

STATUS AND FUNCTION OF ENGLISH AS A LANGUAGE OF INTERNATIONAL/INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN KOREA¹

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Introduction

To date back, English was first introduced in Korea in the late 19th century. According to Hadar (2008), Western ideas including Christianity had reached Korea through China in the 17th century. However, the Choson (the old name of Korea) dynasty shut the doors tightly against Western “barbarians” and it remained as a “Hermit Kingdom.” In the early 1880s, however, Choson found the necessity of changing the national policy and then opened its door to the western countries.

After the Choson-America treaty was signed in 1882, the first English language school, *Dongmunhak*, was opened to train translators in 1883. In 1886, *YugeongGongwon*, Royal English School, was established in Choson to educate young elite officials (Jung, 1998). The students of *Yugeong Gongwon* came from either junior officials who just passed state examinations or high-ranking officials’ sons including royal family members. Although the Classical Chinese script “hanja” (or its writing “hanmun”) was considered as a language of high prestige in general in the 19th century Korea and English was not a dominant language, it is assumed that English education was considered a special benefit for high society. After graduation, the graduates received special benefit such as promotion. English also gave young generations a chance to enter the government administration. Thus, English had been considered a language of opportunity since then.

If we consider the year 1883 as the year of introducing English to Korea, it has been over 125 years since English was first accepted as a foreign language in a social domain of Korea. It has been observed that the way Koreans perceive English in the 21st century is similar to the traditional perceptions, and has been expanded over the changing society. Jeon (2006) identifies three functions of English in Korea in terms of opportunities: personal, business, cultural market opportunities.

The talk will cover three aspects of English in Korea: its functions, benefits of using it, and its status in the given context. Some implications will be drawn from the findings.

The functions of English

In Korea, English is used in various domains of the society such as education, business, media, and government. In secondary schools, English has been taught as a compulsory subject according to the national curriculum over the last 60 years. It was introduced at the primary school in 1997. English education starts from Grade 3 of the primary school. The score in English of college scholastic ability

¹ Some data for this presentation are, with permission, from the Jung & Chang’s (in progress) ‘English Next in Korea’ project funded by British Council, Korea. Dr. Kyu-Tae Jung(Hannam University/Charles Sturt University) is the other key researcher of the project.

test(CSAT) plays an important role in candidates' getting permission from universities. At most universities a variety of English courses are provided to help their students to be better prepared for their career. The importance of English subject in schools has caused a social problem. Rich parents want their children to do better in English and have better chance in the future. This has brought about a gap among children from different family background.

English is also used in the business domain in Korea. For example, the following two figures show imports and exports in Korea from 1965 to 2007 according to English circles. According to Kachru (1985), the Inner Circle refers to English as it originally took shape and later was spread across the world in its first diaspora. The USA, the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Canada belong to this circle. The countries in the Outer Circle use English as a result of the second diaspora: colonization in Asia and Africa. Countries like Singapore, the Philippines, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania, Zambia, Malaysia etc. belong to the Expanding Circle. The other countries where English is used in the limited context are belonging to the Expanding Circle(Jung & Chang, in progress).

Figure 1: Value of Korean Exports by Country of Destination 1965 to 2007 (KOSIS)

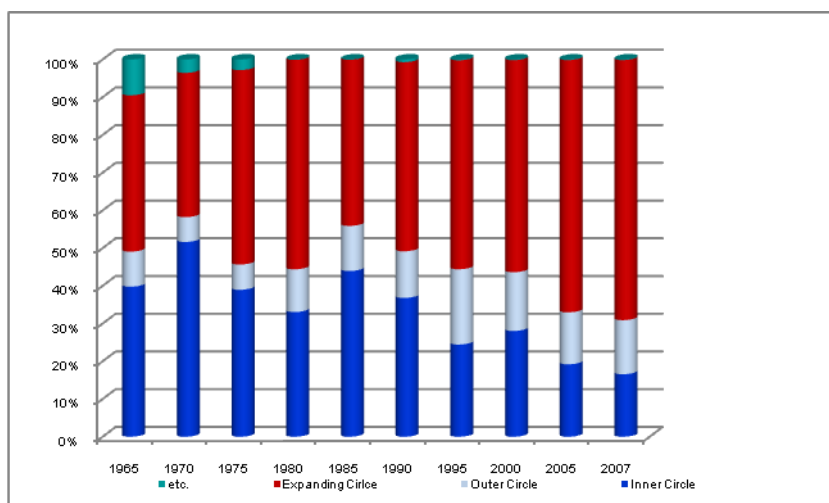
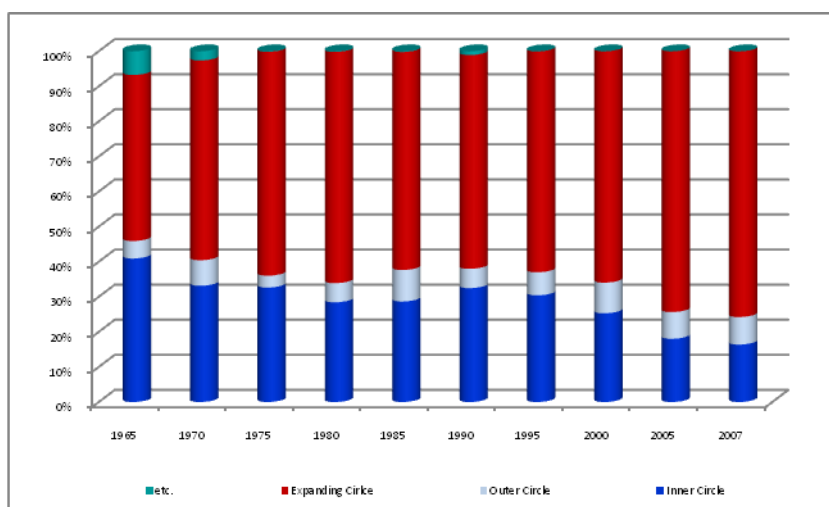


Figure 2: Value of Korean Import by Country of Origin from 1965 to 2007(KOSIS)



According to the above figures, countries belonging to the Expanding Circle (in red) have become increasingly important in the Korean foreign trade. Based on the above figure we can also assume that in business context Koreans use English to communicate with other people whose mother tongue is not English.

According to Media Statistics Information System (MEDIASIS), there are four foreign languages daily newspapers published in Korea. Three of them are English newspapers as shown in the following:

- Joongang Daily (www.joongangdaily.join)
- Korea Times (www.koreatimes.co)
- Korea Herald (www.Koreaherald.co)
- Korea-China Daily

As of October 2008, there are 11 national, 74 regional, and 13 economic daily newspapers published in Korea. Among them 3 national and 3 economic daily news papers provide English and other language services through the web. Their names, and language services are shown in the following table.

Table 1: Newspapers and foreign language services

Name (Romanized)	Foreign Language Services
DongAilbo	English. Japanese. Chinese
Hangyeore	English
Joseonilbo	English, Japanese, Chinese
Financial News	English, Chinese
Jeonjasinmun	English
Maegyeong-internet	English

“The Junior Herald” is Korean-English mixing newspapers, which provides bilingual menus for children. Among 66 internet newspapers “migrantsinkorea.net” provides multilingual service including Korean, English, Chinese, Thai, Vietnamese, and Hindi.

As of October 2008, there are 40 public, 13 private, 46 special broadcasting companies in Korea. EBS is the one that has recently started. It is a free English education channel and employs English-Korean code-switching to serve educational purposes. There are 120 cable TV channels and 2 satellite service providers. Arirang TV is English-only cable channel in Korea. Koreans can get access to a variety of language services through both cable and satellite services.

The Korean government does not use English as an official language, but it provides English service on the web. As of October 2008, the official government website for foreigners (The Korea.net) provides 8 foreign language services including English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Vietnamese, Russian, Chinese, and Japanese. All executive branches including President Office, Prime Minister Office, and 15 Ministries and their affiliated institutions provide English web service. There are seven central government agencies that provide both Chinese and Japanese service as well as English one. The local government consisting of 5

metropolitans and 9 provinces provides three language services such as English, Chinese, and Japanese through the web. Three of them provide two different scripts for Chinese: GB and BIG5.

The benefits of using English

As mentioned earlier, the benefits of English competence begin in the primary and secondary schools. English is counted as a major subject in the national curriculum, and it is also one of the key subjects in the CSAT. It has been observed that students' achievement in English subject at schools and at CSAT has influence on their future.

Koreans believe that English competence is a key component in job market. Based on the analysis of new employment advertising, 45 out of the upper 90 companies in Korea do not give minimum requirement of TOEIC score. Instead, they test various aspects of applicants' capacities (*Sisamail*, 10th July, 2008). The other 45 companies, however, require minimum TOEIC score as shown in the following table 2.

Table 2: TOEIC score requirement of 45 companies

Score	Percent (%)
800s	16.3
700s	54.3
600s	29.3

According to JobKore(www.jobkorea.co.kr), the company which asks applicants English competence as a requirement are as follows (JobKorea, cited from datanews on July 31, 2008).

Table 3: English requirement of companies

Year	Recruiting	English Requirement	Percent(%)
2006 1 st half	359,615	22,216	6.20%
2007 1 st half	416,942	30,291	7.30%
2008 1 st half	468,360	37,872	8.10%

As shown in the following table, foreign trade is the field that asks English capacity most amongst other fields.

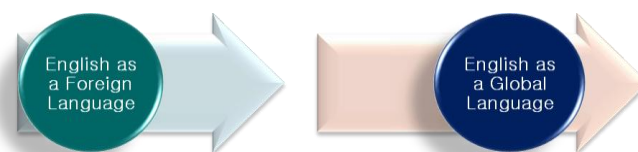
Table 4: English requirement in different fields

Field	Percent(%)
Foreign Trade	29.0
Semi conductor	18.4
Hotel, Airline, Travel	18.2
Auto, Steel, Ship building	13.1
Chemical, Energy	12.9
Electrical & Electronic	12.5
Game & Entertainment	11.9
IT consulting	11.8

From the data above, it can be said that requirement for English competence has increased, and many fields in job market require English. The above table 3 shows that among top 100 companies 50% of them require good English proficiency as a basic requirement.

The status of English

As we have already seen, English has been considered as a major foreign language in Korea since the 19th century. As the world is getting globalized, there has also been a sense of English as a global language, not just a language of the USA or the UK. As shown in the value of Korean export and import by country according English circles (See Figures 1 and 2), there has been more possibility that Koreans use English with foreigners whose mother tongues are not English.



Change in status of English is also reflected in education. There has been a revision in the national curriculum of English. Among rationales for the revision in the curriculum are change in society, economic benefits, and better competitiveness. Amendments in the English curriculum are expected to bring about changes in English language education in schools. Changes in other domains of the Korean society also support that the status of English has been shifting from a foreign language to a global/international/intercultural language in the changing world.

Concluding remarks

As the Korean society has been changing and globalised, more attention has been drawn to English in different areas of society including education, economy and media. The gathered data from different sources reveals that the range and depth of English in Korea. It also shows the characteristics of English in Korea and its future direction.

Although English was considered as a major foreign language in Korea, Koreans in different contexts are more likely to have witnessed, or experienced benefits of having English competence than before. These changes in the functions and benefits have brought about change in the status of English from as a foreign language to a global language.

Language has been changed and will be changed. English is not an exception. Old English was changed into Shakespeare's Middle English and then changed into Modern English. It is still changing. One of the noticeable and fascinating aspects of English in the 20th and 21st century is that it represents different cultural contexts. Terms like English as an international language, English as a global language, English as a *lingua franca* and World Englishes all represent these aspects of English.

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