석사학위논문

# EFL 교실에서 비판적 문화교육의 필요성에 대한 연구

# Essentializing Culture: EFL Pedagogy and the Need for Critical Practices

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우송대학교 TESOL-MALL 대학원

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최 규 남

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# Essentializing Culture: EFL Pedagogy and the Need for Critical Practices

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS . . . . . .iv

TABLE OF CONTENTS . . . . . v

ABSTRACT . . . . . viii

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION . . . . . .1

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW . . . . . 5

2.1. Language, Culture, and Power . . . . . 5

2.1.1. Brief History of Culture . . . . . 5

2.1.2. Decoding Culture . . . . . 6

2.1.3. Language, Knowledge, and Power . . . . . 8

2.2. Culture in ELT . . . . . 9

2.2.1. Crosscultural Perspectives on ELT . . . . . 9

2.2.2. Sociocultural Perspectives on ELT . . . . . .11

2.2.3. The Application of Culture in ELT . . . . . .12

2.3. Teaching Culture Toward Critical Literacy . . . . . .13

2.3.1. English as an International Language . . . . . .13

2.3.2. Culture Revisited . . . . . 15

2.3.3. Teaching Culture toward Critical Literacy . . . . . .17

CHAPTER 3. METHOD . . . . . 19

3.1. Methodology . . . . . .19
3.2. Participants . . . . . 20
3.3. Data Collection . . . . . 21
Interviews . . . . . 21
Questionnaire . . . . . 22
Triangulation . . . . . 22
Member Checking . . . . . 23
3.4. Data Analysis . . . . . 23
3.5. Limitations . . . . . 24
CHAPTER 4. RESULTS . . . . . 25
4.1. Culture Reflected on Teachers' Eyes . . . . . 25
4.1.1. Eyes Wide Shut . . . . . 25
4.1.2. One-Dimensional Culture . . . . . 28
4.1.3. Schrödinger's Cat . . . . . 31
4.2. Culture in Practice . . . . . 33
4.2.1. Me, Myself, and ELT . . . . . 33
4.2.2. Bokanovsky's Process . . . . . 35
4.2.3. Mechanical Animals . . . . . 38
4.3. ELT Mythologizes Culture . . . . . 40
4.3.1. The Fake Genuine/The Genuine Fake . . . . . 40

4.3.2. English, Linguistic Pheromones . . . . . 43
4.3.3. Zero-Sum Game . . . . . 46
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION . . . . . 49
5.1. Culture with a Critical View . . . . . 49
5.2. Culture for International Communication . . . . . 51
5.3. Teachers as Transformative Intellectuals . . . . . 55
CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION . . . . . 58
REFERENCES . . . . . 61
국문초록 . . . . . 71

## ABSTRACT

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One of the most controversial issues in ELT has been the idea that culture can be separated from teaching language. Supporting this axiom, functionalists have defined culture in terms of linguistic knowledge and skills, which enable students to develop functional and cultural literacy. On the other hand, in the views of social constructivists, culture can never be understood apart from language and power relations. This infers that English Language Teaching (ELT) can be a tool to propagate the language, culture, and ideology of a dominant discourse. Permeated by utopian perspectives on English, ELT in Korea seems to have yet to show the possibility of applying culture to decode cultural and political representations embedded in language. Accordingly, to investigate how culture is defined and transmitted and functions in current EFL classrooms in Korea, nine Korean EFL teachers were interviewed for this study. From the data collected, it was indicated that: (1) the teachers with reductionistic views could not completely understand culture, and tended to essentialize it; (2) target culture was transmitted

to develop students' linguistic competence in a positivistic way; and (3) English and the culture of the U.S. were considered as a gatekeeper to higher sociocultural positions. In this study, consequently, I could not observe the possibility of critical practices in teaching culture. Nevertheless, this study was concluded with the hope that teachers can stop (re)producing and circulating the conventional pedagogy by situating cultural education to fit into Korean EFL contexts and that students can appropriate the language of a dominant discourse in order to make their voice heard.

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

**MONICA**: It doesn't make any sense.
**JOEY**: Of course it does. It's smart. I used the thesaurus.
**CHANDLER**: On every word?
**JOEY**: Yup.
**MONICA**: Alright. What was this sentence originally?
**JOEY**: Oh. "They're warm, nice people with big hearts."
**CHANDLER**: And that became "They're humid, prepossessing homo-sapiens with full-sized aortic pumps."
**JOEY**: And hey, I really mean it, dude.
*Transcribed from* ***Friends***

Monica and Chandler ask Joey to write a letter of recommendation to the adoption agency on their behalf. Joey learns how to use a thesaurus to sound smart because he doesn't want to use a silly sentence such as "*Dear baby adoption decider people.*" Contrary to his intention, however, the recommendation sounds dumb rather than *brainy, bright, or clever*. What makes it so stupid, even though he uses a thesaurus in order to write better? Is that really ridiculous to an extent that the letter can never be accepted? It might be true that Joey's writing is not a socially accepted idea in that he fails to use "proper words in proper places" (Widdowson, 1993a, p. 317). As Fairclough (1989) asserted, English used by the working-class, as shown in Joey's case, would form a "class dialect" (p. 57). It

explicitly implies the power relations hidden in language. Hence, their language is considered as neither proper nor powerful English, compared to that of the dominant society.

The implication of the discussion above is that ELT can never be separated from culture and power relations behind language. However, the conventional notion, as Alptekin and Alptekin (1984) argued, is that “no real acquisition of the target language can take place without the learner’s internalization of target language speakers’ patterns and values” (p. 14). Viewed from traditional perspectives, cultural contents in EFL contexts have been more concerned with cultures of ESL countries (Pak, 1999). In these circumstances, culture has been regarded as “ways of a people” (Lado, 1957, p. 110) in a target culture, which can be acquired mainly through contrasting and comparing, after dichotomized into others and self (Lee & Cha, 1999; Lim, 2000; Yu, 2002). Thus, it is alleged that culture has been essentialized to an extent that L2 learners can acculturate by practice. In other words, the richness and diversity of culture was condensed into several “static, monolithic, caricatures” (Guest, 2002, p. 159) to represent the whole cultural phenomena of target culture as well as source culture.

However, Prodromou (1988), in his study on Greek contexts, raised a question about the traditional trend of teaching culture in the EFL classroom: why should western cultural norms be followed in learning English as a tool of

intercultural communication? His challenge to the conventional notion has developed into forming the alternative perspectives (Atkinson, 1999; Kubota, 1999, 2001; Pennycook, 1994) on culture in ELT. Kubota's (1999) assertion is that culture cannot be "neutral or apolitical but produced and reinforced by social forces" (p. 27). This infers that cultural representations embedded in a dominant discourse must be decoded, which can make it possible to understand the relationship of language, culture, knowledge, and power. Hall (1997) also contended that it is language that provides a crucial clue to interpret how culture is represented inside power relations.

In EFL contexts, traditional concepts of culture and the teaching of dominant conventions in western society need to be modified into alternative views manifesting power relations in language and culture. Therefore, for this study, culture will be defined as "a set of practices and ideologies from which different groups draw to make sense of the world" (Giroux, 1989, p. 193). Teaching culture in ELT should not mean teaching "an official truth predetermined by a small group of people who analyze, execute, make decisions, and run things in the political, economic and ideological system" (Macedo, 2000, pp. 4-5), but to empower L2 learners to recognize the origin of culture as being "discursively constructed" (Kubota, 2001, p. 11). Accordingly, a pedagogical change of cultural application must emerge and therefore teachers can challenge

the widespread notions of culture.

Culture in ELT is more critical especially in the EFL contexts where English, together with its localization, is mainly used as an intercultural communicative competence between speakers of English as a foreign language (Alptekin, 2002). Through this study, I will attempt to discover how teaching culture in Korean EFL contexts are performed in order to fulfill a new paradigm. Accordingly, three research questions are posed for this research as follows:

1. How do Korean EFL teachers view culture in ELT?
2. How do Korean EFL teachers transmit culture in ELT?
3. How do English and culture function in Korean EFL contexts?

# CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1. Language, Culture, and Power

### 2.1.1. Brief History of Culture

In *Primitive Culture*, Tylor (1973) defined culture as a "complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (p. 1). His descriptive definition went against the German belief (Kant) that identified culture with civilization (Schäfer, 2001; Yarbrough, 1999). According to Moore (1997), Tylor also believed that culture evolved in a unilinear way of three stages: savagery, barbarism, and civilization. His cultural evolution, however, was attacked by Boas, who argued that each society had its own unique culture. He extended its meaning from singular culture to plural culture (Goodenough, 1981; Moore, 1997; Stocking, 1966). Therefore, culture became more "complicated" (Williams, 1985, p. 87) to the extent that it was developed in various other disciplines such as sociology, psychology, philosophy, and even education.

In spite of these intricate definitions of culture, controversy has remained regarding the relationship between culture and civilization. As revealed in European enlightenment thinkers' views, culture has been interchangeably considered as civilization (Storey, 2001). Influenced by their views, it became dichotomized and stratified into two groups; the upper, high culture for elite, and

the lower, mass culture for labor (Grenz, 2004). This structural characteristic of culture related with social class brought about continuous controversy due to its unequal status. In other words, it has been argued that mass and pop culture should be treated equally and appreciated as high culture (Gans, 1999). To extricate its hierarchic structure, Marxist perspective scholars attempted to find out how culture, as an ideology of the ruling class, is produced, distributed, and consumed in order to oppress the ruling class (Storey, 2001). Based on their views focusing mainly on economic standpoints, afterwards, cultural studies have been extended to analyze the relationship between dominant/subordinate cultures inside the social relations such as gender, race, class, and age (McLaren, 2003).

### 2.1.2. Decoding Culture

The intricate relationship between culture and discourse can be clearly understood by investigating what culture represents and revealing how culture is interpreted in the specific context (Hall, 1997). According to Hall (1997), language would play an essential role to infer cultural representations. In addition, Kramsch (1998) also asserted that it is language that can disentangle interconnections between its representation and its meaning. Theoretically, the attempts to interpret the relationship between culture and language have been developed as follows: reflective, intentional, and constructionist approaches (Hall,

1997).

In reflective and intentional approaches, the culture-language relationship can be decoded from language and speakers in a society (Hall, 1997). To put it another way, these approaches were mainly concerned with what meaning would be implied in words and what intention would be implied in communication of speakers, respectively. This relationship was developed by Saussure, a structuralist who attempted to explain the process of producing meaning in a scientific formula (Storey, 2001). However, Hall (1997) argued that Saussure mostly concentrated on the "law-like precision of a science" (p. 35), langue and parole in order to explain the relations of language, culture, and meaning, giving little attention on social phenomenon such as "power and inequality which are pervasive features of societies" (Thompson, 1991, p.2).

On the other hand, constructivists believed that meaning can be constructed by social interaction, never fixed in a way nor explained by the reflective/intentional approaches. Also, it is asserted that cultural representation can be discursively built in the power relations (Hall, 1997). To fully interpret the relations of language, culture, and meaning, how culture is formed through social interactions must be demystified. Therefore, Hall (1997) asserted that the simple concept of language must be extended to discourse, which will show how cultural representations are constructed into meaning.

### 2.1.3. Language, Knowledge, and Power

Contrary to the traditional Marxist theory of culture that concentrated mostly on the class struggle between the haves and the have-nots, Foucault used the term *discourse* in order to comprehend the power/knowledge relations in specific cultural and historical contexts (Hall, 1997; McLaren, 2003). Moreover, Foucault's theory of power is different from the more conventional views, in which power is regarded as "a general system of dominance exerted by one group over another" (Foucault, 1978, p. 92). Foucault (1980) described power as:

> Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization . . . In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application. (p. 98)

This implies that knowledge and truth would be inconstant along with power locations because they are dependent mostly on historic, social, and cultural contexts. To understand "dominant discourses produced by the dominant culture" (McLaren, 2003, p. 209), therefore, it must be recognized how discourses are controlled by whom, not who would wield the power to control discourses.

Foucault's views on power have had great influence on various

disciplines including, most recently, applied linguistics. The assertions of Atkinson (1999), Fairclough (1989), Gee (1986), and Pennycook (2001) are that it is through discursive approaches that the political implications as well as the power relations embedded in language and culture can be illuminated, and that L2 learners can be truly empowered. Gee (1986) also mentioned that "[d]sicourse practices are always embedded in the particular world view of a particular social group" (p. 742). His implication is that teaching language and culture can be comprehended as teaching dominant discourse of target language. This indicates the need for the critical pedagogy in ELT.

## 2.2. Culture in ELT

### 2.2.1. Crosscultural Perspectives on ELT

Views of culture are very susceptible to causing diverse interpretations in ELT. This ambiguous definition of culture is at the heart of the controversy regarding what must be taught in teaching culture of ELT. (Nemni, 1992; Street, 1993). Nevertheless, an effort has been made to classify cultural aspects of self/others into several categories (Brooks, 1986; Hinkel, 2001; Morain, 1986; Seelye, 1993). In order to more facilitate intercultural and crosscultural understanding in ELT, however, those broad concepts of cultures are commonly distinguished into two cultures: a large C culture for "the great literature, art, and

other contributions of a society" and a small c culture for "the customs and habits of a people" (Brinton, 2001, p. 460).

In addition, crosscultural researchers (Valdes, 1986) have suggested that cultural awareness could be built thorough recognizing cultural differences between native culture (C1) and target culture (C2). Tomalin and Stempleski (1993) define cultural awareness as:

> (1) awareness of one's own culturally-induced behaviour
> (2) awareness of the culturally-induced behaviour of others
> (3) ability to explain one's own cultural standpoint. (p. 5)

Along with cultural awareness of C2, cultural knowledge can function in order to improve communicative (Osterloh, 1986), literate (McKay, 2001), and rhetoric (Kaplan, 1986) abilities. However, Kramsch (1993, 1995) stated that even though L2 learners can reflect both C1 and C2 in self/others' perspective in a sense, intercultural/crosscultural perspectives of teaching culture in ELT have some limitations: (1) they could delimit cultural boundary into specific range; (2) they could essentialize other cultures in a general way; and (3) they could transmit culture as fixed knowledge into L2 learners.

### 2.2.2. Sociocultural Perspectives on ELT

Of Adaskou, Britten, and Fahsi's (1990) four cultural meanings (aesthetic, sociological, semantic, and sociolinguistic), the last one described culture as "[t]he background knowledge, social skills, and paralinguistic skills that, in addition to mastery of the language code, make possible successful communication" (p. 4). This implies that culture can be effectively used to enhance communicative competence (CC) in ELT, the ability that can have "language learners interact with other speakers, to make meaning" (Savignon, 2001, p. 16). Hymes (1974), who coined the term, asserted that it is communication, not just language arrangement that must be comprehended through analyzing the social and cultural interrelations.

Even though Alptekin (2002) asserted that CC has been mostly concerned with small discourse, sociocultural competence (Savignon, 2001) has been considered in the intercultural communication because sociocultural characteristics of communication implies "the roles of the participants, the information they share, and the function of the interaction" (Savignon, 2001, p. 18). Strevens (1987) also argued that misunderstanding of C2 could be barriers, which impeded language learning as well as interpersonal and intercultural communication. Although it is less possible to acquire native-like second cultural acquisition, Lantolf (1999), applying the Vygostkyan view to cultural and

linguistic education, emphasized the importance of cognitive perspective as well as sociocultural perspective in ELT asserting that “the organization of concepts, and hence conceptual thought, varies across cultures” (p. 33).

### 2.2.3. The Application of Culture in ELT

In teaching culture, according to Seelye (1993), L2 learners can develop “interest in who in the target culture did what, where and when, and why” (p. 30) and can more explore target culture. He also suggested three approaches to obtain the above goals in teaching culture: culture assimilators, culture capsules, and culture clusters in which learners can acquire target culture by reading, contrasting, and simulating C2. To fully understand C2, it has been proposed to change the artificial classroom into culturally authentic contexts, along with using authentic materials in ESL/EFL contexts. In here, authentic texts are usually defined as multimedia resources, which include movies (Wood, 1997), newspapers (Blatchford, 1986), websites (Johnson, 2000; Singhal, 1998), and e-mail exchanges (Nutta & Spector-Cohen, 2002). It has been argued, however, whether authentic materials for natives could also be authentic for nonnatives (Kramsch, 1993).

To fully adopt cross/inter/sociocultural approaches in ELT it must be considered how source, target, and international culture are described in EFL

textbooks (Cortazzi & Jin, 2000). On this matter, Cortazzi and Jin (2000) argue that few EFL textbooks are culturally and contextually neutral, and thus identity, ideology, and beliefs of C2 can be embedded in EFL materials, depending on the intention of the author. Therefore, both teachers and students can infer hidden meaning in texts (Brown, 1990; Cortazzi & Jin, 2000). Contents of C2 are generally believed to be valuable in that they can both foster learners' motivation (Guariento & Morley, 2001; McKay, 2002) and help construct cultural background knowledge (Carrell, 1983; Kirsch, 1991; Pritchard, 1990). However, Lee (2002) mentioned that C2 would make students less comprehensible and therefore less motivated when textbook characters, mainly Korean, speak English in the native contexts, Korea. In addition, Prodromou (1988) stated that the misuse of cultural materials could discourage and bewilder learners to be alienated. Therefore, cultural materials must be used, depending on who uses it and where it is used (McKay, 2002).

## 2.3. Teaching Culture Toward Critical Literacy

### 2.3.1. English as an International Language

As inferred from Kachru's inner, outer, and expanding circle considered as a biased view (Pennycook, 1998), the spread of EFL speakers burgeons into new community and demands new standpoints in teaching English as an

international language (McKay, 2002; Modiano, 2001; Pennycook, 1995). Suspicious of positivistic perspectives, which regard English as “natural, neutral, and beneficial” (Pennycook, 1995, p. 37) tools for international communication, it has been asserted that English, not Englishes, has occupied an imperialistic/colonialistic status, reproducing as well as producing inequality in international relations. In addition, it has been questioned whether native-like proficiency in ELT must be the goal to achieve in EFL contexts where English is used for intercultural communication (Alptekin, 2002; Modiano, 2001).

In teaching EIL in which standard perspectives embedded, teachers can instill culture of a particular ideology, such as identity, convention, and values of natives, into EFL learners (Widdowson, 1993b) to an extent that it can “undermine cultural diversity” (Modiano, 2001, p. 340). In addition, Kramsch (1993) asserted that traditional perspectives on culture in ELT were mainly concerned with C2. The implication of EIL, however, is that English would be the medium of communication between nonnatives as well as between native and nonnative (Rajagopalan, 2004). Therefore, it might need a new paradigm toward cultural studies and cultural education in ELT (Atkinson, 1999), in which not only “identity” but also “hybridity, essentialism, power, difference, agency, discourse, resistance, and contestation” must be dealt with (pp. 626-627). In other words, comprehension of source culture must be accompanied in EFL contexts (Kramsch,

1993; Mckay, 2000; Widdowson, 1993b).

### 2.3.2. Culture Revisited

Along with the amendment of the seventh national curriculum in Korea, culture in ELT is more essential for learners to improve intercultural communicative competence (Kim, 2003). However, English textbooks in Korea are designed to promote communication between natives and nonnatives, without suggesting enough evidence to understand international cultures of non-English speaking countries (Ryu, 2002). In addition, as shown in Kim's (2003) study, culture is conceived as declarative knowledge, which can be learned or acquired through teaching linguistic and cultural canons. These transmissional views on teaching English and culture have been historically, socially, and culturally influenced by western mainstream ideologies, which, as a result, would cause EFL teachers in Korea to mythologize English and thus reproduce the traditional pedagogy in ELT in Korea (Sung, 2002). Demystifying the status of English in Korea, Sung (2002) contends that ELT in Korea has been prepossessed with the dominant ideas that English can economically, socially, and culturally benefit students and would make ELT in Korea highly dependent on standardized tests, reading practices, standard English, and native speakers. Influenced by these reductive views on culture in ELT in Korea, standards- and skills-based pedagogy

would preclude EFL students from being critically literate.

It has been argued that pedagogy, practices, theories, and textbooks of conventional ELT in many EFL contexts can never be understood apart from the western colonial discourse (Kubota, 1999, 2001; Pennycook, 1994, 1998, 2001; Phillipson, 1992). In this view, the western teaching styles have become idealized into an analytic, modern, scientific and beneficial model in ELT, whereas that of EFL countries, mainly Asian, has been otherized, peripherized, and essentialized into indirect, traditional, passive, and memorization-centered approaches (Kubota, 1999, 2001; Pennycook, 1994). Revealing the political implications in ELT, Pennycook (1989, 1994) also argued that western methodologies of ELT are adopted as the preferred one in many EFL countries, in which EFL teachers have been indoctrinated with neocolonial perspectives. In these circumstances, language classroom is also assumed to be the social, political, and cultural contexts, in which class struggles, power relations, and knowledge (re)production exist (Pennycook, 2001). Consequently, culture must be transformed into teachers' and students' empowerment rather than that it can never be static in a way positivists expect (Giroux, 1988, 1989). In other words, teaching culture and English can reproduce neocolonial discourse and thus disempower EFL learners, if English cannot be appropriated to fit into local EFL contexts (Kubota, 1999). Therefore, as critical pedagogues (Freire, 1993; Giroux,1989; McLaren, 2003;

Pennycook, 2001) asserted, it is the teacher, as a transformative intellectual, who must analyze the world implied in the words and provide students with the tools to do so as well. As a result, teachers can empower learners to be critically literate and thus form counter-discourses against dominant discourses through discursive approaches.

### 2.3.3. Teaching Culture toward Critical Literacy

Traditional conceptions of literacy, which have been primarily regarded as the ability to read and write, originated from mainstream western culture (Gee, 1986). In addition, Gee (1986) elucidated that this misconception of literacy connoted the politically influenced ideology of oppressors. To put it another way, orality, usually considered as *nonliteracy*, can be accepted as one type of literacy, not the primitive mode, which is a threat to the dominant society (Street, 1984). Ultimately, “the intellectual parameters” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 122), generally known as knowledge, can be transmitted to the ignorant in order to force the illiterate to learn literacy of the dominant society through education. Therefore, in the process of acquiring a new form of literacy, learners would change their identity to fit into mainstream culture (Gee, 1986).

If various types of literacy exist as many social and cultural contexts, then it is essential to analyze what constitutes literacy. To further inquire into this

matter, McLaren (1988) distinguished it from a degree of decoding simple textual symbols to interwinded contextual ideology: (1) functional literacy - the ability to decode “simple texts” (p. 213); (2) cultural literacy - the ability to decode “cultural index or cultural canon of literary works” (p. 213); and (3) critical literacy - the ability to decode “the ideological dimensions of texts, institutions, social practices, and cultural forms such as television and film, in order to reveal their selective interests” (p. 214). He also contended that “the shared prior knowledge” (p. 216) would be provided for students in order to be “culturally literate to the degree that they accept [the] national identity” (p. 217), that is, “cultural canon” (p. 216), which is set by the economically, ideologically, and politically mainstream elite. Therefore, it is only through critical literacy that one can be empowered and literate, and can truly control a dominant discourse, just as Gee (1986, 1993) argued.

## CHAPTER 3. METHOD

### 3.1. Methodology

The aim of this study is to reflect the functions of culture in the Korean EFL contexts and EFL classroom as a cultural place. Furthermore, culture in the EFL classroom can be differently comprehended, depending on the viewpoints of different teachers. For this research, therefore, qualitative approaches are chosen to satisfy its intention. The qualitative approach, an alternative of quantitative approach, is now being considered as new paradigm in that it emphasizes more on researchers' intimate interaction with participants to infer in-depth meaning on social and cultural phenomena rather than statistically analytic data (Creswell, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Patton, 1990; Shank, 2002).

Of the many types of qualitative research methodologies, Watson-Gegeo (1988) stated that ethnography has been a prevailing one in the field of ESL on the grounds that it allows us to "systemically document teaching-learning interactions in rich, contextualized detail" (p. 585) at the scene of teaching. In other words, it is the planned observation which makes it possible to come to a fully understanding of insiders' view of a particular culture. Therefore, I believe that it is ethnographic interview (Spradley, 1980), which focus on "making inferences from what people say" (p. 12), that will be even more proper to listen to teachers' diverse voices and therefore to surely coincide with the intention of this study.

### 3.2. Participants

The participants in this study were nine current graduates selected from a graduate program of English education in South Korea. Not only were eight subjects willing to participate in this research study, but one subject voluntarily joined after observing an interview. They were enrolled in their 1st to 3rd semester of a 4-semester graduate program. All subjects had limited exposure to critical views of language and culture, let alone critical literacy, while some had taken or were taking relevant coursework. In addition, they already had either a B.A. or an M.A. degree in education or foreign language (English, French, or German).

The participants were all Korean females, ranging in age from mid twenties to late forties. All were K-12 English teachers whose experiences ranged from less than one year to 14 years. Four worked at public schools - one from elementary school, two from junior high school, and one from high school. There were three private tutors and two instructors from a language institution. Five participants considered English to be an international language. Four participants believed that English is a tool for further education or profession.

The anonymity and confidentiality of the participants has been respected and guaranteed in this study. Accordingly, pseudonyms are used to document the data collected.

### 3.3. Data Collection

**Interviews**

Commensurate with the methodology on grounded theory (Creswell, 2002; Spradley, 1980), ethnographic interview was conducted as follows. The first interview began with grand tour questions, general questions that elicit participants' raw stories rather than lead them in the direction of the researcher's intention. Then, mini-tour questions, derived from the previous one, were asked to draw on specific description in more detail. Moreover, most interviews were also carried out in an unstructured way so that they could generate participants' internal perspectives. For this research, each participant was interviewed three to four times except for one group interview of Hyunna and Sunyang. The first grand tour questions took about six to 15 minutes for each participant. The rest of interview took 20 to 50 minutes, depending on the participants or the group. In addition, I tried to have informal talks with the participants, having lunch and dinner with them or driving them home after classes and interviews. The interviews formally audio-recorded totaled 328 minutes and 25 seconds.

Interviews were carried out at the classroom of the University, with the exception of visiting Eunmi's classroom four times. Even though the interviews were temporarily suspended by unexpected interruptions of phone calls and visits, participants would not care about them in most cases. I also especially endeavored

to be more relaxed in interviews with Eunmi, an expectant mother. However, the rest of them enthusiastically participated in all the interviews despite their heavy workload and studies. Under their permission, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for the purpose of data analysis.

**Questionnaire**

In order to know their personal characteristics, an open-ended questionnaire was distributed to them before the second interview was conducted. From data collected thorough the questionnaire, the participants provided rich data regarding their educational and occupational background, and educational perspectives. In addition, those data were also used as a source of further interviews.

**Triangulation**

To enhance validity of data, I attempted to follow the triangulation of Patton (1990), a method that would "[check] out the consistency of different data sources within the same method" (p. 464). This research originally started with six participants, including two who had some understanding of critical issues in ELT. However, while conducting, transcribing, and analyzing the second interviews of the first six participants, I soon discovered the need for more voices with different

perspectives. I then interviewed three new participants for more accurate findings. Furthermore, questionnaires provided an opportunity to look into their background and perspectives on ELT.

**Member Checking**

After analyzing the data collected, transcribed data had been more validated through a process of member checking (Creswell, 2002). Because the interviews with the nine participants were conducted in Korean, every word and sentence had to be translated into English. Not to distort the original meaning of what the participants intended to say, both the originally transcribed Korean version and the translated English documents were presented to each participant. After some negotiating, the transcripts were revised to be more accurate to their intention. Also, in the process of member checking, one participant denied what she mentioned during interviews in order to defend herself and her dignity. In the end, I decided to expurgate the data collected from her in the results.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

Analysis of the data collected in this study followed the procedure of Creswell's (2002) coding, a process which is to "make sense out of text data, divide it into text or image segments, label the segments, examine codes for

overlap and redundancy, and collapse these codes into themes" (p. 266). Thus, I repeatedly read through the transcription of data both during and after transcribing data from recorded resources. Through the analysis of line-by-line reading, similar patterns were grouped into categories, which had relevant to the research questions. In the end, these categories were coded in order to make meanings of this research.

### 3.5. Limitations

This study attempts to represent the perspectives of a particular group, EFL teachers in Korea, in detail. Nevertheless, some limitations were shown in the processes of data collection and data analysis. First, needed are more data sources from more teachers of different gender or nationality in that this study was mainly conducted through listening to the voices of nine Korean female teachers. Second, the interviews with students can make this study more valid and reliable, considering that the teacher-student interaction is an essential factor in the classroom. Finally, observation of their classroom will enhance data sources to be more accurate in that observation can show how teachers' perspectives affect their students or whether their intention is properly transmitted to those they are teaching.

# CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

## 4.1. Culture Reflected on Teachers' Eyes

### 4.1.1. Eyes Wide Shut

Generally dichotomized into two categories such as the large C culture and the small c culture (Brinton, 2001), culture can include everything that people do, make, and use. In other words, culture is widely spread out in the sequential and temporal dimensions. However, in this study, the teachers' eyes remain shut in the sense that they cannot see culture with macroscopical views. As illustrated below, most of the participants in this study did not completely understand culture, which, as a result, caused them to be embarrassed and confused.

> Basically people, um . . . what is culture? It's difficult to understand. What does culture mean? Their culture? Isn't that the disposition? Their disposition, linguistic habits, or customs? Or it might be what they hate or like. It could be etiquette. (Mihee, October 20, 2004)

Mihee, for example, believed that the culture to be dealt with in ELT could be the small c culture, "daily customs and ways of life, and mainstream ways of thinking and behaving" (Alptekin, 2002, p. 59). In addition, the response below indicates that teaching culture in Korean ELT conforms to the aims of traditional ELT pedagogy, which is to teach attitude, holidays, and gestures of

English speaking countries.

> I would explain when it is, what it is, and what children do on Halloween. I don't think I use [culture] much. Whenever a popular holiday such as Halloween or Thanksgiving comes, I would explain them. Things that must be known. These are culture. (Hosun, October 11, 2004)

The problem in Hosun's case is that culture is viewed with narrow standpoints so that she does not recognize that what she was teaching could be culture except for holidays of target culture. In other words, she essentialized target culture into a category that only she recognized. The following transcripts of Oksoon also show that cultural contents in textbooks were hardly recognized and valued in ELT of Korea. Inferred from Oksoon's response below, the indifference of culture in ELT might result from her perceptions that considered culture as declarative knowledge to learn mainly through reading practices.

> I am so busy keeping up with the syllabus, but culture must also be fit for the unit. Up until now, I can't find much of a difference in cultural areas, except for one unit. However, I would like to use culture, if given the opportunity. (Oksoon, September 21, 2004)

Two weeks later in her second interview, however, Oksoon's perceptual changes

on culture were perceived. She said:

> There are enough [cultural things] in the textbook if you look for them. They are dealt with in every unit. But I don't use it. It is too much for me. Anyway, it is included [in every unit]. The textbook itself seems to handle cultural things. It does not separate culture… If you see books, you can recognize two parts. There is a grammar part and a conversation part. And the third one is reading. Every reading part includes culture. (Oksoon, October 4, 2004)

Contrary to the first interview, Oksoon recognized in her second interview that textbooks used in her classroom could be very contextual and cultural. However, as illustrated in her response in which she believed that culture could be found in reading materials, Oksoon, in addition to the other teachers in this study, were essentializing culture by accepting it uncritically. This is also shown in Mihee's interview.

> I didn't recognize that it was culture what I used it in the classroom. I didn't even know that it was cultural media what I used it in the classroom. Interviewing with you, however, I realize it was culture that I have been teaching. Even though language must be the first thing to teach, I also realize that I could teach culture incorrectly. (Mihee, November 3, 2004)

Brown (1990) argued that any textbook used in an ESL/EFL classroom can never be decontextualized and deculturalized. In other words, it cannot be expected to find “value-free” (p. 13) teaching materials. However, narrow notions on culture might result in that the teachers would lack further reflection on culture. Also, their incomplete understanding would preclude culture in ELT from being situated.

### 4.1.2. One-Dimensional Culture

Reflected from positivistic and/or reductionistic perspectives, the pedagogical approach to culture may often be one-dimensional. In this circumstance, textbooks and tests have been used as dominant tools to develop students’ linguistic competence in ELT in Korea. To put it another way, especially in Korea, textbooks have been used and taught in the classroom in order to fulfill the national standards. Therefore, as shown in the following excerpts, culture in ELT in Korea could play a crucial role as background knowledge to comprehend unknown and foreign contexts.

> Students don’t understand if they just interpret word by word. They have to know the background, which may explain why they act like that. (Sunyang, September 22, 2004)

> While watching a video, they sometimes don’t understand humor.

> They don't understand why people are laughing when the word "fat" is used. In that case, I explained to them that "fat" can be used to insult someone. So when people call a woman "fat" [in *Friends*], it could be funny. I would show them these links. (Mihee, November 3, 2004)

To understand target culture, as shown above, cultural backgrounds occupied valuable ground in the foreign language classroom. Therefore, here, culture is clearly defined as idioms, which were believed to enhance linguistic proficiency. In other words, the teachers with reductive perspectives believed that cultural background must be accumulated to improve reading skills.

Accordingly, absence or lack of background knowledge can impede EFL learners to understand texts and contexts and thus a dearth of schema would hinder them from being successful in English tests.

> They must know culture. It means that the Korean SAT does not test English itself. They must have schema. They have to solve 50 questions in 70 minutes. Seventeen are listening questions and the rest are reading questions. They must read fast in 70 minutes. Students with schema easily answer the questions as opposed to the students with strong English [grammatical] knowledge or English reading skills. Topics of these questions are related to environmental issues, political issues and so on. So it is difficult to take the Korean SAT without knowing culture. (Soonae, September 22, 2004)

As implied on Soonae's response, one of the aims of K-12 schools in Korea is to help students have good grades on the English test of the Korean SAT. Therefore, the application of culture in ELT can hardly be considered apart from testing. In other words, culture that should be dealt with in ELT has to be significantly related with the contents of tests. Even elementary school students, who are believed to be less influenced by the testing system, cannot avoid the influence of test-centered education in Korea, which is clearly revealed below.

> Using "World Kids," I show them [cultural] differences. That is all. I teach them English right after that, and I just want them to build a cultural background. I think that it is not right to do other things, and highlighting them. Because [ELT] is teaching language, not culture, there must be tools to teach language or there must be a background behind language, I think. (Hyunna, October 6, 2004)

Here, it is indicated that culture was regarded as peripheral to ELT. Hyunna also considered culture as schema that can expedite to understand contexts of target culture. Also, the teacher did not provide students any chance to critically reflect on culture, but did focus on crosscultural comparison. Because the teachers did not see that culture and language are inseparable, it is hard to expect them to apply culture in more diverse ways.

### 4.1.3. Schrödinger's Cat

Culture in the Korean EFL classroom could be metaphorically described as the cat in Schrödinger's box. As nobody can recognize whether the cat is dead or alive before it opens up, culture in ELT can never be essentialized in an unchallengeable way that can hinder students from viewing culture with different perspectives. However, in this study, invisible fantasies are expanding, exaggerating, and sometimes distorting to an extent that its uncertainty is essentialized into an unchallengeable truth.

> When teaching kids, especially young ones, I used to exaggerate while teaching English. When I would say something, I would pronounce loudly and also act in that way. In the case of culture, I would say things like, "Wow, they do that!" Even if I try not to, some parts are exaggerated. (Sunyang, October 6, 2004)

In the same way that the cat is confined in the box, the teachers and students in this study were locked in the language classroom. In here, they could not know what is going on out there. Nevertheless, as Sunyang indicated, the teachers used to exaggerate one phenomenon to make a deep impression, not knowing that they were stereotyping the world.

> I have used the Internet to search [Halloween]. I showed it to kids in the lab. I told them to do a search for "Halloween." Then I

> make them read through what they found. I told them that it is different [culture]. (Eunmi, October 7, 2004)

Eunmi's description of her classroom shows the possibility that students' fantasy on foreign culture can be established into the reality through the teacher's eyes, without providing any chance to recognize the diverse possibilities in decoding culture. Therefore, as indicated in Eunmi's practice, culture was transmitted in order to develop students' functional and cultural literacy through the traditional top-down approaches. In other words, any attempts to situate culture in Korean contexts could not be made in teaching culture.

Nevertheless, some teachers in this study noticed that media could be problematic when applying it in teaching culture.

> When understanding culture, it is best to view visual [materials], like photos, emoticons on the Internet, and so on. They seem to be the fastest way to know culture. But it took so long to understand. We can see the appearance well enough. What they wear, what their holiday is like, what they eat. I can see their parents or family. That is certainly appearance, though. (Hyunna, October 6, 2004)

Hyunna would know the danger of overgeneralizing a whole society from watching just an infinitesimal part of a gigantic society. The problem in Hyunna's

case, however, is that target culture was essentialized and then transmitted to students without any inquiry of the target culture, even though she recognized that it could reflect false images to some extent.

### 4.2. Culture in Practice

#### 4.2.1. Me, Myself, and ELT

It has been argued that teaching culture in ELT must be appropriated in order to truly empower learners and their source culture (Kubota, 2001). Appropriation here means that the target language and the discourse that surrounds it are investigated and contextually acquired by the learners. Therefore, culture in EFL classrooms has to be dealt with in different ways than culture of ESL classrooms. Along with understanding target culture, L2 learners can fully appreciate their source culture and thus establish their own identity while learning culture.

> Through learning foreign language and culture, we can have the opportunity to think over that I am different from them and what is different. In the homogeneous society, we don't recognize the importance of it, because we don't have any chance to think it over. But when we contact with other [cultures], it does mean nothing without me. That is why I try to find mine. (Hyunna, September 22, 2004)

As indicated above, Hyunna recognized that teaching culture could provide an opportunity to reflect L2 learners and their identities in the world. However, her practices would not be called into question that learners' identities could have been socially and culturally constructed through ELT.

> Nowadays, when children are asked what their English name is, they say, "Alice" or something with no resistance at all. They don't refuse to be called that. I'm worried about it in a way. You might say that it is just a name . . . Not having an English name, they would speak irresolutely and be ashamed of themselves. (Sunyang, October 6, 2004)

Let alone young children in the Korean EFL classroom, even some teachers, native or nonnative, would force them to follow western norms. Moreover, it is clearly indicated that L2 learners have been accustomed to western culture through practices to an extent where it might threaten their identities. This indirect experience, being pseudo-English native speakers, is likely to provide L2 learners with an opportunity to experience empowerment, as clearly indicated Sunyang's response. This could be strong evidence that Korean ELT still depends on the mythological power of English. Unfortunately, the upcoming section shows that many teachers in this study unconsciously could transmit westernized values to their students in order to acquire without critical questioning.

### 4.2.2. Bokanovsky's Process

In the *Brave New World* of Huxley (1998), human beings are genetically mass produced through the Bokanovsky's process. In other words, both men and women experience the standardization process in order to be produced as physically and mentally equal identities. Here, they do not have to question the society to which they belong. In a similar way, EFL learners seemed to be trained to become identical native speakers in the language laboratory.

> It does not dominate students' conception, I mean, teaching four hours a week. There are a lot of things out there, and other cultural backgrounds. That's why, it can't be said that it's our responsibility. Well, we'll be responsible in a sense even if students head in a wrong direction . . . It might be possible in theory, but not in reality at all. Culture shock [or] euphoria will never happen in Korea. (Oksoon, October, 4, 2004)

Viewing from very narrow perspectives, it might be possible that Korean EFL students would not experience four steps of culture acquisition (Brown, 2000) at all in that they do not spend much time in studying English at school. However, below, Soonae explains how students have been experienced and also have been forced to become bicultural.

> It can be possible because children, from a very young age, study

> [English] step-by-step, using storybooks. However, I don't think language can change their thought. There might be some other factors that can change their thought. Their exposure [to society] would have great influence. Anyway, while they are learning English, it might be inevitable to convert their thought through English, which can make it much easier to learn English, I believe. (Soonae, October 6, 2004)

As shown above, to further their English proficiency, students are forced to imitate native speakers' ways of thinking. This also happens in a systematic way, from their infancy through their childhood till their adulthood, as is shown below. This notion is strongly related with teachers' neocolonial perspectives on ELT in which students should appropriate target culture and discourse of ESL countries. However, any attempt to create different meanings to fit into Korean contexts has never been made.

> If they read storybooks or English books in the classroom, they can expose the patterns of a sentence. Contrary to our old ways, they say a sentence right away . . . I think, therefore, that the younger, the better. (Hosun, October 4, 2004)

It is Hosun's target students that are of concern. Her students were privately tutored for several years before they were K-6 students. It means that they are even more exposed linguistically and culturally, compared to the ordinary

students of Taejoo and Eunmi. Considering their parents' social and cultural backgrounds, it can be shown that cultural capital as well as cultural exposure could have great influence on English acquisition in Korea. Due to this inequal distribution of opportunity, teachers could competitively teach culture in ELT in a more traditional way to have their students become bicultural.

> Take the example of "I am sorry." We Koreans would not use it. But I used to tell them that there are very common expressions to know when meeting foreigners, including "Thank you," "I am sorry," and "You're welcome." You must be able to speak these expressions at the moment you meet foreigners. That can be culture. (Taejoo, September 22, 2004)

> [Teaching culture] can't be useful in learning words or sentences. But students can learn etiquette through teaching culture. They can also be accustomed to the manner. That is why [teaching culture] can be helpful to enhance their morality, can't it? (Eunmi, September 23, 2004)

Not only did Taejoo and Eunmi want their students to be habituated in a foreign situation, they would compel the behavior of their students to be tailored to unnaturally constructed contexts, believing that values and thoughts of ESL countries can be more appropriate in ELT than that of Korea. In other words, teachers worry about the deeper implications of culture even if they don't fully

understand the cultural implications and are not equipped to deal with them pedagogically.

### 4.2.3. Mechanical Animals

One of the biggest concerns in ELT in Korea would be whether students can survive in testing. This would cause English teaching and learning to depend more on mechanical ways and therefore cause students to become animals that can receive knowledge mechanically. Oksoon's response below provides clear evidence of this.

> Students study for tests. They do not study for what they want or what they like. Therefore, they really like when I emphasize something that can come out in tests. (Oksoon, October 4, 2004)

> If I ask them, "What do you see?", then they would answer "I see." Kids memorize things. In this case, it must be answered like this. Therefore, they speak it right away. In other words, if I ask "What do you like?", then they would not say "banana" but say "I like a banana." It's possible because they listen and listen and listen a lot. In the same way, they can speak right away even an article such as "a," "an," "the." (Hosun, October 4, 2004)

Not to mention of junior high/high school, elementary school English, less test-centered, also sticks to the traditional methodology. This shows that ELT

in Korea can never be separated from the testing system. However, there might be another factor that can cause ELT in Korea to be more conventional. Inferred from the response of Hosun, it may also come from the notion that identifies English acquisition with linguistic skill acquisition. Here, as indicated in Hosun's practices, rote memory can be used as the best way to enhance mechanical skills.

Soonae's consecutive responses below reveal in detail that the Korean educational system can be culpable for uncritically viewing culture in ELT.

> Frankly speaking, I can't afford to use mass media for cultural education. That is why I try to access the mass media. I read newspapers or books to transmit to students. As I told earlier, I am just an agent. As an agent, I try to obtain and then transmit as much information as possible, even though I don't give them all I have obtained. (Soonae, September 22, 2004)

> However, those things are just a preparation for the essay test, not a sound critique. Students don't have to suggest their [creative] opinion. There are some rules to answer those questions. They are even taught what must be written in their essay in their writing classroom. (Soonae, September 22, 2004)

Under the control of schooling, students are deprived of the chance to learn how to think critically as soon as it is provided. Therefore, it cannot be expected for them to develop meaningfully critical literacy. As shown Soonae's second

response, they are domesticated to think appropriately inside the dominant system, to the extent that they could not problematize the system.

> If I say, “study hard,” smart students understand what I am saying. However, others may understand if I hit them. But I can’t do that. When teachers hit them, the average scores of English increase by 20 points. So they say that they hate English. But the scores improve. In my case, I know that it might take long time, but I wait for them till they are interested in English. I don’t want them to hate English because they hate teachers. (Oksoon, October 4, 2004)

The culture produced inside of the classroom has replicated the same structure as the society produced outside of the classroom. As explicitly shown in Oksoon’s description of her school, it can be inferred that students in Korean EFL classrooms are treated as “animals” (Freire, 1993, p. 106) that are fed by teachers. In this context, as Freire (1993) depicted, “[t]he more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are” (p. 53).

### 4.3. ELT Mythologizes Culture

#### 4.3.1. The Fake Genuine/The Genuine Fake

It has been argued that real English for native speakers is less likely to be real for nonnative speakers (Widdowson, 1998). In the same sense, cultural

materials that are authentic for ESL contexts may not be authentic for EFL contexts. In EIL contexts, therefore, it is oxymoronic to depend on authentic English and authentic materials.

> I try to use authentic materials. I think that English storybooks edited in Korea are different from those in English. That's why I try to provide them with as many American storybooks as possible. Even if the students are not that young, I would show them storybooks. I show them how some situations are depicted in pictures. Through the illustrations, we might know how they think. (Sunyang, September 22, 2004)

The problem here is that Sunyang regards English and the culture of the U.S. as authentic, not only because materials are written in English and manufactured in ESL countries, but also because these are used in ESL contexts. In other words, the teacher has a narrow and biased view of authenticity, believing that authentic materials could provide students with clues to understand customs, viewpoints, and values of the U.S. In addition, the teachers' obsession with American culture, without any critical notions on English and culture of the U.S., would even effect students' false conception on standard English that must be followed. This is clearly illustrated in Mihee's interview.

> Most of all, students are surprised at how fast native speakers

> speak. They feel like that they have to try to adapt to speed [of native speakers], listening to audiotapes if that is the speed of native speakers. (Mihee, October 25, 2004)

Here, one of Mihee' intentions to use *Friends* in her classroom is to show how native speakers live. Under the advantageous premise of authentic materials, however, students as well as the teacher could develop a "utopian view" (Alptekin, 2002, p. 59) of native speakers and standard English. In addition, as Mihee's classroom illustrates, students strive to adapt to English and culture of native speakers as norms. The problem is that they may neither question implications of teaching materials nor reflect over them critically, as is shown below.

> You can find everything in the English web site. Almost. There are English websites for kids. There are two bookstores that import English books. If you visit their web pages, they list some related [to culture]. You can find information of Thanksgiving. In the case of "The Three Billy Goats Gruff," for example, we sometimes don't know what that means, even if we can translate it into Korean. It has other meanings . . . These web sites provide information on how Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Halloween are originated. There are lots of web sites. Taking those things from various web sites, you know the contents are very similar. (Hosun, October 11, 2004)

This indicates that some teachers may not investigate the meaningfulness

of materials before they are distributing teaching materials in the classroom. On the contrary, as inferred from Hosun's response, teachers often edit web materials, following the process of select, copy, and paste. These are directly transmitted to students in order to enhance their reading comprehension. Here, many teachers did not question that political implications can be embedded in teaching materials. This infers that many teachers would not practice critical reflection on main/sub textbooks, to say nothing of their activities in ELT. This also indicates that the aim of Korean ELT is still to develop students' linguistic skills.

### 4.3.2. English, Linguistic Pheromones

It is pheromones that are released to transmit a message for the intra-species communication. These might be the main means, by which ants can communicate to locate, attract, or alarm other ants. Along with its mythologization, English, as dominant discourse, is considered an international language that enables intercultural communication.

> I explained in my first class that English is not only an American language but also a world language. So when I give them examples, I might talk of New Zealand kids, not only American . . . I would tell them the countries that I know of, such as England, the U.S., Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. (Taejoo, September 22, 2004)

As indicated above, most of the teachers regard English as an international language, which can enhance intercultural communication between nonnatives and nonnatives as well as nonnatives and natives. In Taejoo's interview, however, the teachers' views on "international" are actually very narrow in their practices. They would limit the boundary of international community only to the western society in which English is used as a first or second language. To some degree, the teachers understood EIL, but the problem is that they did not notice the possibilities that English can become Englishes.

Instead, English is generally considered to belong to BANA (British, Australia, and North America) countries.

> Frankly speaking, Indians have no power. Who cares that they speak English? I think that English is power, not just language. I try to concentrate mostly on [America], and British or Australia if I have to add more. I don't believe that poor countries are dealt with. Even if Chinese culture uses English, their culture doesn't have to be dealt with. (Oksoon, October 4, 2004)

Oksoon believed that ELT must be conducted along the way of power relations. In her perspective, it is implied that one can be empowered through learning a dominant discourse. However, the problem is that her biased views can strongly effect the pedagogical application of culture. Depending on the power dominancy

English and the culture of the U.S. are considered the standard that must be followed in ELT.

In addition, the teachers' notions on the norms of English also undermine the diversity of Englishes and culture.

> **Sunyang**: In limited time, they have to learn English. It can be all right, if they like to study [world culture]. But I don't believe that it has to be included in the curriculum. Language is power. So if someone is involved in the Philippines then they can have the chance to learn Philippine English on the basis of the English they learned.
>
> **Hyunna**: As long as you are learning [language] with great effort in a defined period, I would recommend avoiding learning that of a less powerful country. (Sunyang and Hyunna, October 6, 2004)

While Sunyang and Hyunna recognized that the power embedded in English and ELT can control EFL learners' identity in 4.2.1., the irony is that they also emphasize teaching English and the culture of dominant ESL countries. They also believe that it must be an economically efficient way in that learning their discourse can empower students in a short time. This would cause cultural application in ELT to stick to the culture of powerful ESL countries. It means that they are, to some extent, complicitous in sustaining reductive and neocolonial

views on ELT in Korea. Even though the teachers are concerned over students' empowerment, empowerment through critical pedagogy seems to be difficult, due to the teachers' misunderstanding of EIL and power relations.

### 4.3.3. Zero-Sum Game

English in Korea is closely interwined with society, culture, and education, constructing myths that enable students to prepare for their future (Sung, 2002). Therefore, it can be said that ELT is in the middle of a zero-sum game. Participants can win in this game only when they acquire native-like English proficiency. Instead, however, a negative-sum game might be more appropriate in that L2 learners accept more risks in the Korean educational system in order to acquire language acquisition. To win the game, students need to know and thus follow the norms of dominant English.

> I don't think it's an appropriate expression. According to an old proverb, you must know your enemy and know yourself to win 100 times out of 100 battles. I would tell students that they must know English and the United States. And it can give them a chance to improve their position. And they agree. (Soonae, September 22, 2004)

Soonae metaphorically described the power of English in social, cultural, and

international relations. As indicated in her response, English is considered as a tool to raise the social status of students. In other words, without English acquisition, they could neither succeed in Korean society or in international competition. This also shows the possibility that ideology and hegemony of the U.S. can be transmitted to form neocolonial discourse in Korea.

Hyunna tells her experience at the graduate program, which shows how one's capacity can be depreciated, due to the inability to speak English.

> In here, this classroom, we are divided into two groups, foreigners over there, Korean here. Although I read through the texts and understood what it says, I can't speak English fluently as they do. It makes me diffident . . . I feel inferior because I can't speak all that I read and understand. (Hyunna, October 6, 2004)

Hyunna's response indicates that nonnative English speakers can stand in more equal status with native speakers, if they can make their voice in English heard. It clearly indicates how participating discourse of English can benefit students. In other words, the inability to speak English can deprive students of more chances to show their ability. Therefore, English in Korea is still considered as a "gatekeeper to positions of prestige in society" (Pennycook, 1995, p. 40).

> When people are weak, they depend on the strong. They long for

> that English. I don't want all of them to study English hard, but some of them might need English. English gives them more choices when they have to decide their future. I would tell them of those relationships. I don't talk of history or politics but I would tell them of the power game. I would say, " If we, by ourselves, are rich, powerful enough to make Korea aware to the world, then we don't have to study English, do we?" (Eunmi, October 7, 2004)

> It is the competitiveness that is the most important reason [to learn English]. To survive. Economics and politics are going on by economic power. So, in order to have economic power, we must . . . In a word, we have to learn [English] in order to make money. That's what we are. Anyway, [English] is necessary in our life, whether that is right or not. (Mihee, October 27, 2004)

The problem here is that the power of English is inflated to an extent that English acquisition must be the only way to empower students. During interviews, however, some of the participants perceived the gravity of linguistic imperialism that is rooted in English. Nevertheless, the teachers' responses show that imperialistic delusion remains buried deep within their consciousness in that they would desire their students to exploit the power of English in order to occupy high position within society. If English provides students with ample opportunities, then how can teachers practice teaching culture in ELT in order to empower individual students in Korean EFL contexts?

# CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

## 5.1. Culture with a Critical View

In this study, the teachers did not fully understand how language, culture and power are strongly interrelated. This caused them to depend more on target culture in ELT and to perpetuate neocolonial views on teaching culture in ELT. In other words, the teachers assumed that teaching culture could never be conducted apart from the comprehension of target culture, mainly that of the U.S. In the process of teaching culture, target culture has been essentialized into static, unchallengeable, and canonical knowledge, while the teachers otherized source culture and international culture. The irony here is that the teachers unfortunately were less concerned with source culture, even though they taught English as an international language. As a result, target, source, and international cultures were unequally transmitted in order of its power and priority, which seemed to instigate the neocolonial reconstruction of English. In this context, it is likely to neglect to provide learners with strong evidence to extricate the triangulation of source, target, and international cultures that lies beneath power relations.

As clearly revealed in the teachers' interviews, they did not problematize the political implications in culture itself and even in teaching culture. Instead, believing that conventions of target culture had to be included in teaching culture, the teachers just explained origins, traditions, and customs in the same way that

textbooks, teachers' guidebooks, or web materials would describe. However, Zinn (1990) argued that the power holders could reconstruct knowledge into more static, unchallengeable one. In other words, the ideology of the dominant is transformed into knowledge and truth, which is embedded as truth inside textbooks.

However, less suspicious of the possibility that textbooks can be exploited for the political purposes, the teachers in this study applied culture in ELT for a one-dimensional purpose. It means that culture, as declarative knowledge, was applied to mainly enhance linguistic ability. Mostly influenced by linguistic functionalism, the teachers believed that the students could not comprehend foreign contexts and target culture due to the lack of cultural and linguistic knowledge. In this view, culture is defined as vocabulary, idioms, or expressions. Through teaching and learning culture, the teachers strongly believed that students could build up background knowledge and that learners could develop their literate skills, in other words, the noncritical literacy which can make it possible to read and write texts through "autonomous, asocial, and decontextualized cognitive processes" (Pennycook, 2001, p. 76).

Especially in using authentic materials, generally considered as mirrors of target culture, the teachers with functional and cultural literacy could never think that the materials from target culture may or may not be authentic in the EFL contexts. Because functionalists view culture as a scientific axiom that can be

transmitted to students in order to support their linguistic skills, the teachers could not problematize target culture intermingled with power and thus blurred in the texts, but establish, reproduce, and circulate the distribution of cultural knowledge as a canon.

Culture can never be understood apart from contexts as well as texts, contrary to their naive conceptions on relationship between culture and language. Therefore, some teachers' belief that culture could be found on reading materials should be superseded by the notion that teaching materials can never be decontextualized or deculturalized. I believe that this is the first step to lead teachers to view culture with critical perspectives. Furthermore, learners can unearth the original intention, based on generally known cultural knowledge. Consequently, to develop critical literacy in teaching culture, teachers must decode how target culture is contextualized in source culture, not to mention of decoding texts itself.

### 5.2. Culture for International Communication

Campbell (1988) asserted that "[w]hen a person becomes a model for other people's lives, he has moved into the sphere of being mythologized" (p. 15). In this study, the teachers' narrow views on culture caused them to mythologize English and culture of the U.S. into the norms that must be followed in ELT. In

the process of mythologizing and standardizing target language and target culture, they were unintentionally victimizing themselves and their students, and acting out symbolic violence, which resulted in depending on neocolonial discourses. To put it another way, the teachers unconsciously dislodged themselves from the mainstream society and finally otherized both teachers and learners into the minority. The more serious issue here is that their naive behavior would strongly effect students' consciousness.

Reflecting over the previous sections, it can be recognized that some teachers in the study preferred to transform their classroom into the virtual contexts of target culture, in which both teachers and students would pretend to be in the ESL countries. To enhance its virtual reality, the students would sometimes be forced to directly or indirectly experience target culture, following the ways of creating pseudo-ego, simulating target culture situation, and imitating behavior of English native speakers. In other words, the teachers would cultivate students to act, think, and use English in their EFL classroom in the same way that English native speakers do. This also means that students are being inculcated into foreign ideology and culture without situating or problematizing.

Nevertheless, some teachers, in the interviews, argued that they were less responsible for the reconstruction of students' sociocultural identities, blaming cultural hegemony prevailing in Korean society. Due to the fantasy manufactured

by media, for example, people can be confused of their identity and finally manipulated to do it or not to do it just as its false visuality would shed lights on their heads. As they confessed in the interviews, however, the teachers are also culpable and complicitous in that most teachers would prefer their students to assume native-like identity in order to enhance only linguistic development than help their students fully understand the culture-language relationship behind the power in order to appropriate the language of dominant discourse for empowerment. This would also call into question why the teachers would participate in this victimizing pedagogy and, in effect, committing symbolic violence. Why is it the culture of ESL countries that would attract even more attention?

As asserted by Pennycook (1994, 1995), English and the culture of the U.S. are believed to play the crucial role of gatekeepers in gaining social and economic power in Korea. Supporting its seemingly invincible status, the teachers with positivistic perspectives believed that the high reliance on English and the culture of the U.S. could provide students with even more opportunity to make their voice heard. In other words, without depending on discourses of the U.S., students may not be expected to improve their occupation, education, and business in local communities, let alone in an international situation. As indicated in the data, the English and the culture of the U.S. have been taught on the

premise of the following: its efficiency compared to that of the powerless; its supremacy in the power relations of the international politics; and its competitive advantage for social and economic advancement. This must be the main reason why the teachers could not discard their strict adherence to English and culture of the U.S. in ELT, even though they recognized the imperialistic characteristics of English to some extent.

Consequently, it is inconvincible that the teachers would warn their students to realize the power relations that English would foment while implicitly forcing them to participate in the neocolonial discourse of native speakers. In this context, teachers can neither problematize conventions of target culture and conventional pedagogy that the Korean educational system instigate, nor recognize their teaching and even their classrooms are interwoven with culture. Instead, their uncritical receptions of cultural and educational traditions can result in producing and reproducing neocolonial status of English, target culture, and ELT, while otherizing source culture as an inferior one.

To stop categorizing both teachers and students into victims or others in EFL/EIL contexts, the concerns of culture in the EFL classroom must concentrate more on whether students can perceive what culture implicates or how culture is transformed in a specific context rather than on whether they must be monocultural or bicultural. This will also cease the controversy on standard

English, target culture, authenticity of teaching materials, and enable teachers and students to view culture with critical literacy and reflect their subjectivity, which is under the discursive influence of language, culture, and power.

### 5.3. Teachers as Transformative Intellectuals

Of the teachers in this study, the widespread myth on English was that English, usually that of the U.S., is considered the panacea for the social, economic, and political barriers students will meet sooner or later. In addition, it is remarkable that this notion has greatly been influenced by and also has great influence on the educational system of English in Korea. In other words, both teachers and students are trained to conform to the educational practices that have been dictated by the dominant system. As clearly inferred from the teachers' target students and their occupational backgrounds, some students also have systemically learned English through preschool or extracurricular education in order to fit into the national standards. In this context, how can there not be a wide difference of English proficiency between one who has played with English together with their private tutor since they were young, and one who has played alone, waiting for one's working-class parents? English itself can never be the springboard to overcome the barriers that students will face. Instead, it would make the disenfrenchized more marginalized than provide all students with equal

opportunity to empower themselves.

To fulfill national standards, students can survive in the system of testing. In other words, under current pedagogies, a student cannot resist the dominant ideology and culture that the traditional system would instigate but willingly accept the big lies that the dominant system would foment in order to become a good student (Macedo, 2000). The teachers in this study, influenced by functionalists/reductionists perspectives, were mostly concerned with the tests, which unfortunately could play a crucial role in precluding the dominant education system from being resisted. To put it another way, the aim of transmission education is to teach culture in order to facilitate students' linguistic development and thus make them more competitive in testing. Accordingly, language, culture, and teaching can never be problematized, questioned, or critically reflected, but, instead, can be repeatedly reproduced and circulated to perpetuate the dominant ideology of the educational system in Korea. Through the process of standardization, students are dehumanized into mechanical animals who can passively receive cultural canons and also be habituated to target culture. The problem is that the teachers both knowingly and unknowingly participate in the reproduction of the system. Moreover, under the sweet illusion of linguistic development, even very young students would be culturally hegemonized in order to remain competitive in their own society.

Consequently, the teachers could hardly recognize that their classroom can be a cultural, social, and political place. Instead, most teachers would disempower students, to an extent muting their voices and committing symbolic violence as asserted previously. To provide students with an opportunity to view culture through critical eyes, teachers must reflect on themselves as cultural agents in their classroom. Also, to stop reproducing and circulating the transmissional, victimizing, and neocolonial education, teachers must realize that teaching can also be political action, that their visions of society can be included in their applications of culture, and that they can reproduce culture and system under control of the dominant system. Therefore, teachers must change themselves, which can result in changing their classrooms. This may empower both teachers and students without losing their subjectivity. In this regard, teachers must be the transformative intellectuals, who can show students the way to decode political intention embedded in language, culture, and knowledge.

## CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the applications of culture in EFL classrooms through ethnographic interviews of eight Korean K-12 English teachers. Notwithstanding their different educational backgrounds, pedagogical perspectives, and target students, most participants believed that it was the small c culture that must be taught in ELT. Therefore, their great concerns over culture in ELT were mainly engaged with holidays, customs, and views of native speakers. Without exploring its deeper meanings, however, the target culture was essentialized through the teachers' viewpoints to an extent that specific facts were considered as general phenomena to represent the whole society. This might result from the incomplete understanding of culture.

Also, mainly influenced by functionalists/reductionists perspectives, the teachers applied culture in their ELT in order to develop students' linguistic and literate skills. In other words, culture in ELT was identified with background knowledge, which was believed to further the development of students' functional and cultural literacy. To satisfy the national standards, the teachers in this study would rather transmit culture as static and unchallengeable canon than critically reflect its political implication.

Along with the teachers' incomplete understanding of culture, linguistic applications of culture would cause the teachers to more depend on English and

culture of the U.S. Accordingly, English and the culture of the U.S., as a gatekeeper, was believed to guarantee the heightening of their social, economic, cultural, and political positions. In addition, believing that students could be empowered through following dominant and powerful discourse of the U.S., the teachers in this study reproduced and circulated the neocolonial and positivistic educational system in Korea.

Consequently, for all that teaching culture in EFL/EIL contexts must be comprehended differently from that of ESL contexts, English education in Korea has aimed to follow the traditional norms of western culture, conventions, and pedagogy. Therefore, teacher training in Korea must be reconceptualized in order to situate cultural education, which must be fit into Korean contexts. This may inspire teachers to change their identity, pedagogy, and culture of their classrooms. In addition, the ceaseless circulation of educational conventions can be stopped by critical practice and thus a new paradigm on culture in ELT can be formed in order to empower both EFL teachers and EFL learners.

In this study, I didn't have the opportunity to observe alternative perspectives on teaching culture because it was conducted in a delimited place with a very small group of teachers. Nevertheless, considering that some participants perceived a little of the importance of teaching culture at the end of the interviews, I strongly believe that the teachers' voices from eight different

educational scenes will reverberate around the EFL classrooms and finally start changes. I also hope that this study will inspire many teachers who still struggle for a better education.

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언어를 가르치는 데 있어서 문화를 분리할 수 있는가에 대한 논란이 영어교육에서 지속되어 왔다. 이러한 공리를 지지하는 기능주의자들에게 문화는 언어학적 지식과 기술로 국한된다. 반면에 사회적 구성주의자들은 문화가 언어와 힘의 관계에서 독립적일 수 없다고 반박한다. 이들의 주장은 영어교육이 지배담론의 언어 및 문화 그리고 이데올로기를 전파하는 도구가 될 수가 있음을 함축하고 있다. 그러나 영어에 대한 유토피아적 생각으로 인해 한국의 영어교육에서는 언어에 내재되어 있는 문화적 그리고 정치적 재현을 이해시킬 수 있는 문화교육의 시도가 아직 이루어지지 않고 있는 것 같다. 따라서 이 연구는 현재 한국의 영어 교실에서 어떻게 문화가 정의되고 또한 전달되는지 그리고 어떠한 기능을 하는지에 대해서 조사하고자 하였다. 9명의 한국인 영어 교사들이 이 연구에 참여했고, 그들의 인터뷰 결과로부터 다음과 같은 사실을 알 수가 있었다. 첫째, 환원주의적 영향으로 교사들은 문화를 완전히 이해하지 못하고 있었고, 오히려 문화를 정형화했다. 둘째, 실증주의적 방법에 입각하여 목표문화는 언어학적 능력 발달을 위해서 학생들에게 전달되고 있었다. 셋째, 사회문화적 위치의 상승을 위한

수단으로서 미국 영어와 문화를 습득해야 하는 것으로 여기고 있었다. 결국 이 연구에서는 비판적 문화교육의 가능성을 관찰할 수는 없었다. 그럼에도 불구하고 한국의 EFL 환경에 적합하도록 문화교육을 적용시킨다면, 인습적인 교육의 (재)생산과 순환을 멈추게 할 수 있을 것이라는 바람으로 이 연구를 마쳤다. 이것은 또한 영어 학습자들에게 힘을 부여하는 방향으로 그들이 지배담론의 언어를 전유할 수 있도록 해 줄 것이다.