

CAPE Alumni Internet Connection: English Teacher Talk

CAPE Internet Talk was started as part of CAPE follow-up activities to continue ties with CAPE alumni and those who are interested in professional development in English teaching. It is hoped that this would increase our bond and aloha among former participants, and that the information in the TALK would help our alumni and friends/members review what they know and deepen their understanding of issues and interest in the ESL field.

A Critical Examination Of The Teaching English Through English Movement In South Korea

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South Korea, like many countries around the world, is promoting the teaching of English as a way of ensuring the country's participation in the global economy. English is being required at an earlier and earlier age with increasing number of contact hours of instruction.

In addition, South Korea, like many countries, is encouraging the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching and interpreting this methodology to include a good deal of oral interaction. In order to ensure that this interaction takes place in the target language, South Korean teachers are being encouraged to teach English through English.

The purpose of this paper is to

- Examine the differences between classroom English (CE) and teaching English through English (TETE) as presented in the literature;
- Critically assess the rationales offered for TETE;
- Summarize some of the existing research on the TETE movement;
- Present an alternative to TETE that is sensitive to the local context and current theories of second language acquisition.

Definition of terms

Whereas CE and TETE are often used interchangeably, some scholars distinguish the two, defining CE as English used for classroom management purposes such as checking attendance, greeting students, and beginning and ending a class. TETE, on the other hand, "is defined as speaking and using English as often as you possibly can, for example, when organizing teaching activities or chatting to students socially (Willis, 1981). It means establishing English as the main language of communication between students and instructors" (Kim, 2002, p. 132). It is the latter concept that the Korean Ministry of Education is promoting in its current policy of requiring the use of English as the instructional language from primary school through higher education.

Rationale for TETE

Kim (2002) notes two second language acquisition (SLA) theories that offer a sound rationale for the use of TETE: Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis and Long's (1983) Interaction Hypothesis. Let us examine each of these in the South Korean English classroom context. According to Krashen, the Input Hypothesis posits that for SLA to occur, learners need to be

provided with input that is a bit above their current level of comprehension. If we take the example of middle school students who are not familiar with the marking of the regular past tense in English, how can teachers provide a context so that this tense will become comprehensible input? Some would argue that in TETE classrooms, teachers need to provide a time line or some type of visual to make the meaning and form clear without using Korean. For some students this may provide the necessary foundation for understanding but for other less proficient students, this may not be enough. Hence, it seems to me, that there are valid reasons for providing an explanation in Korean of how the past tense is formed in English.

Long argues that in order to promote SLA, learners need to engage in interaction in which they are involved in meaningful negotiation. It is important to recall that much of Long's research was based on native and nonnative English speakers interacting with one another in English in English-speaking countries. In the South Korean all of the interaction that takes place in the classroom among groups of learners is between nonnative English speakers. In such a context it is much more difficult for meaningful negotiation to take place since in many cases learners do not have the necessary English proficiency to negotiate meaning. If, however, students were encouraged at times to clarify meaning breakdowns in Korean, meaningful communication might continue. In sum, it seems to me that one of the major variables that needs to be considered in applying either Long's or Krashen's theory to Korea is the local context. Context includes a great many factors including: the language background of the learners, the proficiency and age of the learners, the learner's style of learning, the learner's motivation and goals.

In general, it is important to note that many SLA theories and teaching methodologies were designed for ESL contexts in which students are exposed to a great deal of input outside of the classroom. Furthermore, since the students come from diverse language backgrounds, there is not the possibility of using another language to make input more comprehensible. Finally many learners are immigrants to English-speaking countries and hence, want and need to acquire a high level of English proficiency. None of these conditions exist in Korea and thus, it seems reasonable to question whether or not SLA theories and teaching methodologies prevalent in ESL contexts are transferrable to the Korean context. There is, in addition, the question of whether or not there is enough research to warrant the implementation of TETE in Korean schools.

The State of TETE Research in Korea

Kim (2002, 2008) has undertaken a thorough investigation of teachers' views on TETE. Most teachers today perceive TETE to be the use of English for most or all of instructional purposes. At the same time, many teachers reported that they experienced anxiety in implementing TETE, with high school teachers showing the greatest level of anxiety and those with more teaching experience having more anxiety. However, the majority of the teachers believed that the use of TETE is beneficial for developing learners' English proficiency.

Whereas we have some understanding of teachers' attitudes toward TETE, much more information is needed to determine the effectiveness of TETE in Korea. This includes knowing more about learners' attitudes toward the use of TETE in their English classes and knowing more

about how teachers in various contexts actually make use of English and Korean in their classes. We also need to know more about whether or not the use of TETE is effective in promoting learners' proficiency in English in comparison with the selective use of Korean in English classes. Most importantly we need to know these things in reference to the great variety of English teaching contexts in Korea – elementary, middle, high school and university settings with students of various proficiency levels in the development of accuracy and fluency. Until such research is undertaken it is difficult to argue for the use of TETE in all English classes in Korea. However, until this research is completed, it might be beneficial to consider in which contexts TETE may or may not be effective.

TETE in context

Students' Proficiency Level

In general it would seem that it would be more productive to use English exclusively with more advanced language learners who have the necessary resources to negotiate meaningful interactions in English. This suggests that more and more English should be used in language classes as students become more proficient.

Teachers' Proficiency in English

Teachers with less proficiency in English will certainly find it more challenging to implement TETE than will more proficient teachers. Less proficient teachers would benefit from opportunities to develop their English proficiency so they have the skill and confidence to use English in their English classes. Until they receive the support to do this, it makes little sense to require them to have a TETE classroom.

Grammatical Rules

Regular grammar rules may be easier to figure out without the use of Korean than are complex rules. Thus, whereas tasks can be designed to help students figure out the rules that apply to the formation of the regular past tense in English, this would be more difficult to do in the use of articles. As such, teachers may need to explain some generalizations about English articles in Korean for efficient learning to take place.

Accuracy versus fluency

It may be that promoting fluency will develop faster with a focus on the use of English whereas attention to accuracy may benefit from the explanation of grammatical rules and the correction of grammatical errors in Korean.

Lexical development

There are various ways to make the meaning of concrete vocabulary items clear through the use of English whereas this may be quite difficult to do with more abstract items. For example, pictures can easily be used to clarify the meaning of concrete words such as *boy*, *tree*,

car, and so on. Visuals would be much less helpful in introducing vocabulary items such as *liberty, happiness, patriotism*, and so on. In the latter case, the use of a Korean translation could save a great deal of classroom time.

In general then it seems reasonable to consider the many variables that can influence English learning before requiring all teachers to implement a TETE classroom.

Conclusion

While I fully support the use of English in an English classroom, I think it is important to consider in what ways Korean can be used to provide a foundation for the development of students' English proficiency. To begin, I believe it is essential to recognize the benefits of drawing on the first language to develop the second language. Second language learners are quite different from first language learners. Second language learners already have a developed vocabulary to categorize the world. They already have a concept of the orderliness of language. And they have an understanding of the ways in which language can be used to levels of formality and personal identity. Their first language then is a tremendous resource that should be made use of in language classrooms.

Here I am not arguing for the use of translation in language classrooms, although in some instances this might be warranted. I am suggesting rather than teachers use Korean in their classrooms with discretion. For example, teachers can develop language awareness activities that help learners discover similarities and differences between Korean and English. Specifically, this might include activities such as the following: discussing the similarities and differences between how Korean and English signal politeness through the choice of language forms; listing the similarities and differences in the manner in which Korean and English signal various grammatical meanings; and showing how word for word translation from English to Korean generally cannot capture the intended meaning of the English text. Teachers can also encourage their students to use Korean to plan longer texts in English. For example, students can be encouraged to use Korean in planning an English essay or a speech or role-play in English. In this way Korean becomes a resource for developing English fluency. Korean learners are in the process of becoming fluent bilinguals. They have at their disposal a tremendous resource for reaching this goal – the Korean language. I believe this resource should be used judiciously in the English classrooms to help learners succeed in their goal of becoming fluent bilinguals.

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