

Foreign-Language Education in Korea: Past, Present and Future*

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1. Introduction

I will begin with a brief history of foreign-language education in modern Korea. I will then consider foreign-language education as it is currently practiced in Korea, focusing on major recent developments, supply and demand, and major current issues. I will then turn to the future of Korea's foreign-language education, making a number of forecasts and proposals for the decades ahead.

2. History

Foreign-language education in the modern sense of the term has a relatively short history in Korea. Well into the late 19th century, the only foreign languages taught in Korea were the languages of its two neighboring countries, i.e. China and Japan. Chinese and Japanese used to be taught to an extremely limited number of students for the sole purpose of producing translators and interpreters for the government.

2.1. *First Phase* (1883-1910): Things began to change quite drastically in the 1880s when the United States and other Western powers forced Korea's doors open to the Western World. The apocalyptic encounter with the West that this entailed confronted the Korean government with an urgent need for translators and interpreters for a number of Western lan-

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guages, especially English.

The United States and Britain happened to be the two major Western powers operating in the Far East in the late 19th century so that English was in greater demand in Korea in those days than any other Western language. Under these conditions, the Korean government set up and ran a succession of small foreign-language schools with special emphasis on English.

At these government-run schools, they taught not only English but also geography, history, science and other content areas through the medium of English. Thus students were forced to either swim or sink in a sea of English for the duration of the school day, which was apparently conducive to the success with which they learned English. English was also taught along similar lines at a number of private schools founded by American Christian missionaries, notably at Payjay School for Boys and Ewha School for Girls.

2.2. Second Phase (1910-1945): The Japanese Annexation of Korea in 1910 ushered in the second phase of Korea's modern foreign-language education. The cottage-industry foreign-language education of the first phase gave way to the assembly-line foreign-language education of the second phase shortly after the Annexation. Thus the Japanese Annexation of Korea marks a major turning point in the history of modern foreign-language education in Korea.

Foreign languages were officially incorporated into the school curriculum throughout the country for the first time in Korean history, ushering in an era of mass production in foreign-language education. Japanese was imposed on the entire nation as the sole official medium of communication and it was imposed on the entire school system as the sole medium of instruction for the duration of Japanese colonial rule. This gave rise to a diglossic situation on the Korean peninsula, in which Korean was the language of the home and Japanese the language of elsewhere, including the school.

Foreign languages, especially English, were taught in secondary schools mostly to prepare students for the college entrance examination. They were taught in colleges and universities mostly for passive absorption of Western culture, science and technology through books. Thus special emphasis was attached to grammar and translation in both college-level foreign-language education and the college entrance examination. This had the backwash ef-

fect of rendering secondary-school foreign-language education overly heavy on grammar and translation. Thus was born the time-honored tradition of the grammar-translation method in the Korean foreign-language classroom.

2.3. *Third Phase* (1945-1980): Korea's liberation from Japan in 1945 marks another major milestone in the history of modern foreign-language education in Korea. Simultaneously with the surrender of Japan to the Allied Forces in 1945, tens of thousands of American soldiers landed in Korea, establishing a powerful presence almost overnight.

For the duration of American military government in Korea from 1945 through 1948, Americans and their Korean appointees occupied all positions of importance in the country, including all major government posts. Thus English came to be the all-important medium of communication between the government and the people. Since Americans tended to appoint Anglophone Koreans to all major government posts, English rapidly gained in both practical value and popularity throughout the country.

The Korean War (1950-1953) added even more dramatically to the importance of English in Korea. The huge American military presence combined with ever-increasing contact between Korea and the United States to make English an all-important foreign language in all Korean walks of life. For English was nothing less than a key to Korea's very survival as a nation.

The large American presence and constantly expanding Korean-American exchanges resulted in a hefty infusion of American blood into Korean English-language education from 1945 through the 1970s. For most of the post-liberation 40s and the 50s, large numbers of American military and civilian personnel volunteered as part-time teachers of English for schools throughout Korea. Although they were mostly amateurs in language teaching, they provided extremely valuable native-speaker input to Korean learners and teachers of English.

The 60s and 70s witnessed a higher-level infusion of American blood into Korean English-language education, albeit on a vastly reduced scale. Hundreds of Korean teachers of English, including college professors, received formal education and training in the United States in the form of advanced degree work in English, linguistics, TEFL, and American studies. They were mostly recipients of Fulbright and East-West Center grants.

From the late 60s through the late 70s, hundreds of U. S. Peace Corps Volunteers came to Korea to teach English throughout its educational system. The volunteers also played an active role in Korean English-language teacher training, both pre- and in-service. Though most of them were fairly well-trained teachers, they were more often than not assigned to schools which were either unable or unwilling to take full advantage of their resources. Besides, they were not concentrated in a select few strategic schools so that they were stretched too thin to have any major impact on the whole of Korean foreign-language education.

2.4. Fourth Phase (1980-Present): The 80s was a golden era for the Korean economy, which went through an unprecedented expansion in the decade. Prior to this economic expansion in the 80s, Korea's international relations involved mostly bilateral relations with the United States and Japan. With its economy expanding throughout the decade, however, Korea's external relations grew more and more diversified as it came to have ties with a whole lot of countries over and above the United States and Japan. Thus Korea's foreign relations have been shifting in the last ten years or so from mostly bilateral to truly multilateral relations.

This shift in Korea's foreign relations has brought in its wake two major changes in its foreign-language education. Firstly, English has come to be viewed more as an international language than as merely the American or British language. Secondly, more and more foreign languages have come to be taught in Korea, especially in the non-school sector and a few universities.

3. Major Recent Developments

Numerous recent developments are changing the face of foreign-language education in Korea. I will discuss here some of the more important of these developments.

3.1. From Low-Tech to High-Tech: Korean foreign-language education is in the process of transition from low-tech to high-tech educational technology. Most Korean schools and colleges are equipped with low-tech language labs of the traditional type installed in the 70s and 80s. They are beginning to realize, however, that these labs are hopelessly outdated in the 90s and beyond.

Admittedly, most Korean language labs of the traditional type have been enhanced by the addition of video equipment in recent years. Among video materials particularly well received on Korean college campuses are FOLLOW ME and FOLLOW ME TO SAN FRANCISCO, both by BBC. Also popular on college campuses are American and British movies as well as CNN Headline News.

With the exception of their video components, Korean language labs are hopelessly underutilized so that Korean schools and colleges are saddled with what amounts to expensive junk, occupying precious space that could be better utilized for other educational purposes. Under such circumstances, forward-looking Korean educators are calling for the replacement of these traditional labs with their state-of-the-art successors featuring sophisticated computers. With computer-centered language labs of the future slowly beginning to emerge in Korea, the traditional labs currently in place in Korea are bound to go the way of the dinosaur in the decades ahead.

3.2. Mass Media in the Ascendant: The mass media are playing an increasingly important role in Korean foreign-language education today. Foreign-language teaching by broadcast, especially by television, began in earnest in Korea in the late 70s and early 80s with sizable programing not just for English but for Japanese, Chinese, German, French, and Spanish. Since 1989, Russian has joined the ranks of TV-taught foreign languages in Korea. Conducted by eminent professors in tandem with native speakers of the languages in question, these programs provide viewer-learners with first-rate instruction in and exposure to those languages. For this reason, these programs are popular especially with a high-brow viewership comprising college students and college graduates with a keen desire to improve their foreign-language proficiency.

I may note here that many major news networks of the world such as CNN, BBC, and NHK reach the majority of Korean living rooms and that most foreign movies shown on Korean TV can now be heard in their languages of origin. This affords Korean learners of foreign languages unprecedented amounts of exposure to their target languages.

Mention should also be made of the role played by the print media in Korean foreign-language education. Korea has monthly magazines catering exclusively to learners of English and Japanese respectively. Mass-circulation magazines and newspapers often devote some space to foreign-lan-

guage teaching, featuring parallel texts of annotated dialogues, jokes, and other tidbits. Foreign-language periodicals such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, *The Asahishibun*, and *The Mainichi* are readily available in Korea today so that they provide Korean foreign-language learners with plenty of reading matter of current interest.

3.3. Foreign-Language Education as an Industry: The last fifteen years or so have witnessed the emergence of a foreign-language industry in Korea. Among the hottest items on the Korean foreign-language education market today are secondary-school textbooks and their self-study companions both in book form and on tape, which sell millions of copies every year. Big-ticket items on the market include video series catering to learners of conversational English and Japanese.

Private foreign-language institutes also make up a major segment of Korea's booming foreign-language education industry. These institutes are doing very well in financial terms, mostly in the metropolitan centers of the country. Many university-affiliated language-teaching centers are doing equally well or even better. Their clientele comprises corporate employees and college students for the most part.

Language testing is another major item on the Korean foreign-language education market today with a number of testing services, commercial and otherwise, catering to a clientele of millions per annum. Upwards of a million Korean adults take one or more foreign-language proficiency tests a year as part of their job requirements. With such a large clientele, the Language Research Institute of Seoul National University was able to triple the number of its testees from about 6,000 in 1989 to about 18,000 in 1990. The Institute hopes to increase its clientele ten-fold over the next five years or so.

Currently, English and Japanese account for the lion's share of corporate foreign-language testing in Korea. The two languages each account for about 45 per cent of our clientele at the Language Research Institute of Seoul National University. Incidentally, the Institute also administers an annual average of 1,000 foreign-language tests for graduate students at Seoul National University, who need to pass them in partial fulfillment of their advanced-degree requirements.

3.4. Japanese and Russian in the Ascendant: Since the normalization of relations between Korea and Japan in the mid-60s, Japanese has steadily

been gaining in importance throughout Korean society. Japanese has recently become the second most important foreign language in Korea, second only to English, on the strength of Japan's soaring influence as an economic superpower and as one of the major trading partners for Korea. Over the last couple of years, Japanese in Korea has received another major boost from NHK, whose TV programs reach many Korean homes via the satellite dish.

The establishment of diplomatic relations between Korea and the Soviet Union late last year catapulted Russian into contention with German and French for third most important language after English and Japanese. A number of Russian departments have been added to the nation's university system over the last two years or so. Russian has suddenly become one of the most popular college majors all across the country. Before long, Russian may join the ranks of foreign languages taught in the Korean high school system.

3.5. *Modularization of Instruction*: Korean foreign-language education has recently become more and more modularized, especially in the non-school sector. For example, many private language institutes offer programs catering exclusively to vocabulary for TOEFL or GRE, to listening comprehension for TOEFL and TOEIC, or to writing for academic purposes.

Aside from such skill-oriented modularization, private language institutes also offer programs which are more clearly purpose-oriented. For example, they offer English for hotel employees, Japanese for tour guides, and English and Japanese for flight attendants, and English and other major foreign-languages for simultaneous interpreters. Incidentally, English and Japanese for hotel employees and tour guides are also part of the regular curricula for departments of tourism and hotel management at a number of universities throughout Korea.

3.6. *Demographic Changes*: A number of significant changes are taking place in the demographics of Korean foreign-language education. In the first place, the number of Korean learners of English has more or less stabilized at an estimated ten million. In the second place, the number of people learning other foreign languages, especially Japanese, Russian, and Chinese is steadily increasing all over the country. In the third place, more learners are outside the school system today than ever before with non-student learners currently accounting for up to thirty per cent of the entire for-

eign-language learning population of Korea. These non-student learners include housewives, retirees, and even pre-schoolers.

Another significant demographic change relates to the professional credentials of Korean foreign-language educators. More Korean college professors of foreign languages hold doctoral degrees in their respective fields of specialization today than ever before. At Seoul National University, for example, most professors of foreign languages hold doctoral degrees either in linguistics or in literature. I may also point out here that more high-school teachers than ever before hold the master's degree mostly in foreign-language education.

4. Supply and Demand

We will now examine foreign-language education in Korea today from the perspective of supply and demand. We will begin with the demand side and then proceed to the supply side.

4.1. *Demand*: The demand for a foreign language in Korea is often a function of the volume of contact between Korea and the country where the language originates. The large volume of Korea-American contact, for example, accounts for the great demand for English in Korea today. The great demand for Japanese, Russian, and Chinese in present-day Korea can also be accounted for along similar lines.

The demand for a foreign language in Korea is also determined by the functional load of that language in Korea's general international communication. For inbound international communication, i.e. for the flow of information into Korea, English carries the most functional load, followed by Japanese, French, German, and Chinese, probably in that order. For outbound international communication, i.e. for the flow of information out of Korea, once again English carries the most functional load followed by French, Spanish, Japanese, Chinese, and German, probably in that order.

I may note here that English and Japanese in that order are the two major source languages for translation into Korean and also that Koreans read far more in these two foreign languages than in any other. Koreans also listen to broadcasts in these two foreign languages more than in any other. Speaking of target languages for translation from Korean-language sources, English ranks above Japanese, which in turn ranks above other

foreign languages. Thus in terms of the functional load for Korea's international communication, English ranks above Japanese, which in turn ranks above other foreign languages.

The demand for a foreign language in Korea today is also a function of a number of other factors such as the number of its speakers, its geographic spread, and the geographic proximity between Korea and the country where it originates. Chinese, Russian, and Japanese are very important foreign languages to Korea today because of the large number of their speakers and because of the geographic proximity between Korea and the countries where they originate. English, French, Spanish, and Arabic are of great importance to Korea on account of their large geographic spread and the large number of their speakers.

Incidentally, one interesting indication of the great demand for English and Japanese in Korea today is the requirement that most Korean corporate employees take proficiency tests in either or both at regular intervals. It is also worthy of note that most corporate and government employment examinations contain an English component. The results of these tests are often used as the basis for decisions relating to promotions, pay raises, and/or overseas postings. We can see from this that English and Japanese are keys to a successful career in practically every walk of public life in Korea today.

4.2. Supply: Let me turn now to the supply side of foreign-language education in Korea today. The school system is the major supplier of foreign-language education in Korea. Over six million students in the nation's secondary schools and colleges take a weekly average of five hours of foreign languages. An additional three million children in the nation's elementary schools and kindergartens take varying amounts of English every week.

An estimated 300,000 high-school graduates take a weekly average of five hours of foreign languages in college-entrance cram schools. Private language institutes pitch in with varying amounts of foreign-language instruction mostly in English and other major foreign languages.

Foreign-language education for Korean nationals also comes from foreign sources. Thousands of Korean students, mostly college students, receive short-term foreign language training every year at foreign universities and language teaching centers. Foreign agencies also operate language schools in Seoul and other major urban centers throughout the country,

mostly for college students. For example, the British Council runs an English school in Seoul, and the Seventh Day Adventist Church operates English schools in several Korean cities, including Seoul. The French and German government agencies also run French and German programs respectively in Seoul and other major Korean cities.

As already noted, the mass media is another major supplier of foreign-language education in Korea today. Foreign-language education by broadcast is available three hours a day on TV and another three hours a day on the radio. The broadcast media specializes in spoken foreign-language skills, especially listening: the print media specializes in written foreign-language skills, especially reading. Thus media teaching in current foreign-language education in Korea focuses on the receptive skills of listening and reading.

Self-study books and tapes also supply large amounts of foreign-language instruction in Korea today. Most Korean households have at least one self-study book and one self-study tape for English. Self-study materials for Japanese are also widely distributed although not yet quite to the extent of their English counterparts. Rudimentary CALL diskettes are also on the market for do-it-yourself learners of English.

4.3. Content of the Supply: Let me now turn to the content of foreign-language education supplied institutionally in Korea today. I will begin with college-level foreign-language education. The most salient feature of Korean foreign-language education on the college level is that it is a dictatorship of sorts whereby students are supposed to meekly absorb whatever is dictated to them by their professors. Even where student participation is encouraged, all a student is expected to do is to provide a line-by-line translation of the text in question or simply read the text aloud.

Compiled and edited mostly by professors of literature, most foreign-language textbooks for college students are overly long on literature so that their appeal is highly limited. Besides, they are often too difficult for the average high-school graduate, with the result that large numbers of students turn to ponies for help. What with the difficulty of the material and what with the cumbersome line-by-line translation process, the amount of material covered in a typical college foreign-language course in Korea is too minuscule to be of any substantial help to those students who seriously desire to improve their foreign language skills.

It is not uncommon for a Korean professor to spend the bulk of his class time discussing fine points of linguistic or literary theory. The average Korean professor makes light of practical language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing. Thus he pays far too little attention to communicative aspects of his target language with the result that neither he nor his students can acquire an adequate communicative command of the target language in question.

Most Korean college students supplement such low-quality foreign-language education as they receive in the classroom in a number of ways. They attend private language institutes, take private lessons, join on-campus study groups, or take advantage of non-credit language courses offered by the language teaching centers of their respective institutions. Many of them also go abroad for short-term intensive training in their respective foreign languages, mostly during the summer and winter vacation periods.

The required number of credit hours for foreign languages varies from institution to institution, but typically ranges from six to nine credit hours. Many students take more credit hours than are required in foreign languages, especially in English. There are two regular examinations per credit course, i.e. the mid-term and the final. Few Korean professors give quizzes, to say nothing of pop quizzes, although a fair number of them give frequent home assignments in bilingual translation.

Korean foreign-language education on the secondary-school level fits into the so-called grammar-translation mold. Secondary-school teachers spend most of their class time on grammatical details and word-for-word translation. They resort to this grammar-translation method for three reasons. Firstly, they feel familiar and thus comfortable with this method because they themselves were taught by this method when they were students. Secondly, this method is best suited to prepare the students for college-entrance examinations, which often focus on grammar and translation. Thirdly, this method affords them a convenient cover for their inadequate command of their target languages. It goes without saying that the prevalence of the grammar-translation method leaves little or no room for Korean secondary-school students to acquire a communicative command of their target languages.

The quality of English-language instruction is far worse on the elementa-

ry-school level than on the secondary-school level. Most elementary-school teachers of English in Korea today have had virtually no professional training. Their command of English is woefully inadequate so that their English is riddled with all sorts of egregious errors. Since like breeds like, their students form all sorts of bad English habits, which often turn out to be very difficult to eradicate.

I may note here that there is a clear qualitative gap between supply and demand in Korean foreign-language education today although supply does apparently keep pace with demand in quantitative terms. It is thus imperative that serious and sustained efforts be made in the years ahead at closing this gap by dramatically upgrading the quality of Korean foreign-language education. We will be addressing this problem later in this lecture in connection with our discussion of the future of foreign-language education in Korea.

5. Current Issues

I will now turn my attention to a number of current issues in Korean foreign-language education.

5.1. *Economics*: The first issue I wish to discuss relates to the economics of foreign-language education in Korea today. Severe budgetary constraints often prove to be barriers to improvements in Korean foreign-language education. For one thing, experts all agree that the average foreign-language class size in Korea should ideally be reduced from the current sixty-plus students per class to anywhere between twenty and thirty. Although the government also agrees with the experts on this matter, it cannot afford the additional class space and teachers that such a reduction in class size would entail.

We all know that native-speaking teachers of English and other foreign languages can help significantly improve the quality of foreign-language instruction in Korea. However, budgetary constraints force Korean schools and colleges to keep their employment of native-speaking teachers to a bare minimum. To my knowledge, no secondary school in Korea has a native-speaking foreign-language teacher in residence. The situation is a little better at universities, but not by much. My university, for example, has a mere two native-speaking teachers of English on its faculty, serving up-

wards of 25,000 students.

It may also be in order here to note that commercialism is rampant in Korean foreign-language education today. Commercial considerations, i.e. profit motives, allegedly outweigh educational and pedagogical considerations in the construction, selection and adoption of many Korean foreign-language programs or materials. If true, such practices would definitely be detrimental to the development of foreign-language education in Korea.

5.2. *Pollution*: The second issue I will raise has to do with the environmental pollution plaguing Korean foreign-language education today. The college-entrance examination is a major source of contamination for secondary-school foreign-language education in all of Korea today. Since the college-entrance examination focuses on grammar and decoding, secondary-school foreign-language education is forced to have a similar focus. For secondary schools in the Korean context are mere college-preparatory schools. As a result of this contamination, there is little or no room for communicative practice in the secondary-school foreign-language classroom.

Teacher training, both pre- and in-service, is another source of contamination for secondary-school foreign-language education. Teacher training is so long on theory and so short on practicum that the average Korean foreign-language teacher is anything but a good classroom teacher with only a minimal command of his target language.

Materials are another major source of contamination for all levels of foreign-language education in Korea today. Most domestically produced materials, including textbooks, are riddled with errors of various types, which almost always filter into the foreign-language repertoire of millions of Korean students. Domestically produced brochures, signs, and billboards in foreign-languages are also often shot through with errors, which end up infecting the foreign-language repertoire of hundreds of thousands of Korean learners of English.

5.3. *Authoritarianism*: The third major current issue in Korean foreign-language education relates to authoritarianism, which manifests itself in many different forms. For one thing, Korean foreign-language education is completely government-controlled such that the government makes all major decisions with classroom teachers meekly following these decisions. Thus there is virtually no room for creative initiative from below, i.e. from classroom teachers, or for cross-fertilization from interaction between

classroom teachers on the one hand and policy-makers and administrators on the other.

Authoritarianism is also found in the centrality of the teacher in the classroom context. The teacher makes all the major decisions with his students blindly following whatever he dictates to them. For example, the teacher selects course contents, textbooks, and teaching methods largely on the basis of his own convenience and interests with little consideration for his students. This is especially the case at foreign-language or foreign-language-education department of universities, where professors decide upon curricular and course contents to suit their own whims and convenience, rather than to reflect the desire of their students to acquire a good command of their target languages.

Foreign-language education in Korea is also affected by an authoritarianism-based on a pecking order between its universities. A foreign-language textbook by a professor at a first-rate university is automatically considered to be superior to one by his counterpart at a second- or third-rate university. Though it is often without foundation in fact, such a general attitude results in inferior materials by professors at first-rate universities outselling superior materials by professors at second- or third-rate universities.

Authoritarianism also takes the form of unabashed subservience to practices in the United States and other advanced countries. Many Korean professors often blindly champion the cause of every new theory or method of language teaching emanating from these countries. Thus the average classroom teacher is often caught between theories or methods and is busy getting adjusted to ever newer theories and methods. What is worse still, the real needs of Korean foreign-language education are often forgotten in the vortex of shifting theories and methods.

5.4. Academicism: The fourth issue that I will deal with here relates to academicism, i.e. blind respect for things academic or theoretical, as opposed to things practical. Academicism is especially rampant in college-level foreign-language education in Korea today. Theory is so revered among Korean academics that most Korean professors of foreign languages would have nothing to do with anything non-theoretical in either research or teaching. Thus almost all of them choose to specialize in either linguistic or literary theory, distancing themselves as much as possible from such mundane

things as teaching conversation or composition.

Under these conditions, the typical curriculum for Korean college majors in foreign languages or foreign-language education is predominantly linguistics- or literature-oriented to the virtual neglect of classroom techniques and language skills. Thus the average graduate of a foreign-language or foreign-language education department in Korea is a deaf-mute in his target language and a helpless classroom teacher. Academicism is rampant in in-service foreign-language teacher training in similar ways so that Korea ends up getting saddled with tens of thousands of armchair teachers who are woefully underqualified to teach their respective target languages.

5.5. *Lack of Professionalism*: The fifth issue I would like to raise has to do with lack of professionalism in Korean foreign-language education. It is a common perception in Korea that all it takes to be a foreign-language teacher or a foreign-language materials writer is a minimal command of the language in question. It is an equally common perception that one can become a policy maker or administrator in foreign-language education without any expertise at all. Needless to say, nothing could be farther from the truth.

Under these circumstances, pseudo-professionals and paraprofessionals dominate the whole spectrum of Korean foreign-language education from textbook writing to policy making and administration. This has given rise to Gresham's law of sorts in Korean foreign-language education, whereby non-professionals flourish while professionals perish.

Foreign-language education is generally held in such low esteem in Korea that not many bright students choose to major in it, much less pursue a career in it. It should be understood in this context that many of the brightest foreign-language education majors at my university opt for careers outside their field of specialization.

College-level jobs in foreign-language education are far more highly regarded than their secondary-school counterparts. It is thus the ambition of many secondary-school foreign-language teachers to get a doctoral degree in either linguistics or literature and get a college position. Many of my former students in English-language education have actually become college professors instead of continuing as secondary school teachers. This kind of situation results in a brain drain of sorts, whereby secondary schools suffer

a loss of talent to colleges.

In fact, secondary-school jobs in foreign-language teaching were so unattractive at one time in the recent past that many secondary-school teachers quit their jobs in favor of better-paying jobs at private language institutes. All this goes to show that the average secondary-school teacher is not as profoundly committed to his profession as he should ideally be.

I may point out here that even professorial positions in foreign-language education are not that highly regarded, compared to those in foreign literature and linguistics. Thus most Korean professors of foreign-language education are not too firmly committed to their profession, which explains why so many Fulbright, East-West Center, and British Council returnees in TEFL desert TEFL to become professors of English literature and English linguistics.

5.6. *Panacea Syndrome*: The panacea syndrome is prevalent in Korean foreign-language education. The crusade for elementary-school English is a case in point. Many Korean English-language educators believe in the critical period for foreign-language acquisition and claim that they can make all Korean students fluent in English simply by including English in the elementary-school curriculum. This is a patently absurd claim for the simple reason that age is just one of the many variables involved in foreign-language acquisition.

Most Korean foreign-language educators are afflicted with a panacea syndrome related to linguistic theory and language-teaching methodology. As suggested in connection with the issue of authoritarianism, most Korean professors believe and claim that the latest American or European linguistic theory or language-teaching methodology can work miracles for foreign-language education in Korea. Many of my naive colleagues, for example, say that Chomsky's theory of government and binding can help revolutionize foreign-language education in Korea. Absurd as this claim clearly is, it has a large following throughout the Korean educational system.

The panacea syndrome is rampant in the world of foreign-language materials advertising. Numerous advertisers claim that their foreign-language materials are guaranteed to make the customer proficient in the foreign language in question in a matter of months. Hundreds of thousands of people are duped into buying their materials, often at a cost of hundreds of dollars or even thousands of dollars. It is unfortunate that pseudo-experts

from the college community often lend a helping hand to such dishonest advertisers with signed testimonials for their materials.

5.7. *Quantity-Over-Quality Syndrome*: Many Korean foreign-language educators believe that quantity is what matters most in foreign-language education. They say that the more hours we teach a foreign language, the better our students will be at that foreign language.

The quantity-over-quality syndrome is at play in the crusade for elementary-school English in Korea today. The argument here is that elementary-school English will result in so much more English-language education and the amount of teaching thus added will translate into better English proficiency for all Korean students. The quantity-over-quality syndrome is also at play in in-service teacher training for foreign-language teachers. In-service trainees are required just to accumulate a given number of hours of training on the assumption that this amount of training will somehow turn them into ideal foreign-language teachers.

Korean foreign-language educators must remember here the computer-age adage: GARBAGE IN, GARBAGE OUT. In other words, they must bear in mind that the quality of the input determines the quality of the output so that they must turn their attention away from mere quantity to quantity with quality. As pointed out already, input to Korean foreign-language education is generally of such low quality that its output is bound to be of very poor quality.

5.8. *Mixed-up Priorities*: The last issue I will discuss in this lecture is the issue of mixed-up priorities. Let me take as my first example the government requirement that the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing be given equal weight in all phases of foreign-language education. This requirement ignores the fact that reading and listening are in greater demand than writing and speaking respectively in Korea today. It also flies in the face of the fact that reading and listening are easier to teach in the large-sized Korean foreign-language classes than writing and speaking.

My second example of mixed-up priorities relates to the general attitude in Korea that foreign-language education reform should begin at the bottom. They say that the major villain in Korean foreign-language education today is the grammar-translation method in widespread use among secondary-school teachers. They thus argue that the replacement of this method by a better method should constitute the backbone of any meaningful re-

form in Korean foreign-language education.

As suggested earlier in this paper, however, the prevalence of the grammar-translation method at the secondary-school level is due to the back-wash effect of the college entrance examination and the college foreign-language curriculum, both of which are heavy on grammar and translation. Given this fact, foreign-language education reform in Korea should begin at the top, i.e. at the college level, rather than at the bottom.

My third example of mixed-up priorities has to do with the fact that Korean foreign-language education adopts the discrete-point approach, rather than the integrative approach. Korean foreign-language education stresses formal properties of isolated words and sentences at the sacrifice of functional relationships that bind chunks of linguistic expression into meaningful discourse. It should, of course, be the other way around if our goal is to cultivate communicative competence in our students. For communication involves the use of functional discourse, rather than words or sentences in isolation.

My fourth and final example of misplaced priorities has to do with the relative importance of accuracy vis-à-vis fluency in the average Korean foreign-language classroom. Korean teachers have strictly adhered to the tradition of holding accuracy in infinitely higher esteem than fluency so that their students are obsessed with accuracy as their supreme goal as foreign-language learners. As a result, Korean students dare not utter a single foreign-language sentence until and unless they are absolutely certain that they can do it with perfect grammar, perfect vocabulary, and perfect pronunciation.

Needless to say, such blind obsession with accuracy keeps most Korean students from acquiring satisfactory communicative competence in their respective target languages. It should be borne in mind in this connection that human languages are such that we are all bound to make mistakes of numerous types even in our native languages. Thus a more realistic goal for Korean teachers and learners of foreign languages should be fluency with a reasonable degree of accuracy, rather than absolute accuracy at any price.

6. Forecasts

I will now turn to the future of Korean foreign-language education and venture some guesses as to what is in store for it in the decades ahead.

6.1. *Growing Demand*: My first prediction is that demand for foreign-language education will keep growing at a steady rate over the next three decades or so. A number of factors will contribute to this trend.

6.1.1. *Accelerated Internationalization*: Korea's international trade will keep expanding not just in volume but also in the number of its trading partners. Also likely to increase at a rapid clip are Korea's educational and cultural exchanges with other countries, especially the developing countries of the world. If Malaysia's LOOK EAST policy is any indication, Korea will be receiving sizable contingents of students and trainees from many Third World countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America in the decades ahead. Sizable contingents of Korean professionals may also be heading for these same countries to help educate and train their nationals in the art of national development.

Also of relevance to our present discussion is the possible emergence of an Asia-Pacific community along the lines of the European Community. The birth of such a community, possibly around the turn of the century, will result in a dramatic increase in Korea's contact with all the countries of Asia and the Pacific.

As Korea's international relations expand in these and many other directions, the demand will steadily rise not just for major international lingua francas such as English but also for major regional lingua francas such as Arabic. Also rising in demand will be major Asian-Pacific languages such as Chinese, Japanese, and Malay/Indonesian.

Internationalization is a two-way street so that the demand for Korean as a foreign language will also keep growing both at home and abroad. Five Korean universities are already offering Korean as a foreign language for international students in Korea. Two Korean universities have begun to offer master's degree programs in the teaching of Korean as a foreign language. Numerous universities in the United States, Japan, and other foreign countries offer programs in Korean studies with special emphasis on language and literature.

6.1.2. *National Reunification*: Korea's national reunification, which is said

to be not totally unlikely over the next ten years or so, will add new dimensions to Korea's international relations. In the first place, Korea will be sharing land borders with the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union. In the second place, Korea will get overland routes to Europe, especially Eastern Europe, and to all of the Asian continent, including the Middle East. National reunification will thus afford Korea easier access to all the countries of Asia and Europe, which will add that much to the volume of Korea's international contact. This will definitely create new or additional demand for all the languages of Asia and Europe, especially for such major languages as Chinese, Russian, Hindi, Arabic, Polish, German, and French.

6.1.3. *Age of Information*: Ours is an age of information, in which most information of crucial value is stored in a number of major international languages, especially English, Russian, Japanese, French, and German. With our survival often hinging on adequate access to such information, we will witness a steady increase in the demand for such major languages of the world in the decades ahead.

Let us suppose for the sake of argument that an international information cartel were in place along the lines of OPEC such that strategic information were packaged and sold on the international market only in a few major languages. Then we would have no choice but to acquire an adequate command of one or more of the major languages in question, which would definitely add to the demand for those languages.

Something like such a cartel may be said to be already in existence in the world of science and technology. Most crucial publications in science and technology are available only in English and a few other major languages with the result that they are simply not accessible to those who do not have an adequate command of one of those languages.

6.1.4. *Age of Leisure*: Koreans are living in an age of unprecedented leisure today with the result that more and more of them travel abroad for pleasure, most of them going to the United States, Japan, Southeast Asia, and Europe. These footloose Koreans keep growing in number, and so do their destinations. Under these conditions, more and more Koreans seek instruction in many different foreign languages for travel purposes.

More and more Koreans also study foreign languages as a means of spending their leisure time. The study of foreign languages as a hobby is

spreading all across Korea, especially among middle-class housewives and well-to-do retirees. Many of these people study English and Japanese so as to be able one day to enjoy the TV programs and publications in the two languages so readily available in most of the country today. The demand for foreign-language study as a hobby is likely to increase in the decades ahead as more and more people seek ways of coping with ever increasing amounts of leisure.

6.2. *Content of the Supply*: Let me now turn to the supply side of Korean foreign-language education in the decades ahead with special reference to its content.

6.2.1. *Further Academicization*: Korean foreign-language education will get even more academicized in the decades ahead than it is today. By the year 2,000, Korea may have upwards of 1,000 Ph.D.s and Ed.D.s in English and English-language education alone. The figure may very well top 2,000 by the year 2010. It is very likely that virtually all college-level positions in foreign languages and foreign-language education will be filled with Ph.D.s and Ed.D.s in the next decade and a half.

With so many doctorates in the field, all major policy-making and administrative positions in foreign-language education will very likely be filled with professionals with the doctoral degree. I may go so far as to predict that the master's degree may well be the minimal degree required for Korean secondary-school teachers of foreign languages in the next two decades or so.

Good as it may look on the surface, this academicization of Korean foreign-language education runs the risk of making the profession even more theoretically oriented than it already is. Thus practical language skills such as those needed for communication are likely to be given even shorter shrift in the future than they are today.

6.2.2. *High-Tech Educational Technology*: High-tech educational technology will be far more of a factor in Korean foreign-language education in the decades ahead than it is today. The current generation of traditional language labs will have become a thing of the past by the turn of the century. Korea will soon be entering the age of high-tech language labs featuring sophisticated computers and other educational hardware.

CALL will be quite widespread by the turn of the century at all levels of Korean foreign-language education. CALL will provide sophisticated prac-

tice and instruction in all four skills in highly realistic communication situations. It will also relieve Korean foreign-language teachers of the burden of having to individually develop, administer and score course-related achievement tests. Thus CALL may be able to create a foreign-language education environment in which large class size will not be as much of a problem as it now is.

The teleconferencing system will also be an integral part of Korea's language labs of the future. This system will make it possible to hook up foreign-language classes in Korea with those in foreign countries for highly interactive foreign-language practice sessions. Seoul National University has already experimented with such a hook-up with UCLA with eager student participation on both sides. Many future language labs in Korea will also feature satellite reception rooms, in which students can watch TV programs originating in foreign countries. Seoul National University, for one, has plans to install a satellite reception room to expand on-campus opportunities for advanced listening-comprehension practice.

6.2.3. The Rise of the Non-School Sector: Korean foreign-language education will be increasingly dependent on the non-school sector in the decades ahead. The mass media, for one, will figure far more prominently in the years ahead than it does today with the broadcast and the print media focusing on listening and reading instruction respectively.

Private language institutes will also be providing a far larger portion of foreign-language instruction in the future than they do today. They will specialize in foreign languages for specific purposes, offering such programs as English for international trade, Japanese for travelers, and Chinese for the humanities. They will also specialize in tailored teaching, which they will conduct under contract with various agencies, mostly corporate and governmental.

Many private language institutes in Korea will soon be foreign-owned when the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade forces Korea's doors open to the outside world in everything, including foreign-language education. Most of these foreign-owned institutes will be American, British, Japanese, Chinese, Russian, and Spanish.

I would like to point out here that there will emerge a clear division of labor between the school sector and the non-school sector along two lines. Firstly, the school sector will focus on foreign languages for general purpos-

es while the non-school sector will focus on foreign languages for specific purposes. Secondly, the school sector will stress the basics of foreign languages while the non-school sector will stress their more advanced aspects.

The non-school sector, as I use the term here, includes the natural language-acquisition setting of the real world, as opposed to the artificial language learning environment of the classroom. The probability is that this natural language-acquisition setting will figure far more prominently in Korean foreign-language education in the decades ahead than has thus far been the case. In other words, there will be more and more opportunities for Koreans to pick up foreign languages in real-life communication situations outside the classroom. For their international contacts, encounters, and exchanges are bound to increase by leaps and bounds in the future, especially on a person-to-person basis.

6.2.4. *Individualization of Instruction*: With the help of sophisticated CALL software and drastically reduced class-size, Korean foreign-language instruction will be highly individualized in about fifteen years' time. Instruction will very likely be so individualized as to suit the varying needs and proficiency levels of all the students in one and the same classroom. This will be highly instrumental in pushing Korean foreign-language education to unprecedented heights of achievement in the decades ahead.

7. Suggestions for the Future

My forecasts for the future of Korean foreign-language education are on the optimistic side. I would now like to recommend a number of insurance policies that can help further guarantee success in Korean foreign-language education in the decades to come.

7.1. *Foreign-Language Islands*: First of all, I would like propose the establishment of foreign-language islands in Korea. Korea can, for example, set up off its west coast a Chinese-language island populated exclusively with native speakers of Chinese. This island will further have a first-rate Chinese-language teaching center, which conducts all its programs in Chinese only. Selected groups of Korean nationals will be interned on the island for extended periods of time for survival training at its Chinese-language teaching center, in the course of which the internees will have to swim or sink in a sea of the Chinese language. For life on the island would be impos-

sible without recourse to Chinese.

The beauty of this island concept is that Korea can produce a foreign-language elite at a relatively low cost over a relatively short period of time. Beneficiaries of such foreign-language islands will include diplomats, foreign-language teachers, and international business personnel.

7.2. Two Years Abroad for Teacher Trainees: I propose a system of one year abroad for both pre- and in-service foreign-language teacher trainees. Under this system, a teacher trainee would benefit from something like the American junior-year-abroad program in the pre-service stage and from a one-year language-teaching internship program in the in-service stage. This system will help the average teacher to substantially enhance his command of his target language as well as his other professional qualifications.

7.3. Student Exchange: Korea has a great deal to gain from a large-scale student exchange program, whereby Korean students spend one year abroad with their counterparts from abroad spending one year in Korea. With large numbers of students participating in such a program, Korean students should be able to learn a great deal of their target languages and cultures.

7.4. Summer/Winter Abroad for Students: Aside from the student exchange program of the sort just discussed, I would like to propose that Korean students be encouraged to travel abroad during the summer and winter months. This should provide them with excellent opportunities to practice their foreign-language skills in real-life situations.

7.5. E-Mail and Ham Radio: I would like to propose that Korean students of foreign languages make friends with people abroad by E-mail and ham radio. This way they would be communicating with their friends overseas in appropriate international languages at fairly frequent intervals. The E-mail and ham radio network of international communications suggested here can go a long way in helping Korean students to improve their foreign languages through plenty of meaningful practice in communication, both spoken and written.

7.6. Native-Speaker Input: I propose that Korea import substantial numbers of native-speaking teachers of foreign languages in the decades ahead, especially those of major foreign languages such as English. For a major impact on the entire spectrum of its English-language education alone, Korea may need a minimum of 2,000 native-speaking teachers of English.

I further propose that, if and when they are imported in large numbers, these native-speaking teachers be concentrated in teacher-training programs, both pre- and in-service. For that will help significantly improve the average teacher's proficiency in his target language, which will in time filter down to his students.

7.7. *R & D*: I propose the establishment of a national center for research and development in foreign-language education. The R and D projects of this national center can relate to teacher training, materials development, program evaluation, and development of instruments for proficiency and achievement testing. The center can operate within the framework of a series of five-year plans, each focusing on one particular aspect of foreign-language education that needs development.

7.8. *Cooperation with Japan and China*: I propose the establishment of formal ties of cooperation between Korea, Japan, and China for the promotion and development of foreign-language education in the three countries. Sharing similar goals and problems in foreign-language education, the three countries of the Far East have a great deal to gain from mutual cooperation. The three countries can, for example, pool their resources in joint research and development for the production of materials, proficiency tests, and instructional programs.

Parenthetically, we may need a tri-national language center along the lines of ASEAN's Regional Language Center in Singapore if we are to efficiently coordinate joint projects involving the three countries of the Far East. Through this tri-national center, the three countries can, for one thing, deliberate such matters of common interest as the adoption of languages of wider communication for the Asian-Pacific region in anticipation of the birth of an Asia-Pacific Community.

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ABSTRACT

Foreign-Language Education in Korea: Past, Present and Future

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As the title suggests, the present paper is a general survey of foreign-language education in Korea today. As such it takes a critical look at the history of Korean foreign-language education, which is followed by a discussion of major current issues and a forecast of the future. A number of proposals are also made for helping solve the problems facing Korean foreign-language education today and thereby enabling it to better meet the needs of the country in the decades ahead.

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