Defining and Refining Rationales for Foreign Language Education: The Case of Korean as a Foreign or Second Language

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"The space within becomes the reality of the building" -- Frank Llyod Wright

1. Introduction

Curricula occupy a curious place in foreign language education. Most teachers and researchers have an intuitive understanding of curricula because they give structure to their work. To borrow an architectural metaphor, curricula are the pillars and beams that hold buildings together, giving them structure and shape. The resulting shapes, of course, reveal the goals and ideals of the architect and the builders. Likewise, curricula reveal the goals and ideals of the institutions that create them. In so doing, curricula stand at the juncture between goals and practice, ideals and reality.

For all their importance, curricula are often overlooked or ignored in foreign language education. This is unfortunate because it shifts the focus of research in the field to how individual teachers and students deal with the learning task at hand. This explains why there is far more research on issues such as methods, materials, and motivation than on curriculum development. In this paper, I hope to raise a number of research questions regarding curriculum development by looking at several examples of curriculum development in action. In the conclusion, I will discuss the relevance of the research questions to the development of KFL/KSL (Korean as a foreign language/Korean as a second language) curricula in higher education.

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2 This paper is a revised version of a paper presented at the 13 Annual IAKLE (International Association for Korean Language Education) Conference at Seoul National University on August 9, 2003. I would like to extend my deepest thanks the organizers of the conference for the inviting me.
2. Elements of Curriculum Analysis

Analyzing foreign language curricula must beginning with three basic questions:

- Why should foreign languages be taught?
- How should foreign languages be integrated into the institution?
- Who should be responsible for teaching foreign languages?

Answering these questions will offer insight into how foreign languages fit into the overall educational goals of the institution, stated or otherwise. As will become clear in this paper, some institutions place a high priority on foreign language education, using it as a way to attract students to the institution. In other institutions, foreign languages play a more peripheral role and are treated as one of the many "academic" things that good universities do. Institutional decisions about the role of foreign languages emerge slowly as the institution negotiates its place in the world amid complex and often conflicting demands to adhere to its ideals and maintain its existence at the same time.

2.1 Why: Rationale for Teaching Foreign Languages

Consider the following quotations on the rationale for teaching foreign languages:

The foreign language requirement forms part of Columbia College's mission to prepare students to be tomorrow's conscientious and informed citizens. Knowledge of another's language and literature is the most important way to begin to know a country and people.

*The Core Curriculum, Columbia University*

In addition to improving written and oral communication and reasoning skills, proficiency in Hawaiian or a second language is an integral part of the university's mission to 'prepare students to function effectively in a global society,' to 'preserve and promulgate Hawaiian, Asian, and Pacific language, history, and culture and [to] provide students an education experience with an international dimension'

*Strategic Plan 1996-2001, The University of Hawai'i*
The teaching of foreign languages, with its emphasis on cultural context, is an important part of the way we prepare students as global citizens.


Many other examples could be offered, but the above examples reflect the two main types of rationale: cultural and practical. The cultural rationale views foreign language learning as part of a well-rounded liberal education. The practical rationale views foreign language learning as a skill that will offer tangible benefits in future careers or have a positive influence on the development of other skills. The cultural rationale assumes that students accept the rationale or that it should override student views of their own needs, whereas the practical rationale is build around the meeting student needs.

2.2 How: Organization of Foreign Language Courses

The rationale for teaching foreign languages affects where they are located in the institution. Institutions that emphasize a cultural rationale typically put foreign language teaching in a traditional academic department or in some other organization that is closely related to academic departments. Institutions that emphasize a practical rationale put foreign language teaching in more varied locations, some of which are designed specifically to be independent from traditional foreign language departments.

2.3 Who: Teaching and Support Staff

The organizational locus of foreign languages affects the type of teaching and support that institutions provide. In most institutions in North American, non-professor-level faculty do most of the language teaching. For languages, such as Spanish or French, graduate teaching assistants carry much of the teaching load, whereas full-time instructors, either tenured or contracted, are more common for lesser-taught languages. Typically, the professor-rank staff teaches upper-level undergraduate and graduate courses on literature and linguistics. This paradigm appears in a slightly modified form in many other
parts of the world. In much of Asia, reliance on part-time adjunct instructors is equivalent to the place of graduate teaching assistants in North American institutions.

3. Debating the Curriculum: Three Case Studies

The following three case studies represent three different stages in the development of curriculum reform. The first case study comes from Duke University, which is now well into the stage of implementing and refining the new curriculum. In the late 1990s, Duke University began an internal review of foreign language education that led to sweeping changes in how foreign languages are being taught in that university. The second case study comes from Kyoto University, which has started discussion of curricular change through bottom-up changes in materials used for selected classes. The third case study comes from Korea University, which has recently placed English proficiency at the heart of its institutional identity. All three universities are competitive in admissions and therefore sensitive to prevailing academic trends in their society and around the world.

3.1 Duke University

Duke University is a prestigious private university located in Durham, North Carolina. The university was founded in 1838 and has since become one of the leading universities in the United States. According to the controversial U.S. News & World Report magazine rankings of American universities, it ranked fourth in the "National Universities Doctoral" category in 2003.

In 1998, Duke University created a Language Task Force as part of an overall review of its undergraduate curriculum. In its final report, the Language Task Force described the rationale for foreign language education as follows:

In our increasingly diverse and interdependent world, it is imperative that students acquire the ability to understand both global and local events from multiple perspectives. Beyond providing the ability to communicate with peoples from other cultures, the study of language, literature, and culture, like the study of history, philosophy, or mathematics, contributes to the development of analytical, critical,
and interpretive abilities. Acquiring proficiency in another language will enable students to become effective participants in the local, national, and international debates of the next century.

Second language learners broaden and deepen their own experience by reflecting on the relations among language, thought, and culture and by gaining awareness both of other cultures and of their own. Such reflection can lead to an understanding of how language frames and structures knowledge, communication, and even identity. Moreover, there is increasing evidence that foreign language study enhances cognitive and creative capacities. Studies have shown that second-language learners perform better in English than monolingual students. Other research has shown that mathematical and verbal abilities climb higher with each additional year of foreign language study. Reading skills are transferable from one language to another, and there is a positive correlation between the study of a second language and the creative functioning of learners. (Language Task Force, 1998, p. 1)

From here, the Language Task Force discussed the curricular implications of the newly strengthened rationale for foreign languages:

Having our students achieve the levels of language proficiency and cultural awareness necessary to engage foreign cultures, histories, and literatures implies an expanded mission for those departments and programs in which foreign languages are taught. In addition to seeking collaboration with colleagues in other international fields to build interdisciplinary programs (area studies programs, business-language programs, international engineering programs, comparative culture and literature programs, languages across the curriculum programs), and in addition to vigorously promoting study and internships abroad, we must continue to strengthen our lower division language courses to prepare students adequately for advanced study, whether at home or abroad. (Language Task Force, 1998, p. 1)

Next, the Language Task Force devised a new curriculum with the following
main points:

- Credit for a study abroad experience (summer course, semester or year abroad)
- Credit for FLAC (Foreign Languages Across the Curriculum) courses (courses in other subjects that are taught in a foreign language, Straight, 1998).
- Elementary courses meet five times a week; intermediate courses three times a week.
- New faculty with expertise in language teaching.
- Media-capable foreign language classrooms.

The Duke University story is interesting because it shows how a strengthened rationale for foreign language education led to concrete changes in the curriculum. The development of FLAC courses, the hiring of new faculty, and the development of new facilities all show that the university is willing to follow through on its public commitment of improving foreign language education.

3.2 Kyoto University (京都大学)

Kyoto University was founded in 1897 as the second imperial university after the University of Tokyo. It quickly became the one of the most prestigious universities in Japan and now takes pride in having produced more Nobel Prize winners than the University of Tokyo. In 2004, all national universities in Japan became semi-autonomous institutions, which forces them to compete for funding from the national government by showing evidence of achievement in education and research. This change has put Kyoto University in a difficult position because it has traditionally defined itself as a research institution in which students take responsibility for their own learning.

To prepare for semi-privatization, Kyoto University began to focus on improving undergraduate education and that effort brought attention to the state of foreign language education in the university. One of the biggest problems with foreign language education, particularly English, was the large class size and the heavy dependence on part-time instructors (Suiko, 2003). To rectify these problems, in 2000, faculty in the English program agreed to use CALL materials in English courses for students who failed a previous English course.
The course is based on a stand-alone CD-ROM called *Listen to Me!* that was developed by the National Institute of Multimedia Education (NIME). Each class has 90 students who meet the teacher only for examinations four times per semester. There are not class meetings at other times, and students are expected to study the materials at their own pace outside of class. In addition to four tests per semester, students are also required to submit a diskette containing a record of the number of hours that they have used the materials. The development of CALL classes, each of which contains a large number of students, has helped reduce the number of classes for students who failed a previous English course, thereby reducing the number of faculty required for such classes. This has helped reduce class size in other English courses because more faculty members are available. Faced with similar problems, other universities in Japan have begun implementing CALL courses similar to those at Kyoto University.

Aside from the obvious benefits of reduced classes size and reduced dependence on part-time instructors, the adoption of CALL-based course has brought greater diversity to the curriculum and has helped the university position itself advantageously for the external evaluations that will become increasingly important after 2004. In contrast with Duke University where reform of the foreign language curriculum began as part of an overall evaluation of the undergraduate curriculum, reform of the English curriculum in Kyoto University began with an experiment inside the English program. The experiment was successful and has since developed an important role in the English curriculum. The CALL-based course at Kyoto University stands as an interesting example of materials-driven curriculum reform as opposed to, say, the rationale-driven curriculum reform at Duke University. With semi-privatization now a reality, however, Kyoto University may be forced to develop a closer link between the rationale for foreign language education and curriculum development. A pamphlet published in late 2002 by the newly created Institute for Excellence in Higher Education that took responsibility for planning for the undergraduate curriculum from April 2003 offered the following rationale:

*Rationale: Cultural Language Proficiency*

Acquiring the linguistic proficiency and cultural understanding skills necessary to play a leading role in a globalized society.
Goals: Promoting Rich Language Proficiency

Fostering sufficient proficiency in English as an international language is very important, but it is difficult to achieve within a limited class time. A curriculum that promotes independent learning in daily life is needed. In addition, it is necessary to develop cultural language proficiency by removing barriers toward language and cultural understanding so that future leaders can function with confidence in international situations. Strengthening the learning of traditional second foreign languages should also accompany improvements in English education.

[Translation from Japanese by author.] (Koto kyoiku kenkyu kaihatsu tsuishin kiko setchi junbi shitsu, 2002, n.p.)

To achieve the goals implied by this rationale, however, it will first need to forge a consensus among the faculty about what the rationale for foreign language education should be.

3.3 Korea University (高麗大學校)

Korea University is one of the most prestigious private universities in Korea. Founded in 1905, the university has long viewed itself as the voice of the national conscience, and was at the center of the long struggle for democratization that began with the April Revolution in 1960.

Korea University has made several high-profile attempts to improve foreign language education. In the early 1990s, Korea University, like many other universities in Korea, turned to native-speaker teachers in the hope of improving the quality of foreign, particularly, English education. The Institute of Foreign Language Studies, a supporting foreign language teaching institution, became the center of foreign language education in the university and now has 43 native-speaker teachers and 15 Korean teachers, most of whom teach English. (Korean instructors attached to the Department of English Language and Literature teach some classes in the first-year English program) In addition to required courses for all undergraduates, the Institute also offers a number of special courses, including distance-learning courses, that are open to students and the public. At the same time, the university greatly expanded international exchange programs by sending more students overseas and inviting more
foreign students to Korea University. Off and on in the 1990s, Korea University announced plans to develop FLAC (Foreign Languages across the Curriculum) courses, but these plans follow up on these plans was not always forthcoming. In 2003, a new university president, Euh Yoon-Dae, placed English at the center of his vision for the university. In his inauguration speech, President Euh mentioned the following as rationale for English education:

.. This implies a change from a nationalistic university to a global university.

In order to achieve this goal, first, I propose that English must be adopted as an official language or be officially recognized. At Korea University, English should no longer be considered a foreign language and should be considered the same status as Korean. Officializing the use of English does not mean the submission to Anglo-Saxon culture. English is the most influential language in the world. We must recognize and accept this reality so we can become a leader in world culture. In this vein, officializing English is not the defeat of nationalism but the expression of confidence in Korea University's nationalism. In the future, a large number of lectures will be delivered in English. We will also see Nobel laureates give lectures at our ivory tower. The issue is not only about language. The system, organization, and modus of operandi of Korea University will all be globalized by this transformation.

Globalization is not a choice but a must. Indications that East Asia is fast becoming the center of the world's history are everywhere. The nationalism of Korea University should achieve harmony with this tide of change and our country should take its place on the pinnacle of the world. [Translation from Korean obtained from the Korea University Web site.] (Euh, 2003, n.p.)

The rationale for foreign language (English) teaching, then, is connected with national goals from which the university finds a rationale for its existence. Unlike Duke University or Kyoto University where foreign languages are viewed as part of "supranational" liberal arts education, English at Korea University is defined as practical tool that is critical to advancing the national interest.

To achieve the president's goals, Korea University will have to make a
far greater commitment to foreign (English) language education than Duke University or Kyoto University. Such a commitment will most likely involve the development of FLAC (Foreign Languages across the Curriculum) courses and the hiring of new English-proficient faculty members and administrative staff throughout the university. In this context, the foreign language curriculum will find itself playing a supportive role to the larger cause of turning the university into a bilingual or at least semi-bilingual institution. At the same time, the need for other languages, particularly Chinese and Japanese, amid the pressure to improve English education, will also bring attention to the foreign language curriculum.

Taken together, the three case studies discussed in this paper reveal much about the why, how, and who of foreign language education. Duke University and Korea University base their curriculum on a clearly stated rationale, whereas Kyoto University is in the process of refining its rationale. Duke University and Kyoto University base their language teaching in established departments in the university, whereas Korea University relies mainly on an auxiliary teaching institution. The use of CALL materials at Kyoto University moves the locus of discussion in teaching from the teacher to the materials, which raises interesting questions about the who of foreign language education. All universities have a large non-full-time teaching staff with a varying balance between native-speaker and non-native speaker teachers. The diversity of staff suggests varying degrees of teaching expertise and institutional commitment. Finally, the three case studies offer insight into the process of curriculum development. Duke University is now well into the implementation stage and will soon be evaluating the effectiveness of its new curriculum. Kyoto University is developing a rationale for foreign language education while experimenting with materials-based curriculum reform. Korea University, meanwhile, has a powerful, socially oriented (and controversial) rationale for foreign (English) language education that will soon make its way into the foreign language curriculum.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Implications for KFL/KSL Curriculum Development

The preceding discussion has several important implications for the
development of KFL/KSL curricula. First, the institutional rationale for foreign language education and the resulting curriculum affect KFL/KSL curricula. If, as is the case at Kyoto University, the rationale for foreign language education is not clearly stated, then KFL/KSL curricula will face less scrutiny than at an institution such as Duke. At the same time, the success of CALL materials in teaching English may encourage Korean teachers at Kyoto University to develop CALL materials of their own. On the other hand, the incorporation of a study abroad experience in the curriculum as at Duke would bring the topic of studying in Korea into discussions of the curriculum. Second, KFL/KSL curriculum development requires leadership and a willingness to take risks. In all three cases studies, individuals took the initiative for reform that challenged vested interests. At Duke University, for example, the changes in the curriculum weakened the position of literature departments in implementing the curriculum, and at Kyoto University, the introduction of CALL courses without a teacher raises the uncomfortable topic of job security. The de facto "bilingualization" of Korea University raises questions about the university's identity and promises to create a certain degree of stress within the faculty and administrative staff. To remain vital, a Korean program needs at least one person with leadership skills who is willing to innovate and take risks to enhance the program's effectiveness (and hence its standing) in the institution. Third and perhaps most important, a Korean program needs a rationale of its own. A clear rationale for teaching Korean gives direction to a program as it negotiates its relationship with other foreign languages and with the overall institutional rationale for foreign language education. To many Korean teachers, the inherent goodness of teaching Korean gives them the passion to go forward, but it is too vague a rationale on which to build a dynamic program. Defining and refining the rationale for teaching Korean is one of the most urgent issues facing Korean programs in many institutions.

4.2 Questions for Curriculum Theory Analysis

Finally, I conclude with a list of questions to stimulate discussion on curriculum theory:

- Does the institution state its rationale for foreign language education clearly?
How broad is the rationale for foreign language education?
How does the rationale for teaching individual languages relate to the overall rationale for foreign language education?
What is the standing of foreign language education in the institution?
Does the curriculum reflect the rationale and goals for foreign language education?
What are the pedagogical assumptions of the curriculum?
What is the place of students (learners) in the curriculum?
Who is responsible for designing, implementing, and evaluating the curriculum?
How is the curriculum staffed and supported?
Do the teaching and support staff support the curriculum?

Though incomplete, finding answers to these questions offers insight into how an institution views foreign language education. Finding answers to this complex, frequently elusive question clears the ground for a debate on the rationale for foreign languages in the institution. The ensuing debate should be vigorous lest the foundation be weak.

References


