

## **SPEAK THE CULTURE: INTEGRATING LANGUAGE TEACHING AND CULTURE -CULTURAL CONTEXT IN KOREAN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION-**



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#### **I. Introduction**

##### **i. Background and Necessity of the Study**

While functionalist teaching methods have been used in the past, incorporating cultural context in foreign language education has emerged as one of the most important factors in improving learners' language skills, and there is a growing debate about the need to move away from just teaching grammar and vocabulary to teaching in a cultural context. Teaching in a cultural context not only helps learners to use the target language naturally, but also helps them to deepen their understanding of the culture. Han, Ha-Rim (2017)<sup>1</sup> and Lee, So-Young (2001)<sup>2</sup> describe how foreign students learning Korean can improve their understanding of the language by learning cultural elements such as manners, historical background, and traditions of Korean society.

<sup>1</sup> Researching Contextual Models for Korean Language Teaching, Han, Ha-Rim, 2017, Korea University

## **ii. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the positive impact of cultural education on Korean language learning. This study aims to explore the relationship between cultural context and Korean language learning, that is, the interaction between language and culture, and how it affects Korean language learning. It also aims to provide practical evidence by presenting real-life examples of the effectiveness of education that reflects this. In addition, we will provide concrete suggestions on how to effectively integrate cultural elements in language education.

## **II. Cultural Context and Korean Language Education**

### **i. The Relationship Between Culture and Language**

Language is a means of human communication, while culture refers to the shared values, beliefs, and patterns of behavior of a social group. Language and culture are closely related and interact. Language is one of the key elements of culture, used to transmit and maintain culture. As human cultures developed, languages were created and developed. Sung Ki-chul (2001)<sup>2</sup> argues that language and culture have influenced each other in a straightforward way, with language reflecting culture and culture reflecting and accumulating language. He said that language, which is the mother of culture, is now in such a close relationship with culture that it has become the mother of language.

### **ii. The Importance of Cultural Context in Korean Language Education**

To understand the importance of cultural context in Korean language education, we must first understand the nature of Korean language culture. First, there is the issue of language. Korean language culture views language as something to be cherished and avoided. This is reflected in proverbs such as “낮말은 새가 듣고,

밤말은 쥐가 듣는다. (The birds hear what you say during the day and the mice hear what you say at night).” and “말 많은 집이 장 맛도 쓰다. (A house full of talk is a house full of spice.)” It is also reflected in the language life of Koreans, who tend to be silent or blunt.

Language activities are usually context-dependent, and it is common for them to be organized in a way that maintains the consistency of the context. Nevertheless,

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<sup>2</sup> Language and Culture Contact - Language Culture -, Sung, Ki-chul, 2001, International Society of Korean Language and Culture

in Korean, it is not uncommon to deviate from the context and introduce the exact opposite situation.

An example of this is saying something to someone who is hurting from hitting their head on something hard, such as “Do you think that's going to break your head?”, which takes the situation beyond contextual coherence and into the absurd. This is intended to provoke laughter, and Koreans call it a ‘해학-Haehak’. Kim, Dae-haeng(2003)<sup>3</sup> describes this as a linguistic and cultural phenomenon that is widespread in Korean, rather than a personal trait. This phenomenon, which calls for laughter even in sad scenes, is called 'wiping tears with laughter'. From the point of view of linguistics, you might say that non-linguistic factors are of little importance. However, language is a vessel for culture and a means of communication. Concepts such as the Korean honor system and “jung” are closely related to the cultural values of Korean society, and without an understanding of these elements, language use is limited. Therefore, learning the cultural context allows learners to understand how Koreans think and interact, rather than simply using functional language<sup>4</sup>.

### **III. The Effectiveness of Korean Language Education Incorporating Cultural Elements**

#### **i. Enhancement of Language Learning**

There are many examples of how culturally-infused Korean language instruction promotes language learning, especially when learners experience and apply the language in real cultural contexts to maximize learning. Here are a few examples. First, there are programs that utilize traditional Korean cultural experiences. When Korean is taught through experiential lessons, such as wearing a hanbok or making traditional food, learners don't just learn vocabulary or sentences, they learn to use expressions in cultural contexts. These experiences reinforce the connection between language and culture, and they can be interesting and motivating<sup>5</sup>.

Next, learners will be able to understand the context and emotions of conversations through lessons that utilize pop culture content such as Korean

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<sup>3</sup> Korean Education and Language Culture, Kim, Dae-haeng, 2003, Seoul National University Institute of Korean Language Education

<sup>4</sup> A Study on High-context Culture in Korean as a Language Education : With a Focus on Korean Literary Works in Textbooks, Kim, Seon-kyeong, 2017, Busan University

<sup>5</sup> A Study on the High-Context Cultural Characteristics of Korean Language Culture, Choi-jiji, 2014, Hanyang University

dramas and movies to learn Korean dialogues, and learn Korean expressions that are actually used in real life, such as formal and informal speaking, proverbs and idioms that naturally occur in differentiated contexts, and apply them to real-life communication outside of the classroom<sup>6</sup>.

There is also vocabulary and grammar learning using K-pop. Classes including analyzing K-pop's lyrics and singing activities greatly inspire students' interest, and through this, students can easily understand the grammar structure that conveys emotions as well as daily expressions. Learners can naturally learn the use of verbs through music that they can sympathize with.

This approach to learning gives learners the opportunity to experience and utilize the language in real-world contexts, rather than just learning the language functionally. This will be very effective in not only improving their language skills, but also increasing their understanding and interest in Korean culture.

## **ii. Improved Understanding and Adaptation to Korean Culture**

The same goes for cultural understanding and adaptation for Korean learners. Etiquette training can help learners develop social adaptability, and they can understand and apply differences in greetings and rules by experiencing them firsthand<sup>7</sup>.

Participating in traditional festivals will help you understand Korea's family-oriented culture and learn about the background of festivals and how Korean society was in the past. Learning about history and tradition will also help you understand Korean history and traditional values.

Cultural misunderstandings can be reduced through culturally contextualized instruction. For example, the nonverbal communication “humility” may seem like a lack of self-esteem to learners who do not understand Korean culture, but students who learn about the culture of humility in Korean society will be able to understand Korean cultural etiquette and respond appropriately in similar situations, reducing discomfort from cultural differences. In addition, misconceptions about Korean rituals, such as associating them with certain Jonggyeon beliefs, can be resolved by learning that they are traditional family-centered practices and cultural acts that express respect for ancestors, which can help students develop respect for Korean family values. In this way, culturally relevant Korean language instruction not only

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<sup>6</sup> An) Analysis of Cultural aspects in Korean Textbooks and a study on Integrating Korean Language and Culture : focusing on the use of web sites, Lee, So-young, 2001, Ehwa Womans University

<sup>7</sup> A Study on the High-Context Cultural Characteristics of Korean Language Culture, Lee, Sam-hyeong, 2014, Hanyang University

improves language proficiency, but also motivates and excites learners, helps them understand and adapt to the culture, and reduces cultural misunderstandings.

#### IV. Conclusion

This study examined the positive impact of incorporating cultural context in Korean language teaching on learners' language acquisition. It is undeniable that incorporating cultural elements into language learning plays an important role in not only improving learners' language proficiency but also promoting a deeper understanding of Korean culture. Language and culture integration makes the learning process more effective as learners acquire both language and culture at the same time.

However, Korean education is still functionally oriented, so I think it will be one of the important points to reflect the cultural context when developing curriculum and teaching materials in the future. If we focus only on learning grammar and vocabulary through functional education, learners will not be able to use the language appropriately in real-life situations. Therefore, it is very important to reflect the cultural context in language learning.

In this research, I studied the positive impact of cultural context on Korean language teaching. However, it proposed a teaching method that reflects a very narrow view of cultural context. However, our society is changing all the time, and as Korean becomes more and more popular, learners' backgrounds are becoming more and more diverse. Therefore, more research is needed on more effective cultural factors according to learners' diverse backgrounds. If research is conducted on the effectiveness of various cultural learning methods that are not presented above or technologies that are still difficult to commercialize, it will be very helpful to overcome one bigger barrier of language education itself, not just Korean language education.

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