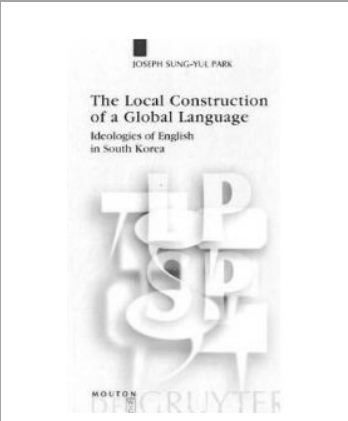


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The Local Construction of a Global Language: Ideologies of English in South Korea		
Author:	Joseph Sung-Yul Park (2009)	
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It is impossible to gauge the full impact that the spread of English continues to have on the world. In South Korea alone, private English education costs reached 20.9 trillion won (roughly \$13.7 billion US) in 2008 (Kang, 2009). ‘English mania’ is so extreme that a surgical operation has been developed that severs a small piece of tissue under the tongue in the hopes of improving English pronunciation (Shin, 2004). While neither of the preceding two sentences are likely to surprise anyone teaching or learning English in South Korea, there is a relatively small amount of research offering a rich interpretation of the beliefs that enable these trends. In light of the current atmosphere Park explores the ways that citizens of one country rationalize such extreme measures in the frantic pursuit of English proficiency and the various social meanings that English takes on in such a setting.

Park takes an overtly critical stance toward the status of English in South Korea. He asserts that to South Koreans English is an unspeakable tongue in two senses. First, “it is a language that drives Koreans into strange and irrational obsessions which unduly burden every Korean, both emotionally and financially” (p. 2). Second, English is widely viewed as a language that is difficult or impossible for Koreans to speak well. Park maintains that these two perspectives are interrelated and contribute to an atmosphere where individuals perpetually strive for the most efficient means of alleviating the English burden in Korean society.

In order to shed light upon underlying beliefs about English, Park analyzes official English policy debates, popular comedy programs (or *yumeo*), scripted television, and face-to-face interactions in a language school. His metalinguistic analysis allows for a comparison of the ways various contexts in Korean society encourage or prohibit certain kinds of discussion

about the English language. Put simply, Park describes how Korean people talk about English and how underlying ideologies are maintained in various settings.

Park concludes that the ways Korean people talk and think about English are mediated by language ideologies that contain three principle components. First, the ideology of *necessitation* holds that financial success in a global economy requires the mastery of English. Second, the ideology of *externalization* asserts that English is the language of an Other, and therefore the mastery of English can conflict with one's identity as a Korean. Finally, the ideology of *self-depreciation* asserts that Korean people are poor English speakers despite their investments in learning English. While these three underlying ideologies may sound like truisms to English teachers and learners in Korea, Park does a remarkable job of showing how these beliefs are constructed in various contexts and makes powerful connections to potential consequences of these ideologies. The strength of this book is in the author's ability to disclose the subtle mechanisms through which these ideologies interact with one another, and in the ways that various settings in South Korea highlight particular aspects of these ideological tensions.

This book offers a rare analysis of everyday conversations about English and connects these to larger ideological beliefs. Park offers both teachers and students the opportunity to recognize their own beliefs within a larger context and to challenge common sense assumptions about the purpose of teaching and learning English. Because it utilizes an eclectic set of methods drawing on ethnography and discourse analysis, the book is also quite valuable to researchers. While ethnographic methods are certainly not new to world Englishes or TESOL (Watson-Gegeo, 1988) this book stands out in part because Park frames the entire study as a means of working through tensions that he himself continues to experience in light of the status of English in Korea. Though there is no extended analysis of how the author's position informs the analysis (in other words, this is not narrative research) the author's is invaluable because it is a direct consequence of the tensions he seeks to address.

Unfortunately, Park is somewhat ambiguous about to whom his findings apply. While the title describes the *local* construction of a global language, there is no explicit definition of the term *local*. Given the increased use of terms of location such as local, global, and glocal (Sarroub, 2009) in world Englishes, sociolinguistics, and TESOL, the term deserves at least some elaboration. Park's use of the term *local* seems to play along a difficult continuum between face-to-face interactions and the nation as a whole as it is represented in official policy debate and television entertainment. One is left unclear as to exactly who Park refers to or how widely he asserts his claim.

Certainly general language ideologies resonate throughout Korean society but one must be cautious not to conflate the entire nation into a homogenous entity under the banner of a few recognizable beliefs. This is particularly troubling as analysis is limited to popular television, newspapers, and face-to-face interactions in a wealthy financial district in Seoul. Moving forward, research which is critical of English in Korea will likely require more nuanced means of analyzing Korean society. This is particularly true in terms of regional identity, gender, and social class (Park & Abelmann, 2004) but also includes issues such as sexuality

and multicultural identities in response to rapid demographic shifts in the Korean landscape (Choi, 2010; Hong, 2010). Critical stances must resist the urge to reify a unified Korean identity in the face of rising cultural and linguistic diversity.

In spite of some difficulties this book has much to offer the fields of English language learning, TESOL, and world Englishes. Both English teachers, teacher educators, and researchers can benefit from unique insights and a rigorous methodology. Most notably, the overtly critical perspective of the spread of English in Korea contrasts sharply with a body of research in English language learning that primarily focuses on efficient teaching practices and the most expedient curriculum at the expense of asking *why*. Current discussions in TESOL and teacher education require not only questions of how we should proceed, but also rich interpretations of where our beliefs come from, how they are sustained, and where they might lead. For those invested in English language education in Korea and elsewhere, Park's book offers an important step towards a better understanding of the somewhat uneasy question: *why are we doing this?*

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