

Sameness and difference in classroom learning cultures: interpretations of communicative pedagogy in the UK and Korea

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This paper is a contribution to the growing sociolinguistic literature on classroom foreign/second language learning and teaching (Duff 1995; Willett, 1995; Bailey and Nunan, 1996; Bremer *et al.*, 1996; Coleman, 1996; Toohey, 1998; Heller, 1999; Rampton, 1999). We report two case studies of mainstream beginner-level FL instruction, using observational and interview data gathered in schools in Seoul, Korea, and in Southern England. In both cases, the public rationales offered for foreign language learning include a mix of ‘internationalist’ and ‘instrumental’ values (MoE, 1995; DES, 1991; DfEE/QCA, 1999). The dominant language-teaching ideologies to which the teachers in the different locations declare allegiance are also similar, involving commitment to various principles of the ‘communicative approach’ to language teaching. (In both settings, for example, the speaking skill is given priority, there is use of group work, etc.) Through analysis of selected lesson excerpts we identify similarities and differences in the classroom interpretations of communicative methodology, and in particular the opportunities available for individual students to engage in L2 interaction. We examine how the identity of the ‘good language learner’ is constructed in the different settings, for example, through differing teacher emphases on individual vs. collective responsibility for learning. Differences between the two classrooms are linked to broader features of the educational setting, but we show that these differences do not reflect common stereotypes about Anglo and Asian teaching styles in any simple way.

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I Introduction

This paper derives from a general concern with understanding the earliest stages of classroom language learning. Empirical investigations of this beginning stage are still relatively rare (Kubaneck-German, 1998). In this paper we adopt a contrastive ethnographic approach, comparing a French FL classroom in a lower secondary school in England, and an English FL classroom in an upper elementary school in Korea.

We have adopted this contrastive approach to illuminate two 'cultures of learning' (Cortazzi and Jin, 1996) and throw local practices into sharper relief. Our motivation is twofold. First, we are interested as language learning researchers in how the internationally promoted 'communicative approach', which dominated discourses about language teaching in the late twentieth century, has been interpreted over time in local contexts, and how it has accommodated itself to national educational traditions and cultures (see, e.g., Li, 1998; Enyedi and Medgyes, 1998; Gorsuch, 2000 for others who have discussed this process).

Secondly, as UK-based researchers we have responded to recent policy debates regarding the perceived ineffectiveness of schools in the Anglo-American tradition in delivering expected 'standards' (e.g., Stevenson and Stigler, 1992; Phillips, 1996). In these debates, UK teachers have been criticized for a preoccupation with learners' perceived natural 'ability', and for failing to challenge many of their pupils with sufficiently high expectations; in this way the 'tail' of underachievement believed to characterize English schools is explained (Bourne, 1988; Brooks, Pugh and Schagen, 1996). This has been contrasted with other teaching cultures' supposed focus on student 'effort' rather than 'ability', which it is claimed leads teachers to challenge all of their pupils, rather than a minority, to achieve. In particular, the perceived success of Pacific Rim school systems in international comparisons of educational achievement, has been attributed by school effectiveness researchers to the use of so-called 'whole class interactive teaching', which engages and extends the entire class in challenging dialogue. (See, e.g., Reynolds, 1998; Reynolds and Muijs, 1999 for research reviews supporting 'interactive teaching'; see Alexander 2000, chapter 1 for extended critical discussion.) Reynolds in

particular has claimed that ‘there exists a “known to be valid”: collection of methods which can be given *to all schools* to improve their English test results’ (1998: 156, our italics). These ideas have influenced recent educational policy in England, for example, through the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy, which supposedly embeds the practice of ‘direct interactive teaching’ in primary schools (see, e.g., Beard, n.d.; Medwell *et al.*, n.d.).

The present study shares the view of Alexander (2000) that ‘culture’ is not a separate, discrete variable whose influence can be factored into correlational explorations of teaching effectiveness. The paper will draw on a range of types of evidence (national policy documents, institutional data, teaching materials, teacher beliefs about pedagogy, and classroom observations) in order to describe two ‘cultures of learning’, one in England, the other in Korea. The account will concentrate on the following questions.

- How is the ‘communicative approach’ to language teaching interpreted in these two settings, and in particular how does this affect the nature of classroom discourse and associated language learning opportunities available to beginning students?
- How is the role of the ‘good language learner’ constructed in these settings, and can this construct be related to any wider cultural/educational traditions?
- How relevant to the observed pedagogy is the concept of ‘whole class interactive’ teaching?

II The settings and data for the study

The paper draws on two separate research investigations: (1) a funded research project co-directed by the first author (ESRC R000234754: Mitchell and Dickson, 1997), which during the 1990s gathered a large corpus of data relating to the teaching and learning of French in lower secondary schools in England; and (2) the doctoral project of the second author (Lee, 2002), which gathered data relating to the teaching and learning of English in an elementary school classroom in Seoul, Korea, in 1999. Lee’s project centred on the English lessons of an experienced female teacher with high professional standing. The English project had collected data relating to a large number of teachers of French;

from this group a single teacher has been selected for the purposes of the present study. She was chosen to match the Korean teacher as closely as possible; she was also female, experienced and professionally well regarded. Here, the two teachers will be known as Teacher E and Teacher K. Figure 1 provides profiles of the teachers, the teaching contexts and the data available for the study.

1 Two teachers and two school settings

Teacher K is a leading specialist who has been involved directly in the introduction of English to the elementary school curriculum in Korea in 1997. Teacher E is not so prominent professionally, but is an experienced teacher with a promoted position in her school.

Both schools are large, with multi-form entry, and socially mixed but ethnically homogeneous intakes. The physical classroom environments are similar, with movable tables and chairs for all pupils, plenty of routine classroom supplies, and easy access to facilities such as tape recorder, video recorder and overhead projector. (Computers were not available in these late 1990s lessons.) However, the school data reflect the different ages and levels at which FL learning now begins in the two national systems. In England, while it is claimed that just over 20 per cent of primary schools have some FL provision (QCA, 2001), the National Curriculum makes it compulsory only from the first year of secondary education (at age 11), and secondary schools typically treat all Year 7 learners as beginners. In Korea on the other hand, English is now taught as a foreign language in elementary school from Grade 3 (at age 8–9).

In this study, the learner age difference was only one year (the Korean upper elementary learners were Grade 5 students aged 10–11 and the English lower secondary learners were Year 7 students aged 11–12) and this did not seem to impact significantly on the styles of teaching and learning that were adopted. In our case, the teachers were also both FL specialists. This is the norm in secondary schools in both systems, but it was relatively unusual in a Korean elementary school to find a specialist teacher such as Teacher K. Most teachers involved in English instruction at this level are non-specialist class teachers (as in many primary school systems: Blondin *et al.*, 1998, Doyé, 2000), a fact that greatly

| | Learning French in England | Learning English in Korea |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| <i>Teacher profiles</i> | <p>Teacher E:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Female • British, English L1, French as FL • 12 years' experience of teaching FLs at secondary school level • Deputy head of FLs department within her school | <p>Teacher K:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Female • Korean, Korean L1, English as FL • 20 years' experience of generalist primary teaching, including 10 years of extra-curriculum English teaching • 2 years' experience as English specialist • Teacher trainer, PhD student, co-author of primary textbook, National Curriculum committee member |
| <i>School profiles</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secondary comprehensive, students aged 11–16 (Years 7–11) • Large school (7 form entry) • Urban area, socially mixed intake • Almost all-white, monolingual intake | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State primary, students aged 6–12 (Grades 1–6) • Large school (7–9 classes per grade) • Capital city (Seoul), socially mixed intake • All Korean, monolingual intake |
| <i>Class profiles</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Year 7 (first year of secondary education, aged 11–12) • 27 students (14 boys, 13 girls) • All abilities • 26 white, 1 Asian; 26 English L1, 1 French–English bilingual • 1st year of French as FL • 5 French lessons per week, total 175 minutes p.w. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grade 5 (fifth year of primary education, aged 10–11) • 40 students (22 boys, 18 girls) • All abilities • All Korean, Korean L1 • 3rd year of English as FL • 2 English lessons per week, total 80 minutes p.w. |
| <i>Data corpus</i> | <p>20 lessons observed and audio-recorded (total 700 minutes)</p> <p>2 teacher interviews recorded plus informal post-observation discussions</p> <p>Curriculum documentation (national and in-house)</p> | <p>20 lessons observed and audio or video-recorded (total 800 minutes)</p> <p>7 teacher-training programmes recorded, 1 interview, post-observation discussions</p> <p>Curriculum and coursebook (produced/approved by Ministry of Education)</p> |

Figure 1 Teacher, school and class profiles

influences curriculum and materials. The materials being used by Teacher K, for example, centred on a video that modelled all dialogues, expressions and vocabulary to be learned, and together with the textbook and teachers' manual giving step by step advice on methodology, provided a complete kit, usable by teachers with limited English (Yim *et al.*, 1998a, 1998b). While textbooks were also available in the English school, Teacher E did not follow a single, published course at all closely. Like many FL teachers in England, even after the 1990s introduction of the National Curriculum (DES, 1991; DfE, 1995), she was following a detailed 'scheme of work' devised with colleagues in her school, and drew selectively on published materials in her lesson planning.

2 Two National Curricula for foreign language study

In both settings, teachers were working in the context of a prescribed National Curriculum. These frameworks can be summarized here only briefly (for fuller treatment see Lee, 2002, chapter 2; Mitchell, 2001). The whole concept of a National Curriculum was an innovation of the late 1980s for England and Wales; the first version of the National Curriculum for Modern Foreign Languages was launched in 1991, and slightly modified in 1995 and 1999 (DES, 1991; DfE, 1995; DfEE/QCA, 1999). The 1991 version stated as primary aim: 'to develop the ability to use the language effectively for purposes of practical communication'. A range of cultural, intellectual and personal reasons was also listed, but the assessment framework which drives classroom activity deals exclusively with this first objective. Successive versions of this framework address the traditional four skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing); for each of these a 'ladder' of eight 'Levels of Attainment' is prescribed in general, skill-oriented terms. During the period of observation, the Year 7 class under scrutiny was judged by their teacher to be working at Levels 2 and 3 of the framework.

This very general model has subsequently been translated into more detailed 'Schemes of Work' (e.g., QCA/DfEE, 2000), but schools are not legally obliged to follow these, and at the time of the research, most schools (including that of Teacher E) were using

their own scheme, detailing topics, functions, grammar patterns and vocabulary to be taught.

Regarding methodology, the guidance provided by the English National Curriculum is also general – a two-page list includes reference to ‘communicating in the target language’, to rote learning, to developing explicit grammar understanding, use of strategies, and so on (DfE, 1995: 2–3), but this listing is not developed in any detail or related to the assessment ladder. (Later supplementary documents have offered more detailed guidance, but at the time of the research their impact was limited; for example, SCAA, 1997.)

In Korea the principle of a National Curriculum has been established since 1945, with regular revisions; the 6th version was in force from 1997 and the 7th was launched in 2001. After a long debate, English for elementary schools was introduced from 1997, in line with guidelines published two years before (MoE, 1995). A broadly instrumentalist rationale relates to the international orientation of modern Korean education:

English is most widely used in the international world, so to cope with the demands of the times, English is needed to a high level for both culture and life. Primary students are at the best time to acquire language in terms of their developmental stage. This is the reason for introducing English into primary school. English in primary school, as a subject, has the intention of enabling students to understand and express simple and basic language used in everyday life . . .

(MoE, 1995, our translation)

The subject-specific curriculum for primary English focuses on speaking and listening (partly as a counterweight to the acknowledged bias towards reading and writing in secondary school). It sets out in detail the language to be taught, prescribing functions and word lists for each grade, as well as everyday situations. There is a strong emphasis on keeping language content simple – for example, there is a restriction on the word length of sentences to be taught.

In broad terms therefore, these two beginners’ curricula have much in common, with a clear focus on the development of young learners’ practical skills and on spoken language. The main difference is the greater detail and more specific prescription in the Korean example.

3 Two groups of language learners

The two classes observed for the study included boys and girls of all abilities. (The ‘setting’ by ability usual in England did not apply to early FL learning in the school concerned.) Crucially for this study, both classes were at a relatively similar, beginner level in their respective languages. (While the Korean children were in their third year of English, and the English children were only in their first year of French, differences in the weekly time allowance for FL learning meant that the Korean children had accumulated only slightly more hours than the English children.) However, an obvious difference was the matter of class size, and related organizational decisions made by the teachers, which turned out to be important for the respective ‘cultures of learning’.

In the English classroom, the 27 students sat in pairs at tables arranged in rows facing the teacher. The classroom itself was usually a specialist languages room, effectively a ‘home base’ for Teacher E, while the children moved from one room to another for different subjects. On arrival for their French lesson, the Year 7 children could normally choose where they sat, and usually did so according to gender and friendship preferences.

In the Korean school, English lessons took place in the 40 students’ regular ‘home base’ classroom. However, Teacher K always rearranged the furniture, regrouping tables that were normally set out in rows into five blocks of eight. For English lessons, students were required to sit in mixed-gender groups determined by the teacher. Group membership remained unchanged throughout the study, and within each group, one pupil was permanently designated the ‘group leader’, and another the ‘vice leader’. These leaders were selected on grounds of perceived ability, and played an important role in discourse management, as will be seen below.

III Classroom talk and organization in the two case-study classrooms

As shown in Figure 1, the data available for this study comprised a corpus of 20 recorded lessons for each classroom, plus teacher interviews and a range of back-up documentation. Both lessons and interviews have been transcribed and systematic analyses

reported elsewhere (Mitchell and Martin, 1997; Lee, 2002). Here we concentrate on a range of 'critical incidents' selected from the lesson corpus to illustrate key elements of the two classroom cultures, interspersed with quotation from teacher interviews and documents.

In both settings, the situational/functional language content and oral skill focus of the lessons were broadly in accord with local National Curriculum prescriptions, as explained above. This section deals in depth with aspects of classroom discourse more under the immediate control of the individual teacher, that is, the prevailing oral interaction patterns and associated class organization (Section 3.1), as well as the teachers' language choices regarding medium of instruction (Section 3.2). These strands have been selected for detailed analysis because of their potential to illuminate the teachers' beliefs about effective classroom practice and in particular, their methodological interpretations of a communicative approach. More ambitious and fluency-oriented interpretations of communicative methodology have been associated with learner-centring, with varied interaction patterns and unpredictable, meaning-oriented target language use, as well as tolerance of error and code-switching (e.g., Brumfit, 1988: 5–6). Such 'strong' interpretations of communicative approach have been advocated for early learners, as a reflection of 'progressivist' educational philosophy (Clark, 1988). However, Howatt among others has pointed out the classroom popularity of weaker interpretations of communicative methodology, in which 'most of the essential features of direct method and structural language teaching have remained in place' (1988: 25), and where the underlying theory of learning remains 'our old friend behaviorism, more relaxed than before' (1988: 25). This distinction is of especial interest for early classroom learning, and will be re-visited in the discussion of our findings (Section 4).

1 Oral interaction patterns

a The British classroom In both classrooms, the teachers presented clusters of target language utterances, mostly functional exponents usable in some kind of dialogic exchange, and practised these intensively with their students. For Teacher E, these utterances typically related to a topic area such as hobbies and

leisure pursuits, or school life, and were practised through question-and-answer exchanges between the teacher and students. Most of these were public exchanges between the teacher and individual learners; choral answering and repetition took place, as did some pair and group work, but none of these were very frequent. Oral work predominated, though usually followed by some form of copywriting or simple written exercise.

Teacher E explained her views on the need for participatory whole class teacher–student interaction, partly linked to her expectations for accurate oral production, partly for management reasons:

I suppose I use a lot more [whole] class activities, oral work activities, than some teachers, because I feel they need . . . they still need the direction so that if I hear a glaring mistake, I gently correct. Otherwise, if they're left to their own devices too much, you end up with a rotten accent, rotten intonation, and I think on the whole they speak well . . . I expect good participation, you know, they get picked on if they don't put their hands up and they know that, so on the whole they do join in quite a bit, but yes, [I also use] pair work, group work.

(Interview 2, 4–57)

I found that that class at the moment isn't terribly good on the pair work, group work, but I aim to do more of that as they get a little bit more used to what I expect from them . . . it falls apart at the moment . . . they think they can get away without working . . . but yes, pair work, group work, [whole] class activities, and that would be mainly oral, in fact I do mainly oral work in class.

(Interview 1, 655–66)

The learners in Teacher E's classroom could vary limited elements within the set phrases being learned through whole-class interaction, according to their personal experience and preferences. (See Excerpt 1; for transcription conventions, see Note 1.)

Excerpt 1 (Ob 3, 1/3)

- 1 TE: (T puts up overhead transparency of leisure picture cues, with picture of football revealed)
- 2 alors, regardez . . . sshh! aujourd'hui, nous allons faire des activités . . . les passe-temps . . . les activités
- 3 qu'on peut faire à la maison . . . le weekend . . . et ça, c'est le foot, le football ou le foot, moi, moi, je
- 4 n'aime pas jouer le foot . . . j'aime regarder le foot . . . je préfère regarder, je n'aime pas jouer au foot,
- 5 Oliver, tu aimes jouer au football? [okay, look . . . shh! Today we are going to do activities, hobbies,
- 6 activities you can do at home . . . at the weekend . . . and that, that is football, me, I don't like playing
- 7 football, I like watching football . . . I prefer watching, I don't like playing football, Oliver do you like
- 8 playing football?]
- 9 OI: oui [yes]
- 10 TE: oui, alors, tu dis j'aime jouer au football [yes, so you say, I like playing football]

- 11 Ol: oui, j'ai [yes I] ... **what was it?**
 12 TE: j'aime jouer au football [I like playing football]
 13 Ol: j'aime jouer football [I like playing *ERROR* football]
 14 TE: j'aime jouer au football [I like playing football]
 15 Ol: j'aime jouer au football [I like playing football]
 16 TE: toute la classe, j'aime jouer [everyone, I like playing]
 17 Ss: j'aime jouer [I like playing]
 18 TE: au football [football]
 19 Ss: au football [football]
 20 TE: j'aime jouer au football [I like playing football]
 21 Ss: j'aime jouer au football [I like playing football]
 22 TE: Jonathan?
 23 S: football
 24 S: j'aime jouer au football [I like playing football]
 25 TE: excellent, Stephen?
 26 St: j'aime jouer au football [I like playing football]
 27 TE: excellent, ah, laisse le football, monsieur, dans la salle de classe, on ne joue pas au football ...
 28 hein? ce n'est pas permis, Julie, répète, j'aime jouer au football [excellent, oh leave the
 29 football alone mister, in the classroom we don't play football, huh? it is not allowed, Julie,
 30 repeat, I like playing football]
 31 Ju: j'aime jouer au football [I like playing football]
 32 TE: Claire, j'aime jouer au foot [I like playing football]
 33 Cl: j'aime jouer au foot [I like playing football]
 34 TE: Celia! ... est-ce que tu aimes jouer au foot? ... oui ou non [Celia, do you like playing football,
 35 yes or no?]
 36 Ce: oui [yes]
 37 TE: oui! alors, tu répètes oui, j'aime jouer au foot [yes, then you repeat yes, I like playing football]
 38 Ce: oui, j'aime jouer au foot [I like playing football]
 39 TE: très bien [very good]

In Excerpt 1 we see intensive rehearsal of the new French expression for 'I like playing football', mostly by individuals, but also some concern for its use in line with participants' real opinions (see the exchanges with Oliver and Celia, as well as the expression of the teacher's own view, at the start of the extract). This would be followed later in the lesson, by introduction of a vocabulary for a range of other leisure activities, plus expressions for 'I don't like ...', and so on, so that students could build utterances in line with the model, while supposedly expressing a greater range of authentic personal opinions.

It should also be noted that even within Excerpt 1, six different individuals are asked to produce the new expression. This was in line with Teacher E's overall interaction strategy when working in 'whole class' mode, which was to distribute speech turns equally around the class.

Excerpt 2 shows another characteristic of Teacher E's interaction style when working with the whole class – regular feedback on errors and insistence on correct production. Here, the preferences of an imaginary character regarding pets are being reviewed in the

same question-and-answer format. Individual students are pushed in turn to produce accurate utterances using third-person pronouns and verb forms.

Excerpt 2 (Ob 3, 1/3)

- 1 TE: elle a un animal à la maison? [*has she got a pet at home?*]
 2 S: chat [*cat*]
 3 TE: Hilary?
 4 Hi: j'ai a un chat [*I have has a cat*]
 5 TE: ce n'est pas j'ai, c'est Lucille, ehm? [*it is not I have, this is Lucille, ehm*]
 6 S: elle a [*she has*]
 7 Hi: elle ... elle a un chat [*she ... she has a cat*]
 8 TE: elle a un chat, très bien, elle ... elle aime quel animal? elle aime quel animal? [*she has a cat, good, she ... what animal does she like?*]
 9 good, she ... what animal does she like?
 10 S: elle j'aime les oiseaux [*she I like birds*]
 11 TE: ce n'est pas j'aime, on parle de Lucille ... [*it is not I like, we are talking about Lucille ...*]
 12 S: elle [*she*]
 13 TE: elle [*she*]
 14 S: elle ... aime les oiseaux [*she ... likes birds*]
 15 TE: très bien, elle aime les oiseaux [*very good, she likes birds*]

b The Korean classroom Interaction in the Korean classroom is illustrated in Excerpt 3. For Teacher K, interaction centred around rehearsal of dialogues and question-and-answer exchanges drawn from the pre-packaged course video, which was also viewed repeatedly. Her aim as expressed in a teacher-training TV programme seemed to be for students to memorize these expressions and use them fluently as wholes, through repeated oral rehearsal (see Note 2):

[you have to use most of a lesson for practising each day's key expressions]
 (19/14/5)

[what is the most important in practice is making everybody speak. Making them say a lot is practice. Practice means maximising speaking opportunity for all individual students]

(9/14/5)

Teacher K's attention is frequently directed at groups of students rather than individuals, and groups are regularly expected to participate collectively in teacher-student interaction.

Excerpt 3 (Ob 15, 5/3)

- 1 TK: (gestures that she is 'going shopping')
- 2 Ss: I go shopping
- 3 Ss: I go swimming
- 4 TK: 자 조끼리 의논 해보세요 [OK, please discuss in your group]
- 5 Ss(G5): (discuss quickly and put their hands on their heads, a routine signal used in this class to show that students are ready)
- 6
- 7 TK: 자, 5조 시작 [OK, Group 5 go]
- 8 Ss(G5): I go shopping (T points to Group 4)
- 9 S(G4): [I went shopping]
- 10 Ss(G4): [I go shopping]
- 11 TK: and your turn (points to Group 3)
- 12 Ss(G3): I go shopping
- 13 TK: (points to Group 2)
- 14 Ss(G2): I go to the shopping
- 15 TK: go to the shopping? (points to Group 1)
- 16 Ss(G1): I went to the shop...
- 17 TK: went to the shopping?
- 18 SHJ: 아니 아니 [no, no] I go shopping
- 19 TK: everybody, I go shopping
- 20 Ss: I go shopping
- 21 TK: I go shopping
- 22 Ss: I go shopping

In Excerpt 3, we see that students are asked to check in groups the expression they are learning, before producing it collectively. We also see that errors are not corrected until each group has had a chance to try, though they are then corrected actively. In a later excerpt (Excerpt 8), we will also see that groups can earn merit points through correct productions. These group responses were a very characteristic feature of the lessons of Teacher K, both as a means of involving students actively and intensively in whole class interaction, and also as a way of maintaining a competitive atmosphere, which Teacher K believed promoted effort and motivation:

[if you have (the students) practise between groups then they will show very high concentration. They will work really hard]

(13/14/5)

[they need to work together. The games should never be used for only a few competent students, and you should never alienate weak students in playing games . . . you need to let them understand that it's not important whether they play games well, but they need to work together (with their group) in an orderly and collaborative manner . . . then they will get more points]

(20/15/16)

2 Medium of instruction – L1 or target language?

Teacher E and Teacher K were themselves native speakers of English and Korean, who had learned French and English

respectively as FLs. They both code-switched in the course of their lessons, between the L1 shared with their students, and the target language.

Teacher E was a high classroom user of her target language, French. Indeed, throughout the 20 observed lessons, around 95 per cent of her utterances were in French. Such a high percentage is unusual in a British context, though in line with a concerted 'push' by government inspectors and others in the 1990s for monolingual teaching. In interview, Teacher E defended the use of L1 English for selected purposes such as setting homework or giving grammar explanations, but in practice she used English very little.

I mean, I try and use target language as much as possible . . . if I have to resort to English then fair enough, I do, but at least they've heard it in French as well, and I think they expect French. . . . I would expect a class to expect me to use a lot of French, and I think they do

(Interview 2)

This commitment to target language use by Teacher E can be seen in Excerpts 4 and 5. These two extracts show Teacher E undertaking various aspects of classroom management through French. In Excerpt 4 she is giving instructions for a new activity, with a good deal of repetition and appeals to non-verbal cues, together with interpretation of some key words by one of the students, and close direction (through nomination) of individuals' focus of attention. In Excerpt 5 she takes time to insist that a student, Katherine, uses French to report an administrative problem, sorts out her misunderstanding of what is required, and models part of the needed utterance for her. (At other times Teacher E routinely accepted student unplanned initiations and contributions to classroom administrative talk in English, as can be seen in Excerpt 7 below. However, two or three times per lesson she insisted that these contributions were made in French, as seen in Excerpt 5. These occasions thus seemed to carry some symbolic force regarding the status of French as a language that could be used by everyone present for 'real' purposes, while remaining rare enough not to threaten the teacher's planned teaching sequence, by using up significant amounts of lesson time for unplanned negotiation.)

Excerpt 4 (Ob 8, 2/3)

- 1 TE: bon numéro quatre, voilà numéro quatre, Gordon écoute bien, page 60 et page 61, tout
 2 d'abord c'est un exercice avec vrai ou faux, hein, vrai ou faux, c'est quoi en anglais, vrai?
 3 *[good number four, now for number four, listen properly Gordon, page 60 and page 61, first of*
 4 *all this is an exercise with true or false, okay, true or false, what is that in English, true?]*
 5 S: **true**
 6 TE: et faux *[and false]*
 7 S: **false**
 8 TE: voilà, très bien, alors c'est pas difficile, regardez la lettre et regardez aussi l'emploi du temps,
 9 Tonie je peux? regardez, voilà page 60, Annie, Claire, regarde, ça c'est l'emploi du temps,
 10 Susan regarde, voilà l'emploi du temps, okay ... Annie ... Kylie ... voilà l'emploi du temps, et
 11 à la page 61 vous avez des photos et des textes, et vous trouvez le texte qui correspond à la
 12 photo ... okay, et vous écrivez le numéro de la photo et la lettre du texte, c'est tout, vous
 13 faites les paires *[that's it, very good, so it is not difficult, look at the letter and look at the*
 14 *timetable as well, may I Tonie? Look, there is page 60, Annie, Claire, look, that is the*
 15 *timetable, Susan look, that is the timetable okay ... Annie ... Kylie ... that is the timetable, and*
 16 *on page 61 you have some photos and some texts, and you find the text which fits the photo*
 17 *... okay, and you write the number of the photo and the letter of the text, that's all, you put*
 18 *them in pairs]*

Excerpt 5 (Ob 8, 2/3)

- 1 TE: shh, pas grave, pas grave, oui je sais, en français, répète ça shh – non écoute! Katherine,
 2 parle-moi en français *[shh, not important, not important, yes I know, in French, repeat that –*
 3 *no, listen, Katherine, speak to me in French]*
 4 K: *[imitates]* parle-moi en français *[speak to me in French]*
 5 TE: non non non, tu parles, tu parles, parle-moi en français shh Katherine a un problème ... shh
 6 ... Katherine, quel est ton problème *[no no no, you speak, you speak, speak to me in French,*
 7 *shh, Katherine has a problem, shh ... Katherine, what is your problem]*
 8 K: **you've got my book**
 9 TE: non en français Katherine *[no, in French Katherine]*
 10 K: oh ehm
 11 TE: je n'ai pas *[I haven't got]*
 12 K: je n'ai pas de cahier *[I haven't got a book]*
 13 TE: de cahier, hein *[a book, huh]*

Teacher K on the other hand did not show any expectation that her students would use English for classroom requests. She also code-switched with greater freedom than did Teacher E. She used English mainly to model the exponents and dialogues that were being learned, but also to give praise, and for basic instructions, greetings, and so on. In her teacher training presentations, she made it clear that repetitive use of simple 'classroom English' could provide extra input/ language models for the students:

[when you use English, you need to provide English input at their level. There are three basic principles, the first one is, ... you have to make it simple, with basic English, very basic language. The second is, clear pronunciation, clear pronunciation. The third is, repetition. For example, you should not say: 'Look here, I'm going to say something, okay, if you know the answer, please put your hand up and answer' – you should not use this kind of difficult English

... *make it basic and simple*. 'Listen carefully', 'good', 'answer me', 'answer me', 'answer me', 'listen carefully', 'like this'. *Please also use gestures...* (15.6, 19/1)

However, Teacher K mostly used Korean to assure comprehension of the target exponents, for classroom management, for feedback to the students, and for disciplinary purposes, and justified this explicitly in terms of National Curriculum expectations:

[if you look at the National Curriculum, it says... (English learning) should assist in understanding our language, and help in the use of our language. So, the textbook is designed so that students can answer the questions in Korean] (14.5/7/4)

The code-switching of Teacher K is exemplified in Excerpt 6, where we see the use of Korean for classroom management (line 26), checking and confirmation of meanings by both teacher and students (e.g., lines 3 and 12), negative feedback and disciplinary comments (lines 13 and 19). However, we also see the use of English for positive feedback (line 3).

Excerpt 6 (Ob 12, 4/1)

- 1 TK: OK, Kim SangMee... uh... 제가 어디에 갔나? 어디에 [*where did she go?... where*]
 2 KSM: shopping centre
 3 TK: shopping centre, OK, very good, Lee InHo... what - did - she - buy?... 뭐 샀어요?
 4 [*what did she buy?*]
 5 LIH: new bag
 6 S: (...)
 7 TK: new bag... new bag, Hong SangKeun... how - much - was the bag?
 8 HSK: ...
 9 S: 얼마네 [*she is asking you how much that was*]
 10 S: (...)
 11 TK: how much was the bag? 얼마였지요? [*how much was the bag?*]
 12 S: 오 팔라 [*five dollars*]
 13 TK: 이 팔라? [*two dollar?*] 어, 너 안 봤구나 [*uh, you didn't watch this*]
 14 HSK?: 봤긴 봤는데 못 알아들었어요 [*I did but I couldn't understand*]
 15 TK: 봤긴 봤는데 못 알아들었어요 [*you watched this but you couldn't understand...*]
 16 지현아... 박지현... 얼마였지요? [*JeeHyun... Park, JeeHyun... how much was that?*]
 17 how much was the bag?
 18 PJH: ...
 19 TK: 에이 열심히 안 하니까 [*see as you are not trying hard*]
 20 GJH: [저 알아요] [*I know that*]
 21 TK: [이건 어려운 게 아니라구요] [*it's not difficult, is it?*]
 22 S: ten dollar
 23 TK: how much was that?
 24 Ss: [ten dollar]
 25 Ss: [오 [five] dollar]
 26 TK: ten dollars? 다같이 [*all together*], five dollars
 27 Ss: [오 [five] dollar]
 28 Ss: [five dollars]
 29 TK: five dollars
 30 Ss: five dollars

3 The 'good language learner'

Both teachers in this study were working with non-selective classes, where FL learning was a compulsory part of the curriculum. Teacher K was working with an intact elementary school class. Teacher E was working with a 'mixed ability' group, constructed when the students entered their comprehensive school so as to include a representative range of academic ability. In this section we explore the teachers' respective views about their students' capability for language learning, and how best to maximize achievement.

In an interview during Year 7, Teacher E talked about individual students in terms of relatively fixed ability and potential for language learning. For a few, she predicted that they would reach a 'linguistic ceiling' before too long; that is, they would cease to progress in learning French. Looking back on this Year 7 class, after teaching them for a further year, she used the same metaphor:

of course some of them have actually reached their linguistic ceiling. We can only go for breadth now . . . so although they cope in different situations, they're coping at the same [fixed phrase] level with different situations. I mean some of them won't get to that spontaneous level, which is a shame.

(Interview 2, 117–23)

She seemed to believe that under classroom conditions, not everyone could be expected to make the transition from the learning of fixed phrases and expressions, to a creative control of target language grammar.

During Year 7 lessons however, Teacher E expected similar participation from everyone. As seen in Excerpt 1, her questioning was distributed very equally around the class. In Excerpt 5, we saw how an individual learner, Katherine, was encouraged to express a problem in French; this student was described by Teacher E privately as 'very willing but not terribly able', yet she was targeted for this 'symbolic' purpose just like others. Teacher E also made only infrequent use of group and pair work, and any groups used were formed in an *ad hoc* way. It seemed that individual students were primarily responsible for their own learning in this class, through taking part in public question and answer exchanges with the teacher and, importantly, being willing eventually to study and accept the arbitrary conventions of a new language:

the linguists (i.e., the students predicted to succeed)... just accept that language is another set – it's a set of rules, and they are conventions, and they have to be accepted... the French have agreed in one way, and we've agreed in another, and that's how language works.

(Interview 2, 271–93)

Only occasionally was a 'good' student given a little extra work, asked to help another, or given any differentiated feedback. Excerpt 7 illustrates the restricted and impromptu nature of such rare exchanges.

Excerpt 7 (Ob 2/3)

- 1 S: (private question to TE) **do you just write** (...)
 2 TE: (...)
 3 S: (...)
 4 TE: non, pas nécessaire, oh si tu veux oui, Susan tu écris assez vite, alors tu peux copier la
 5 question aussi [*no, not necessary, oh if you want to yes, Susan you write quite quickly, so you*
 6 *can copy the question as well*]

Teacher K also made clear in interview her belief that students had differing abilities and potential for FL learning. Despite this, she also provided an undifferentiated programme. However, while Teacher E seemed committed to equal individual participation in lesson activities, Teacher K believed that in order to maximize the learning of the class as a whole, it was necessary to treat individuals somewhat differently.

We have noted already that Teacher K had organized her 40-strong class into five permanent groups. Through an ongoing system of competition for merit points, students were expected to share responsibility for the learning of their group. Furthermore, group leaders were nominated, from among the most active and highest achieving students. These group leaders often responded on behalf of their group, after moments of group practice or preparation, and were the individuals most likely to be called upon, when Teacher K wanted individual contributions to whole-class interaction. In interview and in teacher training presentations, Teacher K explained her view of these students as 'little teachers', who could provide good language models for their peers, and should be called on preferentially for this purpose:

[Group organisation and arrangement is very important. Please use them as I tell you in the classroom... make groups of eight, these are larger groups...]

and nominate a leader and a vice leader in each group . . . you must nominate competent students as the leaders and call them 'little teachers']

(20/15/6)

[if you have the good students demonstrate to the others, then they also become stimulated . . . so, this will encourage the other students]

(14/14/5)

Excerpt 8 shows how groups were expected to work together and produce collective responses. Asked for their food preferences, Groups 2 and 4 are praised and earn points for their unified choral responses. The more varied responses of Groups 1 and 3 may reflect greater authenticity, in the form of individuals' actual food preferences, but this is not rewarded; Group 5 also lose a point, because one group member did not speak.

Excerpt 8 (Ob 1, 6/1)

- 1 TK: 자, 선생님이 일조한테 물어봐요, 두 가지만 대답하세요 [OK, I will ask Group 1, answer me
 2 with only two items], what do you like?
 3 Ss: I like hamburger
 4 TK: 일조만 [only Group 1 answer], what do you like?
 5 Ss(G1): I like (indistinct, various items)
 6 TK: 이조 [Group 2], what do you like?
 7 Ss(G2): I like pizza and cola (speaking together)
 8 TK: one point (gives a point to G2) 너무 대답을 잘했어요, 똑똑하게, 삼조 [they answered really
 9 well, accurately Group 3], what do you like?
 10 Ss(G3): I like (indistinct, Kimchi and so on but not at the same time)
 11 TK: 사조 [Group 4], what do you like?
 12 Ss(G4): I like hamburger and French fries (together)
 13 TK: one point (gives a point to G4), good, what do you like? (to Group 5)
 14 Ss(G5): I like (sandwich, pizza and so on but not at the same time)
 15 TK: no point, 한사람이 안했어. 그러면... I like 라는 말이 나왔는데 [there was one who didn't
 16 say anything, OK, then...there was 'I like'] 자... 일조...사조 [OK...Group 1... Group 4]
 17 one point...원 지방방송이 이렇게 많뇨? 이조는 오늘따라 이상하게...여기서 모 마실것 좀
 18 드시겠음니까 하는 말이 나오는데, 그게 온가봐 [why do you make such noises? Group 2, you
 19 are strange today... there is the expression, anything to drink?, listen to this expression]
 20 (plays the video)

Excerpt 9 shows Teacher K's preferred choice of group leaders as interlocutors in public question and answer. It also shows her willingness to identify students publicly with labels such as 'one of the best'. Interestingly, on this occasion she is not asking for performance in English, only for interpretation in Korean of a straightforward English dialogue, and it is reasonable to assume that many students could have answered. Yet still, the students called upon are respectively a group leader and a deputy.

Excerpt 9 (Ob 12, 3/2)

- 1 TK: 어... 예은아, 니가 제일 잘하니까, 애가 왜 이렇게 아팠지? 어? [uh ... YeEun, since you are
2 *one of the best, why was he unwell? ... uh?]*
3 S: 감기에 걸렸어요 [(he) had a cold]
4 JYE: 감기에 걸렸어요 [(he) had a cold]
5 TK: 어, 감기에 걸렸어요, 그 말을 영어로 어떻게 했더라? [uh, (he) had a cold, how do we say
6 *this?]*
7 Ss: (...)
8 Ss: I had a cold
9 TK: 자, 다같이 [OK, all together], I – had – a cold
10 Ss: I had a cold
11 TK: {I had a cold}
12 Ss: {I had a cold}
13 TK: OK, Kim JoonHo stand up please
14 Ss: stand up please
15 TK: stand up please 애는 어저께 모했어요? [what did he do yesterday?] what did he do ...
16 KJH: 아파서 방에서 알았어요 [he was unwell and stayed at home]
17 TK: 어... 그러면 방에서 아팠다 그 말을 어떻게 했죠? [uh... then how do we say, he was unwell
18 *and stayed at home?]*
19 Ss: {I have a cold}
20 Ss: {I'm sick }
21 Ss: {sick }
22 TK: uh... was sick... OK, he was sick
23 Ss: he was sick
24 TK: he was sick
25 Ss: he was sick

IV Discussion

In this section we sum up the overall instructional patterns in these two classrooms, and review the extent to which they reflect distinctive ‘cultures of learning’. We take account of (a) interpretations of the communicative approach to language teaching, (b) perceptions and roles of the ‘good learner’ and (c) how far these patterns conform to the views of Anglo and Asian teaching discussed in the introduction.

1 Interpretations of the communicative approach

The two ‘cultures of learning’ were similar in their commitment to the rehearsal of oral language, with varied activities and relatively fast teaching pace. The lessons of Teacher K in particular were strikingly dynamic, with competitions, out-of-seat activities, singing, use of gesture, applause, and so on. The lessons of Teacher E were less physically active, perhaps reflecting the ‘secondary school’ setting, but they were still varied and involving, and in both settings attention was paid to motivation through praise and feedback. In both classrooms students had many opportunities to speak, whether chorally and in a group (in classroom K) or in whole-class

dialogue with the teacher (with Teacher E). Both teachers expected accuracy in FL production, and engaged actively in correction. However, there was little explicit focus on form or metalinguistic commentary in either classroom; work on language forms was overwhelmingly inductive. (In interview, Teacher E made clear her belief that for long-term success, the classroom learner does need eventually to develop an explicit understanding of the target language system; the view of Teacher K was not recorded.)

In both classrooms, everyday language was being practised. For Teacher K, this comprised dialogues and associated expressions from the official course video; for Teacher E, question and answer exchanges grouped around everyday themes. But in both cases, interaction meant overwhelmingly the mastery and use of prefabricated expressions, chosen by the teacher. In both cases, the only regular expectations for student creativity involved either selection of prefabricated exponents from material already practised, or oral 'gap-filling' (inserting one's own lexical choice into a prefabricated grammar pattern). Teacher E showed some willingness to match ready-made exponents with students' actual opinions; in Teacher K's classroom, reference to students' own experiences were unusual. For both teachers, speaking the target language for classroom management purposes was the main 'authentic' TL use, though in both cases this was supplemented in differing degrees by the L1.

In summary then, the main priority for both teachers at this early stage of classroom language learning was to equip their students with a predetermined body of everyday expressions and vocabulary, usable in conversational interaction, and this aim drove many aspects of these 'cultures of learning'. It was assumed in both settings that this material could best be learned through repetition and accurate (re)production, with minor slot-and-filler variations. It seemed the teachers saw 'traditional' rule giving and grammar explanation as unhelpful at this stage; but 'naturalistic', creative or spontaneous target language experience was also not regularly seen as an effective use of class time. Their teaching could not be equated closely with any one twentieth-century language teaching 'method', but broadly reflected Howatt's 'weak' interpretation of communicative methodology, with its underlying neo-behaviourist perspective on language learning, rather than, for example, the

stronger, 'progressivist' perspective of Clark. Both classrooms were cheerful and busy places, with a strong sense of purpose and high proportion of time on task. However, student motivation and involvement were promoted through an active pace, a variety of activities and positive feedback, rather than through the expression of personal meanings, or cognitive challenge.

In conclusion to this subsection, what was most striking were the resemblances between these two 'cultures of learning'. Teacher-led interaction, and the mastery of correct language models, took priority over the creative language use and student centring which have been associated with more fluency-oriented or 'progressivist' interpretations of the communicative approach, but also over the 'language awareness' activity seen by some others as central to primary school language learning (see Blondin *et al.*, 1998: 13–15). Observational studies of beginner classrooms remain relatively rare, but some other studies report similar teacher priorities (Blondin *et al.*, 1998: 22–32; Donato *et al.*, 2000). Perhaps, more progressivist student-centred interpretations of the communicative approach become attractive only in the more advanced or more adult settings for which they were originally devised (Howatt, 1988).

2 The 'good language learner' in cross-cultural perspective

So far in this section we have concentrated on resemblances between the two classroom cultures. Here we review the most striking difference – to do with group versus individual activity, and the degree of differentiation expected in student behaviour.

Whatever her private expectations, Teacher E adopted a publicly undifferentiated approach to her 'mixed ability' class. Students were all expected to take their turn in whole-class interaction, and got feedback on their individual contributions. They usually sat where they chose, and occasional pair or group work also reflected friendship links. Individuals were expected to apply the language patterns being learned to themselves, at least to a limited extent. They might also be called on to make original French-medium interventions in the public discourse, with scaffolded help from the teacher, at least on management topics. The programme was adapted in the teacher's view, so as to be accessible to all, for

example, through the limited use of writing and of metalinguistic explanation. However, within this framework individuals were essentially responsible only for their own learning, and peer support and mentoring were limited to occasional pairwork.

In Teacher K's class on the other hand, the teacher-determined seating groups were fundamental to the prevailing culture of learning. Group leaders were identified explicitly as models and contributed regularly to public interaction, while weaker students were expected to attend to and learn from the public performances of stronger students, and join in group activity. Groups practised together with the leaders as peer tutors; they competed for merit points, with language performances which were valued for fluency and convergence on the expected models. Students were not normally expected to apply the language being learned to themselves.

It is tempting to interpret these differences as reflections of a stereotypical Anglo-Asian cultural divide, with greater individualism reflected in the English classroom, and greater collective responsibility for learning in the Korean classroom (Kim *et al.*, 1994; Triandis, 1995). However, like Kubota (1999) and Littlewood (2001) we are wary of accepting such an interpretation too simplistically. First of all, in the Korean classroom, the strong group organization was distinctive to the students' English lessons, and was not found in other lessons. The 'special' group work arrangement was seen by Teacher K as an accommodation to the largely oral English curriculum.

Secondly, while Teacher E made little systematic use of peer tutoring and mentoring, her lessons did not conform fully with the characteristics of 'Anglo-American' teaching described in some other classroom research. Alexander, for example, describes teachers in England and the USA as commonly preoccupied with learning processes (e.g., learning to 'think like a mathematician'), rather than with learning outcomes, and spending much of their time supervising differentiated group and individual work, rather than engaging in direct instruction (2000). The lessons of Teacher E did not fit this model. Indeed from the account given above, it can be argued that she was already delivering a version of the 'interactive whole class teaching' which Reynolds and others have argued should be imported into UK schools. Teacher K was

delivering another version of the same, but with her much more systematic use of group work and varied physical activity, she hardly fits any simple stereotype of an Asian teacher, and shows that 'interactive teaching' is itself not a unified construct.

V Conclusion

These two classroom cultures had much in common. Both were strongly teacher led, neo-behaviourist in learning philosophy and inclusive in their expectations that all students would try their best to learn a common corpus of everyday spoken language. Both were focused on practical activity and oral interaction, eschewing reflections on learning processes and metalinguistic commentary. However, they reflected the internationally promoted expectations of the 'communicative approach' only in part (language material chosen for its functional usefulness, a focus on oral language, some group work).

Compared with these major similarities, the differences were relatively nuanced. However, there were strands within each classroom culture that reflected some sociohistoric features of the local educational setting. First, through her encouragement to relate the ready-made language on offer to personal circumstances, and more obviously through her use of French for classroom management, Teacher E conveyed a somewhat more immediate sense that the target language was intended for authentic use by individuals. Her classroom interaction patterns were egalitarian, and 'able' students were not singled out as models or mentors for the rest. To this limited extent, the British classroom reflected 'Anglo' norms of individualism and individual responsibility for learning, though still in a strongly teacher-led culture. Teacher E was also inwardly pessimistic about the ultimate progress of at least some of her students, and had largely excluded from her teaching – at least for the moment – the grammar explanations which she believed would be significant eventually for longer term success. Was this a reflection of the general 'culture of low expectations' which has been diagnosed by some in English schools? Or just scepticism about the possibility of high all-round achievement in languages, given the lack of instrumental motivation for the generality of native English speakers? Either

way, the ‘ceiling’ metaphor appeared a distinctively British concept.

Teacher K by comparison kept even more closely to a ready-made language script sourced from the classroom video – this may have partly reflected her awareness that she was a role model for class teachers who spoke English much less fluently than she did, but we have cited some interview evidence suggesting she believed that such controlled input was anyhow best for early learning. Like Teacher E, she talked freely about differences in ability among her students, but unlike Teacher E, she capitalized on these differences, recognizing the more able students publicly as language models and mentors for the rest. Her objective in doing this was not to promote difference, however, but to ensure that all would learn the common syllabus through varied practice. Lee (2002, chapter 5) presents further evidence showing how the students generally collaborated with this way of working, for example, complaining only if group leaders were weak or absent, or if group achievements became unbalanced. Whether it reflects a ‘collectivist’ Asian ethos, or more local and pragmatic management decisions by a teacher faced with a large class, this model of differentiated student roles and group responsibility is very different from the ‘equal treatment’ seen in the Anglo classroom, yet it also functioned constructively to ensure inclusion and activity.

In conclusion, we are very conscious of the limitations of this study, and of our boldness in trying to compare single classrooms and their cultures of learning across very distant educational systems. We think the effort has been worthwhile, in several ways:

1. in confirming how language teachers draw on international pedagogic movements (e.g., the ‘communicative approach’), on national educational frameworks (e.g., ‘National Curricula’) and on assumptions about student ability and identity, in constructing local ‘cultures of learning’;
2. in documenting the robustness and prevalence of neo-behaviourism, with the rote learning of fixed expressions and dialogues, in widely separated interpretations of the ‘communicative approach’ for beginning learners; and
3. in demonstrating the complexity and variety of ‘direct

interactive teaching', and identifying cultural obstacles to the direct transfer of significant classroom practices.

We hope in the future to extend this work to a greater variety of contexts and levels.

Notes

- ¹ *Classroom transcription conventions.* Lesson extracts have been transcribed using standard orthographic conventions. Korean has been transcribed using the Hangul writing system. Utterances in French and Korean are accompanied by a translation into English; these translations are given in italics and enclosed in square brackets. Utterances in participants' L1 are given in bold. Learners' names have been changed. Teacher utterances are identified with the abbreviations 'TE', 'TK'. Where individual students or student groups producing a speech turn can be identified, their initials are given. Where individuals cannot be identified, single speakers are identified with 'S', multiple speakers are identified with 'Ss'. Overlaps are enclosed in elongated brackets.
- ² *Interview data.* The quotations from teacher interviews are presented in English only although the quotations from Teacher K have been translated from Korean.

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