Teaching Korean as a Foreign Language and Its Related Fields

Sahie Kang
(Defense Language Institute)

It is needless to say that human’s language ability is known to be the most complex one due to the complex nature of functions of human brain. Therefore we must understand that Foreign Language Education is also dealing with quite complex nature of different aspects of linguistic components of the target language itself as well as external factors such as teachers’ teaching behaviors, learners’ styles and their strategies. Thus it is natural to say that Teaching Korean as a Foreign Language should be considered as an interdisciplinary field that should carry its own identity as a subpart of the field of Second Language Studies. This paper will discuss a variety of related fields, so we can consider different kinds of academic principles to establish a solid and mature Teaching Korean as a Foreign Language as an independent academic discipline.

1. Linguistics

Linguistics definitely is the field that nurtured the field of Foreign Language Education, and consequently Teaching Korean as a Foreign Language has been evolving from the general linguistic tradition for several decades. The structural linguistics and syntax-dominated linguistic theories have lead Korean Language Education as a Foreign Language which focuses on the sentence as the basic unit of language and teaches students more about the knowledge of the language instead of ability of different language skills. The prescriptive description of grammar based on linguistic analysis has been often quite challenging to the foreigners who do not have much linguistic knowledge to begin with.

However, the recent developments in linguistic theory have focused more on the lexicon and on discourse. And discourse analysis with corpus linguistics provides Foreign Language Educators more intelligible explanations at the discourse level considering contextual meaning.

Universal grammar: Universal grammar was initially a theory of first language acquisition. Chomsky (1968) argued children acquire a first language before they are able to accomplish simpler tasks. Children with intellectual disabilities acquire language, and the acquired language is greater than the input received. Input is often full of slips of the tongue and grammatical errors, but children still acquire the language. Not all parents give
error corrections to their children, still children overcome those errors. Due to these, Chomsky argued that human beings must have an innate device that is able to do all languages. One of the features of this language device is the claim that there is a critical period for acquiring a first language. Thus, adolescents and adults would no longer have access to this device to enable them to acquire a second language. Still, proponents of UG argue that the device is still there, it is simply no longer able to assist in the SLA without interference from the first language — that is, the student will see the L2 through the L1.

**Discourse Analysis:** Discourse analysis is a general term for a number of approaches to analyzing written, spoken or signed language use. Contrary to much of traditional linguistics, discourse analysts not only study language use 'beyond the sentence boundary', but also analyze 'naturally occurring' language use, and not invented examples.

Discourse analysis has been conducted in a variety of academic disciplines, including linguistics, anthropology, sociology, cognitive psychology, social psychology, and communication studies, each of which is subject to its own assumptions and methodologies. Discourse Analysis began to develop in the late 1960s and 1970s in most of the humanities and social sciences, in relation with other new disciplines, such as semiotics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and pragmatics. Whereas earlier studies of discourse analysis in text linguistics, often focused on the abstract structures of written texts, many current approaches examine a more dynamic study of spoken discourses.

**Corpus linguistics** is the study of language as expressed in samples *corpora* or “real world” text. This approach derives a set of abstract rules by which a natural language is governed or else relates to another language. The date collection and analysis were originally done by hand, but corpora are largely derived by an automated computerized process nowadays. Scholars in Discourse Analysis logically utilize copora as natural language data.

The corpus approach runs counter to Noam Chomsky's view that real language is riddled with performance–related errors, thus requiring careful analysis of small speech samples obtained in a highly controlled laboratory setting. Corpus linguistics does away with Chomsky's *competence/performance* split and its scholars believe that reliable language analysis best occurs on field–collected samples, in natural contexts.