

The Ideological Construction of English: A Critical Review on the Discourse of English in East Asia

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This research investigates the ideological character of the English language in East Asia. It focuses on the prevailing beliefs, values and propositions relating to English as a global language and the spread of English in the non-English East Asian countries, namely China, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. By analyzing how English is presented in governmental and educational documents, news reports and advertisement, it examines the presentation and construction of discourses and explores public assumptions on the English language. First, in the second section, it reviews the development of English in East Asia in the late 20th and early 21st century. The third section discusses the relations between language, ideology and discourse. Section Four illustrates the research questions and the rationale and hypothesis of this study. In the fifth section, the construction of discourses concerning English and ideological assumptions regarding the English language in these East Asian countries is investigated. Finally, discourses and presuppositions identified in the texts and their implications are discussed. This study suggests that discourses concerning English in East Asia are conditioned by the external global structure and the local socio-cultural context. Concepts such as globalization, internationalization, economic development, national competitiveness and individual competitiveness influence the discourses on English. In the context of East Asia, the ideology of English consequently functions as part of the mechanisms involved in the global spread of English.

Key Words: global English, the ideology of English, the discourse of English, East Asia.

1 Introduction

The unprecedented global spread of English has given rise to heated debates about its socio-cultural and politico-economic impact on non-English speaking countries in the expanding circle (e.g. Pennycook, 1994; Phillipson, 1992; Tsui & Tollefson, 2007). Critiques of the global spread of English from Pennycook (1994, 1995), Phillipson (1992), Canagarajah (1999) and Tollefson (1995, 2000) represent a critical reflection on the neutral account of

English spread and reinforce a socio-political turn in the fields of Applied Linguistics and ELT. The social, cultural and political contexts are of crucial importance to investigate language spread where communication, confrontation and assimilation between different language users are subjected to the international structure of power, culture and knowledge. Therefore, an investigation of a language is not about language alone. Rather, it relates to various aspects in the world to which a language is linked. In order to have a complete and detailed picture of English spread in the expanding circle, this research proposes a critical examination on the discourse of English in the context of East Asia. It seeks to contribute to, as well as enrich, the debate over the effect of the global spread of English by focusing on language, power, and ideology, and by comparatively studying the implications of English spread among non-English East Asian countries.

Although East Asia refers to a geographical region and has been used for describing a group of societies in that area, the concept of East Asia is far from explicit. The main characteristic of East Asia is its wide diversity in terms of geography, ethnic origins, languages, religious beliefs and philosophies. However, East Asia is used as a convenient term to refer to those non-English countries selected in this research, i.e. China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. To a certain degree, these countries have relatively close politico-economic and cultural-historical experiences and relations.

Focusing on the discourse of English, this study investigates the ideological construction of global English in these non-English East Asian countries. The focus is therefore on the prevailing beliefs, values and propositions relating to English as a global language and the spread of English in these non-English East Asian countries. By analyzing how English is presented in governmental and educational documents, news reports and advertisement, it aims to examine the presentation and construction of discourses and to explore the power relations on the English language. First, in the second section, it reviews the development of English in East Asia in the late 20th and early 21st century. The third section discusses the relations between language, ideology and discourse. Section four illustrates the research questions and the rationale and hypothesis of this study. In the fifth section, the construction of discourses concerning English and ideological assumptions regarding the English language in these East Asian countries is investigated. Finally, discourses and presuppositions identified in the texts and their implications are discussed.

2 The Development of English in East Asia at the Turn of the Century

The global spread of English as the major medium of international domains in the late twentieth century has strengthened the need to master English. This trend has led to several important developments of the English language in the region of East Asia.

First, English as an Asian Lingua Franca. For most East Asian countries, English is an important solution to achieving internationalization of their nations. English is rapidly becoming the lingua franca of Asia. For example, in organizations such as the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the APEC meeting English is the main working language. Several reasons have been proposed for the use of English as an Asian lingua franca and for the restricted development of other regional languages. As McArthur (2003) suggests, the regional role of the English language in Asia has been reinforced by its global role. In addition, the long history of interacting with English speakers, first the British Empire and later the US, and the influences from media, telecommunications and other main international domains have made the English language a useful and effective medium for international and regional communication.

Second, reforms and emphasis on English education. Ho (2003) summaries some general developments in English language teaching in East Asia in a review of ELT in 15 countries' education systems¹. The main trends are as follows: Adopting English as a required subject in their education system; introducing English education from the early grades of primary schools; improving ELT through curriculum revision and other initiatives; a divide between the rural sector and the urban sector in the teaching and learning of English in several countries. However, objectives, targets and conditions of teaching and learning English vary among different education systems according to different cultural norms and ideological expectations.

In order to enhance national English capability, the extension of English education is implemented as a major language education policy in the early 21st century in most of the non-English East Asian countries. On the one hand, it increases opportunities and resources to access to the English language, but results in certain challenges on the other. The major challenge that East Asian countries may face is the quality and effectiveness of English education. The issue relates to the language proficiency of teachers, the lack of appropriate teacher education, and insufficient exposure to the English language (Nunan, 2003).

Finally, the enthusiasm about English and the business of ELT. Accompanying the globalization of English as well as the extension of English education is the accelerating development of the ELT business in East Asian countries, which has been described as 'English fever' or 'the craze for English' (Jiang, 2003; Jeong, 2004). The rapid development of the ELT industry in fact has been strengthened by government's promotion of English learning, parents' desire that their children learn English, and the importance of English in academic circles (Jiang, 2003). In fact, 'English

¹ Including Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Loa PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam.

fever' has been fuelled by both external and internal factors. As Jeong (2004) suggests, a series of reforms of English education commenced in the 1990s has resulted in dramatic changes in English teaching, such as English teaching in primary schools and reform of the college entrance examination. In addition, for non-English East Asian countries, the increasing need for international trade and interaction has also resulted in an emphasis on English ability when companies recruited employees in these countries (Jeong, 2004). These developments reinforce the promotion of English in the region. In a way, the spread of English in East Asia has been facilitated through a complex of language-in-education policies and measures, politico-economic needs, global communication, and public perceptions on English.

3 Language, Ideology and Discourse

By proposing the abolition of boundaries between linguistics and other disciplines, Hodge and Kress (1993) correlate language with the socially constructed world. Language as the practical consciousness of society can be used as a means to control communication and is therefore ideological. It conveys as well as distorts meaning through linguistic forms in order to inform as well as manipulate the audience. Language as the fundamental instrument for human communication is indispensably the medium of ideology. As Thompson (1984) argues,

[t]he analysis of ideology is, in a fundamental respect, the study of language in the social world, since it is primarily within language that meaning is mobilized in the interests of particular individuals and groups. (p. 73)

Ideology, then, can be mediated through language in use, for language is used in the process of communication to form ideas and beliefs. Language is thus not simply a structure for communication but “a social-historical phenomenon which is embroiled in human conflict” (Thompson, 1984, p. 2). Therefore, it is suggested that, instead of focusing on sentence structure and sign systems, an investigation of the interrelations of language and ideology is to look at how language expressions function as a means of social-historical production and reproduction (Thompson, 1984).

Eagleton (1991) clarifies the relation between ideology, language and discourse. He argues that “ideology is a function of the relation of an utterance to its social context” (p. 9) and suggests that

ideology, in short, is a matter of *discourse*—of practical communication between historically situated subjects—rather than just of language (of the kinds of propositions we utter). (p. 11)
(original italic)

Discourse in this sense refers to language in context and society, which manifests not only the linguistic features but also the interaction between the text and the world. As a term used in various disciplines with divergent meanings, discourse is defined and employed mainly in two fields—linguistics and social theory. In linguistics, discourse involves a range of language in use from spoken texts to types of language used in different social situations. In social theory, discourse is regarded as a means to represent as well as construct social practices and relations. Language as discourse is therefore not simply a medium for transmitting struggles of domination but the site where struggles of power take place (Mills, 1997). Instead of restricting the application and definition of discourse, ‘a social-theoretical sense of discourse’ (Fairclough, 1992) is adopted in this research as far as ideology and the relation of language and power are concerned. Discourse as social practice involves not only a text but also the whole process of social interaction, including the processes as well as the social conditions of producing and interpreting the text.

An indispensable relation between power, ‘common sense’ in discourse and ideology is proposed by Fairclough (2001) in order to illustrate the function of discourse when transmitting ideology. He claims that the common sense assumptions of naturalizing authority and hierarchy are actually disguised ideologies. These ideological notions of common sense are used mainly in the form of language in order to legitimate the existing social relations and to sustain unequal relations of power. The ideological nature of language is therefore manifested through discourse in the service of power.

Consequently, language as ideology is less a matter of linguistic properties than a question of the correlation between the linguistic and the social. Fairclough (1992, 2001) claims that language as discourse is a form of social practice in that whatever people write, read, listen, and speak is conditioned by social structures and thus serves to produce a social effect. Therefore, discourse as a medium of naturalized ideological assumptions plays a vital role in the exercise of power and social control. That is, ideologies are embedded in discourse in the service of unequal power relations, while power struggles are acted out through discourse in the processes of production and interpretation. And it is through the common-sense nature of discourse (Fairclough, 2001) in relation to the social structures that assure the effectiveness of ideology. The basic notion is that language in context and in society is considered the site of power struggles through the processes of discourse and through the effect of ideologies.

4 Research Methodology

4.1 Research questions

Four themes structure my research: the relationship between language, power and ideology; the power relationship between the English language and globalization in the context of East Asia; the socio-cultural and ideological implications of the spread of English in East Asia; the discursive practices of global English in East Asian societies.

In respect of these themes, the following specific questions are proposed and are answered by critically examining the discourse of English in East Asia: 1. What meanings are being transmitted through discourses of English education and English promotion in Taiwan, China, Japan, and South Korea?; 2. How is English discursively constructed in the media in these countries?

In order to investigate how the English language is discursively constructed and to answer the first question, governmental documents and educational publications about English language teaching and learning are examined. The second question is answered by analyzing advertisements and articles related to English education, globalization, global English and ELT in the media such as newspapers and websites. By answering these two research questions, this study aims to investigate the role of discursive practice in the maintenance of the predominant status of English in East Asia and the ideological effects of discourses on East Asian societies and the development of ELT in these areas.

4.2 Hypothesis and rationale of the research

The hypothesis of this research is that there is a system of ideas embedded and identifiable in the discourses of English produced by cultural institutions in China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. And there is a need to investigate the role of discursive practice in the maintenance of the predominant status of global English and the ideological effects of discourses on these societies and the development of ELT in East Asia. Although every instance of language use can be a reflection of social order, some instances such as governmental documents and news are more influential due to the process of their production and consumption. The assumption here is that these texts created by institutions (e.g. the Ministry of Education and newspaper publishers) can be regarded as manufactured and highly-circulated discourses which produce, reproduce or challenge the existing power relations in the society and therefore are more influential and prevailing at the socio-cultural level. Therefore, the target data include official government and education documents, news reports and advertisements.

In order to effectively investigate the discourse of English in these countries and to avoid any distortion in the process of translation, this research only selects texts written or presented in English in China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. Texts selected and analyzed in this study are chosen from governmental and educational documents, news articles and

advertisements which are related to English education and English promotion in these countries through the Internet and field work in a time period from August 2011 to September 2012. All texts are analyzed using techniques of discourse/text analysis and the analytical skills of Critical Discourse Analysis (see Fairclough, 1992, 1995, 2001; Richardson, 2007; Weiss & Wodak, 2003) where appropriate, and according to their contents and contexts. In order to provide a critical examination on the discursive construction of English in these countries, this research emphasizes discursive and social practices and discourses regarding the English language repeatedly appearing in the texts, instead of focusing on the local properties of linguistic features presented in the texts.

5 Discourse of English in East Asia

Through the analysis of collected texts, a few repeatedly-appearing subjects and themes can be identified in the discourse of English, i.e. the role of English in national planning; English and education; English and employment; English promotion. They reflect the concerns about the English language and the socio-political agenda in terms of national policies, education, and economy in East Asian societies. By focusing on these themes, the ideologically construction and impact of English are discussed in the following sections.

5.1 The role of English in national planning

English as a global language plays an important role in national plans of non-English East Asian countries. It is regarded as a key element for national development in terms of globalization, economy, and information technology. The linkage between national planning, manpower and English can be identified through the analysis of discursive practice. The following discourses can be identified in governmental documents or national policy in countries such as Japan (*The Prime Minister's Commission on Japan's Goals in the 21st Century*) and Taiwan (*Taiwan Six-Year National Development Plan*): a discourse of national development and manpower; a discourse of the inevitability of globalization and internationalization; a discourse of English as the global language to link to the world. Manpower is considered the basis of national development and needs to acquire some skills required for facing the future challenge. Globalization mainly refers to economic globalization which is a process of integrating national economies into the international economy through trade, capital flows, foreign investment, migration and spread of technology. It can also be considered as the internationalization of everything related to foreign countries. The process of globalization and internationalization is not only regarded as an inevitable trend but also a challenge for East Asian societies in the face of the competitive nature of the

international economy. English as the global language is therefore treated as one of the required skills for connecting to the world and facing this future challenge. By combining these three discourses, a strong association between national development and the English language is constructed.

In the analysis of sociocultural contexts, both *Taiwan Six-Year National Plan* and *The Prime Minister's Commission on Japan's Goals in the 21st Century* were presented in the beginning of the 21st century when East Asian countries faced the challenge of globalization and the rapid development of information technology. For Taiwan's DPP government in 2002, the national plan was a midterm policy of DPP's first four-year term of office (from 2000 to 2004) which intended to raise public support, by including almost all important issues related to economic growth and national development. The promotion of English is presented as one of the elements for cultivating talent for the e-generation. On the other hand, *the Prime Minister's Commission on Japan's Goals in the 21st Century* claims the need to enhance global literacy ('to acquire a working knowledge of English') in order to face the challenge of globalization and to master information technology, while Japan's good qualities and the value of the Japanese language and culture are recognized. (Prime Minister's Commission on Japan's Goals in the 21st Century, 2000 [PMC, 2000], chap. 1) The aim is to sustain Japan's status as 'the only developed country from non-Western cultural sphere' (PMC, 2000, Preface).

Actually, English is the main focus for non-English East Asian countries in the beginning of the 21st century, for it is strongly associated with the process of globalization and the development of information technology. And for East Asian countries whose economy heavily depends on international trade and hi-tech industry, English promotion is considered an indispensable national policy. Generally speaking, English are promoted in the following ways: by giving it an official status, by expanding its use in daily life, and by improving the effectiveness of English Education. The implications of these methods of English promotion are considerable. They involve the development of Englishization nationwide; a change of English education; enhancing quality and quantity of English teachers; internationalization of universities and colleges, etc..

5.2 English and education

Having strong association with globalization and economic development, English plays a very important role in the education system in East Asian countries. The development of English boom in East Asia can be traced back to the late 20th century when the process of globalization accelerated and the anxiety of enhancing national competitiveness spread in this area. The discourses regarding worries about national English ability and about being left behind can be found in the media discourse in Taiwan, Japan, China, and

South Korea. The ranking of the average national TOEIC and TOEFL scores has become an indication of national competitiveness and has provoked overhaul of English education in these countries. These discourses therefore lead to issues and policies aiming to establish effective English education and to enhance national English ability in these countries, including introducing English instruction to an earlier age in the education system, providing English programs in higher education, promoting English immersion, and hiring more foreign English teachers in the education system.

5.2.1 Impacts and worries of English education

The implementation of the policies also resulted in debates and discourses on their negative impacts. For example, in South Korea where early English instruction and the Teaching English in English (TEE) have been promoted and implemented for several years, recently these measures provoke debates on their real effects (e.g. Korea JoongAng Daily, 5 June 2012; the Guardian, 8 November 2011). Researchers and pressure groups advocate that starting English education at the right time is more important than an early start (Korea Herald, 13 October 2011). While the implementation of TEE has encountered difficulties, i.e. a culture of teacher-centric teaching and teaching for grammar and vocabulary-based tests, for Korean teachers (Shin, 2012), foreign English teachers at public high schools in Seoul now face massive job cuts due to a budget cut for the teachers' employment (Korea JoongAng Daily, 9 December 2011 & 3 January 2012). In addition, Korea's spend on English education (estimated at 22 trillion won) and households' high expenses on English education also lead to another problem. It is reported that there is a so-called 'English Divide' among students, depending on income and region (Korea Times, 6 June 2012). The gap in English proficiency between students could result in significant disparity in one's academic performance as well as a person's chance of getting a decent job (Chosunilbo, 5 June 2012). To a certain degree, the above mentioned problems can be found in media discourse in most of the non-English East Asian countries. And they can be regarded as discourses of inspection on the phenomena and outcomes of English fever. After years of English promotion in these countries, the influence of English has been profound. It not only arouses issues and discourses regarding the effectiveness of English education but also makes English an important criterion for evaluation and distinction in the field of education, employment, and society.

5.2.2 International education and English

The fact that English is the language for international communication in major domains has made international education a fast-growing business for English speaking countries as well as a concern for non-English speaking

countries. In Japan, a decline of students studying in the United States over the past ten years has led to worries about the future of Japan. It is claimed that without a bunch of students who have studied in English speaking countries and acquire high level of English proficiency, national competitiveness of Japan could be hindered (Custer, 2012). However, in China, international education tells another story. China has seen a rapid growth of students studying overseas since the 1990s and now is one of the world's largest countries sending students abroad. The boom of foreign study not only accelerates the pace of China's opening up to the world but also results in a brand new industry—English training in China (Zhou, 2012). In order prepare for studying abroad, students need to take language proficiency test such as TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) since English speaking countries, especially the US, are the most popular destinations. In other words, China can be regarded as one of the world's largest markets for international education in foreign countries such as the US, Britain, and Canada, and for her own private English education.

On the other hand, the recruitment of international students has become an important issue in non-English East Asian Countries. Attracting international students to study in Japan is considered vital to Japan's economic survival. Japanese government launched the Global 30 program in 2008, which was intended to sponsor courses taught in English for international students at selected universities in Japan (MEXT, 2012). It aims to establish global university network and to internationalize Japanese education. In Korea, efforts have been made to appeal international students, including 'Global Korea Scholarship' program and the launch of 'CAMPUS Asia' (Collective Action for Mobility Program of Students in Asia program). And these measures remarkably increase the number of international students from 17,000 in 2004 to 89,000 in 2011 (Suh, 2012). China is also becoming a popular international education destination. And it can be attributed to a great scholarship policy for foreign students and China's role as a superpower in the world (Davis, 2011). In the case of Taiwan, Ministry of Education is keen on attracting international students. The purpose is to makeup an insufficient number of Taiwanese students due to low birth rate and to internationalize Taiwan's higher education (Taiwan Today, 5 July 2012).

A discourse of international education as global, advanced and rewarding, a discourse of the necessity of global manpower for national competitiveness, and a discourse of anxiety of being left behind can be identified in these reports regarding international education. And it is presupposed that English is the key for the internationalization of education and manpower.

5.3 English and employment

For non-English East Asian countries, English is regarded as the language of global business. English is not only related to national competitiveness but also individual competitiveness. In China, good English proficiency has become necessary for getting higher pay and promotion in international companies (Liu, 2012). It is claimed by New Oriental, the largest provider of private English educational service in China, that medium proficiency in English can increase one's salary by 25 percent while advanced proficiency in English can provide a 70 percent increase (Adams, 2007). In Japan, Rakuten, the country's largest online marketplace, and cloth retailer UNIQLO have decided to adopt English as a workplace language in order to become globally competitive. This development provokes an 'English crisis' in Japan's business world (The Asahi Shimbun, 22 September 2011). While English has become a hiring criterion for more and more companies, it is claimed that this trend combined with the decline of students studying abroad exposes a shortage of English speaking graduates in Japan (McNeill, 2011). A similar concern can also be found in South Korea. According to a report on the economics of English published by Samsung Economic Research Institute (Jeon, 2006), since English is strongly associated with global communication, a shortage of English speaking workers is an urgent problem that needs to be solved. This report can be regarded as the rationale of the massive official and private investment on the English language in South Korea.

In the case of Taiwan, although the relationship between good English proficiency and advantage in employment is recognized, what worries the Taiwan society is not a shortage of English speaking workers but the lower criterion of English proficiency requested by Taiwanese businesses. The Educational Testing Service (ETS)—the US-based organization that administers TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) tests and similar exams—indicated that nearly all of the 1000 largest companies in South Korea request an average TOEIC score of 700 from new employees and 83.4 percent of the Japanese companies request an average TOEIC score of 500 while only 27.9 percent of Taiwan's 1000 largest businesses ask to see a TOEIC score in recruitment (Focus Taiwan, 3 October 2012). The representative of ETS in Taiwan concluded that 'the high standard set by Korean businesses helps raise the country's overall skills and sets a foundation for globalization' (ibid.).

The following identities can be recognized in the above discourses of English and employment: a domestic private English training provider, a US-based English proficiency test organization, a South Korean multinational company, a Japanese multinational online retailer, and a Japanese multinational cloth retailer. By promoting the value of English in employment, the private English training provider advocated the necessity of English for gaining individual advantage. In the account of the US-based English proficiency test organization, the TOEIC tests which are run by the

organization itself are treated as an effective mean for finding a better job and as a criterion to evaluate national competitiveness. To a certain degree, these accounts arouse the anxiety about lacking English and represent a subtle commercial discourse of English promotion. From the accounts of the three multinational businesses, it is presupposed that English is the language of global business and an effective tool for enhancing global competitiveness. By employing a discourse of severe global business competition and a discourse of the anxiety about a shortage of qualified English manpower, English is regarded as a problem as well as a solution in this globalized world for enterprises, employers, employees, and thus national development.

5.4 English promotion

To enhance national English ability has become a national policy for East Asian countries. It results in measures and changes in English education of the state education system such as English medium instruction in China, as well as governmental plans and investment for English promotion such as English villages in South Korea. The recognition of the importance of English also leads to the idea of designating English an official status. Debates on English as an official language can therefore be found in East Asian countries, especially South Korea and Japan. Both countries saw heated debates on the idea of English as a possible official language in the beginning of the twenty-first century due to the wake of the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis (Song, 2011). In South Korea, English is considered necessary for economic survival within the context of globalization. It is argued that in order to access to the world and attract international businesses to the country, language barriers should be removed (Korea Times, 6 November 2008). In Japan, *the Prime Minister's Commission on Japan's Goals in the 21st Century* states the possibility of making English an official second language (PMC, 2000). And it aroused negative responses, including the absence of a definition of an 'official language' in Japan, the political and ethno-linguistic implications of English as the second official language, and the limited domestic function of English (Hashimoto, 2007). So far the idea of adopting English as an official language have not realized in both countries. However, the impact of the discourse of English as an official language is profound. Park (2009) argues that three ideologies can be identified in the official English debate, i.e. necessitation, externalization, and self-deprecation, and they work as an ideological complex. English as a foreign language is against a Korean identity where the Korean language plays an essential role. However, by regarding English as a necessity for Korea's economic development and by viewing Koreans as bad speakers of English, the legitimacy of English promotion is constructed. And a similar construction of English promotion can also be identified in other discourses of English in East Asia.

The development of globalization and national English promotion also lead to the rapid growth of the ELT industry in East Asia. For example, in China, the market of private English education has seen dramatic growth in the past decade. With nearly 300 million people currently learning English, it is considered as a gold mine and has attracted leading global English training institutions such as EF Education, Wall Street English, and Unite English (Liu, 2012). In South Korea, originally engineered by the government and founded on the traditional ‘education fever’ in the country, ‘English fever’ results in the boom of private English education, including cram schools, private tutoring, English camps, and language training abroad (J.-K. Park, 2009). Generally speaking, the zeal of private English education in East Asian countries can be attributed to the convergence of global-structural and internal pressures, i.e. competition in the global society, competition in the local society, and the anxiety of being left behind. An ideological construction of English promotion can therefore be identified in the discourses of private English education. English is presupposed as a necessity for global and local competition, and private English education is considered as an effective solution to the problem of ‘self- deprecation’ (J. S.-Y. Park, 2009) and to the anxiety of being left behind.

6 The Ideological Construction of English: Discourses and Presuppositions

This research has analyzed how English and English language teaching is discursively presented in a variety of reports and documents in China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. Common-sense assumptions in these texts not only indicate the existing power relations and power struggles, but also sustain or change power relations. The underlying ideological assumptions of English are closely linked to the current trends in globalization or internationalization, the concepts of economic development, and competition. A discourse of the inevitability of globalization and internationalization associated with a discourse of English as the global language (for international communication or for enhancing personal competitiveness) prevails in all the texts examined. Globalization which often refers to economic globalization is regarded as an irresistible trend, while English is considered as a requisite for globalization and a potent symbol of internationalization. In addition, the importance of the modern state in the global capitalist system has also implicit effects on the discourse of English. It results in discourses such as national planning and manpower, and a polio-economic discourse that configures the country in the world. They are drawn on for constructing the need for English at the national level. And through the mixture of the above mentioned discourses and discourses such as ‘the younger the better’ and personal responsibility to make one’s children competitive, the national and personal need for adequate English education is reinforced. These discourses can be regarded as

dominant discourses of English, though subject to text selection in this research, reflecting prevailing assumptions of English in East Asia. In other words, these discourses are used as ‘background knowledge’ and thus constrain the production and interpretation of the discourse of English.

The discourses of English are the site where the effect of ideologies functions and power struggles take place. Power relations and power struggles can be identified through presentation of perspectives of different participants. In the above analysis we identified various agents and practitioners: the government, parents, school teachers, cram school teachers and owners, possible English language learners, employers and employees. It is worth noting that the perspectives of pupils and students are often absent or largely ignored as irrelevant. Students are regarded as passive receivers of governmental, paternal, educational and social influences in processing discourses of English.

According to text analysis, the discourse of English in these East Asian countries is constructed through the following types of common-sense assumptions. First, *English is a socio-cultural commodity*. English as a foreign language is described as ‘hyper-collective goods’ (De Swaan, 2001) and has already become a huge financial market around the world (Kaplan, 2001). Ideological assumptions used in advertising or promoting ELT not only relate to the effectiveness of English education but also to socio-cultural meanings of the English language itself as well as the process of acquiring English.

Another assumption penetrating most of the texts is that *English is the language of power*. The ideological assumptions of English mostly are based on the irresistible trend of globalization/internationalization. English is not only linked to the world, but also to the activities and interactions in the world of global capitalism. For East Asian countries, economic value is shared above other values. The economy is invariably the focus of its political propaganda. English is proclaimed as the language of power and is imperative for economic development: it is considered the lifeline of future development for East Asian countries.

Therefore, *English is an indispensable instrument for competition nationally and individually*. For countries such as Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea, and as a small-scale player in the highly competitive economic environment, success in the world is one of struggle, tension and competition. It is presupposed that English determines competitiveness in global capitalism. To a certain degree, national English ability equates to national capability of competition. In terms of individuals, English becomes an indispensable skill for individuals in a competitive domestic workforce. English ability as the requisite skill in employment is used as a gatekeeper to better jobs and promotion. The assumption that links competitiveness with English proficiency, nationally and individually, leads to concerns and worries about English ability and English education.

Common-sense assumptions about the effectiveness of English education, such as ‘the earlier English is learned, the better the result would be’, ‘English level of average citizens is inadequate’ and ‘English education in the state education system is insufficient’, can be found in discourses on English learning and teaching. These common-sense assumptions can thus result in a fear that action and attention are needed in order to enhance one’s English ability.

As a result, *lack of English will have negative consequences*. Varying degrees of anxiety and worry can be found in the texts. Problems of English education are presented as concerns about the effectiveness of English education. It is presupposed that since English is imperative for economic survival and for creating an international profile, deficiencies in English education are claimed to have serious outcomes. In regard to comparison and competition, the discourse of English in East Asia shows national as well as individual anxiety of falling behind other competitors. In a way, through the discourse of these texts, unjustified anxiety and worry are created..

7 Conclusion

To sum up, discourses concerning English in East Asia are conditioned by the external global structure and the local socio-cultural context. Concepts such as globalization, internationalization, economic development, national competitiveness and individual competitiveness influence the discourses on English. Furthermore, the local socio-cultural context nationally and individually reinforces the impact of English in terms of economy, education, employment and future development and therefore can result in anxiety and worry for those not possessing this particular language proficiency. In addition, alternative voices concerning English education and English promotion, such as the influence of early English education on children’s Mandarin or mother language ability or the impact of English on local cultures and identities, have emerged in the discourse of English. However, for the government, the ELT industry, parents and in the mass media, the main focus is still clearly on the benefits English can provide and on the effectiveness of English education, rather than on the socio-cultural impact of the spread of English. Overall, English is regarded positively as the language of advantage; as gatekeeper to better development in employment; and as a means to enhance competitiveness. The necessity of English is thus assumed. In the context of East Asia, the ideology of English consequently functions as part of the mechanisms involved in the global spread of English.

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