

Learning Together: How Creative Understanding Can Help Overcome Negative Attitudes toward English in Korea*

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1. Introduction

“Learning English was sort of a crime in Korea in the 1980s” was how Mr. Kim, a former student of mine, described his days as a student of English literature at Korea University in the 1980s. Mr. Kim’s guilt-ridden memories of the tumultuous 1980s in Korea typify the feelings of many Korean students toward English during this period of unprecedented change in Korean history. Yet Mr. Kim, like many of his colleagues at Korea’s elite institutions of higher education, is highly proficient in English and, despite the guilt, seeks out opportunities to use English. The English language in Korea, thus, finds itself in a paradoxical position. On the sociocultural level, it is viewed negatively as a potential threat to Korean national identity, but on the individual level, it attracts and retains the interest of many learners. If the goal of the Korean educational system as stated by the Ministry of Education (Shin, S. S., 1981, cited in Kim, N. S., 1987), however, is to produce a large pool of proficient English speakers, then Mr. Kim is an exception to the norm. The majority of learners fail to achieve the desired proficiency in English in any of the traditional four-skill areas and end up feel

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ing that their efforts at learning English are wasted.

Various factors cause this failure of English education in Korea, but given that many good language learners like Mr. Kim are successful at bridging the wide linguistic gaps between the two languages and, thus, become highly proficient in English, much of this failure can be attributed to the effect of non-linguistic cognitive and affective variables on learner motivation. The effect of attitudes on learner motivation has been discussed at length in the applied linguistics literature (See Gardner & Lambert 1972; Gardner & MacIntyre 1993; Morgan 1993; Pierson, Fu & Lee 1980; Shaw 1981 for overviews and research on attitudes in a foreign language context) with equivocal conclusions. In Korea, the sociocultural milieu—a product of Korea's national identity and tortured encounters with the outside world—exerts a particularly negative influence over learner attitudes which reduce what would otherwise be positive motivation on the part of most learners. In the Korean classroom, the native-speaker teacher of English in Korea walks along the fault line where these two conflicting feelings toward English meet. What follows is a description of the sociocultural context of learning English in Korea and common personal motivations to learn English. I conclude by making recommendations based on the Bakhtinian concept of “creative understanding” to the native-speaker teacher of English who is new to Korea.

This paper has grown out of my teaching experiences in Korea, particularly my tenure in the Department of English Education at Korea University from 1988 to 1992. I also draw on my experience of learning the Korean language and meeting Korean people from all walks of life during my seven-year residency in Korea. The Department of English Education at Korea University is both typical and atypical of the teaching-English-as-a-foreign-language environment at the university level in Korea. Student culture, the socioeconomic background of the students, and previous educational experience are similar to other universities in Korea. Class size and the overall administrative organization of Korea University are similar to other large universities in Korea. Korea University, however, is one of the most prestigious universities in Korea and, as such, graduates from Korea University have easier access to elite positions in Korean society through an extensive network of alumni. The Department of English Education differs from most such departments in Korea because of its diverse curricu-

lum of English skill courses. I taught six, sometimes seven, different courses at all levels during one academic year. In contrast, most English skill courses in Korean Universities are confined to the first two years and to two subjects only: English conversation and English composition. I was one of two native-speaker faculty members who were on one-year visiting status; there were four permanent Korean faculty members in the department. The diverse curriculum in the Department of English Education is in the forefront of integrating English skill courses into the overall curriculum. The Korean faculty members maintained high standards for themselves and their students which created an unusually studious atmosphere in the department.

2. Background on Korean Attitudes toward English

Koreans have been masters at language learning throughout their history. From the introduction of Buddhism into the Kingdom of Koguryo in 372A. D., classical Chinese became the dominant written language until the waning years of the nineteenth century. Buddhist scholarship during the Koryo Dynasty (918A.D.—1392) produced a large amount of religious writing in classical Chinese (Eckert, Lee, Lew, and Robinson 1990). Following the establishment of the Choson Dynasty in 1392 which adopted the Neo-Confucianism of Chu Hsi as a “state ideology”, Korean Confucian *literati* contributed much to Confucian scholarship and a significant literature of their own in Chinese (Deuchler 1992). Throughout Korean history, then, the aristocratic and religious elite invoked the authority of texts written in classical Chinese to strengthen the ideology that gave legitimacy to their rule. Rigorous study and literal interpretation of the basic canon of Confucian texts raised the written text to an exalted status which, though much diminished, still exists in Korean language education today.

The system of the Choson Dynasty faced unprecedented challenges to its internal stability in the latter half of the nineteenth century (Palais 1975) because it could not arrest the tide of change and keep out foreign powers that were clamoring to get into Korea (Kim, K. H. 1980). Western powers sent missionaries as part of their imperialistic advance into Korea with the majority of the early missionaries coming from English speaking nations, particularly the United States (Clark 1986). They set up schools to provide

a Western-style Christian education in Korea (Kim, N. S. 1987; Park, N. S. 1992) along with churches and hospitals. English became associated with a small elite in Seoul that embraced the new religion and Western technology (Kim, N. S. 1987).

The last years of the nineteenth century saw the great powers, China, Russia, and Japan scramble for hegemony in the Korean Peninsula (Kim, C. I. & Kim, H. K. 1967). With victories in its wars against China and Russia, Japan's domination of Korea was assured and Korea was officially subjugated to Japanese colonial rule in 1910. Once in control, the Japanese sought to rule Korea by destroying Korean culture and, thereby, integrating Korea totally into Japan (Lee 1963). Japanese was made the official language and tight controls over the media and educational system were put in place (Kim, N. S. 1987; Robinson 1984). Until the outbreak of World War II, English continued to be taught in Korea as a school subject in the educational system that Japan built up in Korea (Park, N. S. 1992). English was transformed in the colonial era from being a language of Christian missionaries and their dutiful Korean followers to the language of a growing capitalist elite, many of whom worked hand in glove with the Japanese imperialists (Eckert 1991). English had now become associated with the Japanese oppressors and their Korean cohorts rather than with the West.

The cries of joy on August 15, 1945 upon liberation from Japan faded quickly as Korea found itself trapped in an ideological whirlwind of forces beyond its control. The deepening schism between the United States and the Soviet Union caused Korea to slide toward division into two competing and hostile states (Henderson 1968; Cumings 1981). The Republic of Korea in the South with American-educated Syngman Rhee as president modeled many of its institutions on those of the United States and after Japan through continued reliance on bureaucrats trained under the Japanese colonial administration (Henderson 1968). English was declared a required subject in all three years of middle school and in all three years of high school. Strong American influence, mainly through a powerful military presence and economic aid, continued following the Korean War (Park, N. S. 1992). After taking power in a military coup d'état in 1961, President Park Chung Hee pushed a program of economic development that led to rapid economic growth from the 1960s onward (Kuznets 1977; Woo 1991). The United

States soaked up huge percentage of Korean exports and was the major source of Korean imports in those early years of industrialization. The English language, then, grew dramatically in importance from the 1950s to 1970s. As an English-speaking Korean at the time may have put it, "You can eat off English."

This ubiquitous American influence, however, came into question dramatically in 1980 as hopes for democracy after Park Chung Hee's long dictatorial rule died in Chun doo Hwan's coup d'etat in May of that year. A demonstration in the southwestern city of Kwangju following the declaration of martial law turned into one of the bloodiest incidents in contemporary Korean history as hundreds, perhaps thousands, of civilians lost their lives as the military put down what had become a city-wide rebellion. Many people began to wonder why the United States did not prevent the Korean military from being so brutal (Clark 1988). This question led others to suspect American collaboration with the Korean military in putting down the rebellion. Doubts about what happened in Kwangju and President Reagan's subsequent embrace of Chun Doo Hwan in early 1981 led many Koreans, particularly students to look at the America-as-mentor relationship with Korea in a sharply critical light. Many students concluded that the United States was the enemy of democracy in Korea and, in a larger view, the enemy of Korean culture: the United States was now the evil empire (Kim, A. D. 1993). In this politically charged context, English came to be viewed as the language of the evil empire. This powerfully negative association of the English language with the United States is the source of much of our Mr. Kim's sense of guilt about studying English in the early 1980s.

Anti-Americanism spread from the college campuses to other sectors of society following the democratic reforms of 1987 and reached a peak in 1988 during the Seoul Olympic Games and in 1989 as trade conflicts with the United States worsened (Buruma 1988; Kim, K. D. 1993). Nevertheless, this public venting of anti-American feelings exerted relatively little influence over personal decisions to study English because of the ever-increasing demands in Korea for higher standards of English proficiency. The 1980s also saw growing prosperity for the majority of people in Korea, and after the democratic reforms of 1987, a marked trend toward democratization in many sectors of society (Macdonald 1993). Thus, Korea's emergence as a major trading nation and ever-growing internationalization

served to counter balance the negative view of English at an individual level. Democratization also created a mood of greater tolerance and cultural diversity at a time when public antipathy toward the United States and English was on the rise. As the 1980s gave way to the 1990s, TOEFL training courses, overseas language training and travel, and foreign language conversation classes have all seen a boom in business (Park, N. S. 1992).

The 1980s bring into focus the paradox of English as a manifestation of the evil empire—the United States—on the one hand and of English as a tool for individual success in a rapidly growing economy. Reinforcing this generally negative sociocultural view of English, however, is a complex combination of two other factors: how Koreans view themselves as a people and how Koreans view that institutions where English is taught and used. Kramersch (1993) and Byram (1991, cited in Morgan 1993) argue that views of the native language culture have a significant influence on how the target language culture is perceived. “As a prism, perceptions and counterperceptions bounce images back and forth based on the polysemy of language itself (Bredella and Haack 1988). And yet, myths cannot be discarded, for they affect the way learners of a foreign language see others in the mirror of themselves, despite all evidence to the contrary from ‘objectively’ transmitted facts” (Kramersch 1993: 207). Noted American sociologist Daniel Bell describes the importance of this cultural imagination in forming a “national character” as follows:

A nation or a people is shaped by nature, religion, and history. Mountains or plains or seas influence the varieties of national character. Religion provides an anchorage, even when people are uprooted. History, bound by the principle of inheritance, provides a sense of distinction and of continuity, so that, as Burke put it, a society is a partnership of the living, the dead and the unborn. In the history of different peoples, it has usually been one or another of these fundamentals that was predominant in shaping the distinctive character of the race. (Bell 1981: 249–250)

In contemporary Korean history, the Japanese colonial experience is of seminal importance in ascertaining the Korean view of themselves. The degradation of the Korean national identity left the Korean people deeply humiliated at the time of liberation in 1945 despite the existence of a strong nationalist movement (Lee 1963). Park Chung Hee wanted to create a pos-

itive national identity to rally the people behind his program of economic development (Buruma 1988). He incorporated much of a disparate Korean nationalism into a powerful national history designed to foster national pride. This new nationalism was both positive and defensive: it praised Korean traditions by contrasting them positively with those of other societies. Korean bitterness over Japanese colonial rule was added to this to create a strong anti-Japanese cast to Park's Korean nationalism which still complicates debate on cultural issues in Korea (Buruma 1988; Sanger 1994). Given this black-and-white dichotomy between Korean and non-Korean things, English is viewed as a threat to national identity when nationalistic feelings are heightened by controversy in Korea's relationship with the United States.

Nature has a subtle yet profound influence in creating a strong sense of local community in Korean culture. Korea was a rural society until the late 1970s. Though Korea is now roughly 75% urban, most Korean people have memories of or identify with a rural heritage. Farming in a traditional Korean village, particularly the labor intensive rice crop, depended on cooperation of the members of the village (Brandt 1971; Chun 1985). Long winters followed by dry springs intensified the need for cooperation for survival in the village. This sense of community, of pulling together in adversity can sway the public mood in Korea in potent ways. It came together most recently in 1978 to face the common enemy of Chun Doo Hwan. Things foreign including the English language have also become targets of this mass sense of community that binds Korean people together into a sort of biological nationalism. Korean national history may exist in the realm of ideas, but this sense of community provides the emotional energy to act on deep-seated feelings and frustrations (Buruma 1988; Kim, K. D. 1993).

Religious life in Korea puzzles outsiders because of its great diversity and because of the tolerance for such diversity (Lancaster 1992). Buddhism remains the largest religious group in Korea, but Christianity is rapidly gaining ground in urban areas. Christianity pervades upon English because of the many connections Korean churches have with American and Korean-American religious organizations and because many Korean ministers have been trained in American seminaries. English is viewed positively by many devout Christians, many of whom spend several hours a week in so-called "English Bible study," because of its association with the American Chris-

tian community. A minority of Christians who are influenced by liberation theology, however, has distinctly negative feelings toward the United States and toward English because of what they perceive as moral decline in the United States and selfish American foreign policy. These sentiments draw on a strong xenophobic element in Korean Christianity of many early Christians (Wells 1991).

These generally negative attitudes toward English are reinforced at the institutional level by the educational system. At the top is the omnipotent Ministry of Education that oversees the entire educational system. Most important of all, the Ministry of Education limits the number of students each university and academic department can admit each year. This results in stiff competition for places at all institutions of higher education in Korea because the number of students wishing to enter far exceeds the number of places allotted by the Ministry of Education. Higher education still offers a ticket to better jobs and more social prestige in Korea, particularly a degree from the three most respected institutions: Seoul National University, Korea University, and Yonsei University. The roughly 120 universities in Korea are ranked according to an informal system based on entrance examination scores, history and location of the institution, and the number of alumni in prestigious positions in society (Park, N. S. 1992); this intensifies competition to enter a top-level university. Thus, by establishing tight limits on the number of students, the Ministry of Education is, in effect, using the educational system to limit access to the ranks of the white collar middle class.

Examinations have been a part of the Korean cultural landscape going back to the Koryo Dynasty (Eckert et al. 1990). This tradition lives on today in the form of the university entrance examination which consists of two separate examinations: the "aptitude" exam developed by the Ministry of Education and a content area examination developed by each institution (*Korea Annual* 1993). English is a major component of both examinations which magnifies its influence in determining who gets into which university. In such a stressful environment, high school students who are not attracted to English and who are under great pressure to perform well in school often develop negative attitudes toward English because of the influence it has over their future. English becomes the enemy for many students who fail because of a low score in English.

The Ministry of Education also has the power to draw up a list of approved textbooks which schools must choose from. The ministry chooses the textbooks every four years from a large pool of books submitted by various authors, most of whom are university professors. Foreign textbooks and textbooks written by native speakers are never on the list of approved books. There is a close relationship between the approval of textbooks, academia, and money in the Korean educational system. At the classroom level, this means that teachers and students are forced to use textbooks that are often less than satisfactory from a linguistic and pedagogical point of view (Enger 1982; Park, N. S. 1992). Though the situation has improved in recent years, these "official" textbooks are modeled on a rigorous grammatical syllabus that forces teachers to spend much of each lesson on grammar explanations and grammar translation exercises (Kim, N. S. 1987). To complicate matters, the college entrance examinations consist of discrete point grammar questions with the exception of the innovative listening comprehension section introduced in the 1993 test. In the end, this situation has a profoundly negative influence on student attitudes toward English. Students come to see English as a torturous examination subject and a not a living language that can offer them tangible benefits. The Ministry of Education works against itself in English education, first, by making it a discriminatory tool in determining access to higher education and, second, by giving sanction to a grammatical syllabus that bores students with its impracticality.

The "Korean dream" of limitless economic growth and an increasing standard of living balances many of the negative attitudes toward English by inspiring many people to learn English to get their share of that dream. The Korean dream is another product of Park Chung Hee's drive for economic growth: the belief that one can rise from poverty in the countryside by studying or working one's way up and out to the city. Our Mr. Kim's Korean dream is to get a Ph. D. from a well-known university in the United States which will give him the minimum qualification to get a coveted academic job. This is a powerful motivation to continue learning English despite nagging feelings of guilt. Mr. Kim is an English major, but the need for English is no less in other academic fields in which a Ph. D. degree from the United States is highly regarded (Oggins & Kwon 1989). English is required to get an entry-level job in a business, the media, and many sectors

of the civil service; many companies administer in-house English proficiency examinations which are a part of evaluating employees for promotion (Park, N. S. 1992). Thus, the idealistic university student is often forced by the dynamics of the employment market to come to grips with the importance of English in Korean society. For a growing majority of students, the desire to use English to get their share of the Korean dream remains the prime motivation to learn English. Still others study English assiduously simply because they are fond of it or, as in many cases, because they were inspired by a teacher in middle or high school. Students who are driven by strong personal motivation and who genuinely like English are often classic examples of "the good language learner".

3. The Concept of "Creative Understanding"

How does the native-speaker teacher of English at the university level cope with the diverse and often contradictory attitudes of students toward English in Korea? At a more basic level, how does the native-speaker teacher of English lead his or her students to learning? The TESOL profession is full of various methods, approaches, and techniques in teaching English (mostly as a second language and not as a foreign language), but none of them seems to adequately prepare the native-speaker teacher for the teaching situation in Korea because the TESOL profession is deeply rooted in the empirical-analytic paradigm in educational research in the United States and, to a lesser extent, Europe (Pennycook 1989). This research paradigm divorces language from its social context and treats it as a mechanical phenomenon that can be researched using empirical methods from the natural sciences. (While this approach is invaluable in researching large groups of learners and in language testing, it reveals its limitations in the socially and politically charged context of English in Korea because it cannot explain the full range of issues involved.) Native-speaker teachers in Korea who adhere rigidly to TESOL ideology and the assumptions about language and learning behind this ideology quickly discover that what worked at home does not work in Korea and that they must quickly improvise or risk being shoved into irrelevancy (Balhorn & Schneider 1987).

The work of the Russian critic and philosopher, Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-

1975) offers a useful way out of this void. In his youth, Bakhtin was an obscure intellectual whose ideas were repressed by Soviet authorities because they did not conform to Stalinist orthodoxy. Since the 1960s, Bakhtin has come into his own as an influential thinker on language, literature, and culture (both “high” and “low”). His theories were built on a recognition of the creative diversity of human life and on a negation of an underlying unity in all fields of human life and enquiry (Morson & Emerson 1990). Though Bakhtin’s celebration of the diversity of language has made its impact felt in the work of Cazden (1989) and Kramsch (1993), his concept of “creative understanding” is most relevant to the native–speaker teacher of English in a sociocultural context such as Korea. Creative understanding takes diversity in human life as its starting point and rejects the notion that one culture must subsume itself to the other or that conflict between two cultures will eventually create a third culture that is a synthesis of the conflicting cultures. Creative understanding views diversity as a point of strength that enriches both cultures and, thus, the human experience because as Bakhtin puts it, “one cannot even really see one’s own exterior and comprehend it as a whole, and no mirrors or photographs can help; our real exterior can be seen and understood only by other people, because they are located outside us in space and because they are *others*” (Bakhtin, M. 1986, cited in Morson & Emerson 1990: 55). Creative understanding in the English language classroom in Korea would mean that, “each [culture] retains its *open* totality, but they are mutually enriched” (Bakhtin, M. 1986, cited in Morson & Emerson 1990: 56). By laying the “foreign expert” to rest, Bakhtin’s creative understanding offers the native–speaker teacher the opportunity to turn every class meeting into a learning experience that benefits everyone involved. This creates an atmosphere in which learning through self–reflection and reflection on others and the other creates the potential for personal growth intellectually and *morally* (Morson & Emerson 1990).

4. Recommendations

I now turn to recommendations for how the native–speaker teacher of English in Korea can bring creative understanding into the English–as–a–foreign–language classroom. These recommendations are based on my expe-

rience teaching a variety of English as a foreign language courses at the university level in Korea, but they are applicable to other teaching situations in Korea and to teaching Korean students outside Korea. Creative understanding is not a compact method, an approach, or a technique (see Pennycook 1989 for a discussion of these terms); rather, it is a mindset—an inner pedagogical philosophy—that underlies diverse methods of teaching in any given situation. Creative understanding must remain creative by allowing the teacher to vary his or her teaching to suit each teaching situation. In keeping with Bakhtin's rejection of unitary theories, I do not claim that creative understanding is a panacea for the challenges that the native-speaker teacher of English will face in Korea.

Almost all native-speaker teachers of English have no roots or history in Korea. Most teachers have little knowledge of Korea or Korean culture before going to Korea. This general lack of knowledge is a source of great weakness and potential conflict for the teacher. In such a situation, the teacher can reduce feelings of weakness and insecurity by actively learning about Korea, Korean language. Learning the language is of critical importance in developing creative understanding in the classroom because it allows the teacher to feel empathy with the students and gives the students the opportunity to take pride in sharing their language with the teacher (Kwon 1992). In reality, many teachers teach long hours and have little energy left to learning Korean. In such cases, it is not how much a teacher learns, but how interested and willing he or she is to do so. Koreans use what they call "*nunch'i*"—a gut feeling or sixth sense—in interpersonal relationships to check for sincerity and honesty in human relationships which then become the basis for trust and understanding (Kim, Y. Y. 1985).

Beyond the Korean language, the native-speaker teacher of English should show an interest in Korean culture in general, and in particular as it relates to his or her students. In the classroom, the teacher can integrate discussions of Korean culture into activities and turn such discussions into learning situations for the entire class (Oggins & Kwon 1989; see Erbaugh 1990 for a discussion of how she integrated the Chinese literary tradition into her teaching in China). Kramersch (1993) describes how a contrastive cultural component can be integrated into the foreign language classroom to help learners evaluate their culture and the target culture (229–231). One particularly successful cross-cultural activity that I used in an

advanced conversation class at Korea University was a visit to the university's museum. I divided the class of fifteen students up into groups five groups of three students. I arranged the groups so that there was a mixture of men and women who did not sit next to each other in class so that they had an opportunity to learn more about each other. I asked each group to find five traditional Korean relics in the museum to describe and present to the class later. In the museum, I walked from group to group to answer student queries and make subtle corrections of grammar and vocabulary errors. In such encounters, students often asked me if I knew what something was or if I had ever seen the item in question before. When I replied "no," students were eager to explain what something was to me and took pride in doing so. After each group had found five things to describe, we returned to the classroom for a short discussion. Students were then given roughly five days to write their findings up into a presentation to present to and discuss with the class. The discussions that followed each presentation were as stimulating as the museum visit. Some students disagreed with a group's interpretation of the history and use of certain relics. This prompted lively discussion, and, oddly enough, I was asked to cast the tie breaking vote in one of these debates. This activity was successful because it taught language and culture while it enhanced the creative understanding of the entire group. Pedagogically, the multi-task design of this activity incorporated several language skills and diverse functions into a larger activity. In the end, we all learned something new about what we are; in learning to look at museum relics, we learned to look at each other.

As in all educational settings, the native-speaker teacher of English must function within the institutional culture of where he or she works. Educational institutions in Korea, particularly institutions of higher education, are imbued with Confucian attitudes toward learning and the status of the teacher that puts relationships in a hierarchy according to age and rank (Yum 1991). Those of superior status are accorded respect which means that students are obliged to respect their teachers and teachers in turn are obliged to respect their superiors such as the department chairperson or senior members of the faculty. The teacher should try to conform to general institutional culture or at least limit behavior that goes against it. Various speech levels and honorifics in Korean influence how messages are interpreted which means that the teacher should use polite English to avoid

potential misunderstanding (Hwang 1990). Socializing with Korean members of staff, especially in formal gatherings can help establish trust and good working relations (Kwon 1992). In many cases, native-speaker teachers of English are given greater liberty than a Korean faculty member would be and mistakes are forgiven, but such patience has its limits. Paying separately for meals, discussions about money, strong demands for quick changes in the curriculum, and failing to dress in a professional manner create a negative impression of the native-speaker teacher (See Hur, S. V. & Hur, B. S. 1992; Park, M. S. 1979 for a general introduction to various cultural differences) that is difficult to overcome. Most native-speaker teachers of English in Korea are, in fact, expendable employees because contracts are usually limited to one year based on "visiting status." Teachers are, thus, in an extremely weak position in their own institutions regardless of how effective they may be in teaching or how well they get along with Korean faculty members. Conforming to the institutional culture of the teaching setting does not, however, mean abandoning one's identity for another. Rather it shows the institution that the native-speaker teacher of English respects the institutional culture as any invited guest respects his or her host.

Confucian attitudes also have a pervasive influence over the student-teacher relationship because of its dominance over Korean classroom culture. Leontiev (1981, cited in Morgan 1993) stresses the importance of the teacher's appearance in the classroom in Russia. Swales (1993) argues that a foreign teaching assistant's effectiveness in the American university classroom is influenced by how well he or she adapts to American classroom culture. Students in Korea also expect their teacher to look like a teacher and to conform to Korean classroom culture. The teacher should have a formal presence and avoid sitting on the desk or other informal types of behavior. Professional dress typical of the business world in many Western countries is more appropriate than casual dress. These issues are less important in small language classes where the teacher and students know each other well, but such classes are a luxury in many Korean universities given the large class size. Teachers under the age of thirty should pay particular care in dressing since they lack the aura of authority of older teachers. Teachers should be particularly sensitive to treating all students equally and avoiding preferential treatment of students of the oppo-

site sex. Korean students and educational authorities remain suspicious of close relations, particularly away from the campus, between a teacher and student of the opposite sex. Students also expect a teacher to be calm and have strong self-control when things go wrong or when sudden changes occur. Displays of excessive anger or emotion confuse students which can seriously damage good rapport between student and teacher. Anger of a disciplinary nature, however, is useful at times to remind students of their obligation in Confucian terms to be "good students." These issues of decorum and deportment have direct bearing on creative understanding because they show that the teacher is willing to work within the system as guest and not against it as an imperialist expert bent of "TESOLizing" the heathen (Alptekin 1982).

Phillipson (1992) questions whether native speakers of English are qualified to teach English in an English-as-a-foreign-language environment such as Korea. This argument builds on the work of Kachru (1986) which places native varieties of English in the context of the worldwide spread of English and the rise of legitimate non-native varieties of English. Traditionally in Korea, a teacher has been viewed as a fount of knowledge whose authority could not be doubted, and, though weakened, this tradition lives on today. The native-speaker teacher in Korea is often deluded into thinking that he or she does not have to pay attention to the nitty-gritty details of the language such as grammar and punctuation only to find out that students in a conversation class want to know the difference between "while" and "whilst." Because of the emphasis, no matter how misplaced, on English grammar in the school system and on various proficiency tests, students expect a teacher to know basic English grammar and to be able to explain it. Students appreciate instruction in punctuation, usage, and pronunciation which is of uneven quality in the educational system. The teacher's legitimacy as an employee often boils down to the student's need to be exposed to native speech. Given traditional expectations of a teacher and the power of the written text in the Korean educational system, however, students secretly expect more than jokes and chitchat from a teacher, native speaker or otherwise, and by recognizing those expectations, the native-speaker teacher sends a message to his or her students that their needs are important and valuable.

Learning Korean, integrating cross-cultural activities into classroom in-

struction, working within the confines of the educational culture, and knowing about basic English grammar and usage are tangible steps the native-speaker teacher of English can take to enhance his or her effectiveness in the teaching and, at a deeper level, in developing creative understanding. The teacher can also work toward these goals in intangible ways. Spending time with students and showing them that you care about them is very important in gaining the trust of students individually and as a group. Making oneself available in the office during times which may not be specified as office hours encourages students to reach out to the teacher (Kwon 1992). Participating in student activities such as mountain climbing trips when invited gratifies students in their effort to become closer to the teacher. At Korea University, I often participated in such activities and served as an informal faculty advisor to several English conversation clubs in my department. I also required students, particularly in English composition classes, to visit my office several times a semester to discuss their work and personal concerns regarding English or other issues. Limiting contact with students to class time only may inadvertently give the impression that the teacher is not really interested in the students or in being in Korea. Personal contact with the students is rarely required as a contractual obligation and Korean faculty members may be modest in broaching this subject, but such contact is invaluable in building trust and understanding between the teacher and his or her students.

5. Conclusion

Most native-speaker teachers of English leave Korea with some money in their pockets, snapshots of their students, a collection of business cards, and a few souvenirs. Others leave with memories of themselves as a "museum specimen" and of "hawking and spitting" (Liston, P. M. 1989). These teachers leave Korea unchanged and unmoved and they leave little behind and are quickly forgotten. Teaching in different culture is challenging and demanding business, but potentially rewarding and liberating. The Bakhtinian concept of creative understanding prepares the way for the teacher to find the rewards of personal and intellectual growth with his or her students. The classroom, then, becomes a liberated zone where the teacher and students work together through English to discover some of the hidden

places in each other and in each other's culture.

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ABSTRACT

Learning Together: How Creative Understanding Can Help Overcome Negative Attitudes toward English In Korea

Robert J. Fouser

This paper discusses the development of negative attitudes toward English in the Korean sociocultural context over time. Positive motivation to learn English on the individual level compensates for some of the negative attitudes in the sociocultural context and results in high levels of proficiency for some learners. Most learners, however, fail to reach the desired level of proficiency because of negative attitudes toward English. Creative understanding as defined by Mikhail Bakhtin encourages the native-speaker teacher of English to engage him or herself with Korean culture which should reduce negative attitudes toward the teacher and English in the classroom. Recommendations on how to put creative understanding into practice and on how to function in a Korean educational institution are in-

cluded at the end of the paper.

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