of their test score interpretation and use would be enhanced if they construct tests according to the specific variables operating in learners contexts of use, instead of employing generic imported standardized proficiency tests.

The present authors maintain that the nature of the proficiency construct is not constant but that different linguistic, functional, and creative proficiency components emerge when investigating the proficiency construct in different contexts. There is no social situation in which one may draw equally on all aspects of ones proficiency in a language. With a specific purposes test, teachers would have a more accurate representation of learners proficiency in that specific area and be able to assist them in deciding what needs to be taught from one time to the next.

Lastly, the establishment of an oral component in tests is suggested.

As we have seen in the previous section, oral skills are essential for anyone working in global markets. For improving Koreans oral skills teachers should test oral proficiency in tests and bring some beneficial backwash effects to learners - backwash being defined as the effect a test has on teaching and learning (Brown, 1994).

Test-makers have often insisted that they assess examinees oral skills in indirect ways. However, those tests have failed to encourage Korean examinees to improve their oral skills.

A direct oral test is indispensable in bringing beneficial backwash effects as well as assessing communicative ability which language educators intend to measure and can not be ignored; according to Bachman (1990), communicative language ability includes both communicative competence (grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence) and the ability for implementing that competence in language use - that is, the ability or capacity to use language communicatively in particular contexts of situation, which involves both competence and demonstration of the ability to use the competence (Weir, 1988).

As stated earlier, there are some difficulties such as the cost of time and money to introduce an oral test in the Korean context, where a large number of students have to take an exam in a short time. However, what is certain is that the tests cannot be left as they are, with all their problems. Therefore it is necessary to find a way in which the obstacles that prevent implementation of an oral testing in the Korean situation can be overcome. Indeed, some Korean language educators have recently begun to study a semi-oral direct test such as the Computerized Oral Testing (COT), which may allow teachers to administer an oral test in a shorter time and with less effort.

So far some suggestions have been made for the new form of tests for Koreans. But there is one more important issue Korean educators should consider.

As a result of the broad, global distribution of English, and because it has been taught in many places, English is no longer the sole property of English speakers; different varieties of English now exist (Chalhoub-Deville & Tarone, 1996). Many new varieties of English have developed. For example, Indian English, Nigerian English, Philippine English, and so on. These variations of English are not exactly like American or British English; each one seems to be unique. Then which of a number of varieties of English should it be necessary to learn and test? Only the current American or British standard inner circle English? Or one or more English variants within the growing number of regional/national varieties which may dominate for global communication in the

future? These are questions that should be asked and considered more often in the near future.

7. Summary and Conclusion

Globalization, which is part of an ever more interdependent world politically, economically, socially and culturally, impacts on the life of the individual. Today every individual senses the impact of international changes, and each of them is directly involved in global processes. In this era of globalization, Koreans are eager to learn English as the world's *lingua franca* for their own career and professional development.

Korean language educators have researched and suggested various advanced teaching methods and a new curriculum for improving Koreans communicative skills. But Koreans have often failed to gain sufficient English ability to communicate with people in a global society. It seems to result from language educators insufficient attention to the development of testing.

Korea have simply employed the American tests such as the TOEFL and the TOEIC, and they have been widely used regardless of learners specific learning purposes. But Korean educators should recognize that these tests are commodities which have to be sold globally to a variety of different markets. This means the exclusion of the local community, and it also means that the test items are limited to a narrow range of topics which can be generally accepted by countries of different cultures.

The criticisms of the American tests show that they are inappropriate for Koreans who prepare for the needs of the global community. The tests contain only American English and culture, and this in turn may lead to the kind of cultural homogenization of Koreans that is associated with Americanization (Block&Cameron, 2002). If learning English makes Koreans more homogenous, the cost in time, money and effort cannot be justified. The tests also do not accommodate the specific local social situations in which learners must function in English. Furthermore they do not assess learners oral skills, which are indispensable in international communication.

It is certainly believed that Koreans need their new form of local tests which would give examinees more opportunities to know their own culture and other

peoples cultures, and simultaneously bring beneficial backwash effects to them. Finally, such tests would give Koreans a better fit than the American tests.

In conclusion, Korean language educators in the era of globalization should aim to develop the ability to coexist and interact effectively with people in the global community through teaching and learning English. To achieve this, they should pay more attention to the development of tests, and through such tests an attempt should be made to link the global community with the local. The developed local tests would help to equip learners not only with sufficient English ability to communicate effectively in the competitive global markets but also with a sense of national identity and the worlds cultures that they will need to navigate successfully in a global environment.

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■ 요약

세계화와 한국인을 위한 지방 시행시험의 필요성

주 미 진

세계화는 국가간의 교류를 급속하게 증가시킴과 더불어 한국의 영어교육에도 지대한 영향을 미치게 되었다. 이러한 국제화 시대에 알맞은 인재를 양성하기 위하여 한국 영어교육의 주 관심은 무엇보다도 학생들의 영어실력을 향상시키고자 하는 것이었다. 그리고 또한 영어교육을 통하여 지구촌의 여러 문화를 가르치는 것뿐이 아니라 한국의 문화와 가치를 기르고자 하는 시도가 이루어져왔다. 한국은 수 많은 영어교재와 자료 등을 외국으로부터 도입하여 사용하였고 또한 그에 따른 학생들의 실력을 평가하기 위하여 외국어 시험이 시행되어져 왔다. 이러한 시험은 대부분이 미국에서 들여온 것이며 그 중에서도 한국에서 가장 많이 실시되고 있는 시험 형태는 TOEFL과 TOEIC이다. 하지만 이러한 시험들은 한국에서 충분한 비판 없이 시행되어져 왔으며 지금까지 한국의 상황에 적절한지에 대한 검토가 부족하였던 것 같다.

본 논문에서는 먼저 세계화와 언어의 연관관계와 영어가 세계 공용어가 된 배경을 살펴보고 TOEFL과 TOEIC등과 같은 미국의 표준화 시험들이 한국의 학생들의 영어 실력을 평가하고 또한 그 시험을 준비하는 학생들에게 유익한 역류현상을 주어지는지에 대해 종합적으로 고찰해 보았으며 현재의 영어 시험들에 보완해야 할 몇 가지를 제시하였다. 끝으로 앞으로 지향해야 할 연구의 방향을 또한 제시하였다.

