

Language Education Policy and English Textbooks of Korea and Japan

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to understand how English textbooks in Korea and Japan reflect English education policies for improving the English language learners' cultural ability. In order to achieve the purpose of this study, the method of analyzing English textbooks was used because English textbooks are an important tool that most specifically reflects the English policy of a country. This study analyzed a total of six English textbooks, three middle school English textbooks currently used in Korea and three in Japan. We analyzed nouns/pronouns related to culture presented in the reading section included in each unit, and compared cultural diversity and cultural identity included in English textbooks in Korea and Japan. As a result, it was found that both countries experienced cultural diversity through English education and introduced their cultural pride to Western culture to realize the goal of strengthening global capabilities. This textbook analysis results show that English textbooks of Korea and Japan depend on American/British cultures and norms. The cultural contents of English textbooks in Korea and Japan tend to focus on geography, food and drink, festivals and activities, family and education systems, etc. And English textbooks in Korea and Japan include the cultural sections in each lesson, but they don't suggest how to relate these cultural sections into the learners' real experiences. These results can be utilized as the motives from which both countries develop English education policy and textbooks in the future.

Keywords: Language Policy, Globalization, Textbook Analysis, Intercultural Competence, Cultural Contents, Cultural Identity

1. INTRODUCTION

European nationalism in the 18th and 19th centuries had a political identity, and a common culture and language played an important role in the center of culture, but during the second half of the 20th century, the fundamental changes in social, economic and political organizations at the international level in the 1980s took place. These changes weakened the role of the nation, and at the center of the change was the spread of English, a global common language. With the 1986 Asian Games and 1988 Olympic Games, in which Korea was exposed to the international community very much in the 1980s and also with the globalization craze in the 1990s, English became more important. With the development of new technological prowess, globalization has resulted in important changes both domestically and nationally in all areas of politics, economics and society and culture. The educational system is also recognized and constructed as part of the economic structure of a society [1]. An important educational agenda for many countries, including South Korea, the question is how to respond to the challenges posed by globalization. One of the essential features of globalization is to

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interact each other in all aspects of society. So cultural competence is very important for all global citizens to understand the diverse cultures which are not familiar with them [2, 3].

With the beginning of the 21st century, English learning has been highlighted as a national mission in many Asian countries. South Korea has recently made great efforts to educate people on the ways in which its Korean young learners can propagate Korean culture into the world, assimilate themselves into the various cultures and respect other cultures. The challenge is to train Korean students to be able to play a leading role in international business in response to the challenges of the globalized world. To achieve this goal, the main task is to educate students who are proficient in English skills, and understand the others' cultures different from their own. At the same time, it is important for students to strongly recognize Korea's national identity. This is because Korean students must have the ability to introduce Korean traditions and ethnic homogeneity to the world in English [4]. In the case of Japan, after 1990 when the nation's economy began to be seriously affected by the global situation, the government established as a national mission that all citizens should acquire practical knowledge of English. The Japanese government has ordered a "national strategic plan" to improve English education in Japan [5]. Based on the above situational background, it is very important to set up the English education policy which is very effective to cultivate EFL learners who can play the leading roles in the globalized society. So this study is to investigate the ways to cultivate the intercultural competence through English education in Korea and Japan.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 English Language Teaching in an Era of Globalization

The globalization can be defined as the shorthand for the intensified flows of capital, goods, people, images, and discourse around the globe, driven by technological innovations mainly in the field of media and information and communication technology, and resulting in new patterns of global activity, community organization and culture. Globalization has become a symbol of the modern world in which the global and the local community constantly interact with each other in various dimensions of social life.

The process of globalization has been accompanied, facilitated and accelerated by the global spread of the English language [6 - 9].

2.2 Globalization and ELT Classroom

The globalization is bringing about deep changes into our ways of thinking, learning, and it seems that educational institutions are not prepared to deal with these changes.

In traditional ELT classroom, what ELT teachers take for granted can be clearly defined; for example, the existence of nation-states with their national language and their national culture; the existence of standardized language with their stable grammars; the priorities of national languages over regional dialects and patois; the clear boundaries between native and foreign languages. But these days, alternative sites of language use, such as Internet and online exchanges are exposing students to the heteroglossic real world of linguistic hybridity, truncated multilingualism. With globalization, the clear definition of the standard language and the authenticity of its use by authentic NSs are put into question [10].

2.3 Intercultural Communication in an Era of Globalization

Interculturality is seen as a dynamic process by which people not only draw on and use the resources and processed of cultures with which they are familiar but also those they may not typically be associated with in their interactions with others. Nowadays, it is especially important to recognize that intercultural awareness, skills, and know-how are taking superior status in the circumstances in which ELF or EIL is learned and taught.

Intercultural competence is a conscious understanding of the role culturally based forms, practices, and frames of understanding can have in intercultural communication and an ability to put these conceptions into practice in a flexible and context specific manner in real time communication [11, 12].

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Based on the above theoretical background, this study aims to find the answers for the research questions like these:

1) The models of cultural competence in English textbooks: are the models of cultural competence in English textbooks diverse enough to embrace the multilingual and multicultural contexts? Or depending on a particular culture and language norm?

2) The contents of cultural topics into deeper understanding of cultural differences: what kind of cultural contents are presented in English textbooks in Korea and Japan? Are they just superficial features of cultural manifestation? Or they include more deep understanding about intercultural communication?

3) Intercultural experiences through ICT, electronic media inside and outside classrooms: do English textbooks present the specific methods and resources to be used in relating the cultural contents with the learners' actual experiences in and outside English classrooms?

This study analyzed three middle school 2nd-grade English textbooks (published in 2018) from Korea and three textbooks from Japan. Table 1 shows the information about three English textbooks from Korea and three from Japan which were analyzed in this research. All of these textbooks are being used for the second grade in Korean and Japanese middle schools and were published in 2018.

Table 1. Information of English textbooks analyzed in this study

Country	Textbook Title	Publishing Company	Publishing Year
Korea	Middle School English 2	Nengreul Company	2018
	Middle School English 2	Dong-A Company	2018
	Middle School English 2	Chunjai Company	2018
Japan	Columbus 21(2)	Mitsumura Tosho	2018
	New Crown 2	Sansei do	2018
	One World 2	Koyukuk Shuppan	2018

This study is implemented based on the following research methods:

1) Details of the basic format were recorded, including number of pages, number of units, and number of vocabulary items.

2) In all of the textbooks, each unit includes one main reading passage. The analysis counted types and tokens of every noun and pronoun in the reading passages.

3) Each noun/pronoun that could be identified as referring to culture in any way was classified according to these five categories: (1) people; (2) countries, cities, nationalities, and languages; (3) things (food, clothes, local products, local specialties); (4) events (festivals, national holidays, sports, games); (5) places (attractions, mountains, oceans).

4) The nouns and pronouns with referential meanings that referred to any country, region, or continent were identified. The following countries are referred to at least once: South Korea, Japan, America/Britain (combined for the analysis), Australia, France, China/Taiwan (combined for the analysis), India, Philippines, Italy, Spain. The following continents or regions are referred to at least once, either directly or through reference to one of the countries listed above: Asia, North America (including Britain for the analysis), Oceania, South America (i.e., through reference to Latin America), Europe (excluding Britain). No textbook reading passage referred to Africa.

4. RESULTS

Textbooks analyzed in this study consist of similar formats. One unit contains one reading section. This study analyzed English textbooks of Korea and Japan focusing on the following criteria: 1) Numbers of “culture” nouns identified in English textbooks, averaged separately for Korean and Japanese textbooks, 2) Countries referred to by nouns and pronouns in Korean and Japanese English textbooks, 3) Ratio of references to Korea and America/Britain in Korean English textbooks, 4) Ratio of references to Japan and America/Britain in Japanese English textbooks, 5) Ratio of references to other countries except Korea, Japan, and America/Britain. Among the reading texts contained in each unit, the number of words specified as “culture” was similarly analyzed in English textbooks in both countries. Figure 1 presents the results of an analysis of the word “culture” in the contents of the current English textbooks for middle school students in Korea and Japan. The analysis results showed that the frequency of the word “culture” in English textbooks in both countries is similar. This result signifies that English language education policy of Korea and Japan emphasize the cultural contents in English textbooks.

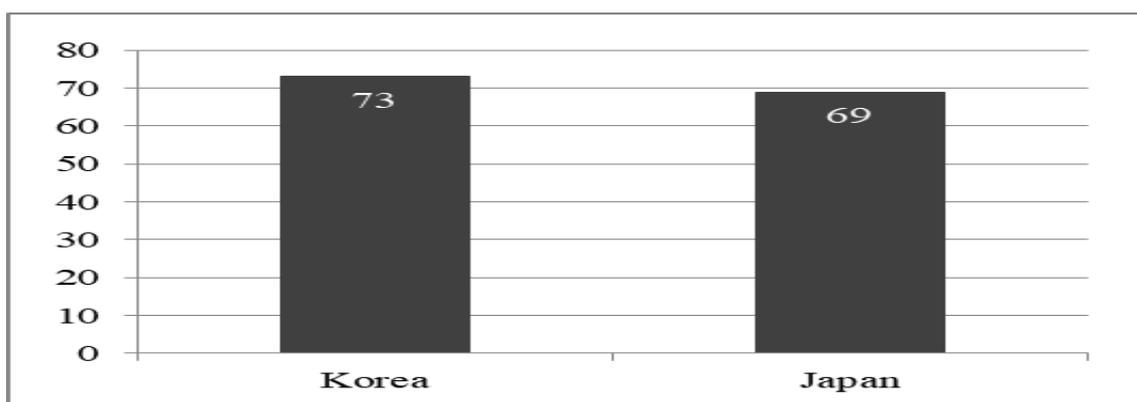


Figure 1. Numbers of “culture” nouns identified in English textbooks, averaged separately for Korean and Japanese textbooks

Figure 2 shows that the English textbooks of the two countries contain various cultural contents from many countries in the world. The total number of the countries whose cultural contents is introduced in the English textbooks of the two countries is 13.

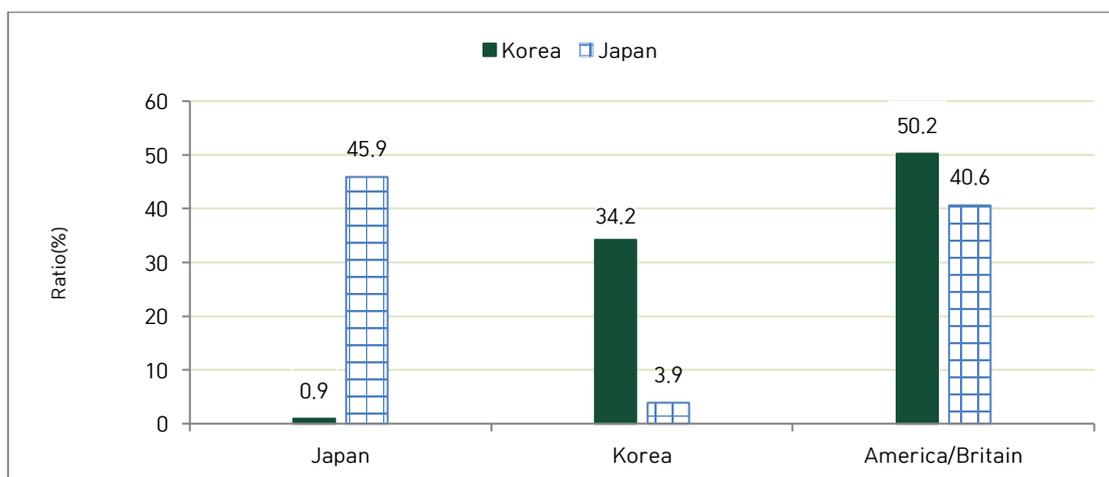


Figure 2. Three countries (Korea, Japan, America/Britain) referred to by nouns and pronouns in Korean and Japanese English textbooks

Figure 3 reveals that most countries except for Korea, Japan, and America/Britain have very poor presentation rates, so these results suggest that English language textbooks of Korea and Japan tend to depend on the cultural issues about Korea, Japan, the United States and the United Kingdom.

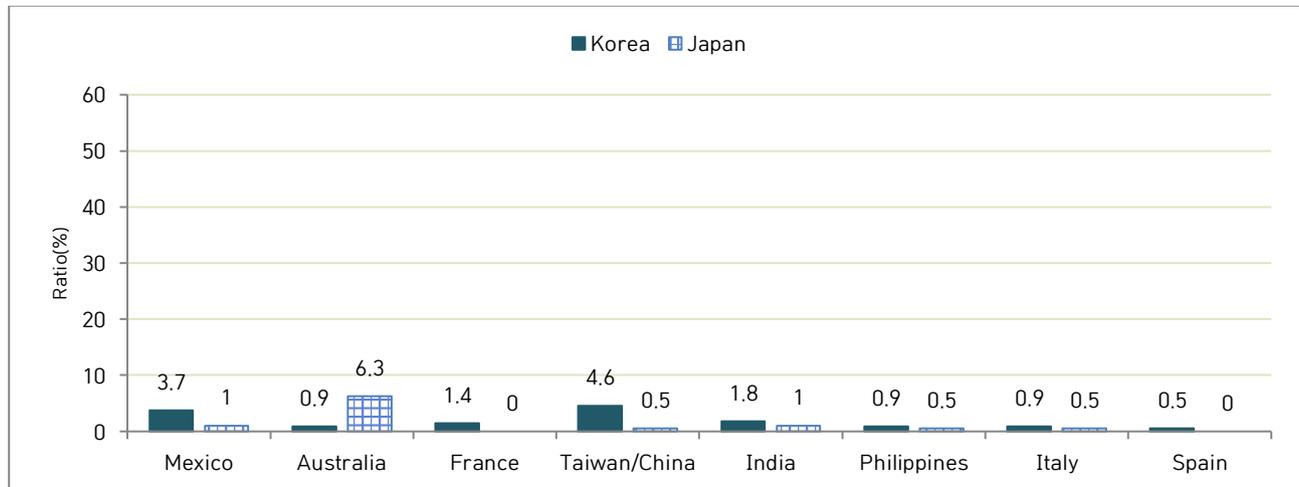


Figure 3. The other countries referred to by nouns and pronouns in Korea and Japanese English textbooks

What's interesting is that the number of countries in both countries' English textbooks is very similar. English textbooks in Korea and Japan present names or cultural content from 13 countries around the world, including Korea, Japan, America and Britain, which can prove that the English textbooks contain various cultural contents. However, the cultural presentation portion of Korea, Japan and America/Britain is so high than those of the other countries (see, Figure 2). When we think about the globalization issue and multicultural competence of EFL learners, it is necessary that the cultural policies for EFL learners in Korea and Japan need to be widened to include the various cultural norms not only from America/ Britain, but also from many other countries in the world.

Figure 4 shows the ratio of Korea to America/Britain among the "cultural" nouns/ pronouns presented in Korean English textbooks. The remaining 1.1 percent represents the proportion of other countries. As Figure 4 suggests, the words related to "cultural" related to America/Britain are 20 percent higher than those related to Korea.

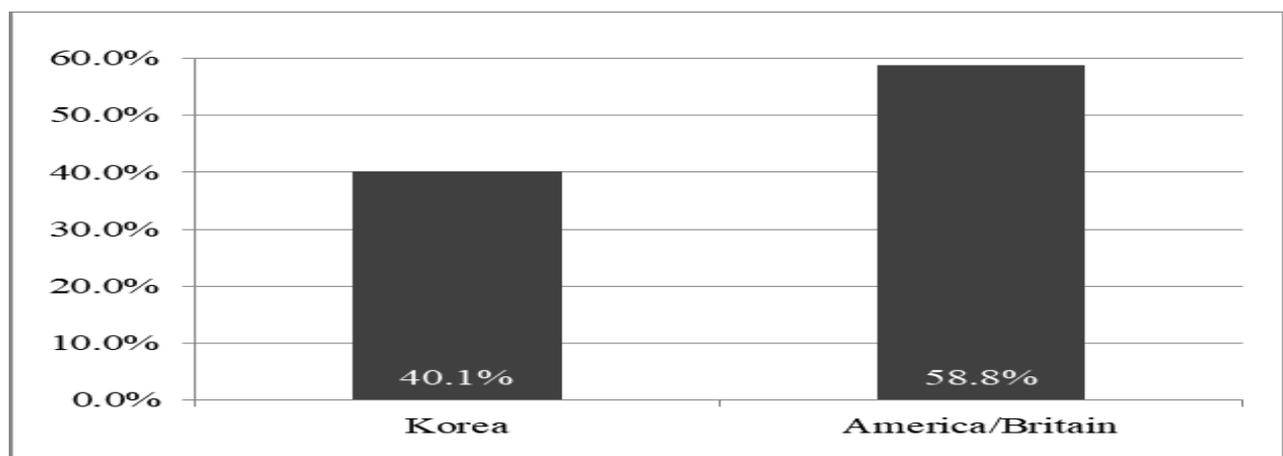


Figure 4. Ratio of references to Korea and America/Britain in Korean English textbooks

This result means that Korean government tried to introduce the America/Britain cultures into Korea, so

that Korean learners can embrace the cultural diversity through America/Britain.

Figure 5 shows the ratio of Japan and America/Britain among the words related to "cultural" presented in Japanese English textbooks. The remaining 4.3 percent represents the proportion of other countries. It is very interesting that the analysis results of Korean and Japanese English textbooks show a little contrasting results.

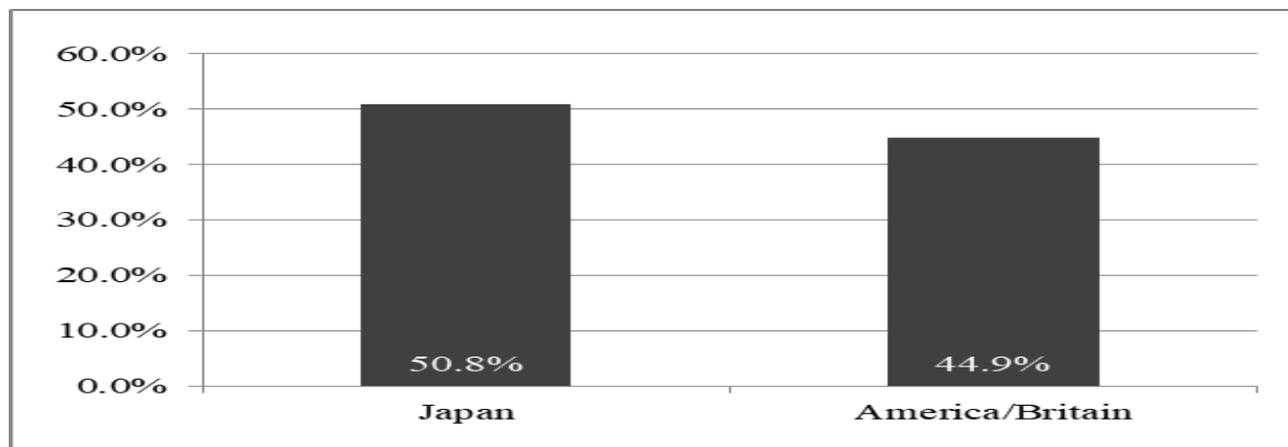


Figure 5. Ratio of references to Japan and America/Britain in Japanese English textbooks

In the case of Japanese textbooks, the words "cultural" related to the U.S./Britain were found to be 5.9 percent less than those related to Japan, according to the analysis in this study [13].

These results of Figure 4 and 5 reflect the differences between the language education policies of each country. Japan emphasizes practical English learning, which emphasizes English's function as an international language. In response to the demands of the global era, South Korea advocated a policy that actively accommodates the various cultures of other countries, prompting Korean society to assimilate into other cultural elements, especially those of the English-American bloc. In particular, the cultural contents of Korean English textbooks tend to be limited to the white middle class in countries that use English as their first language. Japan, on the other hand, has advocated a policy that English learning should not reduce its own cultural identity and values relatively. It stresses that English is just a means of communication and that values and traditions contained in the Japanese culture must be maintained and cultural independence guaranteed [14].

5. DISCUSSINS

Through surveying the cultural contents in English language textbooks of Korea and Japan, the following suggestions can be given as the answers to the research questions in this study.

1) Diversifying the models of cultural competence in English textbooks; this textbook analysis results show that English textbooks of Korea depend on American/British cultures and norms. To promote intercultural competence of Korean EFL learners, English textbooks need to move beyond the dependence on "native speaker" norms and rules. The future directions of ELT need to extend the English norms of NSs into NNSs including cultures and sociolinguistic features from countries in outer / expanding circles.

2) Specifying the contents of cultural topics into deeper understanding of cultural differences; the cultural contents of English textbooks in Korea and Japan tend to focus on geography, food and drink, festivals and activities, family and education systems, etc.; the superficial aspects of cultural manifestation [3]. But intercultural competence models need to explore the deeper understanding, and the critical and principled relative perspectives between diverse cultures, and the skills for negotiation and mediation in the contexts different from the learner's native culture. So in the future, ELT textbooks have to include not only the superficial aspects of culture, but also deeper understanding the cultural differences between what is familiar and what is different.

3) Exploring intercultural experiences through ICT, electronic media (e-mail, chat rooms, instant messaging,

etc.) inside and outside classrooms; exploring the traditional media and art through English is useful to develop the cultural competence, which can include movie, TV, radio, newspaper, novels, magazines. But the internet, email, chat rooms, instant message, etc. can be used to explore the cultural representations. English textbooks in Korea and Japan include the cultural sections in each lesson, but they don't suggest how to relate these cultural sections into the learners' real experiences. So it is necessary to provide some concrete methods and resources to be used to make the learners engage in actual instances of intercultural communication and relate the cultural sections to their personal experiences [15, 16].

6. CONCLUSIONS

Korea and Japan have made their efforts to develop its young learners' intercultural competence to understand the cultural differences among the many countries and to keep their national identity in the world. Considering the rapid changes in every aspect of our lives in the era of globalization, intercultural competence models need to suggest the intercultural speaker as an alternative model through rejecting the monolingual native speaker as the ideal model. The traditional conceptions of communicative and cultural competence in ELT have focused on understanding of particular cultures and countries such as USA and UK. But as English is being used as a global language, this situation forces us to go beyond the notions of teaching a fixed language and cultural contexts in the era of globalization. But English language policies need to recognize the limitations of this kind of knowledge and incorporated the need for a wider ranging understanding of culture for intercultural communication in the expanding contexts. The English education policy of Korea and Japan were written in such a way as to improve the cultural understanding of young students in order for them to grow up as main players in the globalized society in the 21st century. In order to achieve this goal, it can be assessed that the English textbooks implement a cultural policy suitable for the era of globalization in the 21st century by not only containing various cultural material from various countries, but also by promoting their superior culture in textbooks, as well as by aiming to foster their pride in the world.

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