Critical Education

Volume 14 Number 3 July 15, 2023 ISSN 1920-4175

Critical Language Pedagogy in a Neoliberal Space (Hagwŏn) in Korea: Student Awareness and Engagement in Critical Dialogue

Wonguk Cho
University of Massachusetts Boston

Citation: Cho, W. (2023). Critical language pedagogy in a neoliberal space (hagwŏn) in Korea: Student awareness and engagement in critical dialogue. *Critical Education, 14*(3), 37-57. DOI: https://doi.org/10.14288/ce.v14i3.186703

Abstract

Critical Pedagogy (CP) has been carried out in many contexts, and reports of its success in language teaching in various countries have increasingly appeared (Bennet 2018; West 2014). However, South Korea (henceforth Korea) is not well-known for critical inquiry in language education, especially in private language institutions, so-called hagwŏn. The Korean language education system still widely accepts the grammar-translation methodology and problem-solving techniques to prepare students for standardized tests, even though this system is considered a form of oppression by English learners (J. Park 2011). This might be thought as particularly the case in neoliberal spaces — not ideal for CP. Nevertheless, this study explores the possibility of adopting a CP framework in one such space, a Korean private language school. I investigate participants' awareness of a Korean labor issue, their metaphorical language use for indicating power relations, and their recognition of the relationship between English and power. Through analyzing the participants' critical dialogue using the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis, I conclude that students' engagement with critical dialogue, an essential component of CP, is feasible. Thus, CP is applicable even in a neoliberal space such as a hagwŏn.

*Readers are free to copy, display, and distribute this article, as long as the work is attributed to the author(s) and **Critical Education**, More details of this Creative Commons license are available from https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/. **Critical Education** is published by the Institute for Critical Educational Studies and housed at the University of British Columbia.*

Introduction

As a result of the rapid economic development in South Korea (officially the Republic of Korea and henceforth Korea) over the past five decades, English education in Korea has evolved primarily by adopting the principles of the market economy (Park & Abelmen, 2004). Through economic development, English ability has become an important standard or criterion when Korean companies hire employees, and jobseekers in Korea should consider getting not only a college degree but also additional high scores on English standardized tests. These tests are supposed to prove that the jobseeker is competitive and globalized, though the individual may not have opportunities to use English once hired (Choi, 2008). In particular, the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) has been widely accepted for decades in the Korea job market as an essential criterion for measuring the qualification of jobseekers (Choi, 2008). In this situation, English education has become highly popular nationwide because of job-seeking needs.

More specifically, English education in Korea is mainly grounded on instrumental motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). The main reasons for studying the foreign language are getting promotions, building good-looking résumé and entering colleges. To achieve their goals, the young students are compelled to study not only in their schools but also private institutions, which are called *hagwŏn,* especially for the college preparation exam after school until as late as midnight. Adult learners as well study English to prepare for standardized tests at *hagwŏn,* also studying late into the evening after work. In this situation, English educators in Korea generally have little or no chance to introduce critical perspectives (or even communicative perspectives) into the existing language education system. Rather, English education has strengthened its position as a gatekeeping mechanism in the form of standardized tests. (J. Park, 2011; West, 2014).

Although English education is moving towards a standardized oppressive format, and the students conform themselves to the system, Korean citizens began raising their awareness of social justice as they are participating in social activities and political movements (Hancocks, Kwon & Botelho, 2014). They have made their voices heard in the form of strikes, protests, and holding rallies on streets towards the structured inequalities and social injustice. In education as well, students raised their voices about the situations that standardized tests and cram education do not help their real life-related learning (Yonhap News Agency, 2007). Also, the numbers of option of how and where to report and share have increased with the development of social media services, including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, and it is easy to find criticism on their school cafeteria and excessive amount of time for private tutoring after school, or it is even about how long he/she has been unemployed. The citizens of Korea have owned numerous channels to share their opinions and ideas with each other, and I noticed the gap between current curriculum in (most) schools and student awareness; students are prepared to get their voices heard in public, online and off-line.

With this brief background of the target context, the present study investigates adult English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' critical language use regarding certain daily topics or lessons contents that were discussed in my classroom at *hagwŏn*. In the following section, I will present contextual information where and how the study was done. Then, I will examine the verbal production of my students how they reflected their ideas and personal stories on class discussion. Based on that, I will conclude whether the CP models can be applicable to *hagwŏn.*

Conceptual Framework

Critical Pedagogy

As an overall perspective on education, Critical Pedagogy (CP), refers to "teaching for social justice" (Crookes 2013, 8). It intends to develop active citizens who define problems, seek to find solutions to the problems, and take action sequentially (Crookes, 2013). When language-teaching professionals incorporate CP in their field, they use languages and cultures as tools to teach for social justice and to develop responsible citizens who can actively be involved in the local (or global) community. With the languages they learn and practice, they are expected to work on the problems they found. Thus, a language is not just a means of communication but a practice that constructs how learners see critically themselves and their society (Norton & Toohey, 2004).

Students' critical awareness is crucial in this approach (Walsh, 1991). For this, Walsh highlights the simultaneous development of a learner's communicative abilities in a target language and the capacity to apply them to constructing critical awareness, and how the integration of these two perspectives leads learners to taking action. Crawford-Lange (1981) noted that "critical thinking is presenting the people's situation to them as a problem so that they can perceive, reflect, and act on it" (p. 259). In this sense, critical pedagogy has been utilized in language teaching as an influential methodology to facilitate students' critical thinking. However, it is not sympathetic towards neoliberal ideas in education and a private educational context, particularly one heavily oriented to a simple profit-driven understanding of school as a business is not considered ideal for CP (Lipman, 2009).

Hagwŏn as an Inseparable Part of Korean Education

In the education-priority atmosphere of Korea, private education in the form of *hagwŏn* has flourished and been deeply integrated into the Korean education system for decades. During the government-led economic reform era—which started in 1962 and discontinued in 1996 under the name of the *Five-Year Plans of South Korea* (Amsden, 1992)—English education was in great demand; however, the Ministry of Education did not respond to that successfully at the time. Later, with the Asian financial crisis in 1997, *hagwŏn* rapidly increased across the country along with the movement towards small government and privatization of the public services, including education. With the movement, it became a business opportunity for the unemployed and the people who lost jobs during the financial crisis: they opened small size *hagwon* for teaching math, English, painting, etc. The Korean government eventually adopted English as a compulsory subject in the elementary school curriculum beginning in 1997 in response to the nationwide demand for English (Ministry of Education, 1997; Spolsky, 2012).

Although *hagwŏn* was at first supplemental to what the public education system lacked, these institutes became enlarged and corporatized under the neoliberal economic system in the 2000s (Jones, 2013). More specifically, after the global recession in 2008, the number of total public schools across South Korea was 20,540; however, there were over 100,000 *hagwŏn*, including 17,053 private foreign language institutes, so called *eohakwŏn* (KB Management Research Institute, 2012). With this trend, *hagwŏn* became popular as a new business model not only for potential *hagwŏn* openers, but also international investment companies such as Goldman Sachs, American International Group, and the Macquarie Funds Group. Those finance firms

invested over 220 million dollars in the Korean *hagwŏn* industry (Shin, 2009). The vogue for *hagwŏn* earned a boost from the internal logic of capitalism under neoliberal policies.

An examination of the close connection between private education and Korean society reveals another critical aspect that makes *hagwŏn* vital for the Korean education system: Standardized tests. West (2014) reflects on how these *hagwŏn* function as gatekeeping mechanisms for college entrance and employment. *Spec*—which roughly translates into the different types of qualifications on jobseekers' résumé—is a critical requirement in the Korean job market. *Spec* is defined (C. Park, 2015) as a résumé or qualification for their job application, including what the jobseekers have been doing for their professional development and contributing to their local community. The *spec* is often considered as a form of oppression among young people or irregular jobholders since they are spending a great amount of money and time to gain comparatively better qualifications including English standardized test scores, internship experiences, certificates, and awards (J. Park, 2015). In this situation, English standardized tests became critical parts for job seekers to differentiate themselves from others in the job market. However, the public school curriculum does not provide any preparation for these English standardized tests, so Korean citizens have to rely on *hagwŏn* in order to prepare for these exams. Thus, *hagwŏn* attained a rationale for their existence: They offer what public schools do not.

The work from West (2014) becomes a solid motivation for this study. From his research, he examined the verbal and non-verbal data collected in his *hagwŏn*. Analyzing them, he makes inquiries into the needs, limitations and possibilities of critical language pedagogy integration in neoliberal language education setting, specifically in (privileged) young learners' English classrooms. He made a few points that have been stereotyped why Asian contexts, which includes Korean one, became a challenging environment for critical teachers and how its students must be understood: The commonly imagined characteristics of the Asian students are "meek and compliant" (p. 14) with culturally dominant Confucian values, and it is necessary to acknowledge students' rebellious behavior, such as "vandalism, graffiti, purposefully not doing homework" as true resistance, not as "poor behavior or attitudes or laziness" (20).

Lipman (2009) argues that private education institutes or elite schools cannot be ideal settings for CP. She insisted that those market values, including accountability processes, privatization of education service and standardized school management, would result in unequal access to resources and disempowerment of teachers and students. However, the charter schools in Chicago she discussed in the chapter that are operated by non-profit or profit-making organizations, but receive public fund are different from *hagwŏn* in Korea. The essence of *hagwŏn* is maximization of its profit with educational resources as it has been investigated by international finance firms. Thus, it remains unclear how adult EFL learners in Korea would respond to CP and engage in critical dialogue.

Critical Discourse Analysis

For this study, I undertake Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which is widely used for investigating power relations and community members' ideologies. Fairclough who pioneered this methodology and theoretical perspective states that power differences and inequalities influence the relations of people of all ranks and classes: "Between men and women, adults and young people, people of working age and retired people, managers and other workers" (Fairclough 2013,

p. 26). Since these relationships and ideologies lie beneath language use, CDA is an influential methodology for interpreting language, ideology, and power.

Fairclough (2013) also discusses "language in new capitalism" (282), which was defined as an economic transformation involving a

> restructuring of relations between the economic, political and social domains, including commodification and marketization of fields such as education which become subject to the economic logic of the market, and the re-scaling of relations between different scales of social life——the global, the regional (281).

Fairclough (2013) suggests that language might have a slightly more important role now, as compared to the past, for understanding discourse in recent social practices that are interconnected dialectically; this is because recent political or labor-related discourses contain neoliberal language such as globalization, flexibility, employability, privatization and domination (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2001).

Under the assumption that CDA is applied for investigating power dynamics and structured inequality, Fairclough and Wodak (1997) explain how power relations are reflected in discourse, and how it is understood through negotiation among interlocutors. In addition, Sankar (2013) states that "critical discourse analysis has its roots in the discourse of power and ideology and [has] been quite interested in the question of domination and the use of abuse of power" (p. 39). Researchers have adopted the CDA framework to explore the relationship between power and language use. Following these experts, this study provides analysis using CDA frameworks as explicated in Marchin and Mayr (2012) to exhibit if interlocutors are aware of power relations in their contexts.

Context

Brief Information of the Class and my Hagwŏn

In 2014, I taught an English conversation course at *hagwŏn* in Korea. My *hagwŏn* was located in Suwon, one of the metropolitan cities in Korea. It is approximately a one-hour driving distance from southern Seoul, the capital city of the country. As this city has several branches of the multinational manufacturer, Samsung, Suwon has been rapidly developed by government-led policies to make the city more technology-friendly. Along with the rapid growth of the city, the educational facilities were widely expanded throughout the entire city.

The level of my course was intermediate, but my students' proficiency was quite varied, for several reasons, including: (1) Some students rejected going onto a higher level because of their linguistic insecurity or anxiety (Hiramoto & Park, 2014)—the instructors for the pre-advanced level are native English speakers—and/or, (2) there were other students who automatically moved to my class from the pre-intermediate level since they finished all the previous curricula and materials. Most of the students were businesspersons who came to the school after work to improve their English communication competencies or prepare for the TOEIC exam or Oral Proficiency Interview by computer. Each conversation classroom was supposed to have less than ten students, but there were times when there were more than twelve, such as in January since many Korean citizens often decide to study English as a New Year's resolution.

My *hagwŏn* permitted instructors to have almost unlimited freedom to organize and manage their classrooms. In other words, the school administration did not provide any specific

guidelines or pre-established curricula to the teachers. They advertise that they have a *system*, but this was merely a self-promotion to attract students. This is the nature of *hagwŏn*, mainly pursuing profit rather than educating students, and so they have little interest regarding students' improvement. They make appealing commercials and advertisements to draw in more students, which promises more financial gain.

For course preparation, I was allowed to make my lesson plans and unit framework to reflect the concepts of CP, on the basis of preparatory discussions with my school administration. When I had my job interview and presented sample mini-lessons to the managers, I brought up socially or politically sensitive topics such as same-sex marriage and marijuana legalization in the United States. It was not a completely CP-oriented sample lesson, but I tried to get the manager's attention to those social issues and then explained to them why I wanted to bring social topics into my classes according to the framework of localizing Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and CP (cf. Sung & Pederson 2012). In terms of materials for my class, the school administration provided me with a local-made textbook, though it was outdated since it was published in 2004. The main critical materials I used were video clips from a well-known documentary and a local newspaper that was published in English.

Implications of Critical Pedagogy in the English Course

One of my main purposes as a teacher was facilitating and encouraging my students' critical awareness through helping them articulate their status and concerns related to local issues. To support this idea, I reviewed the list of CP components that were mentioned by Crookes (2013, p. 47-48), and I prioritized them for what could be done first in my classroom setting. The first one that came to my mind was *dialogue*. Since the dominant learning/teaching methodology in Korea is known to be the banking model of education (Freire 2000), it is unexceptional if students stay silent; questioning is normally considered as challenging teacher authority (Oh. 2017). That is why it is important to have an open, judgment-free environment for discussion between students and between student and teacher. They should ensure it is safe to share their opinions in the classroom.

Along with having a CP-oriented and dialogue-emphasized course, critical content should be highlighted as well. Following earlier CLP scholars, Crookes (2013) identifies that the critical contents should be: (1) what the learners bring in; (2) based on a critical needs analysis; and (3) having themes according to the needs analysis. Thus, I began teaching English with a question: What do they want to talk about in the classroom? It was obvious that they wanted to talk about their interests. Then, other questions come up. What are their interests? How can they bring up the questions? Answering those questions myself, I decided to focus on local issues, including job market, work environment and feminist movement that were widely reported and discussed by local media. Thus, I tried to bring my students' voice into the classroom regarding target issues and encourage them to think critically about authority, power dynamics and social justice.

Methodology

When this study was planned, I was a practice teacher in Korea; I just had finished my first year of Master of Arts program, and I had a little background of CP. However, I read myself to grab the ideas of how preceding critical scholars have done and clarified EFL classes. Among them, I noticed there are few investigations of how its concepts can be applied to neoliberal education contexts (West, 2014). With the small number of reports, it attains its own rationale to

be inquired into whether CP is applicable in the target context. Thus, in this study, I explore if CP supports students in the profit-pursuing business of language education to constitute a productive pedagogical experience/activity via engaging in critical dialogue.

Their dialogues and discussions were recorded in regular discussion sessions during the course meetings. I chose one group of students who attended my evening class three days a week since the demographic data contained various education history, age and career track; it allowed me to observe different perspectives on the topic. For instance, a mid-twenty student came to my class to practice for Oral Proficiency Interview by computer, which was helpful for job hunting, while another wanted to get promoted as a chemistry researcher. Each course meeting lasted fifty minutes, and eight to ten students attended, even though there were sometimes just fewer than five students joined. While it was a classroom discussion, in the excerpts, the majority of the data seem to be one-on-one meetings since other students stayed silent when one student shared. This situation can be interpreted as infrequent self-selection or less dynamic turn-taking habits (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974). It is commonly found among my students to consider or to be considered impolite if someone *interrupts* a concurrent conversation, especially in a classroom setting.

In my case, as a teacher, I minimized my influence during the classroom discussion. I waited until they requested language support, and I reorganized their languages whenever they demonstrated unconventional or incomprehensible expressions. Also, it was easy to witness a frequent code-switching between English and Korean during the classroom discussions due to the limited proficiency of the target language, but I still included the Korean lines with English translation in the finding section because most of them display critical self-analysis of students themselves.

During the classroom discussion, I marked particular time and brief annotations on my notebook whenever I found meaningful thoughts. After that, I listened to the recording files a handful of times and transcribed it. The excerpts in this manuscript were subsets of the full data which were carefully chosen since they represent and display evidence of the feasibility of engagement in critical pedagogy. Through analyzing and interpreting my students' awareness, the following questions are answered: (1) How do Korean adult EFL learners facilitate classroom discussion regarding critical topics through their personal experiences? (2) How do the students compensate themselves for lack of proficiency through use of metaphor as a discursive strategy? (3) In order to advance their argument, how do they practice specific language forms to engage in critical discourse?

Findings

A small number of major categories emerged through analysis of the data that are relevant to the research questions of whether (and if so, how) a critical language pedagogy might be possible in this context. Course topics were chosen by me and by the students on alternate meeting days; for example, one topic I chose was working conditions. In the following sections, I examine three matters as they appear in the data and in the class discussions my students and I engaged in. The data are presented in the original language(s) used in the classroom setting. All of my students' names that appear in the data are pseudonyms.

Awareness: Diversification of Employment Pattern in Korea

For this class meeting, students read an article that reported the substandard working conditions of irregular workers in Korea. All of the students commented about it in ways that indicated they were aware of these conditions because a couple of them were in the irregular position or job-hunting situation. The extract that follows comes from Hee-jae (pseudonym).

Hee-jae first displayed her awareness of the employment pattern change by bringing in her sister's story.

1	Hee-jae:	Uhm irregular work have not been in Korea 20 years ago, uh hmm (3)
2		hmm I think (hhh) that at that time uh at that time in the past past time
3		20 years the time (.hhh) 20 years ago (hhh) is better I wonder why the
4		workers around environment (1.5) condition work condition changed.
5	Author:	Okay so like 20 years ago there was no such condition like irregular
6		workers.
7		and then it has been changing
8		and you are wondering why the changes happened.
9	Hee-jae:	Little by little changed so Korean society changed little by little.
10		just I wonder. Bank, and my first sister is a banker.
11	Author:	Older sister.
12	Hee-jae:	Older sister 20 years ago at that time same.
13	Author:	What was the same?
14	Hee-jae:	All (0.5) banker was same position.
15		They were working as a same status, same position
16		all of them were full time workers.

In this interaction, Hee-jae started explicitly bringing in her understanding of the job market change by indicating the current working condition is different from the one twenty years ago. To support her opinion, she brought in an individual example (10): Her sister used to work as a full-time banker. In what followed, she generalized her point through extending her notion to "all banker" (14) to support her argument while expanding her example from an individual case to a

broader group of people: Banker, and not every banker is a full-time position holder anymore. Thus, she seemed to be aware of the diversification of the employment pattern in Korea.

In the middle of this discussion, Mi-jeong (pseudonym) brought in another perspective in the Korean job market: Age and how it influences job-hunting, especially for temporary positions. Mi-jeong has been teaching in a public school for two years as a full-time teacher, which is considered very stable and popular nationwide. Since Mi-jeong had passed the Teacher Employment Exam, which is offered once a year and is extremely competitive, she might have a different point of view towards the given topic.

111	Mi-jeong:	I think if irregular workers enjoy their job, it doesn't matter,
112		if they are satisfied. But in Korea it's hard to get the jobs. It's getting
113		harder when you get older.
114	Author:	Age matters in Korea.

She thought it is not important at all whether the current job is full-time or not. Rather, she mentioned that personal interest and satisfaction level are more important. However, she mentioned another anxiety component in terms of the Korean employment system: Age. Age has been an influential factor in the Korean job market. You (2015) argues that older Koreans are confronted with age discrimination despite the Korean government passing the Age Discrimination Act in 2010. The Age Discrimination Act made acts of age discrimination illegal (Ministry of Employment and Labor 2014, 316), but it is still prevalent to consider age as one of the very important qualifications alongside education background and professional experiences in contemporary Korea. This atmosphere remains in numerous jobseekers' minds (Koo 2007).

From those excerpts, my students displayed their understanding of how the job market has changed, moving forward to irregular positions, and the job-hunting situation has become competitive and difficult with the discriminatory standard, age.

Critical Understanding of the Topic: Social Justice Expressed in Metaphorical Language

Commenting on the use of metaphorical language in CDA, Hart (2008) mentions the purpose of using metaphor in discourse and defines a metaphor as a strategy to represent social actors in a given situation. Fairclough (1995) also explains that metaphors have hidden ideologies due to the way that they can conceal and shape understandings, while at the same time giving the impressions that they reveal. Thus, metaphor works as a way of indicating power relations linguistically by reflecting the interlocutors' ideologies. Several metaphoric expressions occurred during the in-class discussion to represent the students' ideological awareness of power dynamics between the two working statuses: Full-time and irregular positions.

Among the students whose data appear here, Ji-hun (pseudonym) sometimes shared his working conditions in my class, explaining how he or his colleagues were overworking, while criticizing the extremely competitive Korean job market, harsh working environment, and the hierarchical structure that requires wholehearted obedience and voiceless laborers. In the following

extracts, he adopts metaphorical language which indicates the distinctions he has already made in his own mind concerning the kinds of workers who have emerged in response to these irregular working conditions and changed society.

70	Ji-hun:	I am deeply thinking about that issue. When I first company,
71		My first company had irregular workers, so I really XXX much time
72		to think of irregular position. and I just in my opinion,
73		I call that just modern slave.
74	Author:	Okay, that’s very strong.
75	Ji-hun:	Modern slave policy because of the regular jobs workers
76		they think they power like
77	Author:	Who has power?
78	Ji-hun:	so I call the kidŭkkwŏn ((authority))
79	Author:	Like authority?
80	Ji-hun:	Yes so they want to become keep the authority.
81		so they instead of irregular workers they (.) ah (.) they have authority,
82		they regular workers so they sacrifice irregular workers.
83	Author:	Hmm so regular, full-time workers who have stable job, position,
84		they are controlling irregular workers.
85		and then make them sacrificed for their benefit.
86	Ji-hun:	Yes like government company, public company,
87		enterprise government company also 30% they got the irregular workers.
88	Author:	Like their 30% of the workers are part-timers.
89	Ji-hun:	Yes I think it is same the they irregular or and regular workers
90		same (.) same (.) they work. they are doing same task.
91	Author:	Their tasks are same.

92	Ji-hun:	But it's a different welfare or benefit and salary.
93		it's so why I called modern slave haha it's 100 or 200 years ago,
94		we just called *yangban*[1] and slave right? That's a modern type of slave.
95	Author:	Sort of new type.
96	Ji-hun:	I can insist same they work same task,
97		so we just we nowadays economy system it is a important competition.
98		so, I have more work. I have to get more salary.
99	Author:	Are you talking about fairness? If I work more, I get paid more.
100	Ji-hun:	Yes just Korean system just success to irregular work and
101		working thing is done.
102	Author:	Success to irregular workers and working is done. What does it mean?
103	Ji-hun:	Ah.. they never try hard or improve their skills
104	Author:	The regular position holders?
105	Ji-hun:	I saw so many people like that. They don't work hard
106		because their position is stable. Like I told you,
107		elementary school teachers, they didn't learn more education skill.
108		so that's Korean problem.

Ji-hun started his conversation by labeling an irregular worker, metaphorically, as a *modern slave*. In addition, he provided his rationale, explaining why he referred to them that way: "because of the regular job workers (75)." According to Ji-hun, the regular workers have *authority*, which is interpreted as power in a workplace, and the regular workers want to keep this power with their superior position while they *sacrifice* irregular workers. He explains this power relation using the words *power* and *authority*.

Moreover, Ji-hun clarified his distinctions between irregular workers and full-time position holders with differentiated lexical choices. From lines 70 to 108, full-time position workers were described using the words *power* (76), *authority* (80), *stable* (83), *control* (84), *welfare* (92), *benefit*

---

[1] yangban was the upper social class in the Chosŏn dynasty.

(92), *salary* (92) and *yangban* (94). However, irregular workers were represented as a *modern slave* (73) and *sacrifice* (82). This structural opposition of the two different positions supports Ji-hun's ideologies of how irregular workers are substandard in Korean society (Machin & Mayr 2012).

Ji-hun also requested equal treatment (96). Initially, he exhibited the distinctions between the irregular positions and full-time status with differentiated lexical choices, but he started using a pronoun, *they* (90), to indicate both positions—although they are working within a different status, their work duties are the same. This idea demonstrated that irregular workers are not distinguished in terms of work distribution, and they do not get a smaller workload compared to the full-time position holders. Rather, it is mere discrimination by differentiated employment patterns or employment status.

In the following excerpt, Ji-hun expressed most of his thoughts in Korean. Briefly introducing the language policy in my classroom, it was generously accepted to share their thoughts on challenging topics in Korean because my students and I agreed that displaying one's opinion was a prioritized activity during the course meeting. However, since they joined my class for practicing English, context-specific expressions, collocations and translation forms were provided after Korean language; it was also responding to meet the demand of the institute that desired receiving no complaints regarding any courses.

141	Ji-hun:	I shared my opinions with them ((colleagues)), but they just
142		made me stop. They don't care.
143		Il ha nŭn saram ŭn kŭnyang hara nŭn taero haeyo. ((switching to Korean))
		Employees just follow what administration says to them
144		Kŭnyang kundae ch'ŏrŏm pokchonghaeyo
		Like an army, they just obey their boss.
145		Kŭnyang sŭsŭro p'ŏp'omŏnsŭ rŭl mot naendago saenggak hanikka
		They think they just do not show appropriate performance or result.
146		Nŏt'ŭ rang polt'ŭ ch'ŏrŏm sŭsŭro rŭl yŏgi nŭn kŏyeyo.
		Many workers feel that they are just one of countless bolts and nuts.
147		Nae sanggage nŭn sŭsŭro k'wŏllit'i rŭl ollyŏya haeyo

In my opinion, they must improve their quality.

148 Tto chagŭn hoesa nŭn mach'i p'asanhal kŏtch'ŏrŏm

And small companies threaten workers that they will go bankrupt

149 Uri ka padaya hal modŭn penep'it ŭl padŭmyŏn

If they provide all the benefits we are supposed to have.

Before this excerpt, Ji-hun introduced one example of how his coworkers obey their managers, and how much they are reluctant to resist authority despite getting irrational or unjustifiable orders. An announcement was reported one day which said that all employees were discouraged from taking a day off either on a Monday or Friday, which could be interpreted as prohibiting employees from submitting applications for a day off on those dates. Although it is illegal to prevent employees from applying for their paid vacation on specific days, Ji-hun and his coworkers must follow and respect the orders.

Ji-hun continued with criticizing his colleagues about having no opinions or critical attitudes of being mere *bolts and nuts*, representing consumable items which can be replaced by other *bolts and nuts*. This metaphorical expression displayed his belief that workers in Korea just obeyed what their employers ordered even though he thought was an unreasonable and irrational decision (142). Moreover, he pointed out how many workers were marginalized, putting them voluntarily in an inferior position and not being active with making their own voice heard in such situations.

Moreover, the potential threat Ji-hun got was shared as another issue (147). All the benefits and rights that all full-time workers should have under their contracts are sometimes ignored. Authorities announce that all workers and management or staff should cooperate as a united organization to move forward together, and even they should share the hardship their company undergoes. This community spirit sometimes activates workers and reinforces their loyalty towards their boss, which results in a one-way sacrifice. Ji-hun's acknowledgement of forcing community spirit, which is letting them give up their rights as workers, are stated clearly in his metaphorical language: *The atmosphere of army* (143). He also spoke about this oppressive situation between a company and a worker; the company terrorizes its workers with the threat of firing them if the companies offer all the benefits in the time of economic hardship (147-148).

Although my students were aware of the employment pattern change and the substandard working conditions of irregular positions, not all of these were reflected in their discourse using metaphorical language. This is likely because of their limited English proficiency or personal speech style. However, it was meaningful to see how the participants indicated their understandings of the labor issues, power relations, and oppression from their companies using metaphorical language. Perhaps this may be one of the easiest ways to raise their voices for resistance.

There may be criticism towards using first language here since Ji-hun switched his language to Korean in the middle of the discussion. With the aspects of Critical Language Pedagogy, my main concern was letting my students speak out their issues and identify problems in their own language (i.e., problem-posing, see also Crookes, 2013). Thus, I did not encourage them to speak English only or set up an English-only environment.

However, I still need to reflect on what I could have done as an English teacher in this situation – how I could take advantage of Ji-hun's opinions shared in Korean language to improve my students' English proficiency. I should have provided additional content and input in the following class meetings concerning how they could deliver their opinions regarding the employment issues in English with reviewing what Ji-hun mentioned. I could have provided sentence-level transcribed data based on their discussion and in-class activities to internalize the target language. For example, I could have asked them to record their narratives using the target expressions. They could have sent me a copy of their voice recording later and I could have given them feedback if they expressed themselves in a comprehensible manner or not, and how they could improve further.

English as a tool to Achieve Stable Positions

All of my students were aware of the power of English, and the importance of English proficiency for their promotions in the workplace and their résumé to use in job-hunting. That is why they came to my *hagwŏn* three times a week in the evening after work.

Throughout the discussion how the full-time positions and part-time positions are differentiated, and how they are interconnected in this competitive society, there exists a characteristic commonly mentioned when they define a desirable job: Stability. Along with the diversified employment pattern in the economic system transformation into the neoliberal capitalist structure, stability was mentioned several times by my students when they described an ideal job.

20	Author:	Okay but then why are you preparing the test for government jobs?
21		What made you choose that? What was your first reason?
22		What comes first onto your mind?
23	Hee-jae:	Stability?
24	Author:	Why so?
25	Hee-jae:	Stability is very important in my life.
26		so I want to keep my want the get stable work.
27		because the life is if hmm (.) if we feel instable at that time I don't like it.
28	Author:	So, a government job, is that stable?

29 Hee-jae: I think so.

30 Author: Irregular workers, their position is not stable.

31 Hee-jae: I think yes.

Hee-jae clearly indicated what her priority is when it comes to work: Stability. Since stability is considered one of the key features for job-hunting in modern Korea (Koo 2007), there have been increasing candidates who apply for the civil service exam (Online News Team 2014). With the increasing numbers of the exam takers, every year it creates a new record for competition rate, which was 125:1 in 2015 (Hwang 2015). Thus, the perception of the jobseekers has changed what is supposed to be valued: Stability, rather than any other factors. As mentioned by Ko and Jun (2015), potential jobseekers including college students in Korea have a motivation to achieve stable and secure futures rather than a high salary and chance to benefit society.

Eun-ji (pseudonym) participated in the discussion and shared her opinion how achieving stability and learning English are interconnected in the Korean job market.

32 Author: What do you think about irregular working position in Korea?

33 Eun-ji: In irregular working position is unstable. That's a problem.

34 Author: Why is that a problem?

35 Eun-ji: If we get a regular job. It's too hard

36 because we have to build personal history and improve personal ability.

37 For example, English speaking ability or I don't like computer.

38 Author: Okay, so individual, each individual person has to develop their own

39 Eun-ji: Some abilities

40 Author: Strategies or skills like English to get a job. And it is getting harder and

41 harder

42 Eun-ji: To get regular job.

43 Author: Full-time job, for example.

44 Eun-ji: So, I think government has to change. It has to be changed.

45 Author: What has to be changed?

46 Eun-ji: Government system and company

47	Author:	Like how?
48	Eun-ji:	I don't know. Irregular worker can to hi.. regular workers get a job easily.
49	Author:	Okay.
50	Eun-ji:	We need some system that irregular workers get a job easily.
51	Author:	What kind of jobs, irregular jobs?
52	Eun-ji:	I mean, we need some system, government system that irregular workers
53		get a regular job easily.
54	Author:	But, the problem is we have limited amount of resources, right?
55	Eun-ji:	Yeah, I know.
56	Author:	So, then do you have any idea how government or company have to
57		be changed with those resources?
58	Eun-ji:	Employers hire some workers. They don't consider any *spec*.
59	Author:	*Spec*?
60	Eun-ji:	Yeah. Just personal history. Consider just personal history.
61		How and what did they do, what did they learn.
62		We don't have to any *spec*, we don't have to have any *spec*.
63	Author:	Any *spec*?
64	Eun-ji:	TOEIC speaking, TOEIC, TOEFL, it's not useful.
65	Author:	For every position?
66	Eun-ji:	Hmm, depends on the position but, or for example,
67		there is a trade company. Some many kinds of languages so important.
68		Ability about language speaking ability is important.
69	Author:	That's true.

70 Eun-ji: Yeah, but other ability any (.) any society activities, they don't need that.

It is important to identify the units of language that contain the speakers' attitudes if they hedge, use modal verbs, or modal adjectives when they deliver their opinions (Machin & Mayr 2012). In this excerpt, Eun-ji was using the deontic form or high modality such as *have to* several times. According to Machin and Mayr (2012), deontic modals express high degrees of certainty that "might be used in order to convince people" (188). In this case, Eun-ji used *have to* frequently (i.e., in line 36, 44, 62) to highlight her certainty and confidence about the given topic.

Eun-ji started her conversation by mentioning why achieving a full-time position is difficult nowadays; that is because "we have to build personal history and improve personal ability" (36-37). This is an indication of one word in Korean English, *spec*, which is widely used in Korea. In this atmosphere, building more *spec* makes young Koreans more competitive which is directly correlated to their reasons for investing in them. Therefore, this neoliberal concept is affecting the job market and the people within that job market.

Going back to the excerpt, Eun-ji was explaining why finding a regular job is difficult: Because she should build good-looking *spec* that proves how much they differ from other applicants. To make their résumé attractive, applicants should add more *spec* (58) such as English standardized test scores. However, Eun-ji argued that those report cards do not prove their English fluency although they may be practically necessary for certain positions such as international trading company workers. Rather, she insists that *personal history* must be considered as *spec* (60), which displays her ideological tension because she was attending this *hagwŏn* for her *spec* building; meanwhile she is clearly acknowledging the oppression from gaining a good-looking *spec*. This is what she should do, just like many other job applicants since she belongs to this community. Eun-ji is not the only one, being critically aware of the status quo and social class identity; it has been widely discussed online and off-line among young people with new *spoon* terms that categorize Korean citizens metaphorically into three social classes, g*olden spoon, silver spoon and dirt spoon. Golden spoon* refers to a person or family who has financially affluent background. The reason why these classification terms is worthwhile for self-identity investigation is that people define themselves whether they belong to *golden*, *silver* or *dirt spoon* family with self-criticism. It is somewhat sarcastic, but often utilized as humorous source as well in various social contexts, including but not limited to social activities, mass media, literature and video gaming. Eun-ji's reflection and ideological tension represent the current generation who have struggled to catch up the social and capital changes and have conformed to the reality to survive in the society.

On line 44, Eun-ji provided a solution to this problem, where she changes her voice to the passive form when she mentioned that the government *has to be changed*. This process of meaning making can be referred to transitivity (Halliday 1994). Transitivity, the "study of what people are depicted as doing and refers, broadly, to who does what to whom, and how" (Machin & Mayr 2012, 104), defining a subject and verb in sentences will be helpful to understand the relationship between agents and actions. Thus, her argument, delivered in the passive voice hides agents who can change the government under the assumption of the hierarchical society of Korea. The government itself should implement a new policy not requiring *spec*, but it is hard to define exactly who can do that when considering the authoritarian system.

All my students were aware of the importance of English in Korean society. They can attain English skills or standardized test scores by studying and spending time and money at *hagwŏn*. Furthermore, my students agreed that a good-looking *spec* will be helpful to achieve stable or full-time jobs. Eun-ji had the same ideas and beliefs, but she contradicted herself when she exhibits an adaptive attitude to the current situation (through coming to *hagwŏn*) while at the same time critiquing the government and its policy.

Conclusion

There have been numerous reports that many laborers have fallen behind, unprepared, in the time of economic restructuring towards a neoliberal capitalist system in Korea (Kim & Lee 2014; Shin 2011). Local media and newspapers have been reporting how the Korean society has been rapidly stratified because of the new employment pattern with the nationwide transformation. Thus, it is important to promote Korean EFL adult learners' consciousness of where they are and with the situations they face in the educational environment. In this case, CP was a successful approach to draw students' voice even though the teaching context was a private business.

As witnessed from each excerpt, my students were interested in describing their issues and concerns in the classroom settings with critical attitudes, demonstrating their awareness of power dynamics. They actively participated in the discussion to share their opinions and ideas and critically analyzed their own stories and stances. In the beginning of the course design, I worried about any potential disagreement among students I might have faced, in case they just wanted me to cover the textbooks, rather than focusing on the discussions. However, as I clarified, my students actively joined the discussions, and I believe, it happened because the topics we shared were *our* stories.

The use of metaphorical language is another major category of finding: My students presented their understanding of power dynamics in their working space, classifying the two different lexical categories. It was an efficient strategy to display clear dichotomy between social classes, especially when they have a limited proficiency of English. In the meantime, a solid language command was witnessed from advanced level students when it comes to the oppressive situation; modal verbs and modal adjectives were adopted to hedge the question of responsibility of unequal social structure.

However, there are limitations that must be considered for further improvement of this study, especially how the language instruction can be reinforced with the CP model. For my own future teaching, I need to consider how I can make balance between language input and output, so students can be exposed to critical languages, internalize and produce in a target language. Additionally, I will be able to prepare a word list and reading catalog in advance after needs assessment in the beginning of the program. Of course, in the context of this study, I would have prepared a language drill in a retrospective manner; with the voice record of the discussion, I would have provided an English translation of how they could have expressed in English, in case that they had failed to search words.

This study explored not only the feasibility of CP integration into a neoliberal space, *hagwŏn*, but also the potential development of critical awareness regarding local issues under the concept of localizing TESOL (Sung & Pederson, 2012). I conclude that CP is promising for development of linguistic competence and shaping students as active citizens who are equipped with a powerful tool: Critical consciousness.

References

Amsden, A. H. (1992). *Asia's next giant: South Korea and late industrialization*. Oxford University Press.

Bennett, L. Y. (2018). An exploration of Japanese students' concept and application of critical thinking in academic writing. In *Teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in Japan* (pp. 123-139). Springer.

Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. (2001). Notes on the new planetary vulgate. *Radical Philosophy,105*, 2-5.

Choi, I. C. (2008). The impact of EFL testing on EFL education in Korea. *Language Testing*, *25*(1), 39-62.

Crawford-Lange, L. M. (1981). Redirecting second language curricula: Paulo Freire's contribution. *Foreign Language Annals, 14(*4), 257-268.

Crookes, G. (2013). *Critical ELT in action: Foundations, promises, praxis.* Routledge.

Fairclough, N. (1995). *Media discourse.* Bloomsbury.

Fairclough, N. (2013). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language.* Routledge.

Fairclough, N., & Wodak, R. (1997). Critical discourse analysis. In T. van Dijk (Ed.), *Discourse as Social Interaction* (pp. 258-285). Sage.

Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* Continuum Press. (Originally published in 1970.)

Gardner, R. C., & Lambert, W. E. (1972). *Attitudes and motivation in second language learning*. Newbury House.

Halliday, M. A. K. (1994). *An introduction to functional grammar.* Edward Arnold.

Hancocks, P., Kwon, K., & Botelho, G. (2014, June 11). Angry families scream at South Korean ferry captain, crew as trial begins. CNN. http://www.cnn.com/2014/06/10/world/asia/south-korea-sewol-ferry-trial/

Hart, C. (2008). Critical discourse analysis and metaphor: Toward a theoretical framework. *Critical Discourse Studies, 5*(2), 91-106.

Hiramoto, M., & Park, J. S. Y. (2014). Anxiety, insecurity, and border crossing: Language contact in a globalizing world. *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication, 24*(2), 141-151.

Hwang, I. (2015, August 31). Competition rate for civil service exam remains high despite innovation of pension: 125:1. Donga Ilbo. http://news.donga.com/3/all/20150831/73338568/1#

Jones, R. S. (2013). Education reform in Korea. OECD Economics Department Working Papers.1067. OECD Publishing.

KB Management Research Institute. (2012). The present industry of foreign language institute in Korea and analysis of the financial structure. KB Research Center.

Kim, A. E., & Lee, C. M. (2014). Neoliberalism and insecure employment in Korea: Emergence of the working poor and worsening socio-economic polarization. *Korea Observer, 45*(2), 255-273.

Ko, K., & Jun, K. N. (2015). A comparative analysis of job motivation and career preference of Asian undergraduate students. *Public Personnel Management, 44*(2), 192-213.

Koo, H. (2007). The changing faces of inequality in South Korea in the age of globalization. Korean Studies, 31, 1-18.

Lipman, P. (2009). Paradoxes of teaching in neo-liberal times: Education 'reform' in Chicago. In S. Gewirtz, P. Mahony, I. Hextall, & A. Cribb (Eds.), *Changing teacher professionalism: International trends, challenges and ways forward* (pp. 67 – 80). Routledge.

Machin, A. & Mayr, D. (2012). *How to do critical discourse analysis.* Sage.

Ministry of Education. (1997). *The 7th English language curricula.* Seoul, Korea.

Ministry of Employment and Labor. (2014). *Labor laws of the Republic of Korea*: South Korean Labor Laws.

Norton, B., & Toohey, K. (2004). *Critical pedagogies and language learning*. Cambridge University Press.

Oh, K. A. (2017). Developing critical thinking skills through a mandatory English course in Korean higher education. *English Teaching, 72*(4), 53-80.

Online News Team. (2014, October 9). Increased competition rate of local public servant positions. *Economy Today*. http://www.eto.co.kr/news/outview.asp?Code=20141009153112667&ts=164836

Park, C. K. (2015). Job competence of college students in Korea: An expansion of core competence theory. *Asian Journal of Innovation & Policy, 4*(1), 55-75.

Park, J. S. Y. (2011). The promise of English: Linguistic capital and the neoliberal worker in the South Korean job market. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 14*(4), 443-455.

Park, J. S. Y. (2015). Structures of feeling in unequal Englishes. In R. Tupas (Ed.), *Unequal Englishes: The politics of English today* (pp. 59-73). Palgrave Macmillan.

Park, S. J., & Abelmann, N. (2004). Class and cosmopolitan striving: Mother's management of English education in South Korea. *Anthropological Quarterly, 77*(4), 645-67.

Sacks, H., Schegloff, E. A., & Jefferson, G. (1974). A simplest systematics for the organization of turn-taking for conversation. *Language in Society, 50*, 696–735.

Sankar, L. V. (2013). Malaysian editorials on the Allah issue: A critical discourse study. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies, 10(*1), 31-61.

Shin, K. (2011). Globalization and social inequality in South Korea. New millennium South Korea: Neoliberal capitalism and transnational movements, 11-28.

Shin, K. (2009, June 5). Big private institutes suffer a bitter blow due to outside investment. Donga Ilbo. http://www.dongascience.com/news/view/-93437/bef

Spolsky, B. (2012). *Primary school English-language education in Asia from policy to practice.* Routledge.

Sung, K., & Pederson, R. (Eds.). (2012). Critical ELT practices in Asia. Springer.

Yonhap News Agency. (2007, November 15). "Abolish the education of college entrance exam" one protester who refused taking KSAT. SBS News. http://news.sbs.co.kr/news/endPage.do?news_id=N1000337267

You, Y. L. (2015). Understanding the perceptions and attitudes of older employees toward age discrimination in South Korea. *International Journal of Welfare for the Aged, 32(*1), 69-96.

Walsh, C. E. (1991). Literacy as praxis: *Culture, language, and pedagogy.* Ablex.

West, G. (2014). Doing critical language pedagogy in neoliberal spaces: a materialist narrative of teaching young(er) learners of English in a Korean hagwon. MA thesis, Dept of SLS, UHM.

Author

Wonguk Cho is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Applied Linguistics at the University of Massachusetts Boston. He completed his B.A. and M.A. degrees at the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa, where he specialized in Second Language Studies. Wonguk taught college-level Korean and ESL courses in Hawaiʻi and China for years before coming back to school for Ph.D. degree. His research focuses on critical language pedagogy and sociolinguistics, with a particular interest in exploring the application of the theoretical framework of CLP in non-western educational contexts, particularly East Asian countries. These countries are undergoing rapid social transformation, characterized by the influence of westernization in terms of capital and culture. Wonguk aims to investigate how CLP can be effectively implemented in these dynamic contexts.