

EFL for children and young people

An increasing proportion of missionaries' children are being educated in English even though it is not their first language. Schools, learning centres and home educators throughout WEC are expressing a need for help and advice with EFL teaching. We would therefore like first of all to make some general comments and recommendations for those working in this area. We will also recommend some teaching resources which are generally helpful for those teaching English to any language group or combination of learners. Later in the article we will look specifically at the challenges faced by Korean learners, since this is the fastest growing language group in WEC. We will refer to students learning in a second language as L2 learners.

1. General comments

Teachers need to have an awareness of the educational background and culture from which the students come. Some of them will come from a 'traditional' educational background in which lessons are much more teacher-centred than is current in the English-speaking classroom. This means that some nationalities will expect much more teacher talk, memorisation and learning by rote. They will be more used to fact-based learning and less used to analysing information and forming their own opinions. It may take time for them to adjust to a different style of learning - although learning by rote can certainly be used to advantage for picking up new vocabulary.

Young L2 learners will need a lot of support throughout the school day, especially if their English is very limited. Additional factors such as being new to school, and even new to the host country, make this even more important. They may at first need to be physically shown what to do and where to go. The children need clear, simple instructions to be given throughout the school day, every time there is a change of activity. These instructions may need to be given one-to-one as it cannot be assumed that they will understand whole-class instructions. The language used needs to be at or just above the students' level of comprehension. If the teacher can use the same word and phrases, the students will grasp the meaning more quickly. In the same way, a well-organised classroom with set places for equipment and classroom furniture will help the students to become accustomed to everything. Even if students appear to have a fair grasp of English, it is important to be aware that they may not be used to hearing the teacher's spoken version of the language. For example, they may have learned some English in Singapore but find an American or British accent more difficult to understand. From the outset, L2 students should be given classroom tasks along with the others, so that they feel part of the class and are able to practise their language while washing brushes, cleaning the board, tidying up etc with their fellow students.

Some topic areas studied in the classroom may be unfamiliar to the learners - examples are the weather, seasons and farm animals. School books were produced in the UK or the USA may well include work surrounding these topics which will not make sense to students from different parts of the world where the weather, seasons and animals bear no relation to those of their life experience. So some adaptation of the lesson materials will be required. It is important for the teacher to be genuinely interested in the culture and background of the students and to convey this in the lessons. The students should be encouraged to write/draw/talk about their own cultures and class work could involve appropriate history or geography projects. (I attempted to do this at BCS by teaching some Korean and Puerto Rican history.) It is an excellent idea to involve parents in this as they have unique knowledge and life experience to share. They could be invited to come in and share stories, music and practical skills such as cooking. This also has the knock-on effects of making the parents feel more involved in their children's education, and strengthening the relationship with the teachers

Practical ideas to help with English include the following:

Music and songs, which help to reinforce language already learned. Individual listening - children listen to stories on tape. They could do a gap-fill or true/false exercise to help focus their listening.

Videos - show them a video clip without the sound, get them to answer gist questions such as 'Is the man on the video angry or happy?' play again with sound, give the children a cut up dialogue from the clip which they have to put in order, and then act it out, etc.

Home made books

Picture story sequencing

Divide a familiar story into pages and make up fun activities based on each page

Older L2 learners will still need clear instructions, and will also need opportunities to ask about language areas which they find difficult or in which further practice is needed. Again, as with younger learners, routine is important and helps them to become familiar with what is going on. Instructions should be given step by step, or could be written down as a reminder. Check whether the students have understood by asking them to tell the teacher what they are going to do. Try not to give too much detail at once and emphasise key words. Make sure that the atmosphere in the classroom is positive and encouraging so that students do not feel ashamed to ask questions or admit ignorance.

The following ideas will help:

- Use a wide range of visual materials to give information - examples are pictures, charts and maps, tourist brochures, cuttings from magazines and newspapers, different types of books, the Internet.
- Teach appropriate study skills such as note taking and summarising, creating a piece of writing, producing reports.
- When asking questions, start with factual ones including those requiring yes/no answers.

Progress to more complicated or abstract ones later.

- Use pair work and group work in which each student has a role - this helps to diminish anxiety and gives the students practice in using problem-solving English.
- When introducing a new topic, find out what the children already know - extend this to include unique elements from the life experience of the EFL students.
- Use plenty of hands-on activities such as science experiments and the construction of relief maps.
- Questionnaires and interviews give speaking practice and also help to provide a basis for later written work.
- New vocabulary can be taught from pictures or real objects. Then use substitution exercises, where students take out certain words in a pattern sentence and replace them with new vocabulary.
- Students could keep a daily diary based on models provided by the teacher.
- Students could be encouraged to create a bilingual dictionary. They could use words and/or pictures for this.
- Use videos as for younger learners.

2. Teaching resources

There is insufficient space to recommend more than a limited number of resources, so I have picked out the Oxford University Press website (www.oup.com/elt) as one of the best available. It is possible to download the entire catalogue from this website (www.oup.com/elt/local/global/pdf_catalogue) or it can be downloaded in sections. The material is divided into British and American English, secondary and primary. I looked briefly at two sets of course books:

- 1) **Active Comprehension**, a series of four books containing activities to improve children's comprehension and writing skills. Advertised as an appropriate supplement to any junior English course. Contains factual and fictional texts, comprehension, vocabulary building and extended writing tasks. ISBNs 0-19-312001-1, 0-19-312002-X, 0-19-312003-8, 0-19-312004-6.
- 2) **Brainwaves**, designed for students learning English from age 9. Three levels, with basic grammar in Level 1, more complex in Levels 2 and 3, special focus on vocabulary, revision units, total of 72 teaching hours per level. One or two of the topic areas are a bit New Age and discernment would be needed - however, most English schemes have something like this which Christians would wish to screen out. The basic material is good and can be adapted.
- 3) A useful resource to help teachers is Coreen Sears' book, '**Second language students in mainstream classrooms: a handbook for teachers in international schools**', ISBN 185359-408-3. This book is American and contains specialist chapters on language in the classroom, strategies to support second language children, teaching language arts (English), supporting ESL students in mathematics, answering ESL students' needs for social studies and science.

It may be possible to run a series in Educare based on information from this book - please e-mail us if this would be helpful to you. If there is sufficient interest we will cover these areas in future issues of Educare.

Challenges faced by Korean learners.

The recommendation is that Koreans, as with all L2 students, learn to read and write in their own language first. When they learn English they will then have to adapt to a number of differences, but this is generally considered to be far preferable to learning English first and then having to adapt to Korean.

Korean is unrelated to other oriental languages, although it still uses some Chinese characters. There are seven dialects, of which the one from the Seoul area is known as 'standard Korean'. The speakers of some dialects find English easier. The Korean alphabet has 24 letters, 10 vowels and 14 consonants. In combination they make 40 sounds - 8 simple vowels, 13 diphthongs and 19 consonants.

Pronunciation is an issue and problems can arise as follows:

Vowels: *horse* and *phone* can sound like *hoss* and *phonn*

cup can sound like *cap*

work can sound like *wohk*, leading to confusion between *work* and *walk*

sit/seat and similar sound pairings are easily confused. (Koreans do not lengthen vowel sounds in the same way as English - instead they use rising or falling intonation.)

Consonants: confusion can arise as follows:

writing/riding

lock/log

r and *l* are represented by the same consonant in Korean - hence sentences like *velly velly dipikelt*. *v* sounds like *b*

f sounds like *p* - *pamily*

z sounds like *dz* - *dzoo*

sh is difficult to pronounce

ch as in *church* is found in Korean but at the end of a word they add a vowel, hence *churchi*

th as in *mother* is pronounced *d*

Speech style, stress and intonation are very different. Koreans do not stress either syllables or words. In the following example in English the stress is placed in different places giving a different overall meaning to the same sentence.

John is at the dentist. (*Peter is not at the dentist, it is John.*)

John is at the **dentist**. (*He is not at home or elsewhere.*)

In Korean the change in meaning is not achieved by intonation but by the addition of a suffix to one of the words in a sentence.

In English, correct intonation is used to convey politeness. In Korean the polite mode is achieved by the use of different verb forms instead. This means that young Korean learners will need to be taught the use of correct intonation in English, or they could easily appear rude without intending to do so.

Writing, spelling and grammar There are implications for spelling stemming from the pronunciation differences already described. In addition, it is important to note the following:

Korean letters are phonetic symbols, and the phonetic value depends on the position in the word, the association with other letters, and whether or not it is doubled. There are no capital letters, but question marks, exclamation marks, full stops and quotation marks are used in a similar way to English. There is no possessive *s* - it is replaced by a noun suffix. For example, Gill's pen becomes pen Gill. Commas, colons and semi-colons can cause difficulties.

Word order tends to be subject-object-verb rather than subject-verb-object.

There are no auxiliary verbs (as in *have gone*) as only one word is used to represent the entire verb phrase. Verbs are divided into two categories, action verbs, describing what is happening, and adjectival verbs, referring to the state of things generally.

E.g. *A boy is going to school* (literally *boy to school going-be*) - action

This flower is beautiful (literally *this flower beautiful-be*) - adjectival.

There is no equivalent in Korean for *there is* and *there are*. Hence, *beautiful-be* and *going-be* are a kind of adjective including the verb to *be*. This means that a Korean speaker does not see the need for a separate verb part such as *is* or *are*, hence:

Tomorrow will hot and *Many foreigners exist*.

Tenses are expressed differently and this leads to examples such as the following:

It has been snowing since yesterday becomes *From yesterday to now snow coming*. *Tomorrow I am going to Scotland* becomes *Tomorrow I to Scotland go*.

There are numerous other examples to do with verbs.

The expression 'to have something done' does not exist in Korean - hence, *I have had my hair cut* becomes *I have cut my hair*.

Questions can cause confusion, as follows:
Don't you like carrots? No (I don't - English)
Yes (I don't - Korean)
Yes (I do - English)
No (I do - Korean)

Tag questions, such as *It's hot, isn't it?* Or *You can do this, can't you?* are replaced by only one expression in Korean, like the French *n'est-ce pas?*

Phrasal verbs such as *to take up, to look at, to join in*, are difficult to learn and there is usually confusion with the word order. E.g. *I look up it.*

Nouns have no articles, so *the* and *a/an* have to be taught. Uncountable nouns, such as *news, advice, luggage*, do not exist so would be mistakenly referred to in the plural in English.

Personal pronouns have three forms, self-effacing, plain and honorific, reflecting the degree of respect to be shown to the person in question. They are not used where the meaning is obvious from the context, e.g. *I must wash (my) hair tonight.*

Adverbs usually come before the verb. Verbs of sense - look, sound, smell, hear and taste - are always followed by adverbs, not adjectives, hence: *That flute sounds wonderfully; He looks sadly.*

General points

Avoid too much teacher-centred work, as Koreans often feel inhibited when interacting with the teacher. Do not expect too much eye contact with the teacher as this is considered rude in Korean culture. Koreans are more limited than English speakers in their use of body language and facial expressions when speaking in public, as it is not considered acceptable to be over-expressive.

'What most Europeans see as openness, expressiveness and articulateness is seen as effusiveness and verbosity in the Korean culture.' (Michael Swan and Bernard Smith, *Learner English*).

We would welcome comments on the above article, especially from Korean speakers. We would also like general feedback. Please let us know if a similar article to the above would be useful for EFL teachers of other language groups.

Gill Bryant
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Book recommendation

Last year we ran a couple of editions on multilingualism. Another book on this issue that we are happy to recommend is

"A Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism" 2nd edition by Colin Baker, published by Parents' and Teachers' Guides, ISBN 1 853594555 - easily available from Amazon

The book is laid out in a question and answer format and is thorough in the issues that it addresses. There are sections on family, language development, potential problems and overcoming them, literacy, educational and various miscellaneous questions. Colin Baker writes from personal experience of his own bilingual family, but also from working in a School of Education in Bangor University that specialises in bilingualism and bilingual education and is a Fellow of the British Psychological Society as a result of his work.

This is worth having and referring to for any multilingual family.

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