The Language Politics of "English Fever" in South Korea

Doobo Shim and Joseph Sung-Yul Park

Abstract

While it has become trite to comment on the forces of global change, globalization is not simply about economy, technology or culture. When Appadurai defines globalization as a "tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization," we can easily supplant "cultural" for "linguistic." Today, English is increasingly established as a global lingua franca, and non-native English speakers such as Koreans are preoccupied with the English learning fever. The main claim of the paper is that the English fever should be seen neither as blind desire towards the glorious commodity of English nor as cheerful appropriation that nativizes the language of the Other. Instead, it is a phenomenon that is firmly grounded in local sociopolitical contexts, yet extends the global hegemony of English onto Korean society. Relevant to our account is the framework of postcolonialism. This paper shall examine the English fever in Korea as well as revisit the hegemony of English in the world.

Keyword: language politics, English fever, globalization, postcolonialism, *jaebeol* (*chaebol*), Korean education

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Introduction

The Korean term *yeongeo yeolpung* ("English fever") refers to the strong desire to become proficient in English and the heavy investments made to ensure that one's children successfully acquire the language, a prominent trend in South Korean society today.[1] One phenomenon that bluntly illustrates this is the increasingly common practice of *jogi yuhak* ("early overseas education"), in which many parents send their children to English-speaking countries so that they can gain native-speaker-like fluency in the language. Even though this results in the separation of families, not to mention a great financial burden for the parents, such costs are often seen as necessary investments for the child's future; according to some statistics, the number of primary or secondary school students studying abroad has increased tenfold over the past ten years (Heo Mi-gyeong 2006). The title of a recent article in the *Washington Post* summarizes the phenomenon aptly: "English is the golden tongue for S. Koreans: Parents pay a fortune so children can learn." This article illustrates the point made in the title by reporting the case of a mother who spent US$210,000 a year for the overseas education of her two sons. According to the article, 24,000 primary and secondary school students left Korea for *jogi yuhak* in 2006 (Cho J. 2007). Another example of English fever can be found in the recent boom in the construction of *yeongeo maeul* ("English villages"). English villages simulate an English-speaking society, complete with shops, restaurants, police stations, banks, hospitals, and even "immigration offices," where the vendors or workers are all native speakers, and which are established so that students (children and adults alike) can learn and practice English in an immersion environment without leaving the country. Constructed and operated by city or provincial governments, there are at least eight English villages in operation as of 2006, and many others are being proposed (Kim and Hwang 2006).

1. In this paper, "Korea" refers to South Korea or the Republic of Korea.

The recent English fever in Korean society may appear incongruent with the image of a country that is well known for its strong sense of national and ethnic pride. At the same time, however, it may appear to be a direct reflection of the recent trend of globalization, in which English has been increasingly established as the worldwide lingua franca (Crystal 1997). Globalization is not simply about the economy, technology or culture; it inherently has a linguistic aspect. When Appadurai (1990, 295) defines globalization as a "tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization," we can easily supplant "cultural" for "linguistic." In this context, Korea's heavy pursuit of English may appear to be a natural reflection of its global popularity. However, this perspective can be problematic, as it lacks an account of the mechanisms through which the global hegemony of English may become manifest in local social relations and the performative practices of local speakers.

The global spread of English is an important topic that has received much attention recently, and for our purposes in this paper, we may identify three different schools of thought in accounting for global English. The first school views English as a "marvelous tongue" for the global age, a victorious language that conquered the world to take on the role of the standard for international communication. While this view recognizes the importance of local/national languages, it simply recognizes them as playing the limited function of identity marking (Crystal 1997), thus presenting English as the language of the "practical world" that everyone desires. We take this position to be flawed in that it does not account for local processes of English adoption, or the "what-is-going-on-here," while simply celebrating the triumph of English (Hanson 1997).

The second school, represented by the "World Englishes" (WE) paradigm, focuses on local appropriations of English and the ways in which different "Englishes" are created around the world (Kachru 1996). Based on a more linguistic perspective, this school argues that nativization of English and Englishization of local languages may be seen as signs of local creativity, evidence of how English is adopted from and adapted to new social and cultural contexts. However, in

focusing on the formal aspects of global English and the creativity of new Englishes, this approach pays less attention to the place of English amidst local relationships of power. Canagarajah (1999), for instance, criticizes this school as ignoring the political context of the global spread of English, noting that it urges us "to bury our eyes ostrich-like to the political evils and ideological temptations outside" (Canagarajah 1999, 210).

The third school, which may be termed the "critical" school of the global spread of English, is most closely related to the perspective we adopt in dealing with the English fever in Korea throughout this paper. This school takes a critical stance towards the global hegemony of English, identifying it as an impenetrable imperial power that threatens the continuity of local languages and cultures (Skutnabb-Kangas 2003). While some theses under this model of linguistic imperialism have been criticized for their deterministic assumptions and conclusions (Phillipson 1992; Pennycook 2000), this school provides an important basis for the awareness that the status of English as an international language is not merely a natural consequence of the hegemony of English-speaking countries, but a social construction that is established and propagated by both native speakers of English and non-native speakers who adopt English locally (Pennycook 2003, 2007). This perspective is crucial for understanding the Korean situation, we argue, as it points out that the increasing influence of English in Korean society does not simply mirror a global trend; it must be deeply rooted in the question of "how English is taken up, how people use English, why people choose to use English" (Pennycook 2001, 62). That is, an account of the Korean English fever requires an analysis of both the global spread of English and its local situatedness.

The aims of this paper are to describe, analyze, and discuss the phenomenon of English fever in Korean society. The main claim that we will make in the paper is that English fever should be seen neither as a blind desire for the glorious commodity of English nor as a cheerful appropriation that nativizes the language of the Other. Instead, it is a phenomenon that is firmly grounded in the local socio-

political context, yet extends the global hegemony of English onto Korean society. In other words, we have to examine the conditions under which English, the lingua franca of the current global society, is actively learned, adopted, desired, modified, and resignified by Koreans for their own purposes—and how these conditions are linked to the persistent conditions of inequality and dominance. From a critical perspective of global politics and culture, this paper shall examine English fever in Korea as well as revisit the hegemony of English in the world. In the next section, we begin our discussion by observing the phenomenon of the global spread of English, which serves as the backdrop for Korean English fever.

The Global Spread of English

As noted above, English is commonly associated with the Western-driven globalization of capitalism, culture, and technology. The spread of English started with the influence of the British Empire during the colonial era. After the Second World War, the rise of the United States as a political, economic, and cultural power accelerated the status of English as a global lingua franca, as the new empire exercised deterritorialized control through language (Hardt and Negri 2000). Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas (1996) summarize the current situation as follows:

> [A]s English is the dominant language of the U.S., the UN, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, many other world policy organizations, and most of the world's big businesses and elites in many countries worldwide, it is the language in which the fate of most of the world's citizens is decided, directly or indirectly. (Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas 1996, 441).

Now, English is "a big commodity," writes Phillipson (2000), "second in importance to the British economy after North Sea oil" (Phillipson 2000, 90). The Blair Initiative, announced in June 1999, is a clear

case of how the United Kingdom makes efforts to increase its share of the international market of foreign students, also taking advantage of the current situation in which the stringent visa requirement of U.S. entry has diverted Asian students to British universities. In 2000, the then British Minister for Education and Employment confirmed the importance of English to the British economy and foreign relations by saying, "It makes good economic sense to use English fluency as a platform to underpin our economic competitiveness and to promote our culture overseas" (cited in Phillipson 2002, 12).

But, perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the global spread of English has to do with how it is adopted as a local language in contexts where English previously did not hold such a status. New varieties of English have already established themselves as a language for local identity in a number of postcolonial contexts such as India, Hong Kong, and Singapore (Platt, Weber, and Ho 1984; Kachru 1986; McArthur 2002; Melchers and Shaw 2003). In addition, an increasing number of speakers are beginning to use English as a second or working language, to the extent that there are now more people in the world who speak English as a second language than as a first language (Crystal 1997).

It must be noted, however, that this does not imply that English is no longer a language of the colonizer, for despite the active adoption of English in local contexts, inequalities still abound in the way different varieties of English are valued. Well-documented new varieties of English still suffer from negative stereotypes, as evidenced by the annual Speak Good English Campaign run by the Singaporean government (Rudby 2001). Also, traditional native speakers of English (i.e., mainstream speakers of English in what Kachru [1985] would call "inner circle" countries, primarily the United States, U.K., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) are regularly privileged over speakers of new varieties of English or speakers of English as a second language (Widdowson 1994, Brutt-Griffler and Samimy 2001). This suggests that spontaneous local adoption of English should not be seen as implying depoliticization of English; on the contrary, we must seek to understand ways in which local appropriations of Eng-

lish continue to be intertwined with global relations of power, and how the global hegemony of English is sustained and reproduced through such processes. Throughout this paper, we will attempt to describe and discuss the complex dynamics of English in the Korean context by providing an outline of the English fever and its concomitant local effects.

National Language Ideologies and the Status of English in Korea

As noted above, the power of global English takes on a particularly strong significance in Korean society because it stands in stark relief to the formidable influence of national language ideologies that permeate the nation's modern history. The image of Korea as a monolingual nation has played an important part in the building of the modern nation-state (Anderson 1991). Throughout the nation's experiences of colonization and modernization, the construct of *danil minjok* ("one people," or racial homogeneity) served as the central ideology (Em 1999). The image of the Korean people united through, among other things, a common Korean language, is an important element here (Ko 1995). The strong monolingualism of Korea is thus both an outcome of this imagining of the nation and a persistent force that reinforces that image.

For this reason, the Korean language is a strong and prominent symbol of national and ethnic pride for Koreans. The language has always played an important part in Korean nationalism, for instance in the resistance towards the Japanese colonial rule. Historical events such as the "Joseoneo Hakhoe (Korean Language Society) Incident," through which Korean linguists who had been working on the standardization of Korean and the publication of a Korean dictionary were arrested and imprisoned by the Japanese colonizers, for example, serve as an important chapter in the lore of the independence movement against the Japanese rule. Based on these roots, linguistic nationalism is still strong and popular in Korean society, as is often

found in various forms of linguistic purism, which condemns excessive loanwords and language mixing originating from influences of other languages (Park N. 1989; Heo 1994).

Despite the prevalence of such nationalistic language attitudes, however, the importance of English as symbolic capital has been on the rise throughout Korea's modern history. English has always been considered a means for upward social mobility since the late nineteenth century when the first schools for English language teaching were opened in Korea. The importance of English became more evident in the period of 1945-1948, during which a transitional military government of U.S. armed forces was established in the southern half of the peninsula after the collapse of the Japanese colonial rule. Korean translators with skills in English who could mediate between American military personnel and the Korean public occupied important positions within this government, to the extent that it was also called a *tongyeok jeongbu* ("translation government") by some (Ko 1995). It was thus no accident that the native Korean government that was subsequently established maintained a close political and cultural alignment with the United States and its language, English. Henderson notes, for example, that the first Korean president, Syngman Rhee, was clearly aware of the political value of English and the pro-American stance that it indexes, when he points out that Rhee "went to missionary schools like Pai Chai [Baejae] less for their Christianity than to look for political position through English" (Henderson 1968, 207. Cited in Cumings 1997, 157). While some of the regimes that succeeded Rhee's varied slightly in the extent to which they adopted nationalist positions, the influence of the United States on Korean politics, economy, military affairs, and culture remained essentially unchanged. This created a foundation upon which English increasingly became a language of importance, even as Koreans; everyday lives remained strongly monolingual and the Korean language served as a symbol of national and ethnic identity. The complex relationship between English and Korean, then, has its origins in the symbolic role these languages played in the process of modern nation building.

English in Korea's Globalization Drive

The status of English has received an even stronger boost since the 1980s, when Korea started to make efforts to improve its tainted national image from its long years of dictatorship and establish a competent position within the global market. The Korean government pushed its citizens to be more proficient in English communication. For instance, the 1986 Asian Games and the 1988 Olympic Games, two major international events hosted by Korea, were presented by the Korean government in terms of a call for citizens to gain a global mindset, and to be equipped with important characteristics of globality, one of which is the ability to speak English. Thus, Baik (1992) comments that a new period of contact between English and Korean was "marked by the declaration that Seoul was to be the host city for the 1986 Asian Games and the 1988 Olympic Games. Ordinary Koreans began to feel the imminent need to learn and speak English" (Baik 1992, 26). While it would obviously be problematic to attribute the hegemonic status of English to these two sporting events alone, Baik's comment does make an important point: that such international events (and others that followed) were clinched by the Korean government as important symbolic resources for the construction of a highly specific connection between globalization, modernization, and English. That is, participation on the global stage was imagined as necessarily mediated by the global language of English, which no doubt served as a crucial ideology for shaping the meaning of the English language in Korean society.

This ideological construction of English has continued by the government's drive for globalization which took place since the mid-1990s. In 1995, the government adopted *segyehwa* ("globalization") as its slogan, focusing more explicitly on internationalization and undertaking a series of neoliberal reforms geared towards a more open adoption of market principles designed to enhance Korea's global competitiveness (Kim S. 2000). Under the banner of *segyehwa*, government officials and businessmen were strongly advised to actively participate in various international organizations and assume

key positions there. In addition, the government advised Korean firms to undertake joint projects with the world's leading industries and expand overseas production in order to keep up with global trends in high-tech development and to increase exports (Yoo 1995). The government's new policy was matched with corporate catchphrases such as *segye gyeongyeong* ("global management") of Daewoo, one of the major conglomerates known as *jaebeol* (*chaebol*). In the 2000s, several free economic zones were developed in the areas of Incheon, Busan, and Gwangyang, along with a free international city on the southern island of Jeju, in order to establish the country as an economic hub of the East Asian region. To attract foreign investors and capital flow, economic activities in these zones were supported in various ways such as special tax incentives and deregulation of employment and labor laws, as well as development of new airport and seaport facilities (Park B. 2005).

English again figured prominently in this nationalistically-driven globalization or utilitarian nationalism. For example, it was advertised that local government offices in the free economic zones would accept official documents in English so that foreign companies could conduct their business with Korean governmental offices (Son 2001). Plans were drafted to strengthen the English skills of the local residents of the proposed free economic zones as well, including proposals to allow local students to attend international schools or begin English immersion programs in non-English subjects (Park B. 2005; Lee Jong-gyu 2005). Such efforts were often characterized as *yeongeo inpeura* ("English infra structure"), highlighting the economic value of the English language as having equal status to material facilities that may serve as a basis for economic development (Son 2001). In this context, in 1998 a writer named Bok Geo-il suggested that English should be established as the official language of Korea so that it could eventually replace Korean as a mother tongue (Bok 1998), a proposal that caused bitter controversy.

National educational policy is another domain through which ideologies of English are reproduced and circulated. Through the sixth National Curricula, introduced in 1995, a shift in English lan-

guage teaching was implemented, from the previous emphasis on grammatical knowledge towards communicative fluency (Kwon 2000; Shin H. 2007). Another change was the introduction of *yeongeo jogi gyoyuk* ("early English education") under the seventh National Curricula: since 1997, English language education has been enforced starting at an earlier age, at third grade in elementary school, four years earlier than what the previous policy had mandated (Lee 2004). These policy changes were all implemented with the explicit goal of preparing citizens to participate with confidence in the global marketplace and increasing the nation's international competitiveness. In April 2007, then President Roh Moo-hyun corroborated the government's view of English by saying, "English is a must in order to catch up with the stream of globalization. The biggest competitive edge that Finland and other rapidly-growing advanced countries have is English-speaking people" (*Korea Herald* 2007). It is quite likely that the Lee Myung-bak administration (2008-2013), well-known for its strong neoliberal political stance, will continue this trend during his presidency, pushing for more English classes in schools under the college level, and possibly introducing English immersion programs so that all English classes in high schools will be taught only in English.

These developments in the context of globalization, which were widely reported prominently in the media, no doubt contributed to the perception that English has more than ever become an important international language. Such changes were not only actual policies through which the Korean government attempted to adapt to the changing global economy, but also symbolic events that created the image of English as a necessary resource for making Korea accessible to the world.

English in Higher Education and the Job Market

The government's emphasis on English naturally has led to and was supported by the growing importance of English in higher education

and the job market. For instance, since the late 1990s, a minimum score or higher on standardized English tests such as TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) or TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) became a requirement for both college entrance and graduation in many universities. Again, these changes reflect an assumption that English has become an indispensable skill for competition in the global context. According to one university staff member, "in this age of internationalization and globalization, TOEIC and TOEFL are now more important than any other core courses" (Park H. 1995).

Many universities also increasingly adopt English as a language of instruction so that students will be more exposed to the language. For example, Korea University became well known for its heavy investments in English, pressuring faculty members to lecture in English. It has been reported that the university will increase the ratio of classes taught in English to 50% by 2012. Yonsei University followed suit by announcing that it would push for a plan that 40% of all lectures would be taught in English by 2010 (Bak 2006). Sogang University explored such ideas as staffing dormitories with native speakers of English (Cho C. 2005), as it is believed that this will "force" students to speak and interact in English, making them more skilled in the language.

This is perhaps a consequence of the fact that English competence has become an important criterion for decisions regarding employment or promotion in *jaebeol* corporations, where trends in the Korean job market often find their origins. For instance, TOEIC has been used widely by such corporations as a measure of an applicant's English language skills since the mid-1990s when they started to pursue more active global expansion. Further, since the early 2000s, companies have begun to adopt a wider range of means to evaluate job seekers' English communicative competence such as oral interviews or group discussions conducted in English, for after years of emphasizing the importance of TOEIC, many employees have achieved uniformly high scores, necessitating additional bases for selection (Han 2003; Kim J. 2005). In addition, major corporations

regularly test the English language competence of their employees throughout their career. Choi Soyoung (2002) shows that over 90% of workers in large private manufacturing and exporting industries are continuously tested on their English.

This emphasis on English, however, does not necessarily mean that English is being used widely in the workplace. Numerous studies have shown that, despite the emphasis on English in the business environment, the amount of English actually used in relation to work is still relatively small (McTague 1990; Choi S. 2002). This suggests that communicative competence in English is not so much an actual resource needed for survival in the global workplace, but an index of an ideal employee in the global economy; regardless of the actual tasks one needs to carry out in the workplace, being able to communicate confidently in English is taken to be a sign that the worker is well positioned within the modern world and worthy of a company that aspires to expand globally.

This shows that English in the Korean job market is used primarily for gatekeeping purposes. The Korean worker constantly needs to adapt to what is stated by employers as requirements of an ideal employee. As we have noted above, with the standards of competence in English constantly being upgraded, English serves as a mechanism for powerful corporations to control who will have access to opportunities and privileges. These trends pressure university students and white collar workers to invest an enormous amount of financial and material resources and time into studying English. Students' anxiety about securing employment in an extremely competitive job market leads them to place greater importance on studying English than their subject of major. Also, according to one newspaper report, nearly 70% of office workers spend their time after work in further self-development, most of whom are studying English (Lim 2006). Of course, through such investments in English, Korean workers do gain greater access to the symbolic resource of English, and this does open up possibilities for active appropriation. However, it should be noted that such possibilities are also constrained by ideologies of what is required of an ideal worker in the age of globalization—an ideology ultimately constructed through the discourses of the government and major corporations.

The Fever for Extracurricular English

The ultimate domain in which the English fever is thrown into starkest relief is the area of English language education for children. As in other East Asian countries, education of children is seen as a matter of paramount importance, since it is believed by parents to be a real basis upon which their children can secure the prestige and resources required for making a good living as adults. For this reason, many parents go to great lengths to provide their children with the right educational opportunities (Seth 2002). This zeal on the part of parents, coupled with the strong perception that good competence in English is of utmost importance for a successful life, leads to a heated pursuit of the language that lies at the heart of the English fever.

Perhaps the most extreme and perverted example of this is the tongue surgery that some parents have their children undergo (Demick 2002). The purported efficacy of this surgery, which is supposed to lengthen the child's tongue by cutting away a thin band of tissue, thereby enabling the child to pronounce the rhotic sound of English with ease, of course has absolutely no scientific basis, and for this reason some critics see it as a serious violation of children's human rights (National Human Rights Commission of Korea 2003).

While tongue surgery may still be a relatively rare and extreme example, there are plenty of other aspects of the education market that demonstrate the English fever. As a TOEFL score is required for admission at some universities and high schools, many Korean students take the test, contributing to the fact that Koreans make up 20% of all TOEFL takers in the world. The *Chosun Ilbo* reported that middle and high school students made up 70-80% of the approximately 130,000 Korean TOEFL testees in 2006 (Won 2007). The general distrust toward the public education system and the need to outdo others have also produced a huge private education market

which caters to a large number of curricular and extracurricular subjects in various modes, and English is the single most important area within this market. According to a report by the Samsung Economic Research Institute, Korean families spent US$15.6 billion on English-language tutoring in 2006 alone (Cho J. 2007). Here, the options for after-school English instruction include *hakseupji* ("worksheet") programs (which consist of working on practice questions on worksheets supplemented with regular guidance by a worksheet teacher), private English institutes, and individual or group tutoring (Park and Abelmann 2004). With the introduction of English as an elementary school subject in 1997, *yeongeo yuchiwon* ("English-only kindergartens") with native-speaker staff are thriving as well, despite the fact that they are often twice or three times more expensive than regular kindergartens.

Another prominent option is to send children overseas. In addition to *eohak yeonsu* ("short term English study abroad"), *jogi yuhak* ("early overseas education") is on the rise, as noted above. For parents who feel that competence in English is a crucial basis for future opportunities, separation of families and the great financial cost may be seen as an acceptable burden. In fact, sending children overseas is often considered to be the most desirable option for children's English language learning for the following reasons. Firstly, many Koreans hold the belief that the best way a Korean can learn to speak English fluently is to be immersed in an English-only environment, where they can be in contact with native speakers of English, who are imagined to be ideal model speakers of "good English." For this reason, leaving the monolingual environment of Korea and moving to English-speaking countries is seen as an ideal option. Secondly, the experience of studying abroad supposedly inculcates in the child a sense of cosmopolitanism as well as a certain image of prestige, for the mere fact that the child's family could afford to send him or her overseas already indicates a privileged background. Indeed, affluent members of Korean society have more resources and connections to send their children to costly English kindergartens or abroad, which in turn may provide them with a better chance at securing better

jobs, thus reproducing and reinforcing class difference (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977/1990). Koreans are generally well aware of this inequality, and for this reason, efforts such as *jogi yuhak* are often criticized on the grounds that they contribute to the reproduction of class relations and social inequalities as well as the "dollar drain."

One area in which this class anxiety is manifest politically is the construction boom of the English villages discussed above. English villages were political projects rather than linguistic ones from its inception, as they were designed to specifically deal with the dilemma faced by parents who could not afford to send their children overseas due to financial reasons. Many English villages are designed to be a perfect replica of a (Western) English-speaking society, which are located at citizens' doorsteps. They purportedly provide everyone with easy access to quality English learning environment. They were first proposed during the 2002 nationwide election of city and provincial officials by two prominent candidates, who recognized the importance of appealing to the desire of parents to secure effective and affordable English language learning opportunities. Their campaigns explicitly aimed at voters who may have felt disgruntled that they were not able to provide adequately for their children by sending them overseas. For instance, on June 3, 2002, Son Hakgyu, one of the candidates for the governor's seat of Gyeonggi-do province, ran an advertisement on the first page of major newspapers, directly addressing parents who were worried about their children's English language learning. The advertisement claimed that Son understood how "sending your child overseas is too costly, and not sending your child breaks your heart," and then promised to "build an English village where one can live with foreigners speaking only English, so that your children can receive an English education that is as practical as sending them overseas" (Son 2002; Kim Seon-ju 2002). In the following years, the idea of English villages became so popular that more than ten candidates proposed new English villages in the following 2006 election (Kim and Hwang 2006). As a result, as of 2007 there are numerous English villages in operation in Seoul, Gyeonggi, Incheon, and other places, with more soon to follow.

However, the operation of English villages faces many problems. The two villages run by Gyeonggi-do province, for example, had a deficit of US$22 million in 2006, mainly because of the exorbitant cost of construction and maintenance, but also because of low usage by citizens (Hong 2007); it is reported that only 3.6% of the elementary and middle school students in Gyeonggi-do province had attended one of the villages during the period between August 2004 and August 2006 (Hong 2006). This brings into question whether the idea of English villages truly connects with the real concerns and situations of ordinary Koreans. Rather, this episode underscores that what Koreans are really seeking through learning English is not linguistic competence per se, but the social and economic advantages that can be gained through the symbolic capital of English. Therefore, English villages, which do not carry the prestige of studying overseas, may never be seen as a viable alternative to *jogi yuhak*.

This is also the case with other efforts purported to fill the class divide in English language learning, such as the recent establishment (in April 2007) of the third channel of the Educational Broadcasting System (EBS) that focuses on English language teaching. While even Korea's president Roh Moo-hyun (2003-2007) expressed hope that the launch of the channel would help deal with the problem of unequal access to resources for language learning (Shin J. 2007), this again misses the class implication that underlies the dissatisfaction of Koreans. In the Korean context, competence in English is sought not as a linguistic skill, but as a form of distinction (Bourdieu 1986), and for this reason, populist alternatives to English language learning aimed at addressing the class divide cannot resolve the problem of inequality, because ironically, they in fact reproduce that divide by marking their users as lacking access to more prestigious opportunities for learning English.

Conclusion: English and the Structure of Global and Local Inequalities

The discussion above shows how the Korean English fever must be seen as a phenomenon that is deeply embedded within local structures of social power. For instance, the place of English within the educational market connects in many ways to the unique role that systems of educational qualifications have played in the nation's modernization process. The Korean zeal for education has contributed enormously to the country's social development and economic growth. It created a more equitable society and was a driving force for the country's emergence out of poverty to become an industrialized country. However, it is derived from a traditional value system that equates social status with one's educational degree and the reputation of the schools that one attended. In this situation, an enormous percentage of family income is being spent on education, therefore ultimately contributing to class structure and inequalities. English, as we have seen above, is a new addition to this equation; as English language learning has become a centerpiece of government policy, corporate strategy, and the education system, it also comes to function as a crucial link in the reproduction of such local relations of power and inequality.

But another important aspect of English is that its local meaning is mediated by its status as a global language and the global-level relationships that it marks. In the Korean case, English is inextricably tied with the hegemony of the United States and the global economy which is imagined to operate through English. That is, the local meaning of English is not only constructed locally, but builds upon the global meaning of English and reproduces it locally at the same time. In other words, through English, what is reproduced is not only local class relationships, but the privileges of native speakers of English over non-native speakers such as Koreans, the power of the U.S. over Korea, and the dominance of the neoliberal order of the global economy. While the privileged few are able to justify their positions by aligning themselves with these global sources of hegemony, the

majority of Koreans without such privilege (and Korea as a whole) can only be subordinated within a hierarchy of power—not only locally but globally as well. This, we argue, is precisely a way through which global structures of power come to be reproduced on a local level, not through active imposition by the "center," but through local practices of dealing with English. In this sense, the English fever in Korea cannot be simply understood as a direct reflection of the global hegemony of English, but as its local manifestation which is mediated by local social relations and structural constraints.

While we took a highly critical stance towards global English above, we also acknowledge the importance of English learning for its utility in international trade, international exchanges, and its role as a vehicle for the circulation of new ideas, cultures, forms of knowledge and sensibilities. In this sense, we do not intend to dismiss the Korean English fever as an ignorant, self-destructive act. For individual Koreans, efforts to learn English are ultimately about appropriating the indexical value of English in the modern world, and insofar as they make such agentive choices they should not be seen as "dupes" that collude in their own subordination. But it must also be recognized that this appropriation is not of the kind that instantly liberates the speaker, for their efforts to secure English is constrained by material forces that define who has access to better channels for learning English. Therefore, we claim that the Korean English fever can only aggravate the class divide between the "English-rich" haves and "English-poor" have-nots (Choi S. 2007) and reinforce the global inequalities that Korea as a nation faces. In this context, we conclude that the Korean English fever is best understood as a local-level projection of global-level inequalities; and that such inequalities are an outcome of working relations of class and power.

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GLOSSARY

danil minjok	單一民族	*tongyeok jeongbu*	通譯政府
eohak yeonsu	語學硏修	*yeongeo jogi gyoyuk*	英語早期敎育
hakseupji	學習紙	*yeongeo maeul*	英語마을
jogi yuhak	早期留學	*yeongeo yeolpung*	英語熱風
segyehwa	世界化	*yeongeo yuchiwon*	英語幼稚園
segyehwa gyeongyeong	世界化經營		