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## English in South Korea: two sides of the same coin

Yulia Fayzrakhmanova\*

*Vitus Bering Kamchatka State University, 4 Pogranichnaya street, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky 683032, Russian Federation*

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### Abstract

This paper examines two tendencies in the use of the English language in South Korea. On the one hand, English is actively used in many spheres of Korean society. Koreans feel free in creating lexical innovations using English material for their own communicative purposes. On the other hand, English communicative skills and English proficiency of most Koreans remain at a moderate rate.

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*Keywords:* English in South Korea; Koreanized English words; lexical innovations; language proficiency; communicative skills

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### 1. Introduction

2015 marks the 132nd year of English education since the first English school, Dongmoonhak, was founded in 1883. However, it still remains an undeniable fact that Korea is one of the countries from the Expanding Circle (Kachru, 1985) where English is used neither as an official nor as a second language. At the same time the active use of English among Korean speakers makes it hard to argue that English is unpopular in Korea. A huge amount of money is spent on English education every year. According to a Korean daily newspaper “The Hankyoreh”, the amount reached up to 20 trillion won (approximately \$20 billion) in 2006 (Park, 2009). Hundreds of thousands of English teachers are “imported” to Korea every year. Most, if not all, English teachers are required to be native speakers, as Koreans believe that native speakers are the best teachers of English. More and more hagwons (English cram school) and English villages (language education institution) have been opened in almost every city. English is

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\* Corresponding author.

*E-mail address:* [juliafayz@gmail.com](mailto:juliafayz@gmail.com)

seen in various aspects of life of Korean society, from education sector to mass-media, sport and tourism. Even everyday conversation cannot be conducted without a few linguistic devices from the English language.

During my stay in Daegu in 2011-2012, Daejeon in 2013 and my short visits to Seoul in 2015 I have encountered a number of examples:

Everyday conversation:

“서비스 드릴게요” (I will give you the service) – I will give you free stuff (complementary extras).

“모닝콜 해드릴까요?” (Do you need a morning call?) – Do you need a wake-up call?

“화이팅!” (Fighting) – Go for it!

“언니 우리 셀카 찍자” (Sis, let’s make a selca) – Sis, let’s make a selfie.

Advertisement boards (Fig. 1, 2) and promo-clips (Fig. 3):



Fig. 1. Chatime – Daegu (April, 2015).

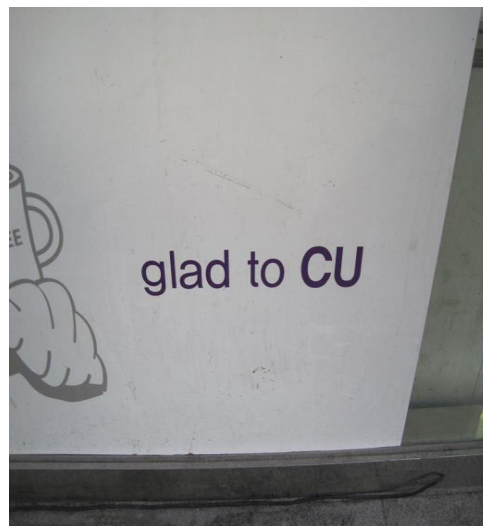


Fig. 2. glad to CU – Daegu (April, 2015).

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