

L2 Digital Literacy: Korean EFL students use their cell phone videocams to make an L2 English video guide to their college campus

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Abstract

In Korea and Japan, the high penetration of student cell phones with built-in features including SMS, Email, Internet capability and bilingual dictionaries, already offers ubiquitous computing facilities for pedagogical applications. Further, nearly all Korean students belong to the Hangul social networking site Cyworld.com. This paper describes an L2 English lesson, where Korean college students were asked at very short notice to make English language video guides to their campus, shooting their videos on the videocams built-in to their cell phones. Students then emailed their videos to their instructor, who arranged for file conversion where necessary, then uploaded their videos to the vblog on his English language US.Cyworld.com homepage. Students were then asked by email to view the videos and post responses in the homepage guestbook, which required them to set up their own English language account, and invited to further explore the social networking site, which is popular among Korean-Americans.

In Dede's inspirational vignette [1], Alec and Arielle stroll through campus, carrying wifi handheld devices to obtain and process information for their class assignment. Cell phones in Japan and Korea already offer a comparable means of ubiquitous computing, as advanced by Kiernan & Aizawa [2], Prensky [3], Thornton & Houser [4], and Meurant [5]. Virtually all Korean students belong to the Korean Cyworld.com social networking site, while many have video cameras built-in to their cell phones, and know how to shoot videos and upload them to Cyworld.com.

However the complicating factor in the L2 classroom, understandably, is language itself. Student L2 English abilities within a single class may range from a rare few with near fluency through to many

with almost no ability. Mac OS remains a novelty in predominantly Windows Korea; most native English teachers who attempt to navigate Windows software in Hangul encounter the substance of nightmares (e.g. faced with <http://www.cyworld.com/main2/index.htm>, where does the monolingual English teacher go next?)

How then may videos be posted and made available for L2 students to view and to comment on? Cyworld.com allows 'neighbors' to link to another, and the formation of 'towns', which can take video files. But site navigation in the Korean Cyworld.com is entirely in Hangul, as is almost all content (although English content can be posted). This makes it difficult for a non-Korean speaker, while providing no opportunity for Korean students to develop digital literacy in L2 English. Ideally, an English language vblog (video blog) with easy - hopefully bilingual - navigation would allow club members to post videos, comments and video responses into a common forum.

I discovered the Korean Cyworld-owned English language site US.Cyworld at <http://us.cyworld.com/> does offer particular benefits to Korean EFL students. It claims to permit Cyworld.com users to log-in using their Korean identities and passwords (though we found that this was not in fact possible). Users can upload video and photos directly from a cell phone, by forwarding them as attachments to MMS (Multimedia Message Service messages) that they address to theirdomainname@upload.us.cyworld.com. Individual 'minihomes' allow owner-posted videos and visitor comments, and can link to one another as 'neighbors'. But Global Cyworld (Korea, China, Japan, Taiwan, and the US) does not permit personal sites in more than one Cyworld site, nor linking of personal sites from country to country. Further, while US.Cyworld allows public, semi-private and private Clubs to be formed, one cannot at present post videos to a club.

A workable compromise is for students to email cell phone videos to their teacher, which is readily

done for free by USB cable to an Internet-enabled computer (wifi internet access available on campus costs the student data transfer charges, which they resist). The original intention was for the teacher to then mix group videos into a class video, using iMovie and QuickTime Pro, post it on his US.Cyworld.com minihome, and invite responses. But it quickly became apparent that with the software and limited experience available, this approach would not work. Trials with seven classes resulted in 36 video submissions (see Figure 1) in only wmv, avi, k3g, skm and mp4 formats. On the Mac, only the avi files would actually open in QuickTime Pro v.7.1.6 (then current), where they could then be exported (e.g. as QuickTime movies (mov)); and only these avi files would import as clips into iMovie v.3.0.3 (outdated). Windows Media Player v.9.0.0 (current) would play these wmv files on the Mac. For assessment, all files could be viewed using the free GOM Media Player v.2.1.3.3413 (current) on the PC (available in English or Korean), except one for which GOM could not find the necessary codec. Various attempts by the teacher to convert files on Mac and Windows, or use online converters, met with dismal failure. Nor would k3g files renamed as 3gp convert, as advised by Ben1 at <http://forums.3ivx.com/index.php?showtopic=84041>.

The solution adopted was for the teacher to upload individual student group files to his US.Cyworld minihome (Figure 1), where necessary combining group sequences of multiple videos using the online US.Cyworld Video Studio mixer (which could have been used to produce a class video; Video Studio also enabled a few videos mistakenly shot in portrait mode to be rotated to landscape mode). When this was done, wmv and avi files behaved well, but k3g, k3g renamed as 3gp, skm and mp4 files lost their audio tracks (though a US.Cyworld FAQ states that avi, asf, divx, dv, flv, mov, mpeg, mpg, rm, wmv, 3gp, and 3g2 video files can be uploaded and used, while the Upload page also includes mp4 as an accepted file format). Eventually, an obliging computer technician was able to convert problem files to wmv and avi (using the Hangu PC Ever Media Player), and these uploaded successfully, though some hesitancy may have been introduced into the streaming.

In a subsequent homework assignment, students were asked in English by email to navigate to the US site, log-in using their Korean Cyworld details, and navigate by their own efforts to this minihome and to its video theater (see Figure 1). Students discovered they were unable to log-in, so the more enterprising created their own homepages on the US site, which enabled them to log-in and post comments. Instead of

viewing their class video as originally envisaged, they were asked to watch their own and several other student group videos, and leave a written response (in English) in the guestbook (for which log-in was necessary). This homework also capitalized on exposing them to the US site, which they could readily compare with the Korean site with which they were familiar; self-generated discovery would, it is anticipated, lead some to further voluntary involvement in such online L2 activities. It is intended to encourage more such involvement in future.

Language issues affect not only problems of L2 digital literacy, but also, naturally, instruction of students to perform a task. In this I propose complete understanding on the part of each student is not the objective; rather I favor tasks set beyond their comfort level, but tolerate misunderstanding and non-performance. If classes are going well, failure to adequately cope with a task should not be a problem, provided students engage with it, try, and do not become disillusioned. Again, as Kohls observes, Korea is a deeply people-oriented and group-centered collectivist culture [6], in contrast with Western individualism. Information seems in some mysterious sense to be stored in the group mind, rather than in each individual. To allow for this, I accept much prompting of students by one another, and even what a Westerner would regard as cheating. However several groups were unimaginative in adopting the topic and style of other group efforts; or perhaps it was a peculiar male student fascination with the women's dormitory that resulted in four videos on that topic.

The English handout explaining the task is admittedly beyond the reading level of many of these students. I have discovered that such laborious explanations in English of what is required don't really connect: but engaging with students, role-playing, and showing them the sort of thing that is desired, does. Further, nonlinear openness is called for; L2 students sometimes radically misunderstand what is wanted, but nevertheless produce really good work, and I have learnt to be content with that.

An unexpected synergy that emerged as the week progressed was that students were better briefed, as a consequence of students of earlier classes advising them on how to proceed. Students with better English ability used their own initiative to explain the task in Korean to their classmates, one even using notes prepared by the volunteer translator from a previous class. Without it being suggested, a few students turned up in class with video digital cameras. Student videos improved in quality and even perhaps (through being advised?) in video format: the last day's

submissions were almost all in wmf and avi, and one video even had titles, music, transitions, and rolling credits. Several groups were quite shrewd in their

unprompted choice of topics, including interviews with Jung, Yu Sung of the administrative department, with long-serving English Prof. Lee, and with myself.



Figure 1: 'My friend SimDuk' video on the author's vblog, accessible from <http://US.Cyworld.com/rmeurant>

1. The software chosen for this lesson

The multimedia software resident on students' cell phones with video cameras enables users to shoot videos, do basic editing, and upload them as MMS attachments to emails. Video enables conversational speech to be recorded and viewed together with visual clues including shaping of the mouth in pronunciation, facial expression, body language, and conversational turn-taking. Social networking sites are exploited: the native Korean-language Cyworld.com (with which students are very familiar) and its fellow L2 English-language US.Cyworld.com (with which most appear not to be). Students also read, compose and post English emails and responses in an online guestbook.

2. The software helps achieve lesson objectives

Lesson objectives are achieved by students using English to: negotiate an adequate understanding of what is required of them; plan storyboards; make commentaries and conduct interviews for the videos; review their experiences; and respond in writing to the videos. They develop English digital literacy by

navigating to a demo podcast site and playing the podcast; composing the cover email for the video upload; comprehending the teacher's email advising the location of student group videos and the follow-up work that is required of them; navigating to the website and the teacher's minihome and video theater; viewing student videos and submitting a response in the minihome guestbook; and, it is hoped, further familiarizing themselves with the US.Cyworld.com site. These strategies focus on newly desirable skills that van 't Hooft [7] considers to be primarily those of the ability to connect, collaborate, and network, in accord with Siemens' notion of connectivism [8].

3. The software applied to pedagogy in general

Multimedia has enormous educational potential. The teacher can provide an overview to each week's lesson as a video podcast, which students can view before class (or in lieu of, if absent), even while commuting. Video podcasts are easily made using a webcam and QuickTimePro to record QuickTime movies [9] (on Mac OS only), which are then posted on the class

homepage. Or these podcasts can be more creatively mixed in iMovie, using flash animations, video, text and audio resources together with titles, transitions and effects, and incorporate content from student-shot videos. Over time an archive of material can be built-up. An advantage is that the teacher can control the technology of her podcasting, needing only to ensure that the content she delivers is in appropriate file format. But beyond that, she is unlikely to be familiar with, able, or even wish to control the technology of her students, particularly when faced with a foreign culture and language. Though problems with video file format compatibility can be expected, group tasks similar to that described can be set which require multimedia video compositions, taking advantage of the existent widespread penetration in Korea of cell phone video cameras and broadband/wifi connectivity (though it would be advisable to encourage students to post their own videos onto a common Internet site). Thompson [10] describes Duke University's initiative as an example of similar Web 2.0 innovation: students use free iPods to create and record material, and upload audio or image files to shared course space.

Secondly, Barnes, Marateo and Ferris [11] recommend that to reach the Net Generation, educators exploit the social networking skills that students use outside class. Social networking websites offer considerable L2 pedagogical potential. An English-language private club set up in US.Cyworld for each class would require students to create individual basic minihomes, for which they would need to use an alternative screen name and password to their Korean Cyworld details. They would post a variety of material on their individual minihome (where they could concentrate on those aspects that interested them, whether videos, animations, music, still images, sketches, or written compositions), their class Club page, and visit and post responses to other students' minihome guestbooks, while linking together as neighbors. This is similar to Wilber's suggestion [12] of exploiting the literacy practices of students by maintaining a course blog, to help develop thinking, reading and writing skills. Links are readily made from class to class; and there is also the potential to interact through English with students from other institutions and countries, exploiting new metacognitive language learning strategies, which I elsewhere explore [13]. Flat Planet [14] provides a wikispace for an online collaborative project between students in Canada and the UK; Wilber [12] cites Ganley's use of blogs to connect students around the globe, who converse in real time using Skype. This interaction can be between students of different native

languages; Graddol [15] notes that the majority of human interactions, in English, do not involve a native English speaker. In turn, this leads me to wonder: how distant can that critical point be, when the majority of all human communications are computer-mediated...?

Hyejeon College enjoys sister relationships with American colleges, with students and staff regularly undertaking educational exchanges. It may be possible to use the techniques discussed to correspond online with these American students, and view and respond to each other's videos. The considerable advantage of using US.Cyworld.com for Korean students is that they are already deeply familiar with its parent/sister site Cyworld.com, and this recognition will prove beneficial in facilitating transference of knowledge and language learning strategies from L1 to L2, by providing essential scaffolding. This provides an opportunity to develop L2 digital literacy, directly building on their existent L1 digital literacy skills.

4. A rationale for this software use in the classroom

Bagui [16] observes that by using multimedia, the resources teachers and students produce can more closely resemble the cognitive schema of the information that is represented, and thus reduce cognitive overload. Multimedia can also more closely represent the formal structures of non-digital phenomena, both communicating more effectively and satisfying the aesthetic sense. The keys to successful implementation of video UCC (user-created content) are the access Korean students already enjoy to ubiquitous computing in the form of cell phone videocams, the high penetration of broadband connectivity in Korea, and the wifi networking of campuses. This pervasiveness means that video recording (together with limited editing capability) is almost always available immediately, on demand, and does not require specialist training (notwithstanding the plethora of video formats and codecs to be dealt with); and Internet connections are freely available.

A key focus of technology integration that Roblyer [17] identifies is the necessity that essential conditions be in place to support that integration. Integrating Korean video UCC and networking capability with Internet-based social networking sites means that video communication for teaching and learning is desirable, feasible, and available now, without an educational institution needing to heavily invest in providing students with multimedia devices - they are already clutching them tightly in their hands during class. Vblog forums are available to share video information and to respond to it, as the capability of YouTube demonstrates, where video

posts sometimes generate a succession of video responses. In Korea, the streaming ability to view this content on a cell phone via wifi access to the Internet is available on campus and at fastfood outlets, with KT and SKT expecting full Wi-Bro coverage of Seoul by year's end. Students can also download video podcasts to their cell phones and video iPods, to view in their own time while undertaking lengthy commutes to and from college (many of our students commute by bus to and from Seoul or Incheon for 4 hours daily).

English L2 digital literacy is rapidly becoming highly desirable, to enable students and professionals to access the enormous depth and variety of English resources available on the Internet, and for global computer-mediated communication with one another in the world's first global language. As the classroom, education and society become more computer-integrated, this tendency is only likely to increase.

It remains to be seen whether, longer term, true ubiquitous computing and eventual smart classrooms (together with digital translation services) will make these technologies totally transparent, and limited L2 language skills will no longer present any impediment.

The cell phone videos and comments are posted at <http://US.Cyworld.com/rmeurant> (no login required).

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