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Cosmopolitan language practices toward change: A case from a South Korean high school

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Abstract

This study explores English language learners' cosmopolitan language practices. Based on the concepts of cosmopolitanism (i.e., becoming a global citizen) and English as a *Lingua Franca* (ELF), it investigates how South Korean high school students engage in collaborative English writing practices to interact with audiences in a global writing community. Using discourse analysis of students' artifacts, this study argues that cosmopolitan language practices are beneficial for cultivating global citizenry. The findings indicate that students positioned themselves as effective communicators and meaningful collaborators for change as they developed intercultural and collaboration skills. Researchers and educators are encouraged to create opportunities for language learners to engage in cosmopolitan language practices utilizing digital technologies.

요약

이 연구는 국제화와 디지털 시대에 맞게 영어수업을 통하여 국제 시민을 양성할 수 있는 방안을 살펴보는 데 그 목적이 있다. 이를 위해 세계시민주의 (cosmopolitanism) 와 공용어로서의 영어 (English as a *Lingua Franca*) 라는 개념에 이론적 바탕을 두고, 디자인 기반연구방법을 활용하여 한국 고등학교 학생들의 방과후 영어 협동 글쓰기를 분석하였다. 연구에 참여한 15명의 학생들은 방과후 영어 수업을 통해 글로벌온라인커뮤니티에서 다른 나라 학생들과 소통하고 교류하기 위하여 영어 글쓰기를 한 학기 동안 지속해왔다. 해당 글쓰기 자료를 담화 분석한 결과, 세계언어활동 (cosmopolitan language practices)은 학생들을 세계시민으로 양성하는데 유용하였다. 학생들은 다른 문화 간의 의사소통하는 기량과 협동하는 기량을 키우면서 사회변화를 위해 효과적으로 의사를 전달하는 행위자, 중요하고 의미 있는 협력자의 자세를 보였다. 그 결과를 바탕으로 이 연구는 연구자와 교육자들이 디지털기술을 활용하여 언어를 배우는 학생들에게 세계언어활동에 참여 할 수 있는 기회를 마련해주어야 한다고 제언한다.

Digital technologies (e.g., social media, smartphones, websites) have accelerated globalization and vice versa (Chareonwongsak, 2002). Through technology development and diffusion, people can be connected more easily—both physically and virtually. Recognizing that increasing globalization includes the flow of people, media, things,

and ideas, several researchers have employed cosmopolitanism in their studies to highlight the dynamic use of English and the importance of learning foreign languages (e.g., De Costa, 2014; Stein-Smith, 2021). There is extensive literature on the concept of cosmopolitanism using different perspectives (Vertovec & Cohen, 2002). Although there is no single definition of *cosmopolitanism* in the literature, I define the term in this paper as becoming a global citizen who can engage in meaningful dialogues with others beyond a particular community, society, or nation. Many people might be aware of the rapid growth and broad influence of globalization on everyday life. Yet, there has been little exploration of how English teachers and researchers can create an English classroom that will cultivate global citizenship among secondary students in an educational network where students are encouraged to network with each other across the world.

Grounded in *cosmopolitan practice* (Hull & Stornaiuolo, 2010), this study analyzes data from an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom in South Korea. This collaborative study comes from a research-practice partnership with my doctoral academic advisor. A Korean English teacher worked with the research team to enable high school students to engage in writing projects designed to discuss social change through a global online writing community for youth.

South Korea has a unique context for teaching and learning English in terms of globalization. Developing English skills has been part of the globalization policy of the South Korean government, carried out in educational reforms to promote students' English capacities so they can participate in the broader world (Chang, 2018; Yim, 2007). The recent strategic plans for promoting public English education at secondary school levels from the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education (2021) are an example of the policy. Cultivating global citizens who can communicate with the world is one of the directions. Specifically, the strategic plans encourage collaboration, experience-oriented education, communication, and a global mindset to learn linguistic and cultural diversity in English education. In South Korea, learning English is required for all students in the education system from the third grade.

In the globalized world, English has been used as a tool for intercultural communication. In addition, K–12 English learning has been an important issue, sometimes referred to as "English fever" (Park, 2009). English fever has drawn attention because English education in EFL contexts like South Korea can be associated with social class as some parents choose to spend significant amounts of money on their children's private English learning and study abroad opportunities. However, English education in high school settings remains focused on reading comprehension and textbook-taught grammar to prepare students for college entrance exams rather than on improving intercultural communication skills (Song & Kim, 2017). It is rare to engage in meaningful interactions or collaborations in English in or outside English classrooms in the EFL context (Jin, 2015). The research reported in this paper stems from a project built to address this lack of communication practice. The project engaged EFL high school students in an after-school program in which they collaborated with researchers and teachers to use technology and enact cosmopolitan language practices.

Cosmopolitan Language Practices

Building on the concepts of cosmopolitanism and EFL, I define *cosmopolitan language practices* in this paper as language practices that facilitate intercultural communicative competence through EFL. The construct of *cosmopolitanism* has been studied in a range of disciplines dating to the philosopher Immanuel Kant's essay on "perpetual

peace" (1991 [1795]). The basic concept is that all individuals should be members of a universal community (Stein-Smith, 2021; Stornaiuolo & Nichols, 2019). According to Barbalet, a sociologist, "globalization and cosmopolitanism are treated differently in various literatures" (2014, p. 199). Globalization can be defined as "the process of world shrinkage, of distances getting shorter, things moving closer" (Larsson, 2001, p. 9). The notion of globalization can put emphasis on time and space. The concept of cosmopolitanism has been (re)examined by scholars in education through multiple lenses. Cosmopolitanism may sound like a simple idea on its face—akin to meaning "citizens of the world"—but in reality, it entails a variety of complex constructs, including moral and ethical stance, language practices, individuals' identities, as well as political and geographical borders (e.g., Campano & Ghiso, 2011; Canajarajah, 2012; Hansen, 2010). Stornaiuolo and Nichols argued that researchers employ cosmopolitanism "as an important means of recognizing mobility and multiplicity" (2019, p. 3).

The efforts to address and respond to contemporary transnational and transcultural flows in which "cultural forms move, change and are reused to fashion new identities in diverse contexts" (Pennycook, 2006, p. 6) are sometimes interpreted and implemented in applied linguistics with the notion of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). There is no consensus as to a definition of ELF. In this paper, ELF refers to using English "as a global means of intercommunity communication" (Seidlhofer, 2016, p. 20), regardless of whether it is used by native or nonnative English speakers. With technology development and globalization, more people are situated in ELF communication that is manifested across physical and virtual spaces. De Costa notes that ELF elucidates "how cosmopolitanism is discursively constructed by individuals on an interactional level" (2014, p. 12). In his study of immigrant secondary school students in Singapore, De Costa took a moderate stance on cosmopolitanism that considers both the larger community (i.e., beyond Singapore) and local rootedness (i.e., within Singapore) to understand the identity of global citizens through the use of ELF. Using this same concept, Kramsch points out that learning foreign languages or being multilingual can reflect "the attraction of wide-open spaces—geographical spaces, cyberspaces, the desire to conquer them and to negotiate ways of populating them" (2016, p. 181). In relation to the role of English in this increasingly globalized world, ELF can facilitate intercultural competence, which is essential to cultivate global citizens (De Costa, 2016; Sobré-Denton & Bardhan, 2013).

Despite the need to examine cosmopolitan language practices, there has not been significant attention paid to the study of ELF in the context of high school EFL classrooms, particularly in digitally mediated settings. Moreover, few studies have explored how EFL students could engage in writing projects to foster 21st-century collaboration and communication skills to become "productive members of a global society" (Bell, 2010, p. 43). The constructs of cosmopolitanism and ELF are useful to examine language practices in globally interactional contexts in which many individuals use English for intercultural communication beyond their local communities. In this digital era, when people communicate or interact with one another in digitally mediated contexts, multimodal approaches (e.g., using images, pictures, or videos) to communication should be considered as important as a text-based approach (Unsworth, 2006). The study reported in the current paper includes multimodal resources as part of students' language practices. To fill the gap in the literature on EFL high school students' cosmopolitan language practices in a digital context, I explore the following research questions:

RQ1: What does a digitally mediated global English classroom look like?
RQ2: How do South Korean high school students negotiate ELF in their collaborative English writing projects toward social change?

The Study: A Global English Classroom in South Korea

This paper is part of a larger *design-based* study (Brown, 1992; The Design-Based Research Collective, 2003), a longitudinal, global research project called Write4Change (W4C) in which adolescents in different countries connect with one another using a virtual space and share their writing to make a change (e.g., Stornaiuolo & Jung, 2017). In the collaborative global project, researchers and teachers work together to "improve educational practices through iterative analysis, design, development, and implementation" (Wang & Hannafin, 2005, p. 6). This research project is an endeavor to design and implement interventions and, further, to advance cosmopolitanism in digital contexts. In the W4C community, adolescents and their teachers around the world interact, communicate, and engage in writing projects toward social change individually or collaboratively. The W4C curriculum consists of three significant inquiry projects designed to discuss social change: (a) My story, (b) My change, (c) Our vision. Google Community was used as a platform to interact and communicate with one another. W4C members had multiple first languages, including English, Korean, and Urdu. I recruited a Korean high school English teacher, Ana (all participants' names are pseudonyms in this paper), through my personal contacts and worked closely with her over one year.

In total, seventy-seven of Ana's students participated in W4C in four after-school English programs in a South Korean high school. The school was located in one of the largest districts of a major city in the Seoul Capital Area. Ana's second after-school class will be analyzed as an example of students' collaborative interactions. Multiple data sources were gathered from Ana's class, including interviews, artifacts, surveys, field notes, and lesson plans. The students from the second class in this paper were finishing their freshman year (tenth grade) when they joined. After the students engaged in their first inquiry projects (i.e., My story) individually, the fifteen students formed four teams for their second and third inquiry projects. The collaborative projects addressed what they wanted to change and how they could solve the problems they had addressed in prior projects.

The data analysis presented below focuses on artifacts from the students, such as a magazine made with students' in-class and online writing, individual written reflections at the end of the class, and eight posts students shared for their team projects online, including comments on the posts. I employed discourse analytic methods (Fairclough, 2010) to understand how South Korean high school students engage in cosmopolitan language practices through the W4C projects. Specifically, I engaged in multiple phases of data analysis focusing on students' ways of interacting with others, representing their ideas, and being in this interactional context (Fairclough, 2011).

"We Hope Our Projects Can Make Change": Effective Communicators to Change Together

A total of fifteen students divided into four teams addressed social issues in developing countries, education, and society and possible ideas to solve the issues in their English writing projects. They shared the projects with other adolescents and teachers from different classrooms and countries in the W4C community using multiple forms of writing, including video, pamphlet, blog, poem, and e-newspaper. The students interacted with one another collaboratively by developing communicative strategies together through dynamic interactions in class and online. In the online space, English was used as the common language to communicate and interact with other members. The students orchestrated written and spoken English with other communicative

resources to interact with the audiences and convey their messages effectively through writing projects. The students negotiated multiple aspects such as the use of English, use of multiple resources, working with others, and representing their work, and interacting with global audiences. They positioned themselves as global citizens who can collaborate for change by valuing cooperation skills and experiences.

The students managed their work collaboratively by utilizing multiple resources together, for example, using English for explicit messages and using other resources (e.g., image, sound, PowerPoint slides, YouTube videos) for nuanced and creative representation in this ELF context. For example, a team named "The Justice" shared a video titled *Irrational* for their project that discussed corruption in society as a problem to be addressed and changed. The unique video impressed others, as Ana shared in a comment, "We all felt touched by this, and some of the members were giving them applause." The Justice created the two-minute video using scenes from a Korean movie, captures from TV news and news articles, and text on slides. Then they added captions, sound, music, and their own dubbed voices.

The sound, music, and scenes from the movie were useful to draw the audience's attention by evoking emotional responses. By mimicking actors' voices and tone from the original movie, The Justice used humor as a resource to engage the audience (Matsumoto, 2014). One member of The Justice replied to the comment on why they chose the way of representing the work: "We thought telling the subject through video clip was the most effective way! The process was very hard because we had to collect every scene." It appears that they tried to find the most effective way to represent their ideas to the broader audience by orchestrating multiple resources, including written and spoken English, images, sound, music, humor, and tone. This example illustrates Seidlhofer's (2011) argument that students use communicative strategies and multiple resources creatively for intercultural communication.

Cosmopolitan language practices supported the students' representation as collective global citizens who can collaborate for change by acknowledging the value of cooperation. This finding is critical as global citizens are "open minded and work actively to build relationships with others" (De Costa, 2016, p. 255). The students expressed their collaboration experience in their individual written reflections. One student, Jia, said, "There were sometimes conflicts." The students noted that negotiations on the best way to represent their ideas and interact with global audiences in a creative and effective way were not easy. However, through collaboration, students learned a critical skill of global citizenship and positioned themselves as collaborators to change society.

Another student, Sean, shared how collaboration pushed the students to be effective communicators in her reflection in English:

> Above all, working as a team especially made this class valuable. I keenly realized the importance of cooperation and how it affects the final result. I could feel sense of responsibility. This project leads students to take an active part in class. This project became the most impressive moment in my high school year.

Sean's reflection gives evidence of how collaboration can affect the way students represent their project to global audiences, interact in class with active participation, and act as responsible community members in practice. In this digitally mediated context where students communicate and interact with speakers of different first languages, the students co-construct themselves as meaningful collaborators to change as The

Justice commented in a post sharing their project with others: "We hope our projects can make change."

Implications and Conclusion

This study examined the cosmopolitan language practices of South Korean high school students in a digital context by focusing on inquiry-based writing projects designed to promote social change and be shared with broader audiences in a global network. In this global and digital era, the findings of this study provide the field of applied linguistics with useful insights on how to employ cosmopolitanism in secondary English language classrooms. In response to the current global flow and mobility (Stornaiuolo & Nichols, 2019), it is necessary to create opportunities for EFL students to engage in intercultural communication using ELF and digital technologies to cultivate global citizens who can communicate with broader audiences in creative and effective ways and collaborate with others to promote change.

In addition, this study sought ways to prepare global communicators who could engage in discourse for change by working closely with an English teacher in the design-based study. The current study offers timely insights about how English can be taught and practiced in more interactional contexts by underscoring students' communication and collaboration skills by blurring the boundaries between EFL and ELF contexts. In this digitally mediated context, the students positioned themselves as effective communicators for change by utilizing unique resources and ways of representing, which adds to the current literature on ELF work at the EFL secondary school level (Kohn, 2015).

There should be more empirical studies on EFL secondary students' cosmopolitan language practices across contexts using various research methods. Such studies can broaden the field by investigating how to help educators cultivate global citizens through English classrooms. Future researchers can investigate dynamic synchronous online interactions with broader audiences and a variety of collaborations with speakers of different languages. Moreover, it is critical to explore analytical tools to examine students' multilayered practices in digital contexts as well as effective pedagogy for in-service teachers. Being effective communicators and collaborators for social change is critical for young people in the twenty-first century, and educators must broaden our approaches to working with language classrooms.

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