
Preface

In the last three decades, two extraordinary changes have occurred in East Asia whose effects will be seen globally in years to come. These two changes—at first glance—appear to be unrelated, but upon deeper examination, one will realize that they are one and the same phenomenon. The first change was a shift in educational curriculum, which spread through Japan to Korea and Taiwan, and then inevitably onwards to the regional colossus, China. Since the Second World War, the primary goal of the public educational systems in all of these countries was to promote citizenship and to foster a sense of intense nationalism. Predictably, foreign contributions to the national development were intentionally minimized in relative importance, and as such, foreign language learning was relegated to the back burner, so to speak. While foreign languages were still part of the mandatory, state-sponsored curricula, the goal—which prior to the war (when, of course, education was more restricted to the upper class) had focused on high proficiency in all four skills of language proficiency (speaking, listening, reading, and writing)—shifted to concentrating exclusively on reading and writing, with little or no emphasis on conversational skills. Furthermore, there was little ambition to gain proficiency in the language, but instead, the language was taught much like Latin was for so many years in the West—as an exercise in logic, without much in the way of broader communicative goals. While teachers may have hoped that students would develop some skills for reading/translating texts, very few (outside of language specialists or those who could credibly hope to study abroad) would ever really need oral communication skills. From the 1980s, however, a seismic shift in educational expectations occurred. Suddenly, one by one, the regional governments embraced the goal of communicative proficiency in foreign languages. Some even went so far as to openly express goals for national bilingualism with English. Due to this sudden shift in political will, the educational institutions are still scrambling to comply—trading textbooks focusing on grammar-translation methods for ones featuring more emphasis on communicative methodologies, and slowly-but-surely changing out the workforce of older teachers (who, being trained in and reliant upon the traditional grammar-translation pedagogies, could teach for days on end without ever actually uttering a whole sentence in the target language)—with younger ones who had been educated with these communicative goals in mind.

The second major regional change has been one of demographics. Namely, the last two decades has seen an exponential rise in people of Western origin flooding into East Asia. Some come as tourists (low airfares and increased stability in the region has helped) or on short-term business trips, but many more come as *immigrants*, and most of these are planning, at least initially, to work as English teachers.

These two changes are connected—the shift to communication as the central goal of foreign language learning and the dearth of communicative-competent native teachers opened a huge market for native speakers of English to come and take on the role of “language expert.” These foreign instructors are now found at every level of instruction across the region, from kindergarten to high school, from universities to private cram schools, from the offices of business executives to private homes. The market has responded to the perception that conversational practice with native speakers is a fundamental (and even necessary) ingredient to the development of high proficiency in the language. It has become a multibillion-dollar industry that has changed the face of education across the region.

It has also had a profound impact on the plans, ambitions, and lives of many Western people who find a world of economic and cultural opportunity opened to them, due simply to a fortunate juxtaposition of the language they grew up speaking and the era in which we live. These teaching practitioners vary greatly—they come from different countries, they speak different dialects, and they have varying degrees of preparation for the job that they are signing up for. Some are expert teachers in their own countries, but come to East Asia seeking a new challenge. Many others have little or no direct training in either language learning or education. Relatively few from either category tend to have any prior experience with the language and culture of the area they are moving to. What they usually have in common is simply a taste for adventure and a willingness to take risks to try something new. This book is written with the desire to help all of these people to improve upon their teaching ability, and ultimately to be able to better serve the students who are entrusted to their instruction. For experienced teachers, this book is designed to give insight into the pedagogical practices and educational culture of East Asia, and to better enable them to adapt their preferred methodologies and activities to an Asian classroom context. To those teaching English in East Asian countries who possess little or no direct educational training (or to students in teacher education programs who aspire to practice their art in East Asia upon graduating), this book will function as a primer on the theoretical and practical perspectives of foreign language instruction which can be used to increase the effectiveness of classroom practices. Finally, I hope that this book can also be of service in a third, vital function, by helping teachers who are native to East Asia to better understand the discrepancies and conflicts between Western and Asian educational practices, and in doing so to be simultaneously better equipped to negotiate that gap between modern pedagogical theory and the practical realities of East Asian classrooms, as well as to recognize and appreciate the struggles that your Western colleagues have in adapting to East Asian educational contexts.

The Goals of This Text

This book is designed as an explicit attempt to detail the state of English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) education in East Asia. While it must be stipulated from the beginning that EFL education is in the midst of undergoing great change in the East Asian region, and individual practitioners will certainly find differences from school to school, region to region, and over the course of time, the primary goal of this text is to argue a theoretical perspective for understanding classroom issues based upon the history, cultures, languages, and educational subcultures of the region in order to make targeted suggestions for how to adapt pedagogy to enable Western foreign language teaching methodologies (and by extension, Western teachers) to enjoy better teaching and learning success in the East Asian classroom context. While there will be some acknowledgement of issues and circumstances related to EFL teaching in East Asian universities, cram schools, and privately arranged lessons, this book will focus on the “core” of national EFL educational efforts, i.e., the K-12 foreign language educational system. Note that, as such, the emphasis will largely be placed upon the public educational sector, especially at the secondary grade levels. While there are thriving private educational providers across the region—many of which, having EFL curricula based upon national standards, do not vary significantly from public schools in this regard, and therefore, the reader could easily apply the principles and techniques from this text to these schools as well—I simply raise the public/private distinction to avoid any conflation with elite boarding schools, international schools, British schools, American schools, and the like, often boasting tuition fees of \$20,000USD or more per year, which obviously operate in such a separate educational context compared to more “local” schools that any direct comparison would be almost futile. While a teacher at such elite international schools may well find this book to be useful in describing the local context from which many of their students hail, these schools usually have an international curriculum through all classes and subjects. While there may be some difficulties with adaptation for incoming students, the educational context and the teaching methodologies employed are consistent between teachers, classrooms, and subjects. By contrast, in “local” schools whose curricula are often based upon national curricular guidelines and/or local decrees, the foreign language instructor often finds him/herself to be the odd man out, attempting to teach students via methodologies and techniques which are completely alien to students, and which stand in stark contrast to how they are taught in every other subject throughout their day. This conflict between students’ (often unconscious) educational expectations and the expectations of both Western teachers and curricular theorists is at the heart of this text.

Regional Considerations

As this text covers an incredibly large, diverse region, the reader will find that the author frequently divides context by national boundaries and people groups. While East Asia as a distinct regional entity stems from the proliferation and adaptation of Chinese culture throughout the broader area, and while the regional countries and districts certainly have a lot in common regarding history, culture, and even education, which means that some of the information presented in this book can be applied regionwide, one would be completely remiss to fail to point out the important distinctions which exist in educational, cultural, and linguistic traits that exist in separate countries and regions—especially in the context of foreign language education, which is so profoundly impacted by all of these other factors. As such, while each chapter will start generally, the reader will quickly note a pattern wherein many topics get broken down by country or region in order to more accurately reflect circumstances in specific areas. This text will provide specific details for the *People's Republic of China* (PRC), Japan, and South Korea, but will also sometimes analyze Taiwan and Hong Kong separately from China. Despite the fact that both Taiwan and Hong Kong are ethnically Chinese, and thus share some cultural and historical traits with China which impact both broad educational philosophies and teaching/learning behaviors, as both are administrated by their own governments, separate from that in Beijing, predictably, the educational systems bear traits that are quite distinctive from the PRC. Simply put, the century and a half of British rule in Hong Kong and the de facto independence of Taiwan (or *The Republic of China*, as it's officially named) from the Mainland since the Nationalist government, fleeing the communist takeover, arrived in 1949 (not to mention the 50 years Taiwan had spent as a Japanese colony from 1895 until 1945) have produced educational systems with important differences from that in the PRC, and any attempt to detail the realities of EFL education in the broader region needs to take this into account. Additionally, while China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong are all Chinese-speaking areas, the local languages differ to such an extent as to have direct impact on issues related to second language (L2) instruction, and thus conflating the learning behaviors of students from Taiwan and Hong Kong with that of students from China would be nearly as grievous an oversight as failing to note the distinctions between Chinese, Japanese, and Korean students.

Chapter Previews

Let's take a look at the topics and themes which will be covered in the upcoming chapters. Chapter 1, *The Foreign English Teacher in East Asia*, will provide a broad overview of the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) industry in East Asia. Herein, industry-specific terminologies will be defined and explained, and the K-12 EFL market will be analyzed in light of post-World War history and educational trends

in specific national contexts. Those market forces which led to and created the interest and need for a “native speaker model”—native-English-speaking instructors recruited from overseas—will be elucidated, and their typical roles and functions in the educational establishment vis-à-vis host national English teachers will be analyzed and explained. We will particularly look at the rise of L2 communicative competence as a curricular goal, and how that has affected wider foreign language curricula. We’ll also examine the perceived failings of the public educational system, and how that led to the rise of private “cram schools” and the like. Next, we will focus on the subject of the native-English-speaking teachers, themselves. Who are they? Why do they come to East Asia? Using anecdotes, poll data, and census data, we’ll gain a sense of who these teachers are, where they’re coming from, and why they’ve come. We’ll look at the market, and see what sorts of work are available within the broader domain of EFL in East Asia. Finally, we’ll look at potential issues and concerns surrounding this “native speaker” model of education—what sorts of training myriad teachers bring to the job, and the various advantages and disadvantages which this reliance on the native speaker model confer on EFL education in the East Asian region.

Chapter 2 will focus on the educational systems and the governmental policies directly pertaining to foreign language instruction and learning through the East Asian region. Particular attention will be paid to the enshrining of communicative competency as the goal and focus of foreign language education programs in the public educational system. The chapter will detail the historical development of educational models in the region, with their accompanying philosophical foundations and prevalent methodologies, and contrast these practices with prevalent educational philosophy and methods in the West. This chapter will pay particular attention to the Hong Kong educational experience, as, for political and historical reasons, it can be argued to have had the most opportunity within the broader region to import, adapt, and internalize Western educational philosophies and practices; however, through this examination, the disconnect between Western and Eastern educational models will become apparent, exposing the incongruence between political rhetoric, which exalts communicative competence in foreign language education to be a core goal of public education, and the day-to-day reality of working teachers, whose livelihoods often balance precariously upon their ability to prepare students for standardized examinations.

Chapter 3 examines the students, themselves, exploring the typical learning styles of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean learners. Herein, the reader will find some commonalities in learning types that extend regionwide, as well as some nation- and language-specific traits. Student expectations of teacher behavior, practice, and comportment will be discussed and contrasted with Western educational norms, thereby showing how East Asian students’ unconscious expectations can shape their perceptions of the efficacy of Western educators. Learning styles will also be analyzed on a linguistic level, paying careful attention to how students in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean educational contexts are taught to read and write in their native languages, in order to make sense of learners’ traits and expectations which impact their performance in foreign language study and how they approach learning tasks.

Chapter 4 turns the spotlight from students to foreign language teachers, themselves, and as such, delves into the teaching styles, methodologies, classroom dynamics, and classroom arrangements which characterize the East Asian region, with particular emphasis on the challenges and difficulties encountered in the daily lives of East Asian foreign language teaching professionals. The traditional, teacher-centered educational methodologies will be contrasted with the more communicative-focused methods which are being openly advocated by governments and educational bureaucracies, and the regional critiques of these attempts at pedagogical shift will be discussed. Additional issues, such as class sizes, exam pressure, and public pressure, and their negative effects on local teachers' ability—and even willingness—to innovate will be addressed. Finally, issues of recent changes to educational dynamics, such as the widespread hiring of native-English-speaking instructors (typically recruited from abroad) and the introduction of official English courses to the standard curriculum at ever-lower grades (and ever-younger learners), and their effects on local teachers attitudes and practices will be elucidated.

At the midpoint of this manuscript, having completed the analysis of the region, its teachers, and its learners, the focus turns to specific pedagogical principles and techniques. Chapter 5 focuses on the dynamics of listening and speaking methodologies and practices, as well as how to adapt such for easier use within the East Asian context. Discussions will include such issues as how to conduct meaningful communicative practice in classrooms of 50–70 students, fear of loss of face by both students *and* teachers, and the general reluctance among East Asian students to speak up in the classroom. The chapter will present a review of popular and noteworthy foreign language teaching methods and techniques from the past five decades, or so, such as audio lingual, silent way, TPR, etc., and contrast the relative excitement such techniques generated in Western education milieus with the negative experiences frequently faced when educators tried to implement similar practices in East Asia. The major focus of the chapter will be devoted to explaining Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methodologies and the problems it experienced in the East Asian educational market leading to its systematic rejection by both students and teachers. Finally, the author will discuss principles and means for overcoming these limitations, thus allowing East Asian students to fully profit from communicative activities. The chapter will conclude with two contrastive examples of fictional lesson plans—of differing quality regarding the attention paid to learners' cultural learning traits—and the principles discussed in this chapter and how they impact the practical applications of each lesson will be discussed.

Chapter 6 looks at foreign language literacy education, and how English reading skills are taught to East Asian students. A case is built for literacy's role as the foundational skill for self-directed learning, and thus one of the potentially most important factors for predicting ultimate attainment in L2 proficiency. The author demonstrates that foreign language literacy acquisition often requires a different skill set and acquisition strategies than did literacy in the students' native language, and as such, many East Asian learners (whose L1 scripts, of course, are all wildly

different from that used in English) may struggle with literacy acquisition due to overextension of L1 reading strategies which may not apply, or may apply poorly, to English. A brief overview is made of the script types used in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean, respectively, along with how native speakers of these languages usually process their script, and then a contrast is drawn with English native speakers' dominant processing strategies. Then, building from the word-level of processing, the author shows variances at phrasal, sentence, paragraph, and text-level comprehension strategies between the students' respective L1's and English, which will all negatively impact English literacy acquisition. This theoretical perspective is followed with practical suggestions for how to teach L2 literacy skills across skill levels, with the goal to enable the development of smooth, efficient text processing skills. As with the last chapter, this chapter will end with two contrastive lesson plans followed by a discussion on how the theoretical perspectives on reading impact classroom performance.

Chapter 7 builds on the ideas presented in the preceding chapter on teaching language-specific text processing skills, but this time, frames them in the context of the *output* skill of academic writing. There will be an overview of general essay writing types in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean, which will be contrasted with the stylistic features from English. In particular, the author will focus on academic essay rhetorical schemes and the preferred means of presenting topic and research/evidence-based arguments within the respective languages, thereby identifying what sorts of patterns and information need to be explicitly taught and exemplified in order to enable students to write effective L2 English academic prose. This cross-linguistic analysis of information organization in essay writing will better enable Western teachers in East Asia to identify and (hopefully) eliminate L1-transfer mistakes of form occurring in L2 English academic writing. Suggestions for curricular adaptation will be offered at all levels of proficiency, and as with the preceding chapters, two contrasting example lessons will be compared and analyzed for effectiveness at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 8 examines the nonexplicitly linguistic features of language which students need to learn in order to have a functional control of a foreign language. These features include both pragmatic and cultural aspects of language acquisition, and require students to learn to restructure their thoughts and interpretations of the world around them in order to experience meaningful communication in the L2. The author will give an introductory primer on pragmatic structures, contrasting East Asian and English communication styles, and taking anecdotal examples, illustrate how pragmatic knowledge (or lack thereof) can impact both general comprehension and language acquisition itself. The author will give some general guidelines via specific suggestions on issues and expressions which are potentially problematic to students, in the hope that teachers who are new to East Asia can avoid major pitfalls and use these general principles to expand their understanding of their students and what skills and information they need instruction in.

The reader should be able to note a general organizational *flow* to this text, based upon the chapter previews above. As the main audience for this textbook is Western teachers (or teachers-in-training) who aspire to teach in East Asia and want to get

prepared, or those who are already in the East Asian region and are possibly reeling from the enormity of difference in “educational culture” vis-à-vis with Western classrooms and schools, and want to figure out what’s going on and how to best tailor their own pedagogical approach to suit their students, this manuscript starts out with a broad informational overview, surveying the foreign language market in East Asia, along with the history which has led to the current educational establishments and practices. Next, there is an examination of the East Asian learner, noting common learning styles and educational issues, as well as scrutiny of our East Asian teaching colleagues, looking at common teaching styles, and the concerns and issues they face in the practice of their duties. The secondary audience for this text—English teachers in East Asian countries who are natives of the countries where they are teaching—would find it quite easy to skim over or even skip these sections, as to them, a lot of this would be common knowledge (i.e., simply *how things are* in their profession), albeit they might still find some of the comparison with Western educational norms to be interesting (at the very least, they might find the information might explain the peculiarities of any Western teacher colleagues they might have). From Chap. 5, the book shifts from explanations of history and educational culture to more practical concerns in teaching the L2 English skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and pragmatics effectively in the East Asian educational context, building a theoretical perspective for each through which to gauge methodological effectiveness, and then giving specific suggestions of methodologies and ideas for practical implementation. It is the author’s sincere hope that these ideas will be found imminently useful, practical, and helpful to English teaching professionals across the expanse of East Asia at all levels of instruction, whether they be natives of East Asia or native speakers of English who have come from afar in search of teaching opportunity.

So if you’re ready to find out more about teaching English in East Asia, let’s get started!

Akita, Japan

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Learners

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