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English 370

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‘Yeongeou Yeolpung’ – English Fever: An Evaluation of Economic and Ideological Influences
on National Language Integrity

Learning English as a second language is a major commodity highly sought after by many South Koreans. There are both economic and ideological reasons for this. In fact, it is a commodity that has created *yeongeou yeolpung* - English fever, in South Korea. This paper seeks to contribute to the study of the English language in terms of its political, social, and economic value for the people of South Korea. At Reading Town, which is an after school program that teaches students how to read, write, and speak English, there are many apparent economic and ideological factors for learning English abroad. Furthermore, the combination of economic reasons and ideological reasons create a strong set of beliefs, values, and ideas that have shaped the way South Koreans think, act, and behave. Therefore, the impact of English on South Koreans goes beyond just the practical usage and reveals an ideology that might possibly have consequences for South Korean national language and cultural integrity.

The Reading Town branch in Abbotsford, B.C. caters to mostly Korean customers. Most of the students, who come to Reading Town, come to live and go to school in Canada to improve their English skills. Almost all of the students come to learn English on a temporary basis which can vary from six months to two years away from home. However, there are a number of students who first come to Canada on a temporary basis but then decide to live in Canada permanently. Usually one parent, the Korean mother, comes over with all of the children. However, students also come alone and stay with Korean or Canadian home stay families. In

some cases, two siblings come together without their parents. However, many times one goes back home or one comes alone. The age of the students coming over to learn varies and the skill levels also vary. Some are as young as four years old and some are near to finishing high school. The age of the students does not mean much in terms of how much English they know. Some students who are five years old far surpass those who are in grade nine or older and vice versa.

Learning English is very competitive and this is noticeable in the way that South Korean mothers at Reading Town push their children to succeed and make perfect scores on their tests. Also, the employees working for Reading Town are expected to encourage students to get above 90% on all scores. Perfect points or “*Tamadaso?*” is a question asked by many students and teachers that motivates them to do well. Therefore, not only are perfect scores highly desired by parents but it is also a significant marketing factor for encouraging parents to invest more into their child’s education. The pressure of time, money, and other student success stories is high. After a teacher praised one mother’s daughter, the mother said, “There are many smart girls in Korea. She needs to be better.” This is an attitude that many parents have at Reading Town who are hoping to give their children the best opportunities and future ahead of them. For them, making sure their children learn English fluently is the number one way in which they can accomplish this goal. Also, parents refrain from giving praise for marks that are below 95% in hopes that their child will continue to get the best scores possible. Some parents show a lot of discontent with employees who praise their children. One possibility for this is a fear that their child will think that a lower mark is good enough, limiting their future educational opportunities. However, in many cases, children are reading books, studying vocabulary, grammar, and reading skill at a grade level above their age. In some cases, two to three grades above their age.

The costs of living and receiving education abroad is extremely expensive and explains

the demand from parents to see fast improvements in test scores. Parents expect this not only from their children but also from Reading Town. Entrance level scores also surprise or deter mothers from enrolling their children. A lot of mothers anticipate their child's level test scores to be higher because of how many years they have already invested in their child's education in after school English programs in Korea. This shows the uncertainty parents face in terms of deciphering the quality of English education their children are being given in Korea or in Canada. However, the conception is that the standard of English abroad far surpasses that found in Korea and if the children get it, they will be a cut above the rest.

There are many economic factors that surround the push for learning English in South Korea and abroad. These economic factors play an important role in creating a framework for the ideological reasons behind English fever. For example, a country's initial desire to learn English has usually been for the purpose of economic success within in a country but then it also starts to change people's values and beliefs that the new language brings. One example of this attitude comes from a video recording called "An English Speaking World". In an interview, the Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew states, "The first business of any language is to help a people make a living and there is no use fulfilling our cultural selves if we can't fulfill our biological selves. So, we make a living, and that means we have to learn English" (*The Story of English Series*). This is interesting because it shows that basic survival needs far outweigh what kind of a threat to nationalism globalizing the local economy and learning English might be. Also, Lee Kuan Yew is acknowledging that they are not fulfilling their cultural selves but that cultural identity comes second to their biological needs. Furthermore, the economic value of English redefines an entire country's priorities and concerns. However, this is not an unwelcomed restructuring in Singapore, in terms of a post-colonial desire to learn English. It is

arguable that colonization had many negative impacts that robbed countries of their national identity at one time. However, in post-colonial times, Lee Kuan Yew states, “We are fortunate, American technology and ideological dominance coincided with our English heritage. So, the problem was solved for us. It was a bonus.” (*The Story of English Series*). What Lee Yew is admitting is that American technology and ideology has dominance within Singapore but it is not viewed as a negative impact but a positive impact. This is important to keep in mind because while it is easy to focus on the negative impacts of globalization and the spread of English, it is also important to listen to the people who have been directly influenced by it. It is no surprise then that South Korea also places a great deal of economic value on the learning of English because it means participating in the benefits of American technology, ideology, information systems, and world trade.

The economic structures within South Korea reflect the strong value placed on being a part of the global economic system. For this reason, there is a strong push for English education. English has become the language of the global economy and all those wanting to take part in the global market economy have to learn English. Countries that are not as industrialized view English acquisition as a ticket to a better economy and a better life for their country as a whole (Shim & Park 130). Many leaders of countries, for example, in South Korea place a high economic value on English and push for their country to learn it. For this reason, David Crystal argues that the “global English is a political and cultural reality” and has received this status because so many countries have picked it up (12). Furthermore, Crystal argues that “a language becomes international for one main reason – the political power of the people who speak” (13). Evidently, this is true given the Prime Minister of Singapore’s remark and Korea’s strong desire to take part in the global economy that has been strongly influenced by the United States.

English as a lingua franca has affected the priorities of many countries because it is associated with the power of “capitalism, culture, and technology” (Shim & Park 140). Shim and Park note that South Korea has strong national language attitudes from the building of “Korea as a monolingual nation” during the “experiences of colonization and modernization” (142). However, Shim and Park note that these attitudes are changing because “English as a symbolic capital” and a means for “upward social mobility” have taken root (143). The phrase “symbolic capital” means English has taken on a value beyond money which shows how economics contributes to the symbolic changes within a country. The economic value placed on the English language develops overtime into an ideological attitude change as well. For example, the influence of the United States on South Korea affected the regimes in South Korea, even the ones that adopted nationalist positions. Shim and Park note that South Korea was influenced by U.S. “politics, economy, military affairs, and culture” despite nationalist regimes (143). In addition, the period where the economic value of English started to really take a strong foothold was during “1945-1948, during which a transitional military government of U.S. armed forces was established in the southern half of the Peninsula after the collapse of the Japanese colonial rule” (Shim & Park 143). The U.S. armed forces brought with them English and this made its way to the local people. Similar to the argument of this paper, Shim and Park state that the influence of English through political and economic factors “created a foundation upon which English increasingly became a language of importance” (143). Again, we see how through economic and political change, a high economic value is placed on English and an ideology about what equivocates success develops soon after.

In the mid-1990’s the Korean government adopted ‘*seggyehwa*’- globalization, as a new slogan for economic growth and took on new neoliberal reforms in order to enhance Korea’s

competitiveness (Park & Abelmann 649). With the neoliberal reforms that encouraged open free trade and economic restructuring, the economic value of English was driven up. What is interesting about the value that South Korea places on English is with how it contrasts with the “nationalistically-driven globalization or utilitarian nationalism” history of South Korea (Shim & Park 145). Despite a strong history of nationalism, Shim and Park state that the government of Korea pushed for English immersion and international education immediately. The effort was called ‘*yeongeo inpeura*’ - English infrastructure (145). This is important because it shows how the language of English became something as valuable as material infrastructure like roads, sewers, highways, and telecommunications. All of these types of infrastructure facilitate economic growth and development in countries and are highly valued in terms of a country's economic strength. The fact that English is viewed as this economically significant is important to the discussion of language and economics. Furthermore, it shows that if a language is attached to economic growth, then it will undoubtedly take a prominent position politically and culturally.

The economic value placed on English therefore virtually transformed the education system in South Korea. For example, the National Curricula from 1997 has enforced English education in the elementary schools from the third grade. The goal was to have the citizens of Korea prepared to participate in the global market. Therefore, the plan was to start teaching children at a young age. This explains the push for so many parents to teach their children English because they want their children to participate in the global market confidently. Many students at Reading Town, when asked why they are here learning English, immediately say that it is because “English is the language of the world”. Furthermore, students argue that in order to get a good job they must learn English. For example, one girl explained to me that in South Korea it is not possible to become a doctor and not learn English because many of the new

sciences and technologies around treatment are in English. Therefore, in order to keep up with the science and technological advances made in the United States or other countries, they must be able to know English very well to benefit from new information. Basically, education is surrounded by the idea of global participation, not local or national economic growth separate from globalization. Therefore, the national economic growth of South Korea goes hand in hand with global participation. For this to happen, the English Language for these students becomes the symbol or commodity that ties the two together.

In order to ensure an economic tie with the global economic community, the government of South Korea has been the main facilitator for placing a strong economic value on English which has in turn encouraged South Koreans to do the same. For example, Shim and Park mention that in April of 2007, President Roh Moo-hyun stated that “English is a must in order to catch up with the stream of globalization” and both argue that the Lee Myung-bak administration will probably continue this from 2008-2013 because of its strong neoliberal political stance (146). “Neoliberal” simply means that the policies surrounding the government are geared towards free trade and open correspondence with the global economic market place. To ensure the success of this, new standards have been placed on entrance requirements for college and graduation from universities, facilitated through TOEFL or TOEIC tests. For this reason, many parents at Reading Town are trying to get their children’s English levels where they need to be to take their TOEFL examinations for college. In fact, at Reading Town in Abbotsford, there are plans to introduce TOEFL instruction so that students can start preparing for this exam in as early as the sixth grade. For example, Shim and Park argue that “The Chosun Ilbo reported that middle and high school students made up 70-80% of the approximately 130,000 Korean TOEFL testees in 2006” (149). In addition the Samsung Economic Research Institute reports that

“Korean families spent US\$15.6 billion on English language tutoring in 2006 alone” (Shim & Park 150). This does not include the money spent for those who send their children abroad. For this reason, it is arguable that English is a major commodity in South Korea if they are spending US\$15.6 billion a year. Therefore, English has not only become important economically because of global and political economic reasons surrounding the development of Korea but it has become a major economic activity through the buying and selling of education (TOEFL) that is generating a US\$15.6 billion income per year in Korea.

The education system has not been impervious to the influences of the demand for the commodity of English. For example, it is projected that 40% of all lectures in local universities will be taught in English by 2010. In addition, the Korean government has spent millions of dollars building English villages so that parents who cannot afford to send their children abroad can send them to the English villages to experience America. The villages are constructed to be a mini American city with an immigration office, ‘50’s style grocery stores, restaurants, and activity centers. In fact, they look like mini stage sets used to experience the United States. However, these villages have met little success and they had a deficit of “US\$22 Million in 2006” because of the cost to run them and because the local citizens did not use them (Shim & Park 152). This is interesting because there are ideological and symbolic reasons for learning English that goes well beyond practical linguistic competence. For example, even though someone could become competent in English at an English Village, it is not viewed as viable as learning abroad.

Although this might seem unnecessary or extreme, Korea has been successful and their accomplishment as a Newly Developed Country (NDC) has not gone unnoticed. For example, in the mid 1960’s South Korea was “a land of traditional rice farmers who made up 70 percent of

the country's workforce. It's GDP per capita –\$230 – was the same as Ghana” (Stutz & Warf 491). Today, the country of South Korea is the “eleventh most powerful in the world” and ahead of some countries in Europe (Stutz & Warf 491). Furthermore, its GDP in 2003 was \$340 billion and the GDP per capita is \$6800. Today, 70% of the country's workforce are in urban jobs not rice farming. South Korea has seen incredible growth economically with its participation in the global economy and strong English acquisition in the last 10 years. South Korea's rapid advancement has “turned this nation into one of the most economically powerful in the world” (Stutz & Warf 436). Its fastest growing sectors are in computers, transportation services, and infrastructure. South Korea used to have low labour costs that attracted Multinational Corporations but now, many of these companies are relocating to lower-cost countries like China and Indonesia (Stutz & Warf 436). This shows how economically advanced Korea has become and how powerful the push for English language acquisition has advanced their current development. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the real economic necessity that English has had for the country of South Korea. It is not a mere fanciful idea that the Korean government unreasonably pushed for. Similar to the Singapore Prime Minister, it was viewed as necessary, acted upon, and now Korea is one of the most economically powerful countries in the world. Furthermore, it shows that the need for learning English is not an illusion but an economic reality for South Korea. English helped them acquire economic success and therefore English is desired to maintain that success.

The economic reality and value of learning English has therefore pushed the entire nation of South Korea to embrace English and resulted in an English fever. However, there are many challenges and struggles that students and parents face as competition rises. Overseas education has created class segregation between those who can afford to go and those who

cannot. The education of those who go overseas is viewed as more viable and productive but not everyone can go overseas. As mentioned earlier, even if children participate in an English Village locally, they are viewed as having acquired an artificial experience that is not as valuable. However, regardless of the competitive nature of going abroad, education within South Korea is also equally competitive. The value of a child is placed on how much education he or she is receiving and how much their parents are investing in after school privatized education. This creates a lot of local inequality and pressure on parents and their children.

Prior to the decade of neo-liberal education reform, there were restrictions that prohibited private educational institutes in order to reduce inequality and provide an equal education for all children. However, with the reform, it was deemed to be in “violation of the South Korean constitution, which guarantees parents rights for their children’s education and the freedom to choose employment” (Park & Abelmann 649). Therefore, private education opened up again and competition and class segregation further expanded. In a study by So Jin Park and Nancy Abelmann, three mothers of three different economic positions express how they feel towards English education. Hun’s mother, of the lower class, “dreams that her children might someday live abroad in a bigger world – even if they have to live abroad as beggars” (Park & Abelmann 654). The middle class mother, Min’s Mother, argues that she wants her children to “live happily like other regular people” but she also understands that “in South Korea a person needs an elite education to live well” which places her in an ambivalent position with respect to English learning (656). The last mother, a wealthy upper-class Korean, went abroad with her children because she realized that “her children were unable to enter a prestigious institute because they tested below the standard of the lowest level class” (662). Here we can notice the words “lowest level class” which exemplifies how class is associated with the level of English acquisition a

child has. It is important to mention that the upper class mother's kids were in the 1st and 2nd grade. This may come as a surprise but the high economic value placed on English has infiltrated down through economics, politics, globalization, and social constructs so that parents feel responsible for their child's success solely based on how well they know English. For example, the Korean government making English a required subject in Elementary school, building English villages, making the entrance exams to local Korean universities a test of English proficiency, all contribute to the mindset of early education.

The purely business perspective of English as a commodity creates a whole new challenge because there are strong marketing strategies to encourage parents to spend thousands of dollars a month on private education. For example, Reading Town has a newspaper called Reading Town Times. In the December 2008 edition of the paper, a man named Soonho Song states, "Harvard starts at the 2nd grade" (RTT 2008). This is a motivating component for many parents and private schools like Reading Town. Parents want to see their children successful which means going to major schools in the United States. The Reading Town Times also highlights the Ivy League schools in America, for example Princeton and Yale with a detailed analysis of what scores and educational supports are needed for a child to get accepted to one of these schools. All of the issues feature young children winning awards and being the smartest kids at their age. Emphasis is placed on creating a "Reading Town Genius" by starting young and building the right habits in your child so that they can achieve lifelong success (RTT 2008).

The fact that parents are extremely concerned about their children's education is not unreasonable given the competition and the marketing of education to parents. There are clear and obvious reasons why South Koreans have had to work so hard and continue to work hard to be successful. Going from a low developed country of rice farmers to a country that is the 11th

largest did not just happen without effort. However, what many parents and children are trying to do is hard and extremely competitive beyond what seems to be just solely economic reasons. For this reason, Min's mother started to feel ambivalence about English education and wondered if it was too much for her children, realizing that none of it guarantees an easy prosperous life (Park & Abelmann 657). However, most parents strive to secure the education of their child for a better life and future despite the unreasonable demand of local competition or lack of assurance that their child will be rich and secure. Regardless of assurances, there is a hope and motivating drive for their children's success and the marketing pull to buy the commodity of English is stronger than any reality that might suggest otherwise. Each parent and child is looking for an opportunity and a greater chance which is why many parents come abroad.

Children with learning disabilities face a tremendous challenge with English fever. For example, one mother brought her son who had a learning disability to Reading Town. Her son needed a lot of special attention that Reading Town simply could not provide, given the three student class arrangement and the distraction he presented for other students doing computer tests. Apparently, this was not the first time that his mother worried and had to convince someone to educate him despite his learning disability. In fact, the reason she came to Canada was in the hope for more equal opportunity and Canada's friendliness towards students with disabilities. One student brought to my attention during the stay of this child with a learning disability that her brother has a learning disability. She bluntly stated that children with learning disabilities are treated poorly in South Korea and are viewed as a waste of time. She said these children are sent to educational institutions that do not help them. She argued that parents bring their children here in hopes that they will get a fair chance at an equal education that other kids have. This fact is extremely sad when considering the amount of competition that has been

mentioned earlier for students who do not have special needs. One can only imagine the helplessness felt by parents who have children with special needs. The concept of class and social segregation takes on a whole new meaning for South Koreans who have children with learning disabilities. These children are viewed as beyond help and immediately cut out of the system of competition that requires a certain score to move forward. Either the child can do it or they cannot. It comes as no surprise then that the mother of the child with a disability that came to Reading Town was finally told that Reading Town could not accommodate his needs. The unfortunate fact of this reality is not only the unfairness but that this poor mother was told this before many times, not only in Korea but also in Canada. Regardless of the fact that the mother was willing to pay the same amount that every other parents paid, the money received was deemed insufficient for the extra time it took to care for him. Therefore, this particular case shows that the economic reality for learning English in order to get a job or to be successful is an economic reality. However, there is also the fact that the economic value placed on English education can have many negative impacts as well.

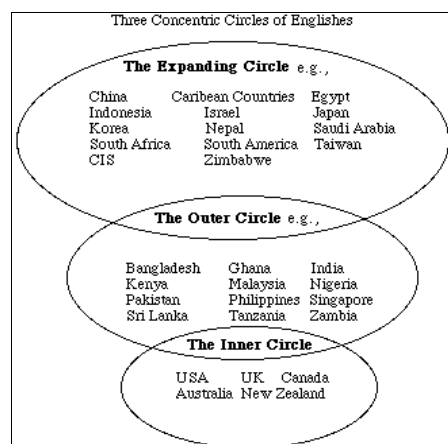
Other negative economic impacts of parents going abroad with their children is the outsourcing of Korean money to other countries economies. Park and Abelmann state that in 1997 “English study abroad adds an additional trillion won (about \$833 Million)” to the English education market coming from South Korea (646). One case study shows that a mother spends “\$210,000 a year for the overseas education of her two sons” and that “24,000 primary and secondary school students left for *jogi yuhak*’-early overseas education, in 2006” (Shim & Park 137). Korean money being spent is leaving Korea and not coming back. This is important because if a country keeps the dollars it makes within the country, it can turn it around and reinvest it back into the development of the country, in things like healthcare, education,

infrastructure, and so on. However, what happens is called, “dollar drain” which can be harmful to the local economy over the long run (Shim & Park 151). In addition, many children that study abroad at a young age choose to go back and study at the university level because of all the hype on American Schools. What happens is that many South Koreans who study at the University end up staying in the foreign country to work or live for the rest of their life. This is called “brain drain” which means that a country loses its educated workers who could help build the local economy. In one sense, this opens up new jobs for other South Koreans, but it also means a gaping hole for specialized labour if brain drain occurs too much. However, these economic reasons are considered small compared to the economic advantage that the government and Korean people feel they are gaining. Perhaps many of the resulting consequences of this type of brain drain and cash flow out of the country has not fully taken shape or realization yet.

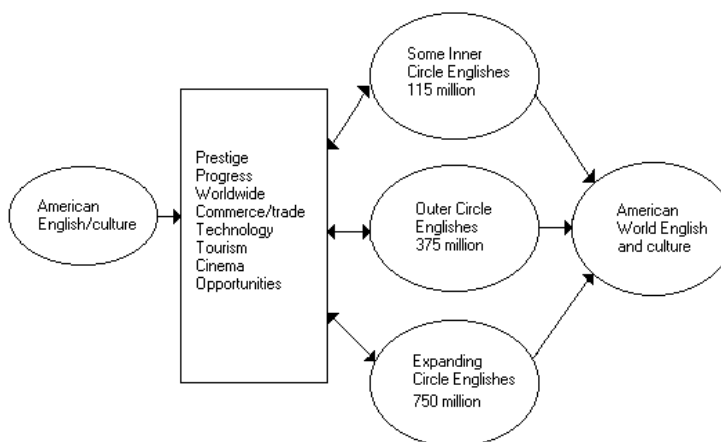
We can see how economic reasons backing up the high value placed on English starts to override the national integrity of a country in terms of its language, culture, social equality, and overall long-term productivity. Because the basic economic reasons for language acquisition are for hopes of capital gain, job security, success, it is easy for these reasons to take on a more ideological desire that surpasses the practical need for English usage to get a job. Learning English becomes about gaining a social identity and an elite education of a particular dialect of English. A particular type of English education begins to have a value attached to it for its symbolic meaning rather than its practical one. Looking at Braj Kachru’s concentric circles of English gives a good perspective on the many types of Englishes in the world but also how there are only a few that are the most desired English dialects to be bought for future success. Figure 1 and 2 below show two different opinions on the understanding of world Englishes. Figure 1

shows the inner circle of Englishes comprised of not only the USA, but also, the UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

(Figure 1)



(Figure 2)



In Figure 2 American English/culture is featured as the sole influence on the rest of the world. In the case of South Korea, there is a combination of both of these figures in the economic activity of learning English. For example, many Koreans view the United States as the elite dialect, the best, and the Ivy League Schools are idealized. In this way, South Koreans are looking at the example of the United States for prestige, progress, worldwide commerce/trade, technology, tourism, cinema, and opportunities when they choose to purchase the commodity of English (see fig. 2). However, many South Koreans also go to schools in the UK, New Zealand, or Canada. For some it is cheaper but they also go to attain an elite dialect. For example, out of the 120 Reading Town schools, 19 are located in Canada and the highest number of Reading Towns in a country is in Korea at 33 Branches. Interestingly, parents are still sending their kids to Reading Town Canada because it is considered ‘better’ than in Korea despite there being 33 schools. In terms of enrolling in a Canadian public school which allows for English speaking practice and the opportunity to interact with native speakers, it is possibly more beneficial. However, the curriculum is exactly the same and many of the students come for a short amount of time and do

not speak much at all at the school. They are timid in public school and make very few Canadian friends because they spend all of their after school time at Reading Town, then tutoring at home, or attending a second academy. The people they end up meeting and befriending are other school focused Koreans at Academies. For this reason, many Korean mothers and children at Reading Town realize that to really benefit from being immersed in another culture, they have to stay in Abbotsford longer. However, there are many Koreans who cannot afford to go to the U.S. or Canada who go to countries in the 'outer circle Englishes' in both figure 1 and 2. However, what both of these figures show is that there is an elite status to English. The number of Koreans wanting to receive an English education from countries in the 'inner circle' illustrates this. Although there is essentially no set standard of English, it cannot be ignored that English is a commodity for many Koreans and is rigorously sought after.

The concept of a Standard English or prescribed English is interesting because many linguistic scholars argue that there is an arbitrarily set standard. Interestingly then, we can look at the activity of many South Koreans and ask ourselves if the desire is really for a set standard of English or if it is also an ideological demand. Not to be mistaken, there is an obvious economic 'reality' for why Koreans want to learn English and to learn a certain standard of English. In this sense, what Deborah Cameron calls an 'illusion' of a standard does not seem to fit when considering the commodity that English has become and the fact that the global world of trade and business requires certain standards of English. Therefore, we can sympathize with the fact that for Koreans it is not an 'illusion' but a fact that has hopes and dreams attached to it. Therefore, to call their demand for a standard simply an 'illusion' might dismiss their efforts and their dreams for a better life. From a North American linguistic perspective, we might have evidence that there is not one set standard and that the authority for a standard is insufficient.

However, it is also important to acknowledge that five countries, the USA, UK, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia are viewed by South Koreans and many other countries as the Standard of English. If they can essentially buy it, then they can share in the success that those five countries have experienced. In addition, Milroy and Milroy argue that standardization and prescription sets the stage for discrimination of ethnicity, race, and culture. Again, we have to consider the other side of this for South Koreans who are demanding a standard and someone to prescribe to them exactly how to speak so that they can be successful. In no way do South Koreans view acquiring a set standard of English as discrimination towards them but rather an excellent opportunity for economic success. However, it is important to step back and consider what Milroy and Milroy and Cameron are discussing in larger terms of what English acquisition looks like for South Koreans. The ability of these two scholars to speak about a standard as ‘illusion’ in this way is in part due to the economic strength of their country and their advantage of already speaking English as a first language. However, this does not discredit what they are suggesting since they might not understand how hard it is for developing countries and citizens to give opportunities to their children. In fact, they would argue that ‘English Fever’ and intense competition for elite dialect acquisition is an unfortunate consequence of factors surrounding dialect status.

The issues surrounding competition in the South Korean education system, job market, high test score requirements, and limited opportunities for children with disability, and class segregation in South Korea, goes far to support what Milroy and Milroy and Cameron are saying. The other side of the economic reality is the reality that the acquisition of English as a foreign language goes beyond basic economic elements and cannot help but spill over into a language ideology. Bambi Schieffelin and Rachelle Doucet define language ideology as “the mediated link between social structures and forms of talk, standing in dialectal relation with, and

thus significantly influencing, social, discursive, and linguistic practices” (176). It can be argued further that language ideology is created through the amount of economic, social, and political value placed on a certain type of language acquisition. In this case, the social capital value that English first symbolized in South Korea has now become a language ideology that has many social, symbolic and political implications. For example, Bizzell and Herzberg explain how blacks had to “demonstrate to white audiences that they were equal to them...that there was no insuperable barrier, biological or culture, to blacks learning white talk and to blacks assimilating white culture” (1). In the same way that there is pressure on speakers of a different dialect of English in the Black community, there is pressure for Koreans to assimilate into a global but strongly American accented community. Not surprisingly, the first way to try and assimilate is to make sure you sound the same. This undoubtedly puts a lot of pressure on those with a differing dialect to try and be like someone else. An extreme form of this pressure in Korea has been a surgical procedure that parents have done on their children’s tongues. The surgery “is supposed to lengthen the child’s tongue by cutting away a thin band of tissue, thereby enabling the child to pronounce the rhotic sound of English with ease” (Shim & Park 149). This does not sound much different to the language politics of Haitian Kreole versus Haitian French which is viewed as the “high prestige form and Kreole as the low prestige form” (Schieffelin & Doucet 178). In the same way that a Kreole Haitian’s capabilities and intentions are being judged on how they pronounce a “front rounded” vowel versus a “front unrounded” vowel, Koreans are also submitting themselves to a surgery backed by no scientific evidence, in order to sound prestigious (Schieffelin & Doucet, 176).

The previous examples make what Milroy and Milroy and Cameron argue in terms of unreasonable standards and discrimination based on language use quite understandable. The

reality is, that for a lot of people in places like Haiti, Korea, and other parts of the world, not speaking the right way presses upon them a lot of language politics, issues surrounding socio-economic status segregation, and unreachable language ideologies. Therefore, what starts as an economic necessity for language acquisition becomes a very complex social and political construction with a strong ideology attached. It is not just a practical standard of English that is desired but also status, wealth, prestige, elite authority in oral communication, and a desire to be a part of the culture that an elite dialect of English represents. For example, attending English schools abroad, aiming at secondary education at idealized American “Ivy League” schools, trying to get the highest TOEFL scores needed, are all examples of goals based on an ideological belief system about an elite English dialect.

The strong ideology attached to the real economic reasons for learning English is perhaps a concern for national language and cultural identity loss. One reason for this speculation is what is seen very often as kids come through Reading Town. Many students have stayed long enough they cannot speak Korean at all. Others can speak it a little but do not like to because they are afraid they might get it wrong. One student described her fear of returning to Korea on vacation after only being in Canada for six Months. Her argument was that she was afraid that she could not speak Korean properly at school or around old friends. She also mentioned that she and her brother speak English so much together and that other children might stare and make fun of them when they visit home. She said that the other kids might think that her and her brother might think they are too good for them. Many students have experienced not wanting to go home. Some students have said they hate Reading Town just a few weeks before they leave in what seems like mixed feelings. They do not want to go back to a new culture that is not Canadian but it makes it easier to say they hate Reading Town. Many students cry when they leave, especially

those that have stayed for a year or two years. Understandably, students have come for the purpose of learning English but they also learn to love a new place, culture, Korean friends and school. The hardest part is for them to go back to Korea which now feels foreign to them. For this reason, many never want to go back. For example, one child boldly exclaimed that he hated the Korean Language and hated to speak it. He also said he hated Korea and likes Canada better because the teachers do not hit students here.

Many parents who bring their kids overseas want their children to be successful and possibly live in a 'beautiful' place like Canada or the United States when they grow up. It is no wonder then that in 4th grade a student is saying he hates Korea and the Korean language. What does this mean for South Korea as many Koreans are looking outside of Korea for success and meaning in their lives and in the lives of their children? Going back to the ideology that is present, there is a risk for language and culture loss when an ideology goes well beyond a national sense of identity or purpose. Schieffelin and Doucet seem to describe this in terms of language ideologies which they argue are "likely places to find images of "self/other," "us/them" (177). This could not be more true for South Koreans who are teaching their children to value English beyond its economic value to an ideological point where the 'other' or 'them' is viewed as better than the Korean 'us' and 'self'. Similarly, David Crystal argues that "the emergence of new Englishes raises the spectre of fragmentation-the eventual dissolution of English into a range of mutually unintelligible languages" (14). However, the interest here is not so much on the fact that there are many Englishes popping up around the world but how the "language of the world" impacts the language and social structures within nations. More importantly, what will happen to national languages? David Crystal argues that languages vanish when older languages are almost gone and "when the last of the representatives speaking that language die, they take

with them their oral history and culture” (40). It seems that the same thing holds true for many countries today in a slightly different form. The languages are not less valued because people are dying, but rather, South Koreans are choosing to give up their language for another because of ideological or economical reasons. In addition, Charles Withers, a human geographer, evaluates the impacts on the society where language diffusion takes place during imperial conquest in what he calls a Social Morale Model. Although Korea is not being conquered and has not been conquered since the Japanese rule in South Korea, the Social Morale Model still applies. The Social Morale Model basically tries to explain how over time “a conquered group is placed in a lower social class, loses pride in its language and culture, and eventually abandons both” (131). Withers explains how “an educational system based solely on the socially dominant language produces bilingualism, and the number of monoglots, or persons able to speak only one tongue, declines” (131).

Charles Withers social morale model applies to the way the South Korean education system is making English a mandatory subject not only in Secondary school but also in Elementary school. In addition, it is an English language standard score that gives you the right to go to a local University in a Korean country. The attitude of the child who says he hates Korean language is a loss of cultural and language pride. The high value South Korea places on English perhaps outlines what Withers’ calls “a message of social inferiority – the old way of speech is primitive and its use is socially degrading” (132). While speaking Korean is still acceptable, it is socially degrading if any member of society cannot speak English really well or at all. However, perhaps speaking Korean is not always acceptable, especially in the minds of young children who are growing up in an environment where English is better. Perhaps that is why children say they hate the Korean language and do not want to go back. They never say

‘home’; it is always ‘back to Korea’. Withers model is useful, especially because his model extends beyond just conquered regions and it recognises instances where “the languages of the conquered and conqueror blend” (132). This is important because the Korean language may never disappear into the language death that David Crystal talks about. However, the Social Morale Model does highlight the social impacts and ideological impacts on a nation because of the strong economic and ideological value placed on a foreign language.

Is the death of the Korean language impossible? No. In fact, much of the economic, political and social restructuring in South Korea points to potential language loss. This is because of how much South Korea places a high capital value on the foreign language and culture. For this reason, the emphasis on the value for Korean national culture and language success is much less, especially for young people. The risk this presents is that a country’s growth depends on its young people. Encouraging young people to have a strong desire to move outside Korea towards something ‘better’ could mean long term demographic changes and a decline in overall growth and productivity.

In looking at both the strong economic and political background of Korea, we can come to understand the reason why English acquisition is highly desired and advertised. However, there are undeniable ideological attachments to the basic economic desire for South Koreans to learn English. Therefore, while learning a standard of English is an economic necessity, it is also an ideological desire for an elite dialect which promises to bring success, wealth, and prestige. In addition, it perpetuates class segregation and denies equal opportunities for the poor and those with disabilities. Furthermore, looking at the ideological factors implies that this creates a “self/other” image for which many Korean children are being raised to view themselves in terms of their economic/social success and status in the world. This can explain the potentially harmful

social morale that is evident in what children say about Korea and the Korean language.

Consequently, when an extremely high level of economic and ideological value is placed on a foreign language like English it encourages a socially degrading view of the Korean language and Korean culture. Although this may not lead to complete language extinction, it does present a concern that young people are leaving the country for school or to work and that children view an elite dialect and a culture based on 'them' not 'us as the Korean people', as more viable for overall happiness and success. Therefore, Korean 'English fever' is in fact a very complex set of economic and ideological factors that when combined make a strong argument for future impacts on South Korean national language and cultural integrity.

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