CHAPTER 6

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN KOREA:

Toward Globalization or *Glocalization*?

HYUNJUNG SHIN

*The University of Toronto, Canada*

ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a critical examination of current issues and controversies in English Language Teaching (ELT) in Korea, focusing on the recent Korean “English-only” educational policy, which requires that English be taught without L1 support in certain school grades. Drawing from a study I conducted with Korean English teachers and students, I investigate how the policy goes beyond the mere discussion of language of instruction and perpetuates the notion of the Native Speaker (NS) as an ideal language teacher. The conflict between the government’s goal for English education (influenced by the discourse of globalization) and English teachers’ goals for English education (constructed through daily interactions with the students in the local classrooms) suggests that Koreans should reconceptualize ELT in Korea. Drawing on Wallace’s (2002) notion of *global literate English* and Robertson’s (1995) notion of *glocalization*, I argue that when the global English is *glocalized* through critical pedagogy, English can work as a language of opportunity for Koreans. A critical understanding of the complex relationship between ELT and colonialism and a reconceptualization of the ownership of English in Korea will have implications for ELT practices in other countries.

INTRODUCTION

The status of English as a global language is undisputed, and the impact of globalization on English education is pervasive in ELT practices in different parts of the world. Gray (2002) argued that the increasing number of transnational corporations, the rise of world organizations with global networks, and the influence of the Internet are mainly responsible for the conjunction of globalization and English. As represented in Jung & Norton’s (2002) discussion of Korea’s new national elementary English program, recent language policies in Korea have been created within the discourse of globalization, as an effort of the Korean government to globalize the economy for further growth. Consequently, languages are often considered as economic commodities (cf. Heller, 2002) and education is treated as a tool to keep up with the rapid globalization of the world economy. The following article from a Korean newspaper is indicative of this:
Universities ... will face mergers and acquisitions just like private businesses, and those failing to meet government criteria will be forced to close their doors ... They are a part of education policies to be pursued in the next five years, as reported by Education and Human Resources Development Minister Yoon Deok-hong to President Roh Moo-hyun yesterday ... In another initiative, a legal base will be established to force 'incompetent' universities to shut down voluntarily. (Na, 2003, p. 1, original in English)

In this chapter, I provide a critical examination of current issues and controversies in ELT in Korea, focusing on the debate around recent Korean “English-only” educational policy, which requires that English be taught without L1 support in certain school grades. I investigate how the policy, endorsed by the supporters of economic globalization, goes beyond the mere discussion of language instruction and perpetuates the notion of the native speaker (NS) as an ideal language teacher. In doing so, I draw from a larger study I conducted with Korean English teachers and students in a large city in Korea, to be reported more fully elsewhere (cf. Shin, 2004).

I first provide some background context with an overview of the impact of the global spread of English on Korea and move to a discussion of the ideological orientation of the English-only policy. I then explore how teachers and students in Korean English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms have responded to this policy. Finally, I discuss the implications of my study for the future of ELT in Korea and around the world, drawing on Robertson’s (1995) notion of globalization, which he introduces as a counterargument to common, monolithic understanding of the relationship between the global and the local in the discussion of globalization:

I have tried to transcend the tendency to cast the idea of globalization as inevitably in tension with the idea of localization. I have instead maintained that globalization ... has involved and increasingly involves the creation and the incorporation of locality, processes which themselves largely shape, in turn, the compression of the world as a whole. Even though we are, for various reasons, likely to continue to use the concept of globalization, it might well be preferable to replace it for certain purposes with the concept of glocalization. (p. 40)

THE GLOBAL SPREAD OF ENGLISH AND ELT IN KOREA

Learning English as a global language means learning how to understand and speak a variety of Englishes with speakers who are not necessarily native speakers of the language ... while the official rhetoric claims that English has become the lingua franca of the world and is not “owned” by any one nation in particular (Widdowson: 1994), everybody knows that not all English accents are equally prestigious, nor are all English ways of speaking. (Kramsch, 1999, p. 134, emphasis in original)

The global spread of English bound up with the spread of capitalism and its dominance in higher education in many parts of the world has made it the language of power and prestige in many countries. Indeed, the global use of English inherently serves the interests of some over those of others and often results in exacerbating the unequal relationship between the Center and Periphery in ELT, and between different groups within the Periphery countries (Canagarajah, 1999a, 2002; Pennycook, 1994, 1998, 2001). Accordingly, although the subtlety of the political nature of education often makes it invisible in everyday local contexts, ELT and colonialism are inherently intertwined (see Pennycook, this volume; Phillipson, 1992). It is clear then that ELT is not a neutral business and “those who wish to deny