

영어교육 50권 2호 1995년 여름

The Worldwide Expansion of Early English Education

Young-ja Lee

(Hanyang University)

Lee, Young-ja, (1995). The worldwide expansion of early English education. *English Teaching*, 50(2), 321-330

An increasing number of countries has been incorporating English as a legitimate primary school subject as English has become a predominant means of communication in the global scene. This paper will closely examine the general trend of the rise and expansion of English as a regular subject in the primary school curricula of non-English speaking countries, and explain what might possibly have played a role in the process of institutionalization of English in the primary curriculum.

I. INTRODUCTION

The number of English speakers in the world today is estimated to be between 750 millions and one billion, which approximates about one out of four or six persons in the world. In addition, English is the most widely used language in various forms of international communication. It is the official language of most international conferences. Major international organizations such as the United Nations, the Unesco and the World Bank adopt English as an official language. About three-quarters of the world's mail, telexes and cables are in English. More than half of the world's technical and scientific periodicals are published in English. English is the medium for 80 percent of the information stored in the world's computers. It is also the most widely used language in international business deals. English is the official language of major

international events such as the Olympics, the Expo and the Miss Universe Competition. It is becoming 'the' language of the planet, the first global language in the truest sense of the word (McCrum, Cran, and MacNeil 1986).

The rise and spread of English as a world language has an enormous influence on educational systems of many countries. Learning English is considered as one of the most important task of so many students of non-English speaking countries. Various types of English training courses, textbooks, tape cassettes, video programs and computerized instruction constitute a huge market throughout the world. For instance, in Korea and Japan, where English is not a regular primary school subject, parents spend millions of dollars to have their children learn English via 'shadow education' in the private sector even before they go to primary schools.

The number of people who speak English as a native language is estimated at about three or four hundred millions. The rest of the English speakers, which is estimated at about four or six hundred millions are those who've learned English as a second language or as a foreign language. Learning a foreign language is not an easy task either for individuals or society. For individuals, it takes a lot of time, energy, and money. Society as a whole has to invest an enormous amount of valuable resources in order to introduce foreign language instruction in the national educational system. Why, then, so many people and societies invest so much resources in English instruction?

This paper closely examines the process of the institutionalization of English as a legitimate primary school subject over time and across society.

II. METHODOLOGY

1. DATA

Data analyzed in this study are gathered from various sources. Major

data sources for the post-World War II period include national reports to the International Conference on Education (International Bureau of Education (IBE) and UNESCO 1984, 1986, 1992): volume 2 of the World Survey of Education (1958): International Bureau of Education (1958): UNESCO Regional Office for Education in Asia (1966): Sasnett and Sepmeyer (1966): and the National Institute for Educational Research (1970). Data for the inter-Wars period are mostly from the country reports in the Educational Yearbook edited by Kandel (1924-44) and International Bureau of Education (1937). Historical data before World War I are collected from a series of special educational reports by the British Education Department (prior to 1899) and the Board of Education (England and Wales) after 1899: and a series of educational reports by the U.S. Bureau of Education.

2. RESULTS

The primary concern of the present paper is to examine the general trend of the rise and expansion of English as a regular subject in the primary school curricula of non-English speaking countries. Therefore, countries in which English is the mother tongue of the biggest ethnolinguistic group are excluded from the sample.

TABLE 1

Percentages of Countries Teaching English as the First Foreign Language in the Primary School (Number of Countries in Parentheses)

a. All cases

1875-99	1900-19	1920-44	1945-69	1970-94
.0	5.4	13.2	31.7	62.4
(18)	(37)	(53)	(123)	(109)

b. Constant panels of countries

1850-99 (N=16)		1875-1919 (N=37)		1900-44 (N=49)		1945-94 (N=96)	
1875-99	1900-19	1900-19	1920-44	1920-44	1945-69	1945-69	1970-94
.0	.0	5.4	10.8	14.3	18.4	34.4	62.5

Table 1a shows the proportions of countries teaching English as the first foreign language in the primary school over time. As shown in Table 1a, English emerged as a regular curricular subject during the early twentieth century. But, the proportion of countries which incorporated English as the first foreign language in the primary curriculum during the 1900-19 period is only 5.4 percent (2 out of 37 countries in the sample). During the 1970-94 period, however, the proportion of countries teaching English is 62.4 percent (68 out of 109 countries).

Table 1b, which reports the same data for constant panels of countries at two successive points in time, reveals basically the same trends reported in Table 1a. But Table 1b allows more precise comparisons over time. The results in Table 1b suggests that the rapid expansion of English is not entirely due to the addition of newly independent former British or US colonies in the sample. In fact, additional analyses of the data reveal that the proportion of countries teaching English as the first foreign language in the primary school among those which have not been colonies of English-speaking colonizers has also rapidly increased (.13 (N=52), .15 (N=93), and .52 (N=82) respectively in the 1920-44, 1945-69, and 1970-94 period).

In sum, the implication of the results reported in both Table 1a and Table 1b is quite clear: the legitimacy of English as a regular primary school subject is unquestionable, and English is being incorporated in the primary curriculum by an increasing number of countries.

3. Discussion

Up until the beginning of the twentieth century, English was not a

strong candidate of legitimate curricular content in the primary school. The knowledge base of the primary education was greatly expanded and the 'modern' form of curricular structure was almost consolidated during the last half of the nineteenth century (Cha, 1991). However, virtually no independent nation-state taught any modern foreign language, not to speak of English, in the primary school by the turn of the twentieth century.

Even in the secondary school curriculum where modern foreign languages were firmly institutionalized by the end of the nineteenth century, English was not the first choice in most countries. For example, the proportions of countries incorporating English as the first modern foreign language in the secondary school curriculum during the 1875-99 and 1900-19 periods are only about 11 and 27 per cent respectively. In contrast, the proportions of countries which taught French as the first modern foreign language during the same time periods are 50 and 54 per cent respectively (Cha, 1989).

However, the number of countries where English is incorporated as a regular school subject has dramatically increased over time, especially during the post World War period. A survey data shows that during the mid-1980s 60 out of 131 countries (about 46 per cent) in which English is not a mother tongue of the majority of the population incorporated English as a regular subject in the primary curriculum. In the secondary school curriculum, about 72 per cent (85 out of 118 countries) of the countries included in the sample taught English as the first modern foreign language during the same time period (Cha, 1989).

Through what process, then, does English become a part of legitimate educational knowledge base in the curriculum? It is quite reasonable to expect that the wider institutional environment external to a given society such as changes in the hegemonic structure of the international system exerts a powerful influence in defining a legitimate knowledge to be taught in schools.

In fact, the rise of English as a predominant world language was possible under the unchallenged hegemony of the United States after the World War II (Cha, 1991).

When a nation-state is closely incorporated in the present world-system where English is a predominant means of international communication, incorporating English in the school curriculum could be a quite rational policy decision for a nation-state. It is thus expected to be seen that an increasing number of countries incorporate English in the curriculum.

English instruction in the primary school is increasingly becoming an institutionalized routine. Only a limited number of countries taught English in the primary school during the earlier period of the twentieth century. However, in less than half a century, English has achieved a legitimate status in the primary curriculum of the majority of nation-states in the world.

The nature of institutional environment in the contemporary world-system provides solid ground for the incorporation of English instruction in the primary school. Major worldwide cultural and organizational forces which encourage individual countries to adopt foreign language instruction in the primary school can be described as follows.

First of all, with the increasing consolidation of the international system, the importance and legitimacy of foreign language instruction is taken-for-granted. An illustrative example of the legitimating accounts with regard to the institutionalization of foreign language instruction can be found in the recommendations adopted by the International Conferences on Public Education in 1937 and 1965. According to these recommendations, incorporating one or more foreign languages into the school curriculum is indispensable for several reasons. A few examples of them are: (1) to further pupil's intellectual training and to prepare for higher courses; (2) to improve international understanding that establish peaceful and friendly cooperation among peoples; (3) to meet the practical necessity of modern foreign languages due to the development of international relations in all fields and perfecting of means of transport and communication; (4) to facilitate the spread of modern scientific and technological discoveries, and thus to contribute to the economic and cultural development of countries; and (5) to prepare for the expanded possibilities of exchanging students and specialists between countries (UNESCO and IBE 1970).

Second, the rise of the United States as a super power in the contemporary world-system, especially after World War II, provided a solid ground for the predominance of English in the school curriculum. Furthermore, with the fall of the Soviet Union during the late 1980's, the United States has become an unchallengeable hegemony in the world. As a result, emphasis on English instruction has become a worldwide phenomenon.

Third, given the legitimacy and solid ground formulated by the institutional environment of the contemporary world for English instruction, scientific theories and professional opinions with regard to the effective methods of foreign language instruction played a critical role in incorporating English in the primary curriculum. During the post-World War, there has been a great deal of theoretical arguments and professional discourse about the optimum age for second language training. In general, it was a widely accepted opinion that the younger the child, the more efficient a second language learner he or she can be (Stern 1976).

With all these cultural forces combined, the incorporation of English instruction in the primary school has become an irreversible trend in the contemporary world-system. Also, it should be a quite reasonable speculation to expect that English instruction will be increasingly emphasized in more and more countries in the foreseeable future.

III. CONCLUSION

The major purpose of this study was to describe and explain the rise and expansion of English as a legitimate primary school subject during the last one hundred years. An extensive historical and comparative data analyzed in the study shows that English instruction has been incorporated in the primary school curriculum by an increasing number of countries over time. The expansion of English as a legitimate school subject is especially noticeable after the World War II.

The overall findings of the study suggest that English instruction is

becoming an institutionalized routine taken-for-granted in most national educational systems. In a way, the worldwide expansion of English instruction during the contemporary period symbolically reflects the nature of modern international system. The increasingly consolidated modern international system has formulated various legitimating accounts with regard to the importance of foreign language instruction, and thus provided a solid ground for the incorporation of English in the curriculum.

The rise of the United States as an unchallengeable hegemony during the later half of the twentieth century has also contributed to secure the status of English as the most predominant language in various forms of international communication. Under these circumstances, English instruction has found, with the help of scientific theories and professional discourses on effective language learning, a legitimate place in the primary curriculum.

REFERENCES

- Altbach, P. G. (1982). Servitude of the mind? Education, dependency, and neocolonialism. In *Altbach, P. G., Robert F. Arnove, and Gail P. Kelly (Eds.), Comparative Education* (pp. 469-84). New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.
- Apple, M. W. (1979). *Ideology and curriculum*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Ball, S. J. (1983). Imperialism, social control, and the colonial curriculum in Africa. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 15(3), 237-63.
- Board of Education (England and Wales). (1897-1914). *Special reports on educational subjects*, Vols. 1-28. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, Ltd.
- Carnoy, M. (1974). *Education as cultural imperialism*. New York: Longman Inc.
- Cha, Y. K. (1991). Effect of the global system on language instruction,

- 1850-1986. *American Sociological Review*, 64(1), 19-32.
- Cha, Y. K. (1989). The effect of global integration on the institutionalization of modern foreign languages in the school curriculum. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. Stanford University.
- International Bureau of Education and UNESCO. (1958). Preparation and issuing of the primary school curriculum. Paris: UNESCO.
- International Bureau of Education and UNESCO. (1984). National Reports International Conference on Education, 39th Session (microfiches). Geneva: IBE and UNESCO.
- International Bureau of Education and UNESCO. (1986). National Reports to International Conference on Education, 40th Session (microfiches). Geneva: IBE and UNESCO.
- International Bureau of Education and UNESCO. (1992). National reports to International Conference on Education, 43rd Session (microfiches). Geneva: IBE and UNESCO.
- International Bureau of Education. (1937). *L'enseignement des Langues Vivantes*. IBE : Geneve.
- Kandel, I. L. (ed.) *Educational yearbook*, (1924-44). New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University.
- McCrum, R., Cran, W. and Mac Neil, R. (1986). *The story of English*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Meyer, J. W. (1977). The effects of education as an institution. *American Journal of Sociology*, 83(1), 55-77.
- Meyer, J. W., Kamens, D. H., Benavot, A., Cha, Y. K., & Wong, S. Y. (1992). *School knowledge for the masses: World models and national primary curricular categories in the twentieth century*. Washington, D. C.: The Falmer Press.
- Sasnett, M. and Sepmeyer, I. (1966). *Educational systems of Africa*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Stern, H. H. (1976). *Optimal age: Myth or reality?* CMLR, XXXII (February, 1976), pp. 283-94.
- U. S. Bureau of Education. (1873-1915). Report of the commissioner of education, 1872-1915. Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office.

- UNESCO and NIER (National Institute for Educational Research). (1970). *Asian study of curriculum*, Vol. I-III. Tokyo: NIER.
- UNESCO Regional office for education in Asia. (1966). Curriculum, methods of teaching, evaluation and textbooks in primary schools in Asia. Bangkok: UNESCO Regional Office for Education in Asia.
- UNESCO. (1958). *World survey of education*, Vol. II. Paris: UNESCO.
- U. S. Bureau of Education. (1873-1915). Report of the Commissioner of Education, 1872-1915. Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office.
- Weber, M. (1972). Selections on Education and Politics. In B. R. Cosin (Ed.), *Education: Structure and society*. Middlesex: Penguin Books.