

# Issues and Trends in Korea's College-Level English-Language Teaching

Nahm-Sheik Park

## 1. Introduction

In this presentation, I will be dealing with twelve major issues of current relevance to college-level ELT in Korea and such trends as are related to these issues. For convenience of exposition, I will pose each of these issues and the trend or trends related thereto in terms of a conflict between two opposing ELT ideologies, i.e. the conservative ideology and the progressive ideology.

## 2. Issues and Trends

### 2. 1. Learner- vs. Teacher-Centeredness

The first issue I will discuss in this presentation relates to the question of whether ELT should be learner- or teacher-centered. The conservative position is that it should be teacher-centered whereas the progressive position is that it should be learner-centered. Most Korean professors of English happen to be in the conservative camp on this issue so that college-level ELT in Korea is overwhelmingly teacher-centered from curricular content to materials development and selection to teaching methodology.

College-level ELT in Korea is a professorial dictatorship of sorts with the

\* This is a slightly enlarged paper version of the plenary lecture that I delivered on 8 September 1993 at the Annual Convention of the Japan Association of College English Teachers at Tohoku Gakuen University in Sendai. I am grateful to Professors Myong-Won Cho, Choon-Hak Cho, and Dae-Sik Min for valuable comments on the content and style of the present paper. Any shortcomings that may remain are entirely my responsibility.

students blindly following whatever their professors dictate to them. For example, Korean students of English are normally fed a heavy dose of archaic English when what they really want is an immersion in contemporary English. They are normally required to read Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, and John Donne, which they find utterly irrelevant to their utilitarian goals as students of English.

Korean students of English are also normally fed an excessive dose of literary and linguistic theories when what they really want is a high level of proficiency in practical English language skills. Often required to familiarize themselves with such abstruse linguistic theories as Chomsky's theory of government and binding even at the undergraduate level, they find it impossible to pay enough attention to practical English language skills.

College-level ELT in Korea is also a professorial dictatorship in the sense that the ELT classroom is dominated almost entirely by the professor with little room for student participation. In other words, there is such an authoritarian presence of the professor in the college ELT classroom that there is virtually no room for student-initiated activity. The classroom atmosphere is so suffocating that it is impossible for the students to learn English through meaningful communication either with their professors or with each other.

Disappointed with this situation, some progressives are calling for a needs analysis for all levels of Korea's ELT, including college-level ELT. They are positive that a conscientious needs assessment is sure to reveal that Korea's college-level ELT as it is currently practiced is way out of line in that it turns a blind eye to the utilitarian needs of its clientele. And it is about time that such an assessment were undertaken for Korea's ELT, which has not had a single formal, large-scale needs analysis at the college level or, for that matter, at any other level.

I personally believe that Korea's college-level ELT should be far more learner-centered than it is teacher-centered or at the very least as learner-centered as it is teacher-centered. That is, if it is to be truly successful in meeting student demand for practical English and thereby producing fluent users of English that Korean society needs in ever greater numbers.

This belief of mine notwithstanding, all indications are that Korea's college-level ELT will continue to remain teacher-centered for the foreseeable future at least. This is because the majority of the professors are too

authoritarian and too self-centered to heed the legitimate utilitarian needs of their students, most of whom are too meek and obedient to rebel against their professors' dictatorial regime.

Under these circumstances, Korea's college-level ELT is likely to continue to suffer from its perennial drawback of falling far short of meeting the ever-growing social demand in Korea for a high level of English proficiency among its college graduates. As a result, it is liable to go right on being dismissed as socially irrelevant for years or even decades to come.

Korean professors of English would be well advised to bear it clearly in mind that in no contemporary democratic society can a socially irrelevant program of college studies long survive and, still less, prosper. Korean professors of English should learn a lesson from the fact that a number of American graduate programs in linguistics have recently been dismantled or are in the process of being dismantled largely because of their social irrelevance, whether real or perceived.

## 2.2. Fluency vs. Accuracy

The second issue concerns the opposition between fluency and accuracy as the goal of ELT. The question here is which of the two should take precedence in Korea's college-level ELT. The conservative position is that accuracy is of far greater importance than fluency. The conservatives are under the illusion that fluency comes quite naturally with accuracy and, therefore, attention need not be paid to fluency as long as it is paid to accuracy.

On the other hand, the progressive position is that fluency should have priority over accuracy. Many progressives feel that ELT of all stripes should strive for fluency with accuracy, meaning that accuracy should not be neglected at all although fluency should be the ultimate goal of all ELT, including ELT at the college level.

Parenthetically, the conservative emphasis on accuracy entails a focus on details or parts of English, rather than on the whole of English. This is in sharp contrast to the fact that the progressive emphasis on fluency entails a focus on the whole of English rather than on details or parts of English. The conservative view is that the whole of English is the same as the sum of its parts so that attention need not be paid to the whole as long as it is paid to the parts. On the other hand, the progressive view is that the whole

of English is larger than the sum of its parts so that more attention should be paid to the whole than to the parts.

On account of this philosophical difference, the conservatives subscribe to the discrete-point approach to language processing while the progressives subscribe to the integrative approach. As a result, the conservatives are concerned primarily with such low-end discrete-point units of language processing as phonemes, morphemes, words, phrases, clauses, and sentences. On the other hand, the progressives are concerned primarily with such high-end integrative entities of language processing as tone units, cohesion, coherence, and communicative dynamism. Probably also as a result of the aforementioned philosophical difference, the maximal unit of language processing is the isolated sentence for the conservatives while it is the connected discourse for the progressives.

The conservatives are overwhelmingly in the majority on the issue in question here with the result that accuracy is the ultimate goal to be attained in most college-level ELT programs in Korea today. One result of this conservative-inspired obsession with accuracy and consequently with discrete-point language processing is that slow and detailed processing of limited amounts of material is the name of the game in most of Korea's current college-level ELT. Thus, far more attention is normally paid to minute parts of English than to the whole of English.

This should help explain why processing, word for word and line by line, small amounts of material tends to be given far more weight in Korea's college-level ELT than processing, chunk by chunk, large amounts of material. In a typical freshman English class, the main activity comprises line-by-line and verbatim translation, usually by the professor, of only a page or so of text per hour. Typical college English composition classes focus on grammatical manipulation of a few isolated sentences or of parts thereof plus translation of a few isolated Korean sentences into English. Probably a fallout of this conservative-inspired trend toward slow, detailed, and belabored language processing is the fact that Korean college ELT materials are, more often than not, excessively difficult. This fallout may be inevitable, given the need to justify the relatively large amount of time that has to be devoted to a very small amount of material.

In fact, freshman English readers are often too difficult even for Korean professors of English and even for educated native speakers of English.

Whether we like it or not, this trend toward power processing of horrendously difficult material will continue to dominate the Korean college-level ELT scene for some time to come. That is, the trend is here to stay as long as accuracy remains the ultimate goal of Korea's college-level ELT.

This power-oriented trend in Korea's college-level ELT is to blame in large measure for the majority of Korean students, including college students, ending up with a dismally low level of linguistic performance in English. Admittedly, most Korean students do acquire a reasonably high level of linguistic competence in the language, which, as you know, is often useless when it comes to real communication situations. I am using the terms competence and performance in their classical Chomskyan senses. The point I am trying to make here is that, as a result of the predominantly power processing trend in Korea's college-level ELT, most Korean students end up with a fairly solid underlying knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary, but seldom a good communicative command of the English language.

On the other side of this issue are a relatively small number of progressives, mostly junior professors who are recent TEFL/TESL returnees from the United States and Britain. A voice in the wilderness, they demand that all ELT in Korea, including college-level ELT, switch from power processing to speed processing. They argue that otherwise the Korean school system will keep right on producing graduates with little or no serviceable command of English. They say that most normal language use involves speed processing, not power processing, and that students need far more training in speed processing than in power processing.

According to these progressives, Korea's college-level ELT should thus focus on teaching students to process large amounts of ordinary material at a natural speed. They say that students should be trained to read not just one page of difficult text per hour of instruction, but several pages of normal text per hour of instruction at the very least. They also say that students should be trained to write in connected paragraphs or longer stretches than in isolated sentences. On the spoken English side, too, they say that students should be trained to process English not in isolated sentences but in large amounts of connected discourse.

### 2.3. Single-Sector ELT vs. Multiple-Sector ELT

The third issue is a territorial one relating to role differentiation between competing ELT sectors, say, between the English department and the English language center on one and the same campus. The conservative position is that the English department alone should have jurisdiction over all on-campus ELT. Many conservatives say that the English language center is superfluous and has no legitimate place in ELT so that it should be excluded in its entirety from the college ELT scene.

On the other hand, the progressive position is that college-level ELT is too multi-faceted a field for either the English department or the English language center alone to do sufficient justice to. Most progressives say that there should be a division of labor between the English department and the English language center. They maintain that the English department should concentrate on English literature and linguistics as academic disciplines on a credit basis with the English language center stressing practical English language skills such as listening and speaking on a non-credit basis.

The conservative position here is arguably the only legitimate position currently in that all credit courses in ELT are under the jurisdiction of the English Department on all Korean college campuses today. If we also take non-credit ELT classes into consideration, however, there is already in place a fairly well-established division of labor between the two at many Korean colleges. Under this division of labor, the English department offers academic ELT courses for credit with the English language center offering non-credit practical ELT courses.

Incidentally, I may note at this point that non-credit ELT classes in spoken English offered by the English language center are in most instances better attended than credit ELT courses offered by the English department. This may mean that the progressive position on the issue of role differentiation under discussion here is in reality just as legitimate as, or even more legitimate than, the conservative position is.

With the progressives thus in the ascendant, there is a turf war of sorts going on between the English department and the English language center at some institutions with the former allegedly defending their traditional turf against flagrant infringements by the latter. The conservatives are so safely entrenched on this issue on most Korean college campuses, however,

that even where the legitimacy of the English language center is accepted by the English Department, the former is always a junior partner to the latter, which will most likely remain the case indefinitely.

The ultra-conservatives would take the position that all ELT is the inviolable territory of the school sector. On the other hand, the progressives would take strong exception to this ultra-conservative position, saying that the responsibility for ELT should be shared by a number of sectors, only one of which is the school sector. In this connection, it may be noted that many progressive college professors of English take the position that part of practical ELT training can be relegated to the private sector comprising private and corporate language training centers both at home and abroad.

A territorial division of this sort, which implies an ELT comprising more than one sector, is tacitly accepted by the vast majority of progressive Korean professors of English and some of their conservative colleagues as well. It is apparently also accepted by most Korean colleges and universities themselves, especially those in major urban areas. They allow private foreign-language institutes to provide on-campus instruction in TOEFL preparation and other non-academic ELT programs sometimes in competition, and sometimes in collaboration, with their own English language centers.

Indications are that this trend toward multiple-sector ELT will be especially prominent at major Korean colleges and universities in large metropolitan centers in the not too distant future. I would not be surprised at all if in about ten years' time the currently dominant single-sector ELT with the English department in the driver's seat gives way to a multiple-sector ELT of the sort under discussion here.

We can conceptualize many different forms of role differentiation in the kind of multiple-sector ELT under discussion here. For example, one sector, say, the school sector represented by the English department, may be devoted to theoretically/academically oriented studies of English while another sector, say, either the school sector represented by the English language center or the non-school sector represented by the private English language institute or both, may be devoted to practical English language skills.

In theory, the division of labor between sectors can also take many different forms according to the purposes or skills catered to. For example, the school sector could focus on English for general purposes with the non-

school sector specializing in English for specific purposes. Alternatively, the school sector represented by the English department may focus on written English with the rest of the sectors concentrating on spoken English. A third option is for the pre-service sector to specialize in the receptive skills of listening and reading with the in-service sector specializing in the productive skills of speaking and writing.

In still another conceptualization of multiple-sector ELT, we can envision a division of labor whereby the Korean sector focuses on the receptive skills of listening and reading with the native-English sector focusing on the productive skills of speaking and writing. The Korean sector refers to the ELT sector comprising resources of Korean origin whereas the native-English sector here refers to the ELT sector comprising resources originating in such Anglophone countries as Britain and the United States.

There are some clear indications that Korea's college-level ELT is beginning to go the way of multiple-sector ELT. At Seoul National University, for example, the English Department focuses on English literature and English linguistics with the Language Research Institute catering to popular student demand for practical English. Those Seoul National University students who find on-campus English offerings inadequate go to U.S. and British ELT centers for intensive English-language training, especially during the summer and winter months. They also turn to private in-country English-language institutes for training in practical English-language skills.

#### 2. 4. Register-Neutral ELT vs. Register-Specific ELT

The fourth issue relates to the register specificity of ELT. The main question here is how specific ELT content should be to the register in which the student ELT consumer in question is expected to operate after graduation from college. Thus this issue has to do with the content validity, so to speak, of Korea's college-level ELT with reference to the careers the student in question plans to pursue.

The conservative view is that college-level ELT should be maximally register-neutral. The assumption here is that the vast majority of college students have not yet decided what careers to pursue and, therefore, do not yet know what kind of register-specific ELT will benefit them most. The progressive view, on the other hand, is that college-level ELT should be as

register-specific as possible, that is, specific to the student's major areas of study. The assumption here is that only highly register-specific ELT programs can adequately equip college graduates for the highly specialized careers of our time.

The conservatives are in the majority on this issue also with the result that things like English for specific purposes are virtually unheard of on most Korean college campuses. One possible exception may be English for business and trade, which is offered at most colleges of economics and business management in Korea.

The trend away from English for specific purposes is apparently changing, however, although not too noticeably at the moment. The change is taking place mainly in the private and corporate ELT sectors. Private or corporate foreign-language institutes have begun to offer programs in English for international business, for tour guides, for hotel employees, for simultaneous translators, for telephone communication, and so on. Interestingly enough, the main body of clients for these programs in English for specific purposes comprises college students and college graduates, who evidently find on-campus ELT offerings far too register-neutral to meet their needs for after their graduation.

At Seoul National University, demand is apparently growing for English for specific purposes with special reference to law and engineering. The university's College of Law, for example, has recently begun offering a course in English for law. Many professors of engineering at the university advocate the necessity of an English language program designed specifically for careers in engineering. A fairly large group of engineering students at the university have for years been running their own English conversation classes with native English speakers as teachers.

Some of my colleagues, including one prominent British ELT expert, believe that English for specific purposes such as English for business management and English for the life sciences, are ideas, whose time is long overdue at many Korean universities. They point out that the major stumbling block to the spread of English for specific purposes on Korean college campuses is lack of adequate staff and materials for college-level ESP. I believe, however, that the trend toward English for specific purposes, which is just beginning to emerge at Seoul National University, is likely to hit other Korean college campuses also, albeit at not too rapid a pace.

Parenthetically, the Language Research Institute of Seoul National University is planning to offer programs in English for academic purposes beginning sometime next year. Designed for large numbers of the university's graduates going to the United States for further study, these programs will focus on expository writing, classroom discussion, and note-taking. This is in addition to programs the institute already has in place for preparing its students for the TOEFL and the GRE.

## 2.5. Educational Technology

The fifth issue relates to the place of educational technology in college-level ELT in Korea. The conservatives believe that ELT, especially on the college level, should concentrate on the receptive written skill of reading and can thus do without any fancy educational technology. In fact, most of them say that any technology beyond chalk and chalkboards is simply superfluous so that no technology is the best technology.

In contrast, most progressives take the opposite position that educational technology is highly desirable because it can help raise the effectiveness of ELT. They believe that educational technology has an indispensable role to play in college ELT programs with specific reference to the spoken English skills of listening and speaking. They are of the opinion that the more sophisticated the educational technology, the better.

Speaking of the kind of educational technology currently utilized on Korean college campuses, most major colleges are equipped with traditional audio-lingual language labs of the 1960s vintage. These labs are often used for token practice in listening comprehension as part of freshman English. Even for this token practice in listening comprehension, however, most of these labs are hopelessly underutilized. In fact, they are shunned by the vast majority of Korean professors of English even when they teach practical spoken English language skills.

In spite of the fact that a few Korean colleges have been beefing up their language labs with video supplements in recent years, it still remains the case that Korea's college-level ELT is essentially in the pre-VCR age. To the best of my knowledge, few Korean colleges are seriously considering adding a computer complement to their language labs. Although a few of my ELT colleagues are touting computer assisted language instruction and testing for ELT at Korean colleges, college-level ELT in Korea is by and

large still in the pre-computer age with the traditional audio-lingual language lab as its main workhorse.

CAI enthusiasts in Korea are predicting that the day will soon come when CAI will assist us in teaching reading, writing, listening, and speaking in addition to vocabulary and grammar. They may be right. With both the computer literacy rate and the computer population on the rise all over Korea, the computer age in college-level Korean ELT may not be too far on the horizon. In fact, the Language Research Institute of Seoul National University has plans to launch a CALL program for ELT beginning in mid-October this year. This will probably be a milestone of sorts in the history of Korean ELT in that it will mark the beginning of a brave new world for college-level ELT in Korea.

## 2. 6. College ELT in Relation to High-School ELT

The sixth issue relates to ties or links between college-level ELT and high school ELT, especially with reference to the backwash effect of college-level ELT on high school ELT. Perennially at issue in this connection is the English component of the college entrance examination. The conservative position is that there is no alternative to the current English component of the college entrance examination with its heavy emphasis on discrete-point testing of grammar, translation, and power reading.

On the other hand, the progressive position is that this kind of English test with a small number of excessively difficult items is highly undesirable for two important reasons. Firstly, it has the extremely counter-productive backwash effect of forcing high-school ELT to focus on grammar manipulation, verbatim translation, and power reading. Secondly and perhaps quite as importantly, its inherent power-test orientation reduces both its reliability and its validity.

In this connection, it may also be noted that the conservative-dominated college ELT or TEFL curriculum places an inordinately heavy emphasis on abstract theories of literature, linguistics, and ELT. This has the extremely adverse backwash effect of producing secondary school teachers of English who are long on theory and short on practical language skills. As a result, most Korean secondary teachers of English simply do not have an adequate command of either the English language or classroom techniques so that

they tend to make very good theoreticians of English but very poor teachers of English. It goes without saying that their poor command of English filters down to their students, which is one of the main reasons why the majority of Korean students end up with such a miserable command of the language. Needless to say, this is because like is bound to breed like. Indeed, this phenomenon corroborates the saying, "Like master, like scholar."

Parenthetically, the progressives have recently won a major victory on this backwash effect front. Bowing to years of their persistent demand, the government has decided to incorporate an English-language listening comprehension component in the college entrance English test beginning this year. Although it accounts for a mere 16 percent of the points assigned to the entire college entrance English test, this listening comprehension component is expected to have a highly wholesome backwash effect on high school ELT. It will surely compel high-school ELT to pay far more attention to spoken English, especially to listening comprehension. It will thus hopefully help jump-start ELT in Korea on both the college and the secondary school level.

The progressives are also demanding that slow-speed reading comprehension items of the power-test type be replaced by natural-speed ones of the speed-test type on the written side of the college entrance English test. Should they score another victory here in the near future, which is not too unlikely, it will combine with their victory on the listening comprehension side to force high school ELT to switch from power processing of small amounts of difficult material to speed processing of large amounts of normal material.

The progressives are positive that this one-two punch, should it materialize, is sure to greatly improve the quality of Korean ELT. I, for one, am keeping my fingers crossed that this will happen in the next couple of years. The sooner, the better. It promises to be the best thing that has ever happened to ELT in Korea. Incidentally, it may be noted that the backwash effect under discussion here is unidirectional in that it flows from the high ground of college ELT to the low ground of high-school ELT.

Another perspective on ties between college and high school ELT relates to the transition or continuity between the two. The conservatives believe or pretend to believe that the transition from high school English to freshman English is so smooth and easy that it does not pose any serious prob-

lem for the average college freshman.

The progressives, however, say that freshman English is often so difficult that the average high school graduate finds it excessively difficult or even impossible to cope with. These progressives demand that this defect be corrected by making freshman English texts easy enough for the average high school graduate to handle. Although clearly in the right, their call has so far gone unheeded in much of the predominantly conservative Korean ELT establishment.

## 2.7. Evaluation

The seventh issue relates to the evaluation of college-level ELT on both the macro and the micro level. The conservative position is that college level ELT programs, designed by eminently qualified professors of English, are more than adequate as they are and thus in no need of evaluation whatsoever. The progressive position, on the other hand, is that Korea's college ELT programs are so run-of-the-mill and thus in such dire need of repairs that it is time they were thoroughly evaluated both internally and externally.

It so happens that current college-level ELT programs are woefully inadequate at least for two reasons. Firstly, the programs are too teacher-centered so that they fail to do justice to the real needs of the students. Secondly, they have been designed by professors with little or no professional expertise in ELT so that they are egregiously defective and highly vulnerable to criticism on many counts. For one thing, as pointed out already, most college-level ELT programs today are so power-oriented that they keep students from acquiring satisfactory communicative competence in English.

Under these circumstances, many young progressive ELT experts are calling for periodic evaluations of college-level ELT programs in Korea. These evaluations can be undertaken either internally or externally by a committee of eminently qualified ELT experts. Needless to say, the results of these evaluations can be used in designing better college-level ELT programs for Korea in the years ahead.

As part of an effort to get its ELT activities properly evaluated, the Language Research Institute of Seoul National University has recently begun conducting student evaluations of all its ELT programs on a regular basis.

The information obtained from these evaluations is used in improving the institute's ELT programs.

Those institute instructors who earn high marks on these evaluations are rewarded with a token 'bonus,' to help encourage them to become even better teachers. Materials and methods that get low marks from the student evaluators are often improved upon or replaced by other materials and methods. Encouraged by the initial results of its student evaluations, the institute is considering expert evaluations of its ELT programs, both internal and external.

On the micro level, the conservatives dismiss language testing as having only an insignificant role to play in Korea's college-level ELT. It is not that the conservatives do not administer English language tests. They do administer English language tests of sorts from time to time, but they seldom concern themselves with the validity, reliability, and backwash effect of their tests. To most of them, the very concepts of validity, reliability, and backwash effect are utterly alien and even useless. Their tests are mostly of the subjective and power variety comprising a small number of difficult vocabulary and grammar items plus one translation passage or two.

On the other hand, the progressives regard language testing as an integral part of the ELT process for all levels of instruction. They believe that formal testing in college ELT has many uses, e.g. for measurement of aptitude, achievement and proficiency as well as for purposes of placement and diagnosis. Few of them are capable of practicing what they preach, however, because they are almost as ignorant of the theory and practice of language testing as are their conservative colleagues.

On both the macro and the micro level, the conservatives are in the absolute majority with the result that Korea's college-level ELT will go right on being unevaluated to its great detriment. In the absence of a viable evaluation and testing tradition on the Korean college ELT scene, there is at present, and will be in the foreseeable future, no objective and reliable way of measuring its success or achievement on either the macro or the micro level.

## 2.8. ELT Nationality

The eighth issue has to do with the nationality of Korea's college-level ELT. The question here is: Should college-level ELT resources be purely

Korean? The conservative position is that Korea's college-level ELT should depend entirely on purely Korean resources whereas the progressive position is that it should also depend on native-English resources such as U.S. and British resources. ELT resources here refer to teachers, teaching methods, testing, materials, and whatever else it takes to make ELT successful.

The conservative camp is opposed to any native-English input to Korea's ELT, including college-level ELT. One of their arguments is that Korea's college-level ELT is already doing a good job independently of resources from such Anglophone countries as Britain and the United States. Another of their arguments is that importing resources from abroad can be a drain on Korea's foreign-currency reserves. Given the miserable shape Korean ELT has been in for a long time and given the economic growth Korea has recently been achieving, neither of these arguments is convincing or tenable. I suspect that the conservatives object to native-English input here because of their fear of the competition from superior native-English resources.

The progressive camp argues that Korea should take maximum advantage of British and American ELT resources, be they on the college-level or otherwise. The main rationale for this position is that, whether in Korea or elsewhere, native-English input to ELT is generally far superior to non-native-English input. For one thing, native-English teachers have a far better command of the English language than do their non-native-English counterparts. For another, native-English ELT materials are also generally far superior to their non-native-English counterparts. For still another, native English professional ELT expertise is generally far more solid than its non-native counterpart.

According to the progressives, even foreign ELT resources from outside the Anglophone world can often prove to be of great value to Korea's ELT profession in many ways. For example, the Japanese or Chinese experience in ELT can serve as a kind of guiding light for Korea's ELT. This is because Japanese or Chinese ELT, which predates Korean ELT by several decades, has accumulated plenty of ELT wisdom from its longer experience of trial and error under ELT conditions very similar to those that prevail in Korea. Thus Korean ELT may have a great deal of value to learn from Japanese or Chinese ELT.

For reasons such as these, many progressives are calling for Korea's

ELT exchange and cooperation with other countries, both Anglophone and non-Anglophone, on all levels of instruction. Among other things, they say that Korean ELT is in need of a hefty infusion of native English teachers from the United States, Canada, and Britain. Some progressives also say that native-English input to materials development and teacher training can be highly instrumental in raising the standard of Korean ELT on all levels. Many progressives are of the view that Korea also has a great deal to gain from ELT exchange and cooperation with Japan and China.

The progressives believe that crossfertilization between Korean and non-Korean ELT resources is sure to render all levels of Korean ELT far more productive than they have hitherto been. They believe that free trade is better than protectionism not only for the economy but also for ELT.

Largely for reasons of budgetary constraints and nationalistic sentiment, however, the conservatives have the upper hand at the moment on this issue of ELT resources nationality. As a result, non-Korean input to Korean ELT is unlikely to materialize any time soon to any substantial degree so that Korean ELT, including college-level ELT, is likely to stay Korean through and through from instructional materials to instructional philosophy to instructional staff.

## 2.9. ELT Expertise

The ninth issue has to do with the desirable level of professional expertise for Korea's college-level ELT staff. The conservative attitude is that all it takes to be a good Korean professor of English is an ability to translate from English to Korean in addition to a familiarity with either English literature or English linguistics. They earnestly believe that a Korean professor of English does not have to have any professional credentials in ELT such as a degree or a certificate. Some of these conservatives, who do have some professional ELT credentials, are apparently ashamed of their ELT connection and often leave it out of their resumes, for example. I will come back to this matter toward the end of this presentation when I discuss the hierarchy of ELT specialties on Korean college campuses.

The progressives take strong exception to this conservative attitude, saying that producing a good teacher of English for any level of instruction requires a great deal of professional training, both pre-service and in-serv-

ice. They believe that a good teacher of English should be conversant with classroom techniques, teaching methodology, and the basics of foreign-language testing theory at the very least. They also believe that a good teacher of English should have a good command of the language. They believe that even a college professor of English is no exception, be he or she in literature or linguistics, and that his or her training must comprise a substantial amount of ELT theory and practicum.

Although in the minority at the moment, the progressives are becoming more and more vocal and assertive as a group, making themselves heard throughout the nation's campuses. They take an enthusiastic part in in-country colloquiums, workshops, and conferences organized by professional ELT organizations. Incidentally, there are five professional ELT associations in Korea today, of which the College English Teachers Association of Korea is the most influential and authoritative. These organizations are all fairly active in terms of conferences and workshops they organize.

On the other hand, the conservatives as a group are every bit as assertive, if not more assertive. They organize more conventions, conferences, workshops, and symposiums on linguistics and literature. Sponsored by a much larger number of professional literary and linguistic organizations, these conventions, conferences, etc. normally steer clear of presentations on ELT topics. An ELT presentation at one of these gatherings may even be considered to be something to be ashamed of and thus shunned entirely. An ELT paper, if and when it is presented at such a gathering, has to suffer the humiliation of having to take a back seat to papers on literary and linguistic theories even if it is a much better paper academically.

At the moment, the conservatives are firmly in the driver's seat on this issue of professional ELT expertise with the result that they have a far larger following both among faculty and students than do the progressives. This means, among other things, that the majority of Korea's college-level ELT personnel neither have any professional ELT credentials to speak of nor regard professional ELT credentials as of the essence to the college-level ELT teacher.

## 2. 10. Medium of Instruction

The tenth issue has to do with the medium of instruction for college-level

ELT in Korea. Most conservatives say that all ELT instruction should be conducted through the medium of the Korean language. They say that learning English in Korea should simply involve learning to translate English into Korean. They argue that this is because English in Korea merely serves the purpose of affording Korea informational access to the outside world. They turn a blind eye to the fact that English is accepted as the premier international lingua franca in all fields all over the world today for both inbound and outbound flow of information.

On the other hand, progressives say that all or most ELT instruction should be conducted in the English language. They argue that this will afford the students more practice in using English for actual communication. They believe that the students will best learn English by using English for actual communication albeit in the rather restricted classroom environment. Perhaps more importantly, they also argue that using English as the sole medium of instruction in the classroom will help students overcome their English-shyness or English-phobia, that is, the psychological resistance they feel when it comes to using English for actual communication.

The conservatives are again in the majority on this medium-of-instruction issue on most Korean campuses. However, there are a couple of exceptions to this norm. The Graduate School of International Studies at Yonsei University conducts all its courses with English as the only medium of instruction. Korea University offers a considerable number of its courses in many different subject areas in English only. The International Summer Schools at Ewha Womans University and Korea University offer all their courses in Korean studies and Asian studies through the medium of English.

At the Language Research Institute of Seoul National University, there are a number of English language classes with two sections each, of which one is conducted entirely in English and the other in both English and Korean of these classes, which were first offered during the spring semester of 1993, the English-only section tends to be slightly less well attended than the bilingual one. This may indicate that English-phobia among Korean college students is so deep-rooted that English as the sole medium of instruction in Korea's college-level ELT may take some getting used to.

At a number of other universities in Korea, there are a few isolated instances, in which courses, mostly in ELT, are conducted in English. It ap-

pears that English as a medium of instruction for ELT may be gaining more and more acceptance on college campuses throughout the country, although at a snail's pace. Given this snail's pace plus the fact that the conservatives far outnumber the progressives on the issue in question here, however, it is highly unlikely that English will become a widespread medium of ELT instruction any time soon. The very idea of English as the sole medium of instruction in Korea's college-level ELT is likely to be rejected as nonsensical on most major college campuses in Korea today.

### 2. 11. Target Skills

The eleventh issue relates to the skills to focus on in Korea's college-level ELT. The question here is which English language skill or skills to emphasize in college-level ELT. Most conservatives take the position that the receptive written skill of reading should be the sole target skill of choice for college-level ELT in Korea. They argue that reading has the greatest sur-render value of all the English language skills for Korean college graduates. In other words, they believe that it is mostly the reading skill in English that Korean college graduates will find useful for their careers for quite some time to come.

On the other side of the issue are the progressives who say that Korea's college-level ELT must attach a great deal of importance to the other skills as well, especially the spoken English skills of listening and speaking. They argue that in today's rapidly globalizing society the spoken language skills of listening and speaking are as important as, or even more important than, the written skills of reading and writing.

The progressives also argue that the productive skills of speaking and writing are at least as important as the receptive skills of listening and reading. They say that this is because Korea's college graduates must take an active part in interactive communication with people from other countries of the world in all fields. Korea's college graduates will often find themselves in managerial or other leadership positions in which they need to work with and supervise people of many different nationalities through the medium of English. They will also quite often have occasion to convey information about Korea to people from other countries in both speech and writing. For these and many other reasons, they simply can no longer af-

ford to be mere recipients of inbound information from abroad.

Some ELT personnel, who are mostly moderates on the ELT ideology spectrum, say that Korea's college-level ELT should emphasize the receptive skills of reading and listening. They believe that the receptive skills of listening and reading have a greater surrender value for Korean college graduates than do the productive skills of speaking and writing. They also point out that, given the large college ELT classes, listening and reading, but not speaking and writing, can be taught with any reasonable expectation of success.

There are also other ELT teachers, mostly progressives, who take exactly the opposite position. They argue that college-level ELT should emphasize speaking and writing, not listening and reading. They believe that most Korean college students are not so good at speaking and writing so that they need a great deal of training in the two productive skills. They also believe that most Korean college students are fairly good at listening and reading, especially reading, so that they do not need as much training in the two receptive skills. Under the impression, which is evidently mistaken, that the productive skills have a greater surrender value than their receptive counterparts, they say that speaking and writing deserve more attention than listening and reading.

The conservatives are again in the majority on this skills issue. As a result, the trend among the vast majority of Korean professors of English seems to be toward emphasis on reading skill with mere lip service paid to the other skills of writing, listening, and speaking. However, at a number of schools like Yonsei University, where a fair number of courses are offered in English, the ELT programs apparently tend to place more or less the same emphasis on each and every one of the four skills.

Incidentally, my experience tells me that the spoken language skills of listening and speaking appear to be in far greater demand than the written language skills of reading and writing among Korean college students. This may be due in part to the fact that most of the students already have a fairly good knowledge of written English as a result of their written-English-oriented high school education. It is apparently due also in no small measure to the steadily increasing demand for spoken English in all walks of life in Korea today.

Recall that I have already referred to spoken English classes which are

often offered on a non-credit basis by English language centers. These classes are normally offered in response to growing student demand for spoken English on many of the nation's college campuses. It is interesting that students often turn to private language institutes if and when they find inadequate these on-campus English language center programs in colloquial English. They also organize on-campus spoken English clubs for the purpose of practicing conversational English. Some of these clubs are intercollegiate in that the membership is drawn not just from one university but from a number of universities in the same general area.

It may be in order at this point to turn our attention once again to the fact that the government-administered college entrance examination currently incorporates an English listening comprehension component. This is apparently in recognition of the growing demand in Korean society for the spoken English skills, especially listening. As I have already pointed out, this will very likely give a big push to the teaching of spoken English at Korean high schools and Korean colleges as well.

## 2. 12. Hierarchy of Specialties

The twelfth issue has to do with the hierarchy of English specialties at Korean colleges and universities. Most conservatives take for granted a hierarchy whereby a professor of English literature ranks higher than a professor of English linguistics, who in turn ranks higher than a professor of TEFL, who in turn ranks higher than a professor of English language skills. On the other hand, most progressives take strong exception to this conservative attitude and dismiss such a hierarchy as preposterous and, therefore, unacceptable.

The conservatives are again in the majority on this issue, however, so that the hierarchy referred to above finds favor with much of the Korean college ELT establishment today, and will most likely continue to, for quite some time to come. One funny thing is that this conservative view of the hierarchy is generally accepted not just at departments of English but also at departments of TEFL, which should by their very nature value TEFL and English language skills far more highly than either English literature or English linguistics.

I may note in this connection that this conservative position on the hier-

archy of ELT specialties is taken for granted by the majority of not just professors of English but also their students. On account of this skewed hierarchy, Korean professors of English normally prefer courses in literature or linguistics to those in TEFL or practical language skills. This distorted hierarchy is also responsible for the fact that most competent young scholars of English in Korea prefer English literature or English linguistics to TEFL as their area of specialization. This is true of even those students who are affiliated with TEFL departments.

It is also worth noting at this point that the majority of Korea's ELT returnees from the United States, Britain, New Zealand, Australia, and Canada have become professors of either English linguistics or English literature. These ELT turncoats are, more often than not, even more anti-ELT than those of their colleagues who have had no connection with ELT whatsoever in the course of their careers. All this can be blamed upon the distorted hierarchy of ELT specialties that prevails at Korean colleges and universities today.

In this connection, it may be noted that the problematic hierarchy of the sort under consideration here is responsible in no small measure for the theory-dominant college-level ELT curricula in popular currency in Korea today. Such curricula in turn keep both professors and students from paying sufficient attention to practical English language skills either departmentally or personally. This is part of the reason why the vast majority of secondary school teachers of English and their students are not quite as proficient in English as they should be and why their teaching methods and classroom techniques are in such poor shape.

### 3. Concluding Remarks

Thus far I have discussed twelve different issues and trends related thereto in Korea's current college-level ELT. My discussion has painted a rather confusing picture of the college-level ELT scene in Korea today. The confusing nature of the scene may be inevitable, given the state of flux that Korea's college-level ELT is in at the moment. Originating in a conflict between conservative and progressive ELT ideologies, the state of flux in question here may be defined as a process of transition that Korean ELT is currently undergoing from the traditional competence-dominant ELT to a

performance-dominant ELT. Incidentally, the competence-dominant ELT of the sort referred to here is out of touch with reality in the sense that it fails to meet the needs of the learners while a performance-dominant ELT is more in tune therewith.

The conflict between conservative and progressive perspectives in college-level Korean ELT may be regarded as a force highly instrumental in advancing Korea's college-level ELT as a profession. Absence of this kind of conflict in any field of human endeavor can only be interpreted as a sign of complacency with the status quo, which can lead only to stagnation in the field in question.

What I am trying to suggest is that the conflict under discussion here may be viewed in terms of the Hegelian dialectic process of a thesis being opposed by an antithesis with the opposition being reconciled by a synthesis. In other words, I regard the conflict between conservative and progressive perspectives on Korea's college-level ELT here as healthy in that it is bound to lead sooner or later to an alternative perspective, which is likely to be distinctly superior to either perspective.

I must admit here, however, that I have committed the grave sin of overgeneralization by posing all the issues and trends in black-and-white terms, i. e. as a consequence of the conflict between conservative and progressive ideologies. Needless to say, the ELT scene in Korea is far too complicated for this kind of overgeneralization to do sufficient justice to. However, I have chosen to neglect finer details for convenience of exposition.

Before I conclude, I do hope that my discussion has contained something of interest and relevance to college-level ELT in Japan. In other words, I hope that I have been able to strike a chord in your heart with what I have had to say about college-level ELT in Korea today. I also hope that my plenary presentation can help usher in a new era of exchange and cooperation between the JACET and its Korean counterpart, the College English Teachers Association of Korea, which I represent here today as its immediate past president.

I am positive that we have a great deal to learn from each other in all aspects of college-level ELT, especially because our two countries have similar ELT conditions, goals and aspirations. Besides, we are next door neighbors with our capitals just about two hours apart by air. They say, "A near neighbor is better than a far dwelling kinsman."

Our two countries have more to gain in ELT as cooperators than as competitors so that we can and must, for a change, become cooperators, rather than competitors, in our common quest for a better ELT for our two countries. For my part, I will do my best in the years ahead to foster friendship, understanding, and cooperation between our two countries in the ELT field.

### References

- Moon, Yong (1976) 'A History of English-Language Education in Korea (1883-1945),' *The Sunggok Collection of Theses VII*, Seoul, The Sunggok Foundation.
- Nahm, Yong-Woo (1976) *A Historical Survey of the Methods of Teaching English in Korea*, Seoul, Tower Publishers.
- Park, Nahm-Sheik (1982) 'Current Issues in English Language Education,' *The Proceedings of the Conference in Commemoration of the Centennial of English-Language Education in Korea*, Seoul, Shi-sa-yong-o-sa Publishers.
- Park, Nahm-Sheik (1987) 'English-Language Education in Korea Today,' An unpublished paper read at an East-West Center seminar in Honolulu, Hawaii.
- Park, Nahm-Sheik (1992) 'Foreign-Language Education in Korea: Past, Present, and Future,' *Language Research* 28.1, 149-174, Seoul, Seoul National University Language Research Institute.
- Pyo, Han-Yong (1990) 'A Study of English Education in the Late Yi Dynasty,' *The Kyunggi University Collection of Papers*, Seoul, Kyunggi University Press.

**ABSTRACT**

**Issues and Trends in Korea's College-Level  
English-Language Teaching**

Nahm-Sheik Park

This paper addresses some of the major current issues in Korea's college-level English-language teaching. It does so by posing each of these issues in terms of an ideological conflict between conservatives and progressives.

The paper reveals some of the major problems facing Korea's ELT practitioners, administrators, and policy makers, with particular reference to college-level ELT. In the process, it also throws light on the direction that must be taken by Korea's college-level ELT if it is to be more productive in the years ahead.

English Language and Literature Dept.  
College of Humanities  
Seoul National University  
Shillim-dong, Kwanak-gu,  
Seoul 151-742