Insights into Korean Students’ Sense of Self-Identity Regarding the Study of English in Korea

Tukcha Kim (Sunchon National University)
Teresa J. Kennedy (University of Idaho)


This article describes a study examining the relationship between the social pressures in Korea to learn American English and the learners’ sense of self-identity. The aim of the investigation was to determine possible influences on student attitudes that may be detrimental to successful language acquisition, as well as provide pedagogical recommendations to teachers of English in Korea. Data from a survey developed to assess Korean students’ attitudes toward learning English were collected from 450 Korean students. Results provide English teachers of Korean students with information that could assist them to better understand the interconnectedness between language and identity, and ultimately enable these teachers to cope with some of the common classroom situations they face.

I. INTRODUCTION

In Korea, English has been a mandatory subject from middle school to college for over the past 50 years. But beginning in 1997, English classes were extended down to the third grade level for the first time. The public and professional reaction to this new governmental policy has sometimes been harsh. Many scholars have criticized the new foreign language policy of the Korean government by saying that teaching English beginning in the elementary school setting was similar to when the Japanese Imperial Regime instituted the old Japanese colonial language policy requiring all elementary schools to teach Japanese after the forcible annexation of Korea in 1910 (Choong-Youl Oh, 1990). “From 1910 to 1945 Japan saw education as a means of Japanizing Koreans, who were forced to give up not only their native names but also their written and spoken language” (Robert Hyung-chan Kim, 1990, p. 353).
Today, many Korean people are concerned that “Korean children may lose their cultural and historical identity as Korean” with so much emphasis being placed on learning English (Kirk, 2000). Sungwhan Mun (1997) also reported the possible loss of Korean student identity and cultural subordination to another country, noting that many elementary school students are encouraged to travel to other countries to study English at a very young age. It appears that many Korean people seem to feel both a sense of oppression about being required to learn English as well as a sense of shame about their poor English skills even when in their own country (Hakchan Kim, 2001).

In Korea, learning and teaching English is not a simple, straightforward matter since every examination from middle school to college includes English as a significant component of the test. Anecdotal reports suggest that Korean students have complex feelings toward the imposition, both official and economic, of learning English in Korea and for at least some Koreans, their sense of cultural identity may be threatened by this pressure to learn English. In foreign language acquisition, an awareness of the learners’ sense of cultural identity is equally important for both teachers and students. Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) postulate that one’s identity is very much related to the language one speaks, so “the process of acquiring a second language forces a re-evaluation of one’s self-image and the successful integration of new social and cultural ideas” (p. 181). Baker (1992) conducted a survey of attitudes toward English as a foreign language and reported that the results could “reveal the possibilities and problems” within the country in question as a social indicator of students’ thoughts and beliefs (p. 9). Based on this research, it was hypothesized that a student’s attitude toward learning a new language in relation to their sense of self-identity could affect his or her success in acquiring that language. This study examined the attitudes of Korean students toward learning English as a foreign language.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Definition of Identity

Psychologists often include a secure sense of identity as one of the hallmarks and prerequisites of a healthy personality. One’s sense of identity, however, consists of many complex, interacting facets: social identity, cultural identity, ethnic identity, and so on. From the standpoints of cultural identity and social identity, attitude to English in Korea might provide meaningful direction for teaching English as a foreign language. This article examines the Korean sense of self-identity as it is impacted by the requirement that they learn English as a
foreign language in Korea.

Even a brief review of the literature reveals several different definitions of identity. Levey-Warren (1992), for example, defined ethnocultural identity as a person's sense of connection to class, ethnicity, geography, activity, and/or sexual orientation. As adolescents, people become aware of their sociocultural world such as political ideology, philosophical concepts, and sociocultural differences. Levy-Warren thought that these cultural roles were major aspects of adolescents' identity formation processes. Weedon (cited in Peirce, 1995) viewed social identity and subjectivity as the same concept, which she defined as "the thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (p. 32).

Norton (1997) tried to distinguish between social identity and cultural identity. To her, social identity related the individual to the larger social world such as one's family, schools, workplaces, social services, and law courts. She argued that this relationship had to be understood with reference to a person's race, gender, class, or ethnicity. Cultural identity was related to the individuals and members of a group who shared a common history, a common language, and similar ways of understanding the world. However, she saw "the difference between social identity and cultural identity as fluid and the commonalities more marked than the differences" (p. 420).

On the other hand, Duff and Uchida (1997) did not distinguish between social and cultural identity. They often used them as sociocultural identities. They posited that ESL teachers' sociocultural identities were "deeply rooted in their personal histories", based on their past educational, professional, and cultural experiences (p. 460). So, every ESL or EFL teacher could have a different sociocultural identity depending upon his or her individual experiences and could teach classes according to her or his personal identity.

In practice, we cannot define identity firmly because it is always seen as a changing process (Erikson, 1964; cited in Duff & Uchida, 1997; Miller, 1983; Peirce, 1995). However, Erikson (1964) saw that identity was the ability of the ego to keep sameness and continuity in the face of a changing process. But, Peirce (1995) explained that identity was constantly changing across time and space with an investment in the target language, which causes and investment in a learner's own social identity. These seem contradictory with each other: maintaining sameness while constantly changing as well.

According to all these definitions, a sense of Korean students' self-identity is a kind of cultural identity as Norton (1997) defines it, as relating to the individuals and members who share a common history, a common language, and similar ways of understanding the world.
2. Historical Influences on Korean Sense of Identity

The Korean sense of identity reflects Korea’s history of involvement with other countries, referred to by Yur-Bok Lee (1999, p. 15) as “suzerain-dependency relations,” with China, the Japanese colonization of Korea, and the military, economic, and political relationships with America.

For about 1000 years before Japan colonized the Korean peninsula, Korea had a close relationship with China in which China tried to control the cultural and political affairs of old Korea. During this period, Chinese written characters were taught and learned in Korea. There were many books of Korean literature written in Chinese characters under the Chinese influence.

From 1910 to 1945, Korea experienced a major threat to its identity, including the Korean language, under the Japanese reign of colonization. “During the colonial period, anything traditional . . . [did] not deserve to be retained, rather [it] might be conceived [of as worthy] to be destroyed or eliminated” (Don-Hee Lee, 1990, p. 322). Ngugi (1985) described two important aspects of colonialism: “the destruction or deliberate undervaluing of a people’s culture . . . and the domination of a people’s language by that of the colonizing nation” (p. 118).

When Japan unconditionally surrendered to the Allied Forces on August 15, 1945, Korea was emancipated after 35 years of Japanese rule. For three years after that, however, Korea was under the rule of an American military government (Choong-Youl Oh, 1990). During that time aspects of Korean life such as education, politics, and economies were changed from the Japanese system to the American system. Although the Korean language was taught and spoken once again at school, the Korean educational system changed mostly to “western institutional frameworks and programs” (Don-Hee Lee, 1990, p. 322). Therefore, Koreans had no chance to restore fully their personal identity and pride as Koreans because they were under American influence after the end of the Japanese colonization. Their “life style as a whole took steps gradually towards westernization in both ideational and institutional traits, and Korean society itself lost the basis of cultural integration by breaking away from [its Korean] tradition” (Don-Hee Lee, 1990, p. 310) The result for some Koreans has been a conflict of cultural identity leading to negative attitudes toward the pressures to learn English.

3. Self-Identity and Social Pressures in Language Learning

As a foreign language, English has become unusually important in the minds of Korean students. They believe that learning English as an international language is essential for national success in world trade, keeping up with developments in technology, and obtaining global
information in the computer era. Nevertheless, while most students agree that mastering English is important for prospering in a competitive world, they still often wonder why it is stressed so strongly as a desired skill for working even within Korea.

The Korean people, from kindergarten to college and beyond into the work force, endeavor to learn English no matter what else they do. They are not, however, free of social, historical, cultural, or political constraints when they make this choice because they feel considerable social pressure to acquire English proficiency. During the pursuit of globalization under the Youngsam Kim administration (1993-1996), many Koreans became obsessed with studying English, and many American English teachers came to Korea to work for both schools and private language institutes (Sungteck Im, 2000). Pennycook (1994) noted that just as was the case for English in British colonial Hong Kong, English in Korea "has become the language of power and prestige ... thus acting as a crucial gatekeeper to social and economic progress" (p. 13).

In the Korean school systems, English is stressed more than other subjects. A person who scores well on English tests in Korea will have advantages over other people educationally and professionally, such as in obtaining promotions and opportunities for further study in graduate school. For obtaining entrance to both high school and college, there are two crucial entrance exams, and to many students and their parents, passing or failing those entrance exams exerts a major influence over their future jobs and life style. Scores on the English portions of those tests play key roles in the overall results of the exams.

After graduating from college, job applicants in both the public and private sectors are commonly asked for their English scores by their prospective employers. Furthermore, corporations with job vacancies often have their future employees take English tests as a part of the selection process. Many companies also accept scores from the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) and TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) which are produced in the U.S. To many of the applicants, however, it seems illogical to select new employees for Korean businesses inside Korea on the basis of their test scores in English. According to TOEIC Newsletter (2003), there were 1,131,696 TOEIC test-takers in Korea in 2002. (cited in Hyo-Woong Lee & Gi-Pyo Park, 2003)

The justification offered for emphasizing English is that this is a global age and that therefore all employees need a global language—English. Even though one may not use English in his or her work at all, an employee still may have to prepare for some future situation. As a result, in the minds of some Korean students, English is really an arbitrary obstacle to overcome in order to succeed, even within Korean society.

The social pressure that Korean students seem to be under to learn English sometimes creates negative attitudes toward the language. Such negative attitudes may be strong in students who have complicated feelings about the official and socioeconomic pressures to learn English. In
order to get a clearer picture of Korean students' attitudes, this questionnaire was created to explore the attitudes of some Korean students toward the pressure to learn English and its potential effect on their sense of self-identity. The goal of this research is to provide students, teachers and educational policy makers with some preliminary information that might help them to understand the interconnectedness between language learning and identity, ultimately enabling them to cope better with some of the classroom situations that they may face.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

1. Participants

A non-random sample of 450 Korean students were administered questionnaires in order to investigate possible relationships between various pressures to study English and how these affected their sense of self-identity. Although the majority of the population consisted of undergraduate college students (96%), a few were graduate students and some were individuals who had already graduated from college. Survey questions inquired about their general attitudes toward studying English as a required subject at school, regardless of their majors or the classes that they were taking. Questionnaires were distributed to students enrolled in courses such as food and nutrition, medicine resource, and three English lecture courses. Survey participants consisted of 268 female and 182 male students. There were 57 major fields represented among the respondents with Food and Nutrition being the largest category. Medicine Resources second, Oriental Medicine third, followed by various other major fields of study. Majors were collapsed into 7 groups from the 57 total majors reported which included English (22 students), Food & nutrition (96 students), Korean (11 students), Oriental Medicine (43 students), Medicine Resources (53 students), Tourism (33 students), and other majors (192 students). The length of time the students had studied English varied from 1 to 28 years. The ages of the respondents varied from 19 to 42, with more than half of the population sampled representing the 20 to 26 year old age group. All students completed the questionnaires anonymously.

2. Instrumentation

The survey used in this study was adapted from the existing survey "Attitudes to Bilingualism" (Baker, 1992, p. 79-84). Minor linguistic modifications were made to existing questions and additional statements were created in order to assess the relationships between
language and identity, specifically related to western English culture in comparison to Korean culture, learning English and associated viewpoints, opinions regarding the acceptance of English as an Official Language in Korea, Korean job opportunities to English-speaking applicants, and perceptions about native English-speaking teachers toward their students. The questionnaires were translated into Korean by the researcher and four Korean students (one undergraduate and three graduate students) edited the survey for accuracy.

Participants completed all questionnaires during the fall of 2000. Since there has been little change that has resulted from the mandated reform in English education in Korea to date (WonKey Lee. 2003), the results of this survey regarding attitudes toward the study of English are applicable today. The questionnaire consisted of 23 items concerning students’ attitudes about the relationship between various pressures to study English and students’ sense of cultural identity (see Appendix). The survey was composed of two parts. The first section solicited demographic data such as gender, age, school, major, year in school, and number of years studying English. The second section consisted of 23 statements with which respondents were asked to indicate their opinion according to a five-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree Nor Disagree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree).

3. Results

The results of the survey suggested that the Korean students sampled believed they must study English even though their only reason for doing so is to enable them to successfully complete mandatory exams required by employers for obtaining a job or for securing other employment advantages such as promotion. Therefore, there appeared to be some ambivalence toward studying English as both positive and negative viewpoints were noted. For example, even though these students felt that English as a foreign language threatens the Korean language and culture, they also reported that they felt it was important to have skills in English in order to obtain a job and accomplish personal goals, as well as attaining globally objective viewpoints. In regard to the outcome of the process of studying English, 41% of the respondents indicated they did not believe learning English influences the Korean sense of self-identity, and consistently, 47% also reported that they did not believe Korean identity becomes lost in the process of acquiring English. However, 49% of the respondents reported that they believed one should not learn English too early in life because it could lead one to disregard the Korean language and culture even though 50% believed that both Korean and English languages should be required courses in all Korean schools.

The results of the study were further examined in regard to gender, age, and academic major. Although some results indicated differences between female and male respondents, most
questions did not show significant differences in regard to gender. However, it was noted that the majority of the females sampled (41%) felt that there is a stronger relationship between learning English and Korean self-identity in comparison to the male respondents (28%). Males (39%) also felt stronger about the Korean language alone being sufficient in Korea in comparison to the females (19%). Furthermore, regarding the topic of English as an Official Language (EOL) in Korea, responses differed greatly by gender as 76% of the male respondents disagreed with EOL while only about 51% of the female respondents disagreed. Interestingly, to all but three statements, female respondents had more neutral opinions than did the male respondents surveyed (see Table 1).

**TABLE 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Relationship between identity and language</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Learning process influences self-identity</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>English has a strong influence in Korea</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Self-identity becomes lost during study</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Viewpoint change while studying English</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Korean language and culture are threatened</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>English dominates Korean</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>One should not learn English too early</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>English is damaging Korean</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>English helps me get further in my goals</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Learning English gives an objective view</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>English should be required in school</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>It would be good to speak Korean and English</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Speaking both is better than speaking one</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Korean is all that is needed in Korea</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Only study English if anticipate future need</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Social mood forces the study of English</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>English should be an official language</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Benefit from two cultures by speaking both</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>English is important to get a job</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>English helps people get promotions</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Strange emphasis on English in hiring</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Native English teachers' awareness of Korea</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Likert Scale: Strongly Agree (SA); Agree (A); Neither Agree nor Disagree (Neutral); Disagree (D); Strongly Disagree (SD).

Survey results identified four reoccurring themes: the relationship between language and
identity, the age one should begin the study of English, mandatory requirements for learning English, and benefits to knowing Korean and English.

On the whole, all majors agreed highly with the statement regarding the existence of a close relationship between language and identity (see Table 2). Korean majors showed the highest level of agreement to the statement regarding the possibility of the Korean language and culture being threatened by the addition of the English language and American culture. On the other hand, English majors showed the lowest level of agreement with this statement. Based on these results, it is not surprising that Korean and English majors also showed different results about early English education. English majors strongly supported early English education while Korean majors strongly disagreed with the same issue (see Table 3).

The majority of the respondents believed that studying the Korean and English languages should be required in all Korean schools and that speaking Korean alone was not sufficient to be successful in the professional world in Korea (see Tables 4 and 5). However, as expected, the majority of the Korean majors reported that they felt it is not necessary to require the English language in all Korean schools, and at least half of the Korean majors indicated that speaking Korean alone is sufficient in Korea and that one should not learn English too early in life as it could lead one to disregard the Korean language and culture. It should also be noted that similar responses were reported by students studying Oriental Medicine, as it is also traditionally framed around the Korean language and culture as well as incorporates Chinese characters.

In regard to employment in Korea, all majors agreed that knowing the English language was an important factor related to obtaining employment and securing promotions (see Tables 6 and 7). However, an important factor to note is that when questioned about the attitudes that native-speaking English teachers may bring into the classroom, all majors indicated that it was beneficial for their teacher to show interest in the student's first language and culture (see Table 8). These results suggest that respondents prefer that their teachers, especially native-speaking English teachers, respect and appreciate their Korean language, culture and heritage.

### TABLE 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship between Language and Identity (Statement 1)</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Food &amp; Nutrition</th>
<th>Korean</th>
<th>Oriental Medicine</th>
<th>Medicine Resources</th>
<th>Other Majors</th>
<th>Tourism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>72.7%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>81.8%</td>
<td>81.4%</td>
<td>90.6%</td>
<td>76.6%</td>
<td>72.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**TABLE 3**

Relationship between Early English Learning and Disregard of Korean Language and Culture (Statement 8)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Food &amp; Nutrition</th>
<th>Korean</th>
<th>Oriental Medicine</th>
<th>Medicine Resources</th>
<th>Other Majors</th>
<th>Tourism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>39.6%</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>39.5%</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>77.3%</td>
<td>47.9%</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>51.2%</td>
<td>64.2%</td>
<td>54.2%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 4**

Relationship between Korean and English Language Requirement. (Statement 12)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Food &amp; Nutrition</th>
<th>Korean</th>
<th>Oriental Medicine</th>
<th>Medicine Resources</th>
<th>Other Majors</th>
<th>Tourism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>72.7%</td>
<td>61.5%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
<td>56.6%</td>
<td>57.8%</td>
<td>69.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>51.2%</td>
<td>34.0%</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 5**

Speaking Korean Alone Is Sufficient in Korea. (Statement 15)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Food &amp; Nutrition</th>
<th>Korean</th>
<th>Oriental Medicine</th>
<th>Medicine Resources</th>
<th>Other Majors</th>
<th>Tourism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
<td>34.0%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>90.9%</td>
<td>49.0%</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>58.1%</td>
<td>62.3%</td>
<td>66.2%</td>
<td>59.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 6**

Importance of Studying English for Future Employment. (Statement 20)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Food &amp; Nutrition</th>
<th>Korean</th>
<th>Oriental Medicine</th>
<th>Medicine Resources</th>
<th>Other Majors</th>
<th>Tourism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>86.4%</td>
<td>85.4%</td>
<td>90.9%</td>
<td>83.7%</td>
<td>79.2%</td>
<td>88.5%</td>
<td>90.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 7**

English Proficiency Benefits Promotion Opportunities. (Statement 21)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Food &amp; Nutrition</th>
<th>Korean</th>
<th>Oriental Medicine</th>
<th>Medicine Resources</th>
<th>Other Majors</th>
<th>Tourism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>95.4%</td>
<td>87.5%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>86.0%</td>
<td>90.6%</td>
<td>90.6%</td>
<td>97.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 8
Relationship between Teacher Interest in Korean Language and Culture and Student Success in English Language Acquisition (Statement 23)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English N=22</th>
<th>Food &amp; Nutrition N=96</th>
<th>Korean N=11</th>
<th>Oriental Medicine N=43</th>
<th>Medicine Resources N=53</th>
<th>Other Majors N=192</th>
<th>Tourism N=33</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>86.4%</td>
<td>77.1%</td>
<td>81.8%</td>
<td>95.3%</td>
<td>94.3%</td>
<td>91.1%</td>
<td>90.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Likert Scale: Agree and Strongly Agree (Agree); Neither Agree nor Disagree (Neutral); Disagree and Strongly Disagree (Disagree). (From TABLE 2 to TABLE 8)

The participants were divided into three categories according to their college status: freshman and sophomore year students (ages 19-21), junior and senior year students (ages 22-27), and graduate students (ages 28-42). The graduate student group strongly supported all statements pertaining to the English language dominating and damaging the Korean language. Interestingly though, this same group also showed virtually no support for any of the statements on early English education, the study of English resulting in a more informed or global view of the world, or proficiency in English as a means of advancement in careers and goals. Results suggest that the younger age group supports the idea of English as an Official Language (EOL) in Korea. The responses to the question regarding EOL in Korea (statement 18) showed a 26% difference between the younger age group (19-21: 52% disagreed) and the older age group (28-42: 78% disagreed). It is worth noting that the older group (66%) also expressed higher agreement than the younger age group (44%) with the statement referring to Korean companies demanding English proficiency when they recruit new employees in the monolingual country of Korea.

Distinct results also showed up among majors that indicated profound differences between Korean and English majors, but it must be noted that the number of respondents representing Korean majors formed a very small percentage of the total numbers, making conclusions formulated by these comparisons somewhat unreliable. The Korean and Oriental Medicine majors reported more protective attitudes toward the Korean language than English majors, while the tourism majors reported to be less threatened by the study of English.

IV. DISCUSSION

The results of this study have possible implications for future research on Korean social pressures to study English, and on how Korean students' attitudes toward English could affect
their sense of self-identity and ultimate success in their studies of the English language. The respondents in this study clearly demonstrated their mixed attitudes toward learning English. In statements concerning the relationship between the two languages (Korean and English), half of the respondents showed similar attitudes—that the English language threatens, dominates, and damages the Korean language. These results might indicate that the participants felt insecure about the value of their language in relation to the English language. However, even though they felt that the Korean language is threatened by the study of English, the survey results regarding employment and job promotion possibly explain why these Korean students felt that it was necessary for them to study English since all respondents agreed that studying English is a critical factor linked to obtaining a job and furthering oneself through promotions. These results suggest that even though some of the Korean students held negative attitudes toward the study of English, they were still motivated to study English because they perceived English proficiency as an important factor related to employment.

The attitudes of students toward learning English and their Korean sense of self-identity may also reflect Korean social demands as many respondents indicated their belief that English threatens the Korean language. Many respondents also recognized the need to learn English even though half of the respondents disagreed about the relationship between learning English and their Korean sense of self-identity. This may indicate that studying English is more closely related to social context rather than just students' attitudes toward English, and that they do not want to lose their Korean sense of identity by learning English. If they thought that their Korean self-identity was strong and important, they probably would not accept the idea that their sense of identity could change by studying English alone. Opinions about adopting EOL showed that less than a quarter of the students (15%) agreed with the proposed EOL policy, with about two-thirds of the respondents (61%) disagreeing, and about a quarter of them (24%) holding no opinion at all. These findings suggest that the participants believe that English is very much a foreign language in Korea rather than an official language.

Overall, the indecisive nature of responses to most all statements made by female respondents when compared to those made by male respondents shows an interesting gender implication. Generally speaking, female respondents showed more neutral opinions than did male respondents. This seems to reflect traditional Korean cultural expectations regarding women—to keep your opinion to yourself. Traditionally, men and women were taught in different ways in Korea. A man's bravery would be admired, but a woman's bravery could be interpreted as ill fortune. In other words, the lack of an expressed opinion held by the female respondents might be due to role differences and traditional Korean expectations. Jun-Yong Lee (1996) explains that Korean students are generally very indirect in expressing their opinions and that expressive
verbalization has not been encouraged. Therefore, this deeply rooted positional type characteristics tend to impede social interaction.

Responses to statements regarding native English teachers' awareness of Korean language and culture revealed a fascinating aspect about Korean students' attitudes toward native English teachers. Both female and male respondents appear to be genuinely concerned about Korean language and culture as was demonstrated by their belief that native English-speaking teachers who are interested in the Korean language and culture facilitate Korean students in acquiring the English language. If native-speaking English teachers are aware of the host language and culture, this background knowledge enables them to support and encourage their students to learn English, in a manner that maintains students' pride as Koreans.

Many researchers have discussed the possible outcomes teachers can have on their student's English language acquisition. For example, Alptekin and Alptekin (1984) noted that native English-speaking teachers tend to encourage their non-English-speaking students to learn about English-speaking cultures, but in fact, ironically, they are often unable to understand their students' culture or to speak their students' native language(s). Ignoring their own culture and language, and conforming to the native English-speaker's norms and values might affect students' feelings in the process of learning English. Furthermore, Pennycook (1994) mentioned that "a critical practice in English language teaching must start with ways of critically exploring students' cultures, knowledge and histories in ways that are both challenging and at the same time affirming and supportive" (p. 311). Wu (1983) recommended that foreign English teachers and Chinese English teachers work jointly to produce effective learning and teaching in the EFL setting found in China. This is consistent with the findings of this study and can therefore be generalized to EFL in Korea. If native English-speakers teaching abroad do not know the host language and culture, both the teachers and their EFL students can easily misunderstand each other in many areas such as general discussion topics, grammar points, as well as through cultural differences found in the teachers' and students' learning and teaching styles.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Many Korean people are interested in accepting English as an official language because they believe that economically it is important for their country. However, many Koreans also blame the English educational system and specifically English teachers for Korean students' poor ability to communicate effectively in English even though they study from kindergarten to college, including those studying in private English schools. Acceptance of English as an official language will not automatically bring an English-speaking country to Korea, and could possibly
even create a more complicated situation in a homogenous country. Therefore, it appears to be more reasonable to focus on "best and promising practices" related to teaching English if we truly wish our society to excel in this area.

The research presented in this paper represents a tentative first step toward exploring the relationship between the social pressures in Korea to learn English and Korean learners' sense of self-identity. English teachers must be sensitive to the personal and cultural issues confronted by their students that ultimately influence their learning outcome. If English teachers are concerned with both their students' social contexts and attitudes toward learning English, they should then be sensitive to the fact that the study of English is not generally optional for most students, and that success in language study holds extremely important implications for future success in their professional life.

It is easy to overlook the learner's sense of identity while concentrating on teaching alone. Pedagogical suggestions for Korean English teachers who wish to teach English more effectively to their Korean students include:

1. **English teachers must put effort into integrating their students' real life situations into the classroom.** By providing students with the opportunity to discuss their Korean cultural heritage in the classroom through the vehicle of the English language, their identity is in fact empowered. These students are in effect discussing what is relevant and meaningful to their everyday life which ultimately motivates them to use the language of study (English) to communicate without losing their true identity or assuming an Americanized identity.

Students who are provided validation of the importance for English language usage tend to be more motivated in their English language studies. For example, English teachers can teach about the cultures found in both the target culture and the native culture through the study of English. Sung-Ae Kim (1998) mentioned that one main reason that Korean English teachers easily ignore the English culture is that many teachers themselves have little or no experience at all in the target culture and do not feel comfortable dealing with the target culture in their classroom. She suggested that teachers should be provided with a model for introducing systematic instruction on the target culture that includes the categorization of various aspects of the culture that can be adapted to the text being used in the classroom, and incorporating these scenarios into dynamic classroom activities. Using Korean cultures that are familiar to both teachers and students can activate a more communicative classroom environment for students, ultimately encouraging active participation in authentic activities since students feel comfortable discussing topics related to their own cultures and are provided with practice to express their cultures and beliefs in the English language. Classroom activities should also provide students with unlimited opportunities to express their opinions in commonly used language regarding practical situations...
and current events and teachers should encourage and compliment their students' active participation. If students were afforded the opportunity to practice explaining about their beliefs and cultures in English they would be more confident in communicating among themselves as well as with foreigners in a social and professional context. Future research and curriculum development should address this issue.

2. Korean English teachers must provide an appropriate environment for students to use more English in the classroom setting. Korean English teachers have a better understanding of Korean students culturally and historically than do native English teachers. They can consider and respect students' attitudes and behaviors such as saving face, making eye contact, and being silent. If teachers talked clearly about the differences between the two cultures and shared their language learning experiences as Korean English teachers, their students would be more motivated to perform class activities without conflict from their Korean sense of self-identity.

The first step begins with Korean English teachers using English as a medium of instruction in their classroom in order to provide Korean students with the opportunity to practice listening, speaking, reading, writing and observing in a natural manner. But teaching sentence-by-sentence grammar and interpretation has been a long tradition in English education in Korea. Almost all English teachers found in Korea are non-native speakers of English who studied English in a very traditional fashion. It is very important for Korean English teachers to use English meaningfully both about the target culture and Korean culture. As Soksan Tak (2000) pointed out, retraining Korean English teachers in English-speaking countries is desperately needed so that these teachers are able to use English fluently in their classroom and model a more authentic English-speaking environment for Korean students. The advantages to teachers would be to help them clearly understand both cultures and have a balanced perspective when teaching English. It is especially important to note that non-native English teachers can be good role models for their students. Even if the Korean English teachers may not possess a perfect command of the English language, advantages to being a Non-Native EFL Teacher (NNEFL.T) are that they clearly understand their students' language and culture as well as have personal experience as English learners. In some respects, teachers who are non-native speakers can communicate better with their students since they themselves experienced difficulties with the language and are able to understand the barriers their students may encounter in their struggle to reach fluency. Many times the non-native teacher has also studied the grammar of the second language to a much more sophisticated extent than typically studied by the native-speaker who does not have the need for such analysis of the language since speaking the language comes naturally.

This study suggests that students' attitude toward learning a new language in relation to their
sense of self-identity, combined with social and cultural influences, could affect his or her success in acquiring that language. Therefore, these insights clearly demonstrate the need for reform of traditional English teaching methodology in our schools. Over all, it will not be an easy task for nonnative Korean English teachers to incorporate real-life situations into their classrooms or to provide authentic communicative environments under the current test and grammar-centered curriculum found in the Korean school system. However, we must begin an active movement to change the pedagogical structure of Korean schools so that students do not lose their cultural and historical identity as Koreans or feel any sense of shame or oppression about being required to learn the English language.

REFERENCES


APPENDIX

Learning English and Sense of Cultural Identity Questionnaire

This is a survey about how you feel about learning the English language and its influence on Korean sense of self-identity. Your answers will provide us with valuable information that can be shared with English teachers in both Korea and the United States in order to help them to better understand their students. Reports of the survey will not identify you in any way. Thank you participating in this project.

Note: This survey can be obtained in the Korean language by contacting the author.

Please complete the survey by filling in the missing information and/or circling your choices.

Gender: M______ F______ Age:______
School: ____________________________ Major: __________________________
School Year: ____________________________ Number of years studying English:____

Please indicate which response most nearly reflects your opinion by circling one of the following: SA: Strongly Agree, A: Agree, N: Neither Agree nor Disagree, D: Disagree, and SD: Strongly Disagree.

1. There is a close relationship between language and identity.
   SA A N D SD

2. As a Korean, I believe that the process of learning English influences the Korean sense of identity.
   SA A N D SD

3. The English language has a powerful influence in all aspects of Korean life.
   SA A N D SD

4. I feel that my identity as a Korean gradually becomes lost in the process of acquiring English.
   SA A N D SD

5. A Korean viewpoint can change to an American viewpoint while studying English.
   SA A N D SD

6. Hangul (the Korean Language) and Korean culture are threatened by the English language and American culture.
   SA A N D SD

7. I believe that the English language dominates the Korean language in Korea.
   SA A N D SD

8. One should not learn English too early in life because it may lead one to disregard Korean language and culture.
   SA A N D SD

9. The English language is damaging the Korean language.
   SA A N D SD

10. The English language will help me further my career and my personal goals.
   SA A N D SD

11. Learning English gives me a more informed or global view of the world.
   SA A N D SD

12. Korean and English should be required in all Korean schools.
   SA A N D SD

13. It would be best if all Koreans could speak both English and Korean.
   SA A N D SD

14. Speaking both Korean and English is better than speaking just the Korean language.
   SA A N D SD
15. Speaking Korean alone is sufficient in Korea.
SA A N D SD

16. Only someone who needs to use English should study English in Korea.
SA A N D SD

17. There is a misguided social mood in Korea that forces every Korean to study English.
SA A N D SD

18. English should be an official language in Korea.
SA A N D SD

19. Speaking both Korean and English helps people benefit from two cultures.
SA A N D SD

20. Studying English is important for obtaining a job after graduating from college regardless of ones' major.
SA A N D SD

21. Proficiency in English helps people get promotions in their jobs in Korea.
SA A N D SD

22. It is strange that many companies in Korea demand English proficiency (TOEIC score, English interview) when they recruit and hire new employees while Korea is a monolingual country.
SA A N D SD

23. Native-speaking English teachers who show interest in the Korean language and culture facilitate their students' success in learning the English language.
SA A N D SD

Applicable levels: general education, secondary education
Key words: student's attitudes, self-identity

Tukcha Kim
Lecturer, English Education Department, Sunchon National University
Maekok-dong Sunchon city, Chonnaam, 540-742, Korea
Tel: (061) 722-1591
Email: tuukchakim@hotmail.com

Teresa J. Kennedy, Ph. D.
Associate Professor, Foreign Language/Bilingual Education
College of Education, University of Idaho
Moscow, Idaho 83844-3038
Tel: (208) 885-7536
Fax: (208) 885-0560
Email: tk kennedy@uidaho.edu

Received in December 2003
Reviewed in January 2004
Revised version received in February 2004