The Key Importance of L2 Digital Literacy to Korean EFL Pedagogy:
College Students Use L2 English to Make Campus Video Guides with Their Cell Phone Videocams, and to View and Respond to Their Videos on an L2 English Language Social Networking Site

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Abstract

In East Asia, the high penetration of student cell phones, with built-in features that include bilingual dictionaries, SMS, Email, Internet access and videocams, already offers ubiquitous computing facilities for pedagogical applications. This paper describes an EFL task that required Korean freshmen of Hyejeon College in Chungnam to make L2 English video guides to their campus. Videos were made on their built-in cell phone videocams, and then emailed to their instructor. After file conversion, their videos were uploaded to the instructor's vblog on his homepage on the English language social networking site US.Cyworld.com (a sister site to the Hangul social networking site Cyworld.com which most Korean students already use). Students were instructed by email to view the videos there, and to then post responses in his homepage guestbook. This required them to use English to set up a personal account and to navigate the social networking site, as well as to compose and post responses. The task illustrates the developing critical importance of L2 Digital Literacy within EFL pedagogy.

1. Introduction

Dede's 2002 inspirational vignette [1] describes Alec and Arielle strolling through campus, carrying wifi handheld devices that they use to obtain and process information for their class assignment. But just five years later, cell phones in Japan and Korea already offer a comparable means of ubiquitous computing, as advanced by Kiernan & Aizawa [2], Prensky [3], Thornton & Houser [4], and Meurant [5]. Nearly all Korean students have cell phones, and most belong to the Korean Cyworld.com social networking site. Many have video cameras built-in to their cell phones, and know how to shoot videos, edit them on their cell phone or computer, upload them to Cyworld.com, and also use their cell phone to view Internet content.

The complicating factor in the typical L2 classroom, understandably, is language itself. In Korean college classes, student L2 English abilities within a single class may range from a rare few with near fluency through to many with almost no ability (despite years of study) and low motivation (not bringing the textbook, or even a pen to class). Further, while Mac OS remains a novelty in predominantly Windows Korea, most native English teachers who attempt to navigate Windows software in Hangul encounter the substance of nightmares

(what does the monolingual English teacher do when faced with http://www.cyworld.com/main2/index.htm?)

How then is it feasible for videos be posted and made available for L2 students to view and to comment on in the target language? Cyworld.com allows 'neighbors' to link to another, and the formation of 'towns', which can take video files. But at the time of writing, site navigation within the Korean Cyworld.com is entirely in Hangul, as is most content (although English content can be posted). This makes it difficult for the non-Korean speaker, while providing minimal challenge for Korean students to develop digital literacy in L2 English. The ideal solution is an English language vblog (video blog) with easy (ideally bilingual) navigation that would allow club members to post videos, comments and video responses in a common forum.

2. The video task

The Korean Cyworld-owned English language site US.Cyworld at http://us.cyworld.com/ offers particular benefits to Korean EFL students. Although it claims to permit Cyworld.com users to login using their Korean identity and password, at the time of writing we found that this was not in fact possible (note the site interface was extensively restructured in late 2007, after the task this paper describes). Users can upload video and photos directly from a cell phone, by forwarding them as attachments to MMS (Multimedia Message Service messages) that they address to theirdomainname@upload.us.cyworld.com. Individual 'minihomes' allow owner-posted videos and visitor comments, and can link to one another as 'neighbors'. But (again at the time of writing), Global Cyworld (Korea, China, Japan, Taiwan, and the US) does not permit personal sites (i.e. with the same ID and email address) for more than one Cyworld site, nor linking of personal sites from country to country. Further, while US.Cyworld allows public, semi-private and private Clubs to be formed, videos can't be posted to a club.

The workable compromise I eventually settled on was for students to email cell phone videos to their instructor (rather than have them post videos directly to the vblog). This is readily done for free by first uploading via USB cable to an Internet-enabled computer (wifi internet access, available on campus, costs the student data transfer charges, which they resist). The original intention was for the instructor to then mix group videos into a class video, using iMovie and QuickTime Pro, post it on his US.Cyworld.com minihome, and invite responses. But it quickly became apparent that with the software and limited experience available, this approach would not work. Trials with seven classes resulted in 36 video submissions (see Figure 1) in only wmv, avi, k3g, skm and mp4 formats. On the Mac, only the avi files would actually open in QuickTime Pro v.7.1.6 (then current), where they could then be exported (e.g. as QuickTime movies (mov); and only these avi files would import as clips into iMovie v.3.0.3 (outdated). Windows Media Player v.9.0.0 (current) would play these wmv files on the Mac. For assessment, all files could be viewed using the free GOM Media Player v.2.1.3.3413 (current) on the PC (available in English or Korean), except one for which GOM could not find the necessary codec. Attempts by the instructor to convert files on Mac and Windows, or use online converters, were unsuccessful. Nor would k3g files renamed as 3gp convert.

I eventually adopted the solution of personally uploading individual student group files to my US.Cyworld minihome (Figure 1), where necessary combining group sequences of multiple videos using the online US.Cyworld Video Studio mixer. This mixer could actually have been used to produce a class video, despite its very limited features. Video Studio also

enabled a few videos mistakenly shot in portrait mode to be rotated to landscape mode. On uploading to US.Cyworld.com, wmv and avi files behaved well, but k3g, k3g renamed as 3gp, skm and mp4 files lost their audio tracks (though a US.Cyworld FAQ states that avi, asf, divx, dv, flv, mov, mpeg, mpg, rm, wmv, 3gp, and 3g2 video files can be uploaded and used, while the Upload page also includes mp4 as an accepted file format). Eventually, an obliging computer technician was able to convert problem files to wmv and avi (using the Hangul PC Ever Media Player), and these uploaded successfully, though I suspect some hesitancy may have been introduced into the streaming.

3. The subsequent homework assignment

The students were subsequently emailed in English and asked to navigate to the US site, login using their Korean Cyworld details, and navigate to this minihome video theater (see Figure 1). However, students discovered they were unable to login using their Cyworld details. The more enterprising then created their own homepages on the US site, which enabled them to login and post comments. Instead of viewing their class video as originally envisaged, they were asked to watch their own and several other student group videos, and leave a written response (in English) in the guestbook (for which login was necessary). This homework also capitalized on exposing them to the US site, which they could readily compare with the Korean site with which they were familiar. It is anticipated such self-generated discovery would lead to further voluntary involvement in such online L2 activities. I intend to encourage more such involvement in future; in the following semester I set a task that required more intensive use of the same L2 social networking site. This task will be documented in a forthcoming paper [6].

Language issues affect not only problems with L2 digital literacy, but also, naturally, the instruction of students to perform a task. Here I propose complete understanding on the part of each student is not the objective. Instead, I favor tasks set beyond their comfort level, but tolerate misunderstanding and non-performance. If classes are going well, failure to adequately cope with a task should not be a problem, provided students engage with it, try, and do not become disillusioned. Further, Kohls observes Korea is a deeply people-oriented and group-centered collectivist culture [7], in contrast with Western individualism. Information seems in some mysterious sense to be stored in the group mind, rather than in each individual. In response to this, I accept much prompting of students by one another, and sometimes even what a Westerner would regard as cheating. However several groups were unimaginative in adopting the topic and style of other group efforts; or perhaps it was a peculiar male student fascination with the women's dormitory that resulted in four videos on that topic alone.

The English handout explaining the task is beyond the reading level of many of these students. In my experience such wordy explanations in English of what is required don't connect effectively: but engaging with students, role-playing, and showing them the sort of thing that is desired, does. Further, nonlinear openness is sometimes called for: L2 students sometimes radically misunderstand what is wanted, but nevertheless produce really good work.

4. The video task reviewed

As the week progressed an unexpected synergy emerged. Students were better briefed, as a consequence of students of earlier classes advising them on how to proceed. Students with

better English ability used their own initiative to explain the task in Korean to their classmates, one even using notes prepared by the volunteer translator from a previous class. Without it being suggested, a few students turned up in class with digital video cameras. Student videos improved in quality and even in video format: the last day's submissions were almost all in wmf and avi, and one video was complete with titles, music, transitions, and rolling credits. Some groups proved quite shrewd in their unprompted choice of interviewees.

4.1. Software chosen for this lesson

The multimedia software resident on students' cell phones with video cameras enables users to shoot videos, do basic editing, and upload them as MMS attachments to emails. Video enables conversational speech to be recorded and viewed together with visual clues including shaping of the mouth in pronunciation, facial expression, body language, and conversational turn-taking. Social networking sites are exploited: the native Korean-language Cyworld.com (with which students are very familiar) and more particularly its fellow L2 English-language US.Cyworld.com (with which most appear not to be). Students also read, compose and post English emails and responses in an online guestbook.

Figure 1: A page of the author's vblog at http://US.Cyworld.com/rmeurant/videos

4.2. Software helping achieve lesson objectives

Lesson objectives are achieved by students using English to: negotiate an adequate understanding of what is required of them; plan storyboards; make commentaries and conduct

interviews for the videos; review their experiences; and respond in writing to the videos. They develop English digital literacy by navigating to a demo podcast site and playing the podcast; composing the cover email for the video upload; comprehending the teacher's email advising the location of student group videos and the follow-up work that is required of them; navigating to the website and the teacher's minihome and video theater; viewing student videos; registering on the site to create their own homepage; and submitting responses in the minihome guestbook. It is hoped they would further familiarize themselves with the US.Cyworld.com site. These strategies clearly focus on newly desirable learning skills that van 't Hooft [8] considers to be primarily those of the ability to <u>connect</u>, <u>collaborate</u>, and <u>network</u>. These accord with Siemens' notion of connectivism [9], which addresses shortcomings in the traditional theories of learning of behaviorism, cognitivism and constructivism which arise from their development before the advent of the Internet and ubiquitous computing.

4.3. Software applied to general pedagogy

The enormous educational potential of Multimedia is apparent: teachers can provide an overview to each week's lesson as a video podcast, which students can view before class (or in lieu of, if absent), even on their PMP's while commuting. Video podcasts are easily made using a webcam and QuickTimePro to record QuickTime movies [10] (on Mac OS only), which are then posted on the class homepage. Or these podcasts can be more creatively mixed in iMovie, using flash animations, video, text and audio resources together with titles, transitions and effects, and incorporate content from student-shot videos. Over time an archive of material can be built-up. An advantage is that the teacher can control the technology of her podcasting, needing only to ensure that the content she delivers is in appropriate file format. But beyond that, she is unlikely to be familiar with, able, or even wish to control the technology of her students, particularly when faced with a foreign culture and language. Though problems with video file format compatibility can be expected, group tasks similar to that described can be set which require multimedia video compositions, taking advantage of the existent widespread penetration in Korea of cell phone video cameras and broadband/wifi connectivity (though it would be advisable to encourage students to post their own videos onto a common Internet site). Thompson [11] describes Duke University's initiative as an example of similar Web 2.0 innovation: students use free iPods to create and record material, and upload audio or image files to shared course space.

   To reach the Net Generation, Barnes, Marateo and Ferris [12] recommend that educators exploit the social networking skills that students use outside class. It is clear that social networking websites offer considerable L2 pedagogical potential. An English-language private club set up in US.Cyworld for each class would require students to create individual basic minihomes, for which they would need to use an alternative screen name and password to their Korean Cyworld details. They would post a variety of material on their individual minihome (where they could concentrate on those aspects that interested them, whether videos, animations, music, still images, sketches, or written compositions), their class Club page, and visit and post responses to other students' minihome guestbooks, while linking together as neighbors. This is similar to Wilber's suggestion [13] of exploiting the literacy practices of students by maintaining a course blog, to help develop thinking, reading and writing skills. Links are readily made from class to class; and there is also the potential to interact through English with students from other institutions and countries, exploiting new metacognitive language learning strategies, which I elsewhere explore [14]. Flat Planet [15]

provides a wikispace for an online collaborative project between students in Canada and the UK; Wilber [13] cites Ganley's use of blogs to connect students around the globe, who converse in real time using Skype. This interaction can be between students of different native languages; Graddol [16] notes that the majority of human interactions, in English, do not involve a native English speaker. In turn, this leads me to wonder: how distant can that critical point be, when the majority of all human communications become computer-mediated...?

Hyejeon College enjoys sister relationships with American colleges, with students and staff regularly undertaking educational exchanges. The techniques discussed could be used to correspond online with these American students, and view and respond to each other's videos. The considerable advantage of using US.Cyworld.com for Korean students is that they are already deeply familiar with its parent/sister site Cyworld.com, and this recognition will, by providing essential scaffolding, prove beneficial in facilitating transference of knowledge and language learning strategies from the L1 to the L2. This provides an opportunity to develop L2 digital literacy, directly building on their existent L1 digital literacy skills.

4.4. A rationale for the use of this software in the classroom

Using multimedia, according to Bagui [17], the resources teachers and students produce can more closely resemble the cognitive schema of the information that is represented, and thus reduce cognitive overload. Multimedia can also more closely represent the formal structures of non-digital phenomena, both communicating more effectively and satisfying the aesthetic sense. The keys to successful implementation of video UCC (user-created content) are the access Korean students already enjoy to ubiquitous computing in the form of cell phone videocams, the high penetration of broadband connectivity in Korea, and the wifi networking of campuses. This pervasiveness means that video recording (together with limited editing capability) is available immediately, on demand, and does not require specialist training (notwithstanding the plethora of video formats and codecs). Wifi and Internet connections are freely available, allowing videos to be posted, viewed, and responded to using just cell phones.

Roblyer [18] identifies a key focus of technology integration to be the necessity that essential conditions be in place to support that integration. Integrating Korean video UCC and networking capability with Internet-based social networking sites means that video communication for teaching and learning is desirable, feasible, and available now, without an educational institution needing to heavily invest in providing students with multimedia devices - they are already clutching them tightly in their hands during class. Vblog forums are available to share video information and to respond to it, as the capability of YouTube demonstrates, where video posts generate successive video responses. In Korea, the streaming ability to view this content on a cell phone or PMP via wifi access to the Internet is available on campus and at fastfood outlets, with KT and SKT having established full Wi-Bro coverage of Seoul. Students can also download video podcasts to their cell phones or PMPs, to view in their own time while undertaking lengthy commutes to and from college (many Hyejeon College students commute by bus to and from Seoul or Incheon for 4 hours or more daily).

5. Conclusion

L2 Digital Literacy, particularly in English, is rapidly becoming highly desirable, and I suggest it is both appropriate and inevitable that it play a more dominant role in EFL

pedagogy in Korea. While access to face-to-face conversations with native speakers remains difficult, computer-mediated communication with other non-native speakers is rapidly growing. L2 Digital Literacy in English enables students and professionals to access the enormous depth and variety of English resources available on the Internet, and facilitates global computer-mediated communication with one another in the world's first global language. As ubiquitous computing permeates the classroom, education and society, this tendency will only increase.

It remains to be seen whether, longer term, true ubiquitous computing and eventual smart classrooms (together with digital translation services) will make these technologies totally transparent, and the limitations of L2 language skills will no longer present any impediment.

5.1. Postscript

The cell phone videos and comments are posted at http://US.Cyworld.com/rmeurant (no login is required, though without login, comments cannot be posted). Note that the site interface was radically changed in late 2007, and some data including responses appears to have been lost in the process. The site also contains substantial material from a subsequent task that was set in Fall 2007, which I intend to document in a forthcoming paper at ICCIT08.

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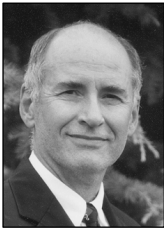
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