Language Teaching and Intercultural Communication:
Teaching Korean Grammar to Non-native Speakers

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Grounded upon the interactive relationship between intercultural communication (IC) and foreign language education and the recent gradual salience of communicative language teaching (CLT) in foreign language grammar learning sectors, the study reported in this paper deals with the issue of teaching Korean grammar to non-native speakers in terms of teaching Korean as a foreign language (TKFL). This paper attempts to examine and analyze several Korean language textbooks prepared for foreign learners of Korean, which is used overseas, especially in Hong Kong (HK). It is also attempted to evaluate the textbooks in terms of CLT and communicative competence. By doing so, we can further understand the methods of Korean grammar instruction provided to foreigners as a second language or a foreign language.

Keywords: Korean grammar, intercultural communication, grammar translation method, communicative language teaching, non-native speakers

1. Introduction

In 21st century contexts, countries around the world are rapidly globalized and internationalized nowadays. The notion of Intercultural Communication (IC) is getting high attentions in the field of foreign language education. Intercultural Communication (IC) requires to be considered by the language teachers to teach the language effectively to the foreigners (Fong, DeWitt, & Leng, 2018; Zhang, 2017). Holliday (1994) points out that in lots of contexts of language teaching and learning, students seem to be frustrated and to fail in language acquisition when the curriculum and teachers do not take IC into consideration. However, grammar is still given priority in teaching languages to the foreigner. Of course, it is by no means exceptional for grammar education, which is still a very important part of language teaching.

In alignment with particular relevance of IC to language education in the contemporary globalization era (Laopongharn & Sercombe, 2009), recent pedagogical developments in foreign language grammar sector have been made under Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) or Communicative Approach (CA) methods. Here the focus has been on the active use of language or the communicative competence in various (inter)cultural contexts. Kramsch (1993) and Brown (2004) suggested, while the traditional grammar teaching approach well known as Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) is still respected and used (see Chang, 2011).
In the light of the interrelated relationship between IC and foreign language teaching, and the latest salience of CLT in the field of foreign language grammar education, this project approaches the issue of Korean grammar education for foreigners from the perspective of teaching Korean as a foreign language (TKFL). In this paper, we attempted to explore and analyze some Korean language textbooks used for non-native Korean speakers used overseas, especially in Hong Kong (HK), to understand the method of Korean grammar teaching offered to foreign speakers as a second language or a foreign language. It also targeted to estimate the textbooks in terms of CLT/CA and communicative competence.

2. Literature Review

According to Penny (2000), grammar is defined as a set of rules that define how words/parts of words are connected/changed to build up the acceptable units of meaning in a language. Also, Close (1982) earlier said related to the English grammar, that it is mainly a sort of system of syntax which decides the order and patterns where vocabulary is arranged in a sentence. The view of grammar reflected in the above definitions is restricted to matters of grammatical structure and the teaching of grammar is also viewed as the presentation and practice of discrete grammatical forms. Therefore, the mastery of grammar, which is an indispensable element of a language and traditionally has been addressed so importantly especially in foreign language education, here is immediately related to the enhancement of the accuracy of language commanding and communication rather than the fluency of them.

The traditional grammar teaching method, or Grammar-Translation Method has been so far emphasized and respected by not a few linguists and grammarians (see Austin, 2003; Cunningham, 2000). GTM still plays positive roles in the foreign language learning process including helping to understand accurate meanings of target language words, sentences and grammatical expressions. Chellapan (1982) proposes “translation can make the student come to closer grips with the target language. A simultaneous awareness of two media could actually make the student see the points of convergence and divergence more clearly and also refine the tools of perception and analysis resulting in divergent thinking” (p. 60). Stern (1991) also points out that a contrastive linguistics study is important for the L2 learners, and so, translating can play a certain role in language learning and acquisition. Julio, F. (2019) pointed out that grammar provides a basic structures to a language users in order to organize and put their messages and ideas across. It works as the base of meaning transformation mechanism through which the messages have been transported. He used a metaphor here that without it, in the same way as a train cannot move without railways, the users will not be able to convey the ideas to their full extension without a good command of the underlying grammar patterns and structures of the language.

However, if learners cannot use the grammar rules flexibly and appropriately in the practical communication, although the traditional grammar education method helps improve their grammatical mastery and linguistic understanding of the target language, what is the use of talking? That is to say, GTM has its disadvantages which prevent the learners from developing their communicative competence: (1) it is teacher-centered; (2) memorization and rote learning are the basic learning techniques (Chang, 2011). The alternative to GTM accordingly is the CLT or CA. CLT/CA makes language/grammar learning as in real-world situation, emphasizing its practical communication competence. Namely, the new teaching method is content-based, meaningful, contextualized, and discourse-based rather than sentence-based. The definition of grammar
instruction from this context is a broader one (Ellis, 2006): “grammar teaching involves any instructional technique that draws learners’ attention to some specific grammatical form in such a way that it helps them either to understand it meta-linguistically and/or process it in comprehension and/or production so that they can internalize it” (p. 84).

About the definition of CLT, Richards (2006) points out “communicative language teaching can be understood as a set of principles about the goals of language teaching, how learners learn a language, the kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning, and the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom” (p. 2). Much earlier, Nunan (1991) suggested five features of CLT: (1) an emphasis on learning to communicate via interaction in the target language; (2) the introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation; (3) the provision of opportunities for students to focus, not only on language but also on the learning process itself; (4) an enhancement of the student’s own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning; (5) an attempt to connect classroom language learning with language activities outside the classroom.

The above mentioned literatures stated some important aspects related to the meaning and function of GMT and CLT/CA. Based on the literature reviewed above and realizing TKFL at the general move from infancy to development (Choi, 2012), the researchers here attempts to investigate the method and trend of Korean grammar instruction to foreign learners in Hong Kong (HK) where the number of Korean learners is on the rapid rise at the moment. This paper aims to place some findings that were made through comparing and analyzing three most popular Korean language textbooks for non-native speakers used now in HK and furthermore assessing them in terms of CLT/CA and communicative competence. It is to be mentioned here that there has been few researches yet related to some GMT or CLT/CA-based approach to Korean grammar instruction for English-speaking learners. Few researches was found specifically only on “textbook development for English-speaking students” and “Korean textbooks in Chinese Mainland” (Lee, 2012; Hu, 2013).

3. Data Analysis

This is a comparative textual analysis of three textbooks of the Korean language for foreign/non-native learners, used at college-level institutions in HK: Ewha Korean 1-1 (ELC, 2010), Sogang Korean 1A (SUKLEC, 2008), Yonsei Korean 1-1 (YUKLEC, 2007). The three Korean textbooks are all the first book of their own Korean language study book series for foreign learners, and so they are naturally for the very beginners. This selection solves unfair matters from the different object and level each textbook is targeted at according to its series progress. About respective texts, there will be an analytic approach categorized into external and internal structures in the large.

3.1 Ewha Korean 1-1

Ewha Korean 1-1 (hereafter EK) as the first textbook of “Ewha Korean Textbook Series 1-1, 1-2, 2-1, 2-2, 3-1, 3-2, 4, 5, 6” is a 140-page book with parallel texts in Korean and English, including a separate workbook and audio CD. EK shows a total layout as follows: Preface, Table of Contents, How to Use This Book, Main Characters, Lesson1: Korean & Hangeul, Lesson 2: Introductions, Lesson 3: School Life, Lesson 4: Home, Lesson 5: Daily Schedule, Lesson 6: Weekend, Lesson 7: Family, Listening Script & Answers, Index.

The each main unit consists of 4 small parts internally respectively: Part 1, Part 2, Part 3 and Culture. Part 1 & 2 focus on speaking and dialogue, introducing new grammar points along with vocabulary, a partnered
exercise and some alternate phrases. However, in the first unit no grammar is introduced for the sake of teaching the first learner Korean alphabet *Hangeul*, and additionally EK uses International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) only for the beginning part of introducing *Hangeul*, starting Lesson 1 without any Korean Romanization. By and large, the grammar explanations are not so many and heavy but so simple. Part 3 deals with listening, reading and writing. Culture section at the end of each unit introduces useful facts about Korea and its people over a wide range of topics. It also includes short passages of just a paragraph-long literary piece. Depending on what the topic is about, quite a few new words are introduced like simple onomatopoeic animal sounds or words that describe emotions.

3.2 Sogang Korean 1A


The instruction of grammar, which appears in the very front part unlike most other foreign language textbooks, is very brief and to the point in general, and the grammatical indication is directly linked to the adaptation into the subsequent “Dialogues” and “Task” sections. The insufficient explanations of grammar points are supplemented in the separate “grammar & vocabulary compendium” booklet. Relevant illustrations and pictures accompanying each lesson provide abundant visual context. Related to the text language strategy, lesson objectives, instructions and tasks have been written only in English. SK also has no specialized cultural section or reading, instead offering modern daily city life-based contents in the dialogues and reading paragraphs in the main and “Games” sections.

3.3 Yonsei Korean 1-1

*Yonsei Korean* 1-1 (hereafter YK) is the first book of “*Yonsei Korean Textbook Series 1-1, 1-2, 2-1, 2-2, 3-1, 3-2, 4-1, 4-2, 5-1, 5-2, 6-1, 6-2*” with 181 pages and includes a separate workbook and audio CD. YK has a Korean-dominant text with a necessary English explanation and indication especially for grammar, and shows a total layout such as Preface, Explanatory Notes, Composition of Content, Main Characters, Lesson 1: Greeting, Lesson 2: School and Home, Lesson 3: Family & Friend, Lesson 4: Food, Lesson 5: Daily Life, Listening Script, Index.

Every unit of this first installment contains 5 small parts: Dialogues, Vocabulary, Grammar & Patterns, Task and Culture. In the “Grammar & Patterns” there are usually around 2 grammar rules introduced with English-only explanations and usages. This grammar section is relatively in detail and each grammar pattern is well-explained in English, providing examples written in both Korean and English. Not to mention the explicit cultural part, the section of “Dialogues” also reflects Korean social contexts directly or indirectly in the YK. On
the whole, the each unit doesn’t have many new and difficult words and has a writing, speaking and listening practice incorporated into every part, and the reading skill is undertaken by a small paragraph of “Culture”.

4. Discussion and Concluding Remarks

EK generally deals with overall basic language-related areas such as speaking, listening, reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary and cultural information in balance. Grammar is introduced in each unit regularly in a certain amount with no introduction of the first unit only, accompanied by vocabulary and exercises. It is located in the right back of the main text of speaking and dialogue traditionally showed in many other foreign language textbooks. The cultural section is protruding separately and there appear a little bit many new and not-so-easy words for non-native speakers in every unit. The cohesion of all parts within the unit is some loose.

SK’s external construct of the textbook is very unique and characterized because of the specialized Hangeul and preliminary course. In the first Korean alphabet part, there is no grammar-relevant mention or content. Grammatical issues are in earnest introduced from the preparatory unit in a way of task-based activities rather than independent explanations. SK suggests the grammar points in the front part, linking them even to the last part of “Games” in the unit. The shortage of the immediate explanation of grammar is supplemented by a separate and associated “grammar & vocabulary compendium” book in the SK. There is no protrusion, emphasis or textual digestion of cultural issue in this textbook, and instead there exist some strong pursuits of interactive activities such as group games.

YK represents very similar patterns in external and internal arrangements of the textbook to EK. In general, showing a common and traditional layout of “Dialogues, Vocabulary, Grammar & Patterns, Task and Culture”, it leads its most texts based on the Korean cultural and social context. Most of all, the presentation, explanation and practice of grammatical issues stand out with various patterns and examples compared to other linguistic sections in the unit. YK is entirely descriptive and explanatory of linguistic issues rather than proposes some activities for linguistic task solution.

Comprehensively speaking, EK, SK and YK are all adopting communication-centered language instruction methods because they have all the main elements of speaking, listening, reading and writing comparatively evenly without leaning too much towards reading, grammar and vocabulary stressed in the traditional GMT. Particularly speaking, however, there are some differences that EK and YK is pursuing a kind of “audio-lingual approach” respecting imitation and repetition starting with speaking and dialogue in a foreign language teaching while SK is attempting a kind of “task-based language teaching” focusing on the commanding of practical language and on promoting learners to do meaningful tasks using the target language, and that grammar is taught in a more explicit way based on the explanation and indication in EK and YK while it is instructed in a more implicit way on the basis of task-oriented mutual interactions.

Judging the three textbooks of EK, SK and YK in terms of Nunan (1991) and communicative competence, we can say surely that YK is much more competitive than the other two textbooks thanks to the richer interactive activities of language learners. But it should be looked at more carefully that this text-based judgment is faithfully connected to the practical communicative competence of students with the other factors such as learners, teachers and HK’s Korean language learning environment considered. Therefore, to do so, it is necessary to additionally do qualitative and quantitative research about Korean learners and instructors in HK in the future.
References


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