

Cultural Identity in Korean English¹

Bok-Myung Chang

Namseoul University

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This study aims to investigate the cultural identity of Korean English and to make the intercultural communications among non-native speakers successful. The purposes of this study can be summarized as follows: 1) to recognize the concept of English as an International Language(EIL), 2) to emphasize cross-cultural understanding in the globalized world, 3) to investigate the cultural identity in Korean English, and 4) to suggest a good model for cultivating the cultural intelligence in EFL. For these purposes, this study focuses on investigating characteristics of Korean English based on value systems. Also this research surveys the para-linguistic features and socio-cultural characteristics of Korean English through analyzing word's connotations, syntactic differences, non verbal actions and gestures, address terms, interpersonal relations among Koreans, communicative behaviors, pragmatic features of Korean English, and emotions. As a conclusion, it is necessary to cultivate the cultural intelligence among English language learners in the globalized world.

Key Words: cultural identity, intercultural communication, English as an International Language, cultural intelligence, para-linguistic features, socio-cultural characteristics

1 Introduction

Every year Korea spends billions of dollars on English education from elementary schools and universities. Many people also spend vast amount of time, money and energy at correspondence schools, prep schools, commercial English language schools, and lifelong educational institutions in order to learn English. Also one of the main purposes of English education in Korea can be said to cultivate the communicative competence of Korean EFL learners.

Despite these enormous investments, Korean people lack confidence about their English proficiency and always are eager to learn and practice

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Bok-Myung Chang

English in order to overcome their inferiority complex toward native speakers of English. So we need to devise more successful ways to make English education successful in Korea and most Koreans who lack the self-confidence in their English proficiency, feel confident in English abilities, so that Korea can gain the successive results for the enormous investment of time and money on English education.

English has evolved into an international language for global communication. While 350 million people speak English as a mother tongue, 400 million speak the language as a second language, and 750 million speak it as a foreign language (Crystal, 2003). So it is natural to find more common cases of the communication between Asian people through English rather than their native language, which has motivated to do research on cultural understanding among native speakers and non-native speakers. This study focuses on achieving these purposes: 1) to recognize the concept of English as an International Language (EIL), 2) to emphasize the cross-cultural understanding in the globalized world, 3) to investigate the cultural identity in Korean English, and 4) to suggest a good model for cultivating the cultural intelligence among students of divergent countries.

From the results of this research, the following conclusions could be found: it is very important to emphasize cultural intelligence in communicative competence among English learners. Cultural intelligence is defined as the social and emotional intelligence plus cultural awareness, and the main function of cultural intelligence is to develop student' awareness of culture-specific aspects of communication that may combine with more personal styles and responses. So the focus of teaching and learning English as an international language must be transformed to cultivate the cultural intelligence through sharing information, receiving information, and noticing similarities and differences. This research on the cultural identity of Korean English will be helpful in understanding Korean people and Korean English by predicting the miscommunications stemming from cultural differences of Korea.

2 Theoretical Background

2.1 English as an international language

These days, we are using English as a communicative tool in every aspects of life. Jenkins (2003) found that in the period between the end of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I in 1603 and the later years of the reign of Queen Elizabeth II at the start of the twenty-first century, the number of speakers of English increased from a mere five to seven million to somewhere between one-and-a-half and two billion. The English language was spoken in the mid-sixteenth century only by a relatively small group of mother-tongue speakers born and bred within the shores of the British Isles, it is now spoken in almost every

Cultural Identity in Korean English

country of the world, with its majority speakers being those for whom it is not a first language.

Crystal (1997) found that currently, there are approximately seventy-five territories where English is spoken either as a first language (L1), or as an official (i.e. institutionalized) second language (L2) in fields such as government, law and education. From these data, we can infer that English plays not only a role as an agent of transcending the cultural values of England or America, but also a role as a communicative tool for every aspect of life; economics, politics, culture, finance, travel, scientific research, military, etc. Smith (1976) states three views about English: World English (WE), English as an International Language (EIL) and English as Lingua Franca as follows:

1. English as an International Language is "decultured", i.e., English learners do not need to internalize the cultural norms of native speakers of the language.
2. The ownership of it has become "de-nationalized"
3. The educational goal of learning it is to enable to communicate their ideas and cultures to others. Considering these factors in technological and cultural innovation, it is necessary to set up a new model of English as an international language.

Until recent times, English was used as a communicative tool among native English speakers, but recently English was used as a tool among native English speakers (henceforth NS) and nonnative English speakers (henceforth NNS). Even more the communication between NNSs and NNSs is delivered through English, so it is urgent to set up a new model of English as an "International Language" or a "World English."

One of the most famous scholars who defined the notion of World English, Kachru (1992) defined World Englishes as three concentric circles, the Inner Circle, the outer Circle, and the Expanding Circle. Each circle represents the types of spread, the patterns of acquisition, and the functional allocation of English in diverse cultural contexts. The Inner Circle contains the countries in which English is used as a national language: USA, UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The Outer circle contains the nations in which English is used as a second language; Bangladesh, Ghana, Kenya, Malaysia, Singapore, etc. The Expanding Circle includes the nations in which English is being used as a foreign language: China, Egypt, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, etc. Jenkins (2003) said that the English spoken in the Inner Circle is said to be 'norm-providing', that in the Outer Circle to be 'norm-developing' and that in the Expanding Circle to be 'norm-dependent'. In other words, English-language standards are determined by speakers of English as a national language. Another scholar who contributed to construct the notion of World English, McArthur(1987) suggested the model Circle of World English, which places International English at the centre, followed by moving outwards: a band of 8 regional standard Englishes.

Bok-Myung Chang

The more recent attempt to take account of developments in the spread of World Englishes is that of Modiano (1999). He breaks completely with historical and geographical concerns and bases the first of his two models, 'The centripetal circles of international English', on what is mutually comprehensible to the majority of proficient speakers of English, be they native or non-native. The centre is made up of these who are proficient in international English. Modiano redrafted his idea in response to comments which he had received in reaction to his first model. At the centre is EIL, a core of features which are comprehensible to the majority of native and competent non-native speakers of English. The second circle consists of features which may become internationally common or may fall into obscurity. Finally, the outer area consists of five groups (American English, British English, other major varieties, local varieties, foreign varieties) each with features peculiar to their own speech community and which are unlikely to be understood by most members of the other four groups. For people who use English as a second language, foreign language or international language, the cases of interaction among non-native speakers are increasing very rapidly. Korea and most other Asian countries belong to the expanding circle which was suggested in the Kachru's model, so it is natural to find the cases that people in expanding circle countries interact among non-native speakers through English. So, if we were to cultivate English proficiency of Koreans, it would be necessary to construct the environment of learning English as a foreign language or international language. And English learning environment in expanding circle countries must include the environment for NNS - NNS interaction as well as NS-NNS interaction.

2.2 Cross-cultural understanding in the globalized world

Every culture is different in its categorization of experience and environment. So the causes of miscommunication as well as misunderstanding include linguistic differences and underlying cultural differences. Investigation of the structured system of value orientations in Korea, thus, gives us insight into Korean English as a world English.

When communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds, the interlocutors, people who are participating in the conversation must know not only the form-function relation of the foreign language and the social constraints on how certain things are said, but also the basic values and other cognitive aspects of acceptable behavior in each other's society. For effective communication across cultures, many studies propose universal pragmatic principles such as the speaker must be sincere and speak the truth and the speaker must say only as much as required because irrelevant and redundant speech is just a distracter that only makes the conversation ineffective. These principles best serve when the goal of communication is simply to transmit information. However, in interpersonal relationships, these principles are employed in many different ways where the interlocutors have different value systems.

Cultural Identity in Korean English

So, to achieve successful communication, you have to be aware of cross-cultural differences that affect language use. For example, Korean adults do not commonly use nicknames nor first names. Instead, Korean adults commonly use a deferential speech style in their daily social interactions. Now what we need to do is to understand linguistic and communicative differences resulting from value orientations.

Prof. Michiko Nakano (2006) emphasized the importance of cross-cultural understanding through mentioning the objectives of Cross-Cultural Distance Learning courses like these : the first goals of the course is to enable our students to achieve the English ability to integrate the four components of communicative competence : grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic and strategic competence. The second is to enhance our students' inter-cultural or cross-cultural awareness so that rather than adopting native English cultural norms, they are encouraged to create a culturally third-place in which Asian youths can deal with real problems in the world, possibly fostering pluri-cultural personality. The third goal is to enable Asian youths to impart their local values in view of global perspective so that their cultural and social literacy should be shared among them.

Lee (2004) proposes a Cultural Learning Tree in which he emphasizes that learners must recognize themselves as cultural beings; cultural awareness is the starting point of culture learning. Cultural awareness includes empathy, openness toward other cultures, willingness to engage in active negotiation of meaning, willingness to suspend judgment and to take into consideration cultural differences.

3 Characteristics of Korean English Based on Value Systems

It is said that the value system in Korea has become a lot more like the western one due to a structural change of Korean society from a traditional, vertical system to the modern horizontal form since World War II . The young generation has been much westernized in their way of thinking and behaviors and many leaders have been educated abroad. However, traditionalism is still found in most Koreans' consciousness, which is reflected in language.

Individualism, equality, directness (confrontation), pragmatism, and rationalism are values considered important in America. But what do you think is important in Korea? Collectivism, hierarchism, indirectness, formalism, and emotionalism, these are our values. Among these five value dimensions, the first two appear to be basic, thus marking the most characteristic distinctions between Americans and Koreans. Individualism, which is an important value in America, means that the extent to which you are involved in someone else's business is relatively lower than in other cultures, sometimes, even when it comes to your family matters. Compared to this, you are more concerned about things that are not directly related to you in Korea. It is so because of that distinctive value, which we call collectivism. Egalitarianism has to do with the concept of equality: symmetrical / horizontal relationships. In contrast, hierarchism means

Bok-Myung Chang

asymmetrical, vertical power relationships. Most oriental countries including Korea are based on Confucianism. It is the basic idea of Korean and it affects Korean lives for a long time. The abundance of honorifics and respectful expressions in Korean English stemmed from the Confucian virtue of respecting others and humbling oneself.

3.1 Honorific words: special words used to old people

Korean language includes a lot of example of honorific words and suffix, so this paper would like to suggest one example for each case.

Table 1. Honorific Words Examples

Meaning	Common Words	Honorific Words
food	bap (밥)	jinji (진지)
speech	mal (말)	malssum (말씀)
age	nai (나이)	yeonse (연세)
disease	byung (병)	byungwhan (병환)
house	gip (집)	daeg (댁)

Table 2. Honorific Suffix Examples

Honorific Suffix	meaning	Common Expressions	Honorific Expressions
- nim (님)	grandmother	halmeoni (할머니)	Halmeonim (할머니님)
	elder brother	hyeong (형)	hyeongnim (형님)
	elder sister	nuna (누나)	nunim (누님)
	elder brother	orabeoni (오라버니)	orabeonim (오라버님)

3.2 Sociocultural values in Korea

The fundamental value systems for the oriental countries and western countries are totally different from each other. One of the most distinctive value systems for the oriental countries is the collectivism and group orientation, for example, our house (vs. my house), our husband (vs. my husband). The other example of the collectivism and group orientation is “yes/no response” in Korean communication. For example,

Yes/no response (other-orientated response)

AI : You like pizza? ... Don't you like it?

KS : Well.... Yes, I don't like it. (meaning 'He doesn't like pizza.')

Cultural Identity in Korean English

Table 3. The Comparison Between Oriental and Western Value Systems

Oriental Value Systems	Western Value Systems
1 Collectivism and Group Orientation	Individualism and Privacy
2 Hierarchy / Rank / Social Status	Equality
3 Cooperation	Competition for Success
4 Spiritualism	Materialism
5 Strong Face-consciousness	Weak Face-consciousness
6 Being Orientation	Action/Work Orientation
7 Formality	Informality
8 Indirectness	Directness / Openness / Honesty
9 High Considerate	High involvement
10 Conservative	Liberal
11 Ethics -Oriented	Rules and Regulation Oriented

4 Para- linguistic Features and Socio-cultural Characteristics of Korean English

In this section, paralinguistic features and socio-cultural characteristics of Korean will be explained.

4.1 Word's connotations

There are significant differences in connotation between the Korean words and their English equivalents. For example, when Koreans say “*gohyang*” (hometown), it means the place of our ancestors, of our kin and neighbors. It is the place from which we derive our identity. In other words, the term “*gohyang*” carried a deep sense of human interrelatedness and interdependence. The concept of “*hyodo*” (filial duty) seems relatively unfamiliar to American. However, to Koreans, it refers to a particular relationship between parents and children, a relationship of sincerity and respect as well as loyalty, obedience, and sacrifice. Therefore, terms such as “*gayinjuuy*” (individualism), “*Sali*” (self-interest), and “*jajonsim*” (self-esteem) carry strong negative connotations due to their association with selfishness and egocentricism and concepts such as privacy, self-concept, and identity seem a bit selfish to us, Koreans.

4.2 Syntactic differences

(1) Americans write the given name first and the family name last. If they don't know each other very well, Koreans do not call each other by their given names.

(2) Americans write a mailing address in the order of the personal name

Bok-Myung Chang

followed by gradually larger units (i.e., street, city, state).

(3) Whereas English noun phrases (both personal nouns and pronouns) must be explicitly expressed in sentences, Korean personal nouns and pronouns especially 'I' and 'you' are generally omitted if they are contextually or situationally understood. For example, we say 'plan to eat dinner in that restaurant'. Instead of 'I plan to eat dinner in that restaurant.'

(4) A strong feeling of collectiveness leads to expressions such as 'our country,' our husband' instead of 'my country,' or 'my husband'. In Korea, using 'my' gives an impression that the speaker is very egocentric or even arrogant.

(5) There are many expressions which reflect Americans' emphasis on privacy. These are derived from individualism. Koreans' emphasis on mutual involvement and concerns are derived from collectivism. In Korean greetings, you request some very personal information that can be considered rude when you ask such a thing in America. It sounds awkward if you ask somebody where he has been for a greetings but you do that in Korea.

(6) How about the responses to questions. Yes/no response of English is based on one's own action whereas Korean yes/no depends on agreement or disagreement with the content of the question. As some Japanese scholars have pointed out, the American communication pattern is me oriented whereas the Korean pattern is other oriented. For example, as a response to the question, didn't you go?, "Yes" in Korean means he didn't go, but "Yes" in English means he did go.

(7) Where the close involvement in the business of either your family or the mere acquaintances is more common, Koreans often ask personal questions about personal things such as marriage, salary age, and cost of the addressees' belongings. Koreans' interest in others' private lives are based on collectivism.

4.3 Non verbal actions and gestures

In this section, the non verbal actions and gestures of distinctive Korean language will be discussed.

(1) Koreans rarely go Dutch whereas Americans follow the custom of Dutch treat when paying at restaurant unless invited out. When you are drinking, Koreans fill each other's glasses and pass an empty glass around whereas Americans fill their own glasses and do not pass an empty glass to others.

(2) Before entering someone's room, Koreans often do not knock whereas Americans usually do. Well, in the past, they used to cough as some sort of signal that they were entering the room.

Cultural Identity in Korean English

(3) Koreans visit people without previous engagement or prior notice whereas Americans seldom do. Also, Koreans generally prefer to stay close while engaged in conversation whereas Americans keep about an arm's length of personal space around themselves. For example, at a dinner table, an American asks his neighbor to pass the salt to avoid invading the latter's spatial privacy. A Korean will reach over and take the salt himself because he feels like he is causing you trouble if he asks you a favor.

(4) Koreans seem to depend relatively more on their parents, their seniors from the same school, home town, whatever societal groups you can belong to. That's why decision-making is sometimes influenced by the head of an organization in Korea.

(5) The concept of hierarchy is very strongly reflected in the Korean language unlike in English. That is what creates different communicative patterns for different levels of groups in Korea.

4.4 Address terms

(1) Americans show a certain degree of hierarchism in every walk of their life in address and reference but Koreans are much more hierarchical than Americans. Americans like informal and comfortable relationships. So, they often call each other by their first names even when their social statuses are not the same. American's use of deferential and plain forms of address and reference is determined by the dimension of solidarity not by the hierarchical dimension. What I mean is that what title you are going to use is determined by how close you feel to the person you are talking to, not by if that person is higher or lower, or older or younger. For instance, both the professor and the student can call each other's first names in America, but in Korea, professors call your first names and students must use appropriate titles like 'professor' or 'teacher'.

(2) The use of Korean honorifics reflected on rank status based power relationship. Titles are hierarchical in Korean whereas English titles such as Mr. Mrs. Miss do not have any hierarchical connotation. A president of a company can be called just "*sajang*" when the caller is older or higher-ranking person. But he is also called "*sajangnim*" when younger or lower-ranking person is addressing him. So, the difference between these two titles is that the suffix-*nim* is added to show respect from a younger or lower-ranking person.

(3) Pronouns in Korea are also hierarchical. Even when you are talking about yourself, you can say "*je*" to an older or higher-ranking person and you say "*na*" to a person on an equal or lower status.

(4) There are terms for social superior's family member, possession, action,

Bok-Myung Chang

and manner. The deferential terms for a superior's wife are "*samo-nim*" and "*buin*" (Mrs. Wife, deferential). In contrast, the plain forms are "*che, anae, manura, jibsaram*". "*Daeg*" is the deferential for house and the plain form for house is *jip*.

(5) Six different speech levels for addressee honorifics are reflected in verbal suffixes: to show formal deference, the verb ending should be "*-subnida*", for informal deference, it's "*-eyo*", you sound blunt if you are ending a verb with "*-so, -ney*" is for a close younger person, "*-e/a*" shows intimacy, "*-da*" is just a plain verb ending.

4.5 Interpersonal relations among Koreans

(1) Koreans view age as one of the important elements for showing deference in the choice of honorifics and speech styles as well as non-verbal behaviors. Seniority counts in all aspects of life, such as in a promotion or the election of a chairman or president. The criteria that determine the use of all different terms are not always the same. The seniority of two people from different groups is determined by rough age groups. If one person is in his early twenties and the other is in his late forties, a significant seniority exists in this relationship.

(2) In traditional Korea, gender is another important social variable and non-reciprocal speech style is used in conversations between husbands and wives. Usually, wife uses the deferential level of you style while husband uses the intimate level of a style. Women generally use less assertive and more polite language than men.

4.6 Communicative behaviors

Communicative behaviors are also different in two countries. Koreans do not have particular address terms for spouse whereas Americans have a variety of them (darling, honey, Jim, Mary). Korean wives say *yebo*, which means "look here" or they say *abba*, means dad, to call their husbands.

In Korea, since any open and direct disagreement can be taken as hostility, Koreans avoid such expressions as 'I disagree,' 'I have a different view on that,' 'I cannot agree with you,' etc., especially to their social superiors while the extent to which Americans avoid face-threatening disagreements is the same in all relationships.

Silence is golden in Korea whereas frankness and outspokenness are prized in America. Old Korean sayings explain that it is a virtue not to openly express one's opinions or feelings but to show humility by remaining silent. Koreans hardly say "I love you," because they believe that love is not conveyed verbally. Even in conversations long silences are not only tolerated but often appreciated. Most Americans feel uncomfortable and rush in to fill the gap in the conversation when there is a long silence. This is why

Cultural Identity in Korean English

Americans often think Koreans are unfriendly whereas Koreans often think Americans are too talkative.

Expressive acts such as thanking, apologizing, congratulating, and offering condolences in Korea, are not as expressive as in English in terms of both the number of forms and frequency of use as well as their expressive intensity.

5 Conclusions: Cultural Intelligence

As English language spread to North America, Australia, and further to Asian and African countries, it has been transformed to different varieties by incorporating local languages, beliefs, worldviews, values, attitudes, and ideologies. English need to meet local needs of cultural expressions and identities. The main function of English as an international language is to play a role as a communication tools in divergent environment. In this environment, it is very important to understand the cultural differences among divergent countries.

Salovey and Mayer (1990) defines the notions of emotional intelligence and cultural intelligence. Emotional intelligence is the subset of social Intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions. Cultural intelligence is defined as the social and emotional intelligence plus cultural awareness, and the main function of cultural intelligence is to develop students' awareness of culture-specific aspects of communication that may combine with more personal styles and responses.

A model for cultivating the cultural intelligence through distance learning among Japanese and Korean university students can be suggested as a conclusion of this research. This model is based on Cross-cultural distance learning delivered among university students in Japan and Korea during the second semester, 2008. This class model was based on the cultural theme (i.e. social and global issues), and class procedure consisted with one week of preparation class, one week of joint class, and the students' submitting the reflection papers on the class. The class was conducted through distance learning using video-conferencing, chatting, e-mailing, and using bulletin board services (See Appendix A, for more specific information about the class). From the students' reflection papers, it can be found that this kind of class was helpful for raising the intercultural understanding among university students in Korea and Japan (Appendix B). So in the future, it is very important to integrate the concept of cultural intelligence into English and devise the practical mode, for example Cross-cultural distance learning model that can be applied to English educational contexts.

So the focus of teaching and learning English as an international language must be transformed to cultivate the cultural intelligence through sharing information, receiving information, noticing similarities and differences. This study introduces the concept of English as an International

Bok-Myung Chang

Language (EIL) and emphasizes the importance of cross-cultural understanding in the globalized world. Also this research surveys the cultural identity through studying the characteristics of Korean English based on value systems, and para-linguistic features and socio-cultural characteristics of Korean English. This research on the cultural identity of Korean English will be helpful in understanding Korean people and Korean English by predicting the miscommunications stemming from cultural differences between Korea and the West.

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Cultural Identity in Korean English

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Bok-Myung Chang
Department of English
Namseoul University
21 Maeju-ri, Seongwhan-eup
Cheonan-sity, Choongnam, 330-707, Korea
Tel: 82-41-580-2168/2771
Fax: 82-41-580-2170
E-mail: bmchang@nsu.ac.kr

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Bok-Myung Chang

Appendix A.

Culture-based Class Model through Cross-Cultural Distance Learning

1) Class Procedure

1. Preparation Class – 1 week (Reading + Research +BBS)
2. Joint Class – 1week (Voice Chatting + Text Chatting + BBS)
3. Reflection Paper

2) Cultural Theme of the class : Social and Global Issues

Topic 1: Introduction : Facilitation Skills, Intercultural translation
Topic 2: Happiness Factors : Individualism/Collectivism
Topic 3: Family Roles : High/Low context communication style
Topic 4: Neighborhood : Relationship Development
Topic 5: Climate Change : Agreement Styles

3) Preparation Class Procedure

Choose Top 5 Personal Happiness Factors

Clear goal in life, Convenient living environment,
Create & Sustain world peace, Dream/hope for the future,
Family ties, High post/position/status, Interesting hobby/leisure,etc.



Write personal opinions and reasons for choosing five factors on BBS and
discuss their opinions with the students from the counterpart university

4) Learning Points of Preparation Class and Joint Class

<Preparation Class>

- Raising awareness of reasoning behind others' happiness factors.
- Identifying individual and group related sources of happiness.
- Analyzing society in terms of group membership.

<Joint Class>

- Understanding the difference between individualism and collectivism.
- Raising awareness of personal value orientation related to individualism and collectivism.
- Considering the connection between personal and cultural values in terms of happiness.

Cultural Identity in Korean English

Appendix B.

Samples of Reflection Papers

- 1) My opinion ... First of all, I like this program. because I can meet another country friend and I have learned about other country`s cultures, educations, and Japanese. And I don`t have to go abroad. It is this semester program`s benefit. We can learn English so easily and with fun through CCDL. And I want to use voice chatting more than this time. If I get a chance , I want to have the chance of chatting one more time
- 2) The main benefit of this course is to practice English and to make Japanese friends. We made new friends from another country while we typed English in chat room every week. This course improved my various English questions and typing skills. And I knew some diverse opinions of Japanese students. It is fresh and new in my memory.
- 3) Talking with friends in English is the best way to learn English. Chatting with friends from other countries will improve our English, it is true. We have practiced our conversational skills every week through making sentences, asking questions, accounting, comparing and contrasting, expressing emotion, etc. We discussed with the subject. CCDL gives us the chance to speak English free