Abstract

Jeong, Hyeon-Seon. 2004. Cultural Literacy for Understanding Internet Humor: Perspectives on Multiliteracies and Cyberliteracy. *Korean Semantics, 14.* This article considers cultural literacy in the context of the contemporary Korean society which is increasingly dominated by the Internet. South Korea is considered as a world leader in the field of Internet in terms of the flourishing culture as well as the technological development. In such a context, it seems that Korean language education needs to consider how to teach the diverse meaning making processes of multimodal cultural texts which are widely available on the Internet. Teaching about Internet humor seems to be an interesting pathway to cultural literacy education. I propose that multiliteracies and cyberliteracy should be two key words for understanding the dynamic, multimodal communication on the Internet where everything can be easily copied, replaced and transferred through the techniques of hyperlink. Multiliteracies refers to the ability to understand and design multimodal communication such as textual, verbal, visual, gestural, spacial languages and the interplays of the diverse languages. Cyberliteracy refers to the ability to understand how the language and culture made of hypertext can create different kinds of communication and cultures in the cyber...
space. Considering these two elements of literacy requires some significant changes in the perspectives and the areas of study in Korean language education.

Internet humor is discussed in this article as the object of a case study of rethinking Korean language education in terms of considering multiliteracies and cyberlitercy. Understanding humor requires very sophisticated language abilities even for native learners of Korean, considering that humor can be highly strategic communication that is used for a gentle criticism of particular kinds of people or social events. Multimodal humor texts made of diverse interplay of verbal, visual, textual and sound languages are often loaded with multiplicity of different social discourses, which require the audiences to reflect their own positions. Internet users need to consider that such multiple discourses are communicated in the cyber space where 'simulation' erases the traces of references of signifiers.

This article discusses these issues through a case study of Internet humor. The discussions here are ultimately related to the reconceptualization of 'cultural literacy' in the age of multimodal communication through diverse media. Considering this, understanding Internet humor can provide interesting ways to create more genuine dialogues in the classroom of learning Korean not only for native learners but also for non-native learners in the process of reaching a higher level of Korean competence.

핵심어: 인터넷 유머, 문화교육, 문화적 문식성, 다중문식성, 하이퍼텍스트

1. 인터넷 유머 이해와 문화적 문식성

낮선 사람과의 대화를 경험해 본 사람이라면 누구든지, 가볍고 효과적인 농담 한 마디가 어색한 긴장감 해소에 큰 도움이 될 수 있을음을 잘 알고 있을 것이다. 그러나 유머란 늘 발화자의 의도대로 효과를 거두는 것은 아니어서, 스스로 던진 유머가 제대로 작동하지 않아 난감해지거나 누군가가 가볍게 던진 농담에 은근히 불쾌해지는 경우가 생기기도 한다. 외국어를 배우는 과정에서 가장 어려운 점이 바로 유머의 이해라는 말에서도 알 수 있듯이, 유머는 메시지의 생산 주체와 이를 해독하는 수용자가 특정한 정보, 배경 지식, 정서