

The (Non)Incorporation of World Englishes in English Education in Korea

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Abstract

In this talk, the (non)incorporation of World Englishes in English education in Korea will be discussed. Past studies on World Englishes in Korea will be introduced. In addition, the English variety, Standard American English (SAE), used in officially sanctioned textbooks in Korea will be examined. Lastly, attempts by the Korea University-Waseda University Cross-cultural Distance Learning Project (KUCCDL) to expose university students to World Englishes will be presented. Lastly, implications for the (non)incorporation of World Englishes in English education in Korea will be examined from a pedagogical perspective.

Keywords

World Englishes, English education, EFL, Korea

Introduction

While awareness of different varieties of English seems to have increased in Korea, direct incorporation of the notion of World Englishes (WE) or English as a lingua franca (ELF) has been minimal or non-existent. The National Curriculum of Korea for the subject of English, while focusing on communicative competence, has always implicitly promoted the use of Standard American English (SAE) in compulsory English education. This lack of exposure to other varieties of English has resulted in a narrow and limited view of Englishes.

1 Research in WE in Korea

Research regarding WE has been minimal in Korea. Most of the past studies have examined perceptions and attitudes towards WE to determine what teachers and students think about the feasibility of incorporating WE in the classroom (An, 2017; Jo, Lee & Kim, 2017; Kim, Lee & Kang, 2017; Shim, 2015 among others).

This research trend indirectly shows that WE has yet to become grounded in English education in Korea.

2 English in Textbooks

Textbooks are a direct window into what is learned in the classroom. For primary and secondary level education, in Korea, the Ministry of Education reviews and officially validates textbooks. Presently, textbooks are being written to comply with the Revised 2015 National Curriculum of Korea. As with all past official English textbooks, the target variety of English has always been SAE. All aspects of language (e.g., grammar, pronunciation, pragmatic use, etc.) follow SAE norms. Culture related to English usage is also dictated by SAE. Thus, exposure to WE varieties is practically non-existent in official textbooks and in turn English classrooms in Korea.

3 WE and KUCCDL

Although the notion of WE has not been incorporated officially in primary or secondary English education, a small number of universities are attempting to introduce WE in their curricula. One example is the Korea University-Waseda University Cross-cultural Distance Learning Program (KWCCDLP). This program can be traced back to 1999 and introduces students to diverse varieties of English through joint courses and on-demand lectures (Park, 2003). At present, Korea University (KU) runs three credit courses, and two non-credit courses per year in the KWCCDLP. One course in particular focuses on WE and is rightfully named “World Englishes and Miscommunication.” The KWCCDLP’s goal is to promote the use of ELF and promote awareness of WE.

4 Incorporating the Notion of ELF

The goal of English education in Korea is still highly focused on native-like production, in particular in SAE. English variation such as in pronunciation, spelling, grammar, and vocabulary is not introduced through formal education. The distinctions of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) are slowly eroding as the notion of EFL is taking hold (Jenkins, 2009; Kirkpatrick, 2007). In this light, language learning, in this case learning English in Korea, needs to focus more on using English for communicative purposes rather than on deficiencies as a non-native speaker.

Conclusion

This talk will attempt to provide a holistic view of the (non)incorporation of WE in English education in Korea. As past research, official textbook development standards, and attempts at universities show, the notion of WE has not been established as a bona fide concept which influences English education in Korea.

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