How International is EIL?:
A Critical Discourse Analysis of Cultural Representations in a Korean EFL Education Television Program

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The paper addresses how the notion of English as an international language (EIL) is reflected, and how the culture of EIL is represented, in an English education television program in South Korea. The program is broadcasted on the English education channel run by the Korean government. This paper examines the cultural representations of EIL embedded in the television program through the lens of critical discourse analysis. The analysis of 26 episodes reveals that the program attempts to incorporate Korean English language learners’ voices, culture, interests, and current global issues in various forms. However, these cultural and linguistic representations and intercultural interactions reproduce unequal power relations that propagate the notion that the American English variety and Anglo-centred culture are the normative variety and normative culture of EIL. These findings lead to a discussion on the discourse of inequality embedded in EIL teaching and pedagogical suggestions for more critical intercultural English teaching practices.

Keywords: English education, EFL, textbook analysis
Globalization, and the resulting cultural and linguistic contact, has influenced both the economic activities of individuals and nations, and individuals’ sense of identity and culture. Within this context, English is considered a global or international language as well as a language of power that provides individuals access to technology, commerce, and education (Crystal, 2003). Canagarajah (1999; 2002), however, criticizes this view as a continuation of a colonial discourse that views the world in a hierarchical dichotomy of superior and inferior, center and marginal, dominant and dominated, and legitimate and illegitimate. In other words, the discourse of English as a global language reifies the superior linguistic power of certain English varieties—namely, American and British English—while, at the same time, marginalising local varieties and consequently, cultures and identities.

This paper investigates whether unequal power relations are revealed in the context of a public English education site in Korea and if so, how they are manifested. The research focuses on the cultural representations embedded in SEL 10 Maditneun [Delicious] English, an English education television program produced by the Korean government-run English education broadcasting station (henceforth EBS English), designed to supplement classroom teaching at public schools. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) (van Dijk, 1993) is used as an analytic lens in order to uncover inequalities existing in the cultural representations and intercultural interactions in the program. This leads to a discussion of how local culture, knowledge, and identities are positioned in English education practices. Prior to presenting the analysis, the following section discusses the prevailing rhetoric surrounding English language education in international contexts.

Globalization and English Education:
The Politics of English Learning and Teaching

Many scholars critical of the spread of English argue that the appropriation of English across the globe has not been a case of equal exchange across cultures (Block & Cameron, 2002; Canagarajah, 1999, 2002; Gray, 2002; Park, 2009; Pennycook, 1994, 2001; Phillipson, 1992; Tsui & Tollefson, 2007). Rather than serving as an opportunity for learners from outer and expanding circle nations (Kachru, 1992)—where English is learned as a second or foreign language respectively—to exchange expertise, English language teaching (ELT) and learning is viewed as leading to the reproduction of the social dominance of inner circle nations where English is the first language.

For example, in Singapore in the 1980s, a governmental movement sought to eradicate the local variety of English, ‘Singlish’ and to legitimize British English (Tsui & Tollefson, 2007). In South Korea, only British and American English are considered as legitimate English and American cultural products and persons are predominant in cultural representations of the English language (Park, 2009; Yim, 2007). The local variety of English, ‘Konglish,’ is considered ‘a broken English,’ and its use by Koreans is often viewed as deficient (Park, 2009). A similar phenomenon is also found in Japan where American English is held up as the ideal model and the use of non-native English speaker varieties is considered shameful (Tsui & Tollefson, 2007).

This perceived superiority of Standard varieties of English (i.e., American and British English) is reinforced by powerful institutional gatekeepers such as Cambridge
examinations, International Baccalaureate (IB) standards, and the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). Herein resides the imperialism of ELT: there is little opportunity for users of English to develop legitimate alternative varieties, which can in turn lead to cultural discrimination toward non-standard English speaking groups.

In English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts, which roughly correspond to Kachru’s (1992) expanding circle, there is a hiring tendency which favors native English speaking teachers (NESTs) from inner circle nations, mostly from North America, Britain, and recently Australia (Tsui & Tollefson, 2007; Yim, 2007). This is particularly the case in South Korea where there are explicit government programs such as the English Program in Korea (EPIK) that aim to place NESTs from inner circle countries in schools all across Korea. Phillipson (1992) argues that these hiring practices reflect what he has termed ‘the native speaker fallacy’ which may position qualified local bilingual English language teachers and their local variety of English as deficient in comparison to less qualified monolingual NESTs. These hiring practices in turn reproduce an Anglo-centred hegemonic discourse in English language teaching (Tsui & Tollefson, 2007).

The hegemony of inner circle English permeates popular television programs in South Korea. Park (2009), for instance, calls attention to the image of Koreans as illegitimate English speakers within Korean television comedy programs where Korean-accented English is presented as another genre of humour. The mocking of Korean accented English is a discursive practice wherein the ownership of English belongs to inner circle speakers and those who are not from the circle are viewed as deficient. In other words, the acquisition of an inner circle variety appears vital for non-native English learners to be viewed as legitimate speakers of the language.

In summary, English serves a hegemonic role where inner circle varieties are preferred over local varieties in English language teaching, testing, and entertainment. However, this strong preference for inner circle English ignores important issues. For instance, the complexity of human cultures and relations that have evolved along with globalization such as hybridity (Bakhtin, 1982) are overlooked along with power inequalities that tend to be reinforced rather than challenged (Cummins, 2001; Freire, 1970). The following section explores the evolution of English education in South Korea in light of globalization.

**English Education in South Korea**

English was first introduced to South Korea in 1883 in order to train interpreters. Immediately, English became, and continues to be, the most popular foreign language in South Korea with the exception of during the Japanese colonial period between 1910 and 1945 (Kim-Rivera, 2002).

In the 1990s, with the Kim Youngsam government’s segyehwa (globalization) policy, communication skills in English became increasingly important to South Koreans. The nation’s economy became highly dependent on international trade, which required employees to be able to communicate fluently in English. The English language gained symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991), as ‘cultural capital’ or as a ‘linguistic commodity’ (Heller, 1999). English became the language of survival rather than the language of choice. English proficiency became a crucial requirement for many higher paying jobs.
and for acceptance to many institutions of higher education (Jung & Norton, 2002; Park, 2009; Shin, 2010; Shin & Kubota, 2008; Yim, 2007).

The current revised Korean national English curriculum views English as the language for global/cosmopolitan citizenship (Korea Institute for Curriculum and Evaluation, 2008). This curriculum attempts to promote cultural diversity and embrace cross-cultural and cross-linguistic differences. The curriculum reflects the importance of intercultural communicative competence which, according to Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey (2002), aims “to prepare [learners] for interaction with people of other cultures” and “to enable them to understand and accept people from other cultures as individuals with other distinctive perspectives, values and behaviours” (p. 6). However, despite the curricular emphasis on intercultural understandings in English education, and calls for the inclusion of diverse cultural references, the implementation of the curriculum is not always consistent. Song (2010), in an analysis of Korean secondary school English textbooks, found that textbooks showed a cultural bias favoring American culture and the American standard variety of English. This tendency, present in the current study, will be explored in further detail within this article’s analytical sections. Prior to this discussion, however, the following section will lay out the underpinnings of the conceptual and methodological frameworks used in this study.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is used as an analytic tool to look at the biases and cultural imbalances that may be embedded in the cultural representations in the English education television program, SEL 10 Maditneun English, analyzed in this study. van Dijk (1993) argues that the importance of CDA lies in an understanding of social problems through, “the analysis of the complex relationships between dominance and discourse” (p. 252). Moreover, CDA is used to “deconstruct dominant discourses as well as counter-discourses by posing questions at the boundaries of ideology, power, knowledge, class, race, and gender” (Kumaravadivelu, 1999, p. 476). Thus, in this study, CDA is used to identify cultural dominance and bias represented in the television program. This dominance is determined by looking at the frequency of appearances of cultural groups as well as the cultural/intercultural interactions between different cultures. In addition, this study will analyze which groups play dominant roles in the different segments and determine which individuals are positioned as superior in order to decode the power relations in intercultural interactions and add depth to the analysis.

SEL 10 Maditneun English

SEL 10 Maditneun English— which translates to School English Level 10 Delicious English— was broadcasted on the Korean Government run network, EBS English. The program, which targeted Korean high school students, originally aired from February 25, 2008 to May 20, 2008, and consisted of 26 episodes, with a running time of approximately 20 minutes each. All the episodes are available on-line through the website, www.ebse.co.kr.

The program had three main hosts and each episode was divided into three sections based on the organization of a Western restaurant menu: Appetizer, Main Dish,
and Dessert Party. The Appetizer section was hosted by Nancy, a native English speaker from the United States. Nancy played the role of the manager in a restaurant and in this role she introduced the topic of the lesson for 2–4 minutes. In the Main Dish section (henceforth, main section), which ran for approximately 10 minutes, a Korean female English teacher played the role of a chef. She further developed the topic and discussed communicative and grammatical points. One or two Korean high school students also participated in this section to contribute their opinions and practice the language of the segment. The final segment, Dessert Party, was hosted by Sam, a native English speaking teacher from Australia. Sam played the role of a patissier or pastry chef. He wrapped up the lesson for 5 minutes by giving additional examples related to the main topic of the lesson.

Analysis

Visible Cultural Representations

This study uses Moran’s (2001) five dimensions of culture in order to define a cultural representation. According to Moran, cultural representations mirror a group of people’s shared set of practices (e.g. different forms of communication and interaction), connect to their shared set of products (e.g. food, music, and festivals), reflect a set of perspectives (e.g. beliefs, values, and ideology) of the world, and are set within specific social contexts (e.g. community, and nation) (p. 24). He argues that these elements are all interconnected. Some are more visible, tangible, and explicit, while others are more invisible, intangible, and implicit. Considering more visible and tangible cultural representations in its analysis, this study considers the nationalities and geographic regions of people and products, which are explicitly addressed in the program, in order to infer the dominance of cultural groups.

The first part of the analysis focuses on cultural representations of nationality and geographic region. In the 26 episodes there are 23 specific nationalities and three geographic regions identified. However, each reference appears at different rates of frequency and in varying detail. Some national and geographic representations are mentioned briefly as an example to support an argument while others are extensively covered as the main subject for a particular episode. Also, some representations are not specific to one nation. In some cases, there are cultural references based on broader geographic locations such as Europe, the Middle East, and the West.

The number of national and geographic representations was recorded in order to compare how often various cultures appear in the episodes. The occurrences were recorded section by section (i.e. Appetizer, Main, and Dessert) within each episode in order to determine their relative dominance throughout the episodes (see Figure 1). Figure 1 presents the nationalities and geographic regions mentioned two or more times in the program.
It is noteworthy that the representations of Korean culture and U.S. culture are dominant. The Korean cultural group appears a total of 43 times across 22 out of 26 episodes (Appetizer n=15; Main n=14; and Dessert n=14). U.S. cultural references occur a total of 30 times across 20 episodes (Appetizer n=7; Main n=9; and Dessert n=14). References to Britain, the third highest frequency, appear 7 times in total (Appetizer n=0; Main n=2; and Dessert n=5). In this sense, the program seems to promote the Korean national identity in 12 out of 26 (46%) episodes. The Main section specifically deals with stories about Korean people or Korean-centered topics. For example, episodes 1, 3, 4, and 7, talk about world famous Koreans—a singer, designer, swimmer, and astronaut, respectively. Episodes 2, 9, 10, and 20 address cultural products such as Korean movies, national treasures, food, and traditions, respectively. Although some episodes do not deal directly with Korean cultural products or persons, they still tend to address the main topics based on Koreans’ perspectives, for example, regarding global warming awareness, destinations and preparation for travelling, studying abroad, and the impact of English on individuals’ lives as found in episodes 8, 16, 22, and 26, respectively. The next dominant cultural group in the main sections is the U.S. cultural group. Popular songs, Hollywood movies, famous historical figures, travelling, and education in the U.S. are introduced as main topics in episodes 6, 11, 13, 16, 18, 22, and 24. However, in some episodes, such as 16 and 22, American culture interacts with Korean culture. This data helps us grasp the general idea that among the numerous cultural references in the episodes, Korean and U.S. cultures are predominantly represented.
Intercultural Interactions

The interactions between different cultures are also examined in order to understand which cultural groups are positioned as superior to others. Twenty-one of 26 episodes contain examples of intercultural interactions. In intercultural interactions, cultural differences are often addressed by comparing Korean learners’ culture with other cultures. Cultural diversity and complexity is also discussed by comparing different cultures and their history. However, there are instances when these intercultural interactions within a global culture are limited to Western culture or U.S. culture while non-Western cultures are marginalized. The following passage in excerpt 1, taken from the main section in episode 9, explicitly reflects this bias:

Excerpt (1) From Ep. 09 Table Manner, 03/24/2008

Nowadays a number of parents are sending their children to “manner schools,” where children are taught how to eat properly in a Western restaurant. This shows the increasing demand to learn “global manners” as Koreans are gaining more opportunities to meet foreign partners.

This passage indicates that Koreans need to learn global manners since there are more opportunities to interact with non-Koreans. However, the show embodies Western cultural dominance by exclusively focusing on how to eat properly in a Western restaurant, which prioritizes Western manners as the global manners to be learned.

Excerpt two from episode 22 exemplifies a narrow notion of intercultural understanding as expressed by the Korean high school students dealing with culture shock while studying abroad.

Excerpt (2) From Ep. 22 Study Abroad, 05/05/2008

Seo-young: And if you want to reduce culture shock, you have to be good at English.
Young-Hun: Yeah. That's why we are studying English very hard.

Seo-young’s opinion that one has to be good at English in order to reduce culture shock is an oversimplified view and may mislead learners into believing that English is the solution to dealing with culture shock. In other words, English is described as a panacea to solve cultural conflicts, which reflects a hegemonic function of English and overlooks deeper intercultural differences.

At the end of each episode, Sam introduces different cultural products related to the episode topics. He frequently introduces cross-cultural and cross-linguistic differences. Sam can be seen as a good model for Korean English language learners as he is a bilingual speaker, competent in Korean and English, and he often transcends the two distinctive linguistic borders in his segment. At the same time, he can also be seen as an intercultural speaker who has knowledge of different cultures and attitudes and respects cultural differences. He often introduces different cultures and explains linguistic and
cultural differences to the viewers. Yet, he does not seem to promote local linguistic varieties nor challenge the hegemony of the dominant standard varieties of English. As a result, his teaching practices tend to reproduce inequality in linguistic varieties by legitimizing American and British English as both superior and the norm, thereby marginalizing local varieties as inferior. Sam introduces Konglish examples as broken English that should not be used. For example, in episode 13, Konglish ‘handphone’ was corrected as cell phone in American English and mobile phone in British English. Moreover, Sam often identifies local English varieties as problematic, such as in the following excerpt, in episode 26.

Excerpt (3) From Ep. 26 English in Your Life, 05/20/2008

In fact, English has become so big that there are numerous varieties of English. For example, here in Korea, we have Konglish. We also have the variety of English that Koreans most like, American English, the original version of English from England, we have Kiwi English which is from New Zealand, Aussie English from Australia. Singapore has their own English. In Japan, they have Japlish. Now how are we going to solve this issue? [Italics added for emphasis]

In Excerpt 3, Sam addresses the status of English as an international language and introduces different varieties of English used by many people. Sam, himself, speaks Australian accented English. After introducing various English varieties, he announces that this is an issue to be solved; however, he does not go into further detail. This indicates that the program recognizes linguistic diversity as a problem. This further reproduces English linguistic imperialism by referring to the different varieties as a problem thereby legitimizing the hegemony of American and British English.

Nonetheless, the program can be said to be successful in presenting Korean culture and identities. There are various Korean persons from different social areas, and both traditional and national Korean cultures are introduced as the nation’s pride in episodes 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, 10, and 20. These Korean cultural icons are all compared with other cultures and are perceived as excellent by outsiders and excel beyond the local context. This shows that Korean cultural products and persons are successful in the world and have become global assets. However, as noted above, there is a tendency for Korean cultural products to be compared with American products, which implies that international interactions are interactions exclusively with the U.S. This is further shown in the excerpts below taken from episodes 1, 2, and 16.

Excerpt (4) From Ep. 01 K-pop, 02/25/2008

As most of you know, Rain [Korean singer] has played a part in a Hollywood movie and even held so many concerts overseas.

Excerpt (5) From Ep. 02 Movies, 02/26/2008

The recent movie D-war has been a great hit not only here but also in the United States.
In other words, globalization may have propelled Korean national assets onto the world stage; however, the program seems to have constructed a narrow conception of Korea by looking at the world through a distorted lens as if it only consisted of Korea and the United States.

The intercultural practices demonstrated throughout the program tend to over-simplify intercultural interactions by limiting them to interactions between Korean cultural groups and American cultural groups. Although the program values the culture of learners in language learning, the dominance of U.S. culture tends to play a role in legitimizing American culture and knowledge as the norm to learn and negotiate with.

**Reproduction of American English and Cultural Imperialism**

Equating speaking ‘correct’ English and learning English culture with speaking like an American and learning American culture is prevalent not only in the main section but also in some grammatical examples and in student dialogue. For instance:

Excerpt (7) From *Ep. 19 Diet*, 04/28/2008

Young-hun: 영어를 잘하려면 워낙 워낙 미국인 친구를 사귀는 게 좋지. (If you want to be good at English, no matter what, having an American friend is the way for it.) In addition, your American friend must be talkative. (Korean translated by the author in italics)

This example from episode 19 is highly hegemonic since it implies that U.S. citizens are recognized as a cultural group that Koreans prefer to befriend in order to succeed in English, which serves to marginalize non-U.S. groups and is, thus, discriminatory. This discourse is present in other voices in other episodes. The following is from episode 22:

Excerpt (8) From *Ep. 22 Study Abroad*, 05/06/2008

We are living in an era with 100 thousand Korean students in America. The reason most Koreans go to study in America is to study English as a child or young adult and as a college student to achieve a reputable degree.

Excerpt 8 indicates that many Koreans go to the United States to obtain a prestigious university degree, which reflects the Korean societal phenomenon where Koreans desire degrees from top-ranked U.S. universities (Shin, 2010). This excerpt is accompanied by pictures of Korean students studying and posing with international students and teachers, mostly Caucasian, and pictures of the U.S. map and flag. The images are indicative of
Koreans favoring the U.S. as a destination to study abroad and to interact with Caucasian friends.

Excerpt (9) From *Ep. 22 Study Abroad*, 05/06/2008

**There are many good reasons and benefits in choosing a community college as your first academic institution in the United States.**

The sentence in excerpt 9, also from the study abroad episode, acknowledges the value of community colleges in the United States for Koreans. However, the excerpt appears to reproduce American educational dominance by emphasizing community colleges in the United States, rather than valuing Korean institutions and the local knowledge of Korean students. The topic of studying abroad in this episode is actively discussed among cast members. The multiple voices reinforce the perceived superiority of American community colleges as seen in the passages below.

Excerpt (10) From *Ep. 22 Study Abroad*, 05/06/2008

Ahn: There are **many community colleges in America, and as you heard, they are very helpful for the international students.**
Seo-young: They provide students with the first two years of academic training.
Young-hun: And it also provides them many different types of subjects.
Nancy: In America it is very common that students go to a community college first and then transfer to a university.

Excerpt (11) From *Ep. 22 Study Abroad*, 05/06/2008

Seo-young: I think going to a community college is too good an opportunity to miss.
Ahn: Yes. It is so good a chance that we can't miss it. Right?

The teacher in excerpts 10 and 11 speaks to the value of community colleges in the United States. Interestingly, Nancy introduces the idea that many students transfer to a university from a community college in the U.S. Therefore, attending community college is viewed as a step toward an American university education. However, information about going directly to a university is excluded. As a result, it appears to devalue Korean students’ ability to gain university admission in the United States.

The portrayed superior role of English as an international language is clear in episode 26. This episode stresses the importance of English as a global language as may be seen in the following passage, “That is why learning English is not just for communicating with native speakers but to communicate with the world.” Episode 26 also emphasizes the importance of English for learners as can be seen in the various ways it is positioned in the following conversation:
Excerpt (12) From Ep. 26 English in Your Life, 05/20/2008

A: I think learning English is one of the best ways to improve your life.
B: Hmm... how?
A: If you speak English well, you can get unlimited access to knowledge.
B: That's right. Most of it is in English.
A: And English is the language of communication. If you can communicate in English, you'll be able to contact people from all over the world.
B: Of course. Plus, you'll be able to travel more easily.
A: In addition, knowing English will help you get a good job and not lose it.
B: Little did I think that English will save my life someday!

The dialogue in excerpt 12 implies that English can provide learners with unlimited access to knowledge and improve their lives. However, this seems to be too simplistic to determine one’s quality of life. Also, it is interesting to see how student participants are interacting with the topic. To both of the students, English is viewed as something that they need for employability as shown in excerpt 13:

Excerpt (13) From Ep. 26 English in Your Life, 05/20/2008

Seo-young: That's so true. Communicating in English is essential.
Young-hun: I want to put "excellent efficiency in English" in my resume.
Seo-young: I want to be a world-class businesswoman.
Nany: I'm happy I can contact people from all over the world. English is an international language.

The belief that English is an international language permeates different episodes and sections of the program; however, the interaction with English seems to be limited to certain cultures, namely the U.S. and Korea. Although the program attempts to include various cultural references, it fails to challenge the linguistic and cultural inequalities in English education and may further serve to reproduce these inequalities.

Discussion and Implications

The EBS English education channel has great potential to provide a new pedagogical paradigm, reflecting the intentions to offer complementary education for everyone in order to narrow the educational gap between the affluent and the less privileged. Also, the topics that this program introduces are appropriate for older teens, dealing with teen culture and providing students’ opinions on issues. Nonetheless, this program fails to present equitable cultural and linguistic representations surrounding non-Korean cultural and linguistic groups. In other words, the program constitutes the discourses that tend to reproduce hegemonic relations and strengthens English linguistic and cultural imperialism throughout the 26 episodes explored in the paper. Although a large portion of the cultural references and the main topics are Korean-centered, many intercultural interactions are limited to those between Korean and U.S. culture. In this light, there are numerous areas that users of the program, including English classroom practitioners, have to be conscious of, and subsequently modify, in order to use this program to instil equitable worldviews and socially just educational practices.
In order to challenge the hegemonic functions of the texts, firstly, educators need to see the cultural imbalances, biases, and stereotypes embedded in the texts and activities, and attempt to address the inequalities through discussions with students. For instance, in episode 22, when students addressed the issue of culture shock, there was not a clear explanation of cultural differences and the relationship between language and culture. Culture shock could better be understood by sharing individuals’ experiences of culture shock and by role-playing to situate learners in new and different cultural contexts. Also, teachers, rather than ignoring or overlooking, can instead engage problematic content. For example, in episode 26, after Sam’s comment, ‘Now how are we going to solve this issue [of diverse English varieties]?’, educators could facilitate debate around English varieties or comparisons with local Korean varieties as a way to raise learners’ linguistic and cultural awareness in language learning. Thus, teachers should seek to challenge the cultural biases and inequalities presented in teaching materials since not challenging them may contribute to the reinforcement of the biases and inequalities (Lawrence, 2010).

For a more inclusive intercultural education, there is a need for collaborative and creative cultural content development. For this development, it is also important that teachers and learners possess critical intercultural awareness. Without critical awareness, educators may ignore critical issues and strengthen ‘coercive relations of power,’ reproducing the hegemonic, hierarchical structure of society, rather than facilitating ‘collaborative relations of power’ that empower social and cultural minority groups and individuals (Cummins, 2001).

**Conclusion**

This paper has explored how the notion of English as an international language and culture is reflected in *SEL 10 Maditneun* [Delicious] *English*, on the English education television channel in South Korea. The analysis indicates that the program attempts to accommodate various cultural events and issues; however, it fails to challenge the existing hierarchical discourse in English education by favoring the American English variety, as well as American cultural products and people. In other words, the program contains biased linguistic and cultural preferences toward the target language and culture and, as a result, the notion of English as an international language does not include nations beyond North America, and more specifically, beyond the United States. This implies that the international interactions in English in Korea only involve American culture. Thus, it is an essential and urgent task for teachers and learners to recognize and challenge inequalities surrounding various forms of texts in learning and teaching resources in order to develop democratic citizens who can respect linguistic and cultural differences as well as appreciate the coexistence of diverse cultures with just world views.
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References


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