

AsiaNet Korean Elementary Online: Issues encountered while teaching Korean online in Finland

Mary Hyunhee Song*

Centre for East Asian Studies

University of Turku

Abstract

This teaching report on Korean language online illustrates processes of course preparation, teaching online, and issues encountered while teaching Korean language online in Finland. AsiaNet, the Finnish University Network for Asian Studies has organized a Korean language course for elementary level online since the fall semester of 2016. I prepared teaching materials for the course in the summer of 2016 and have taught the class for the fall semester of 2017. In the paper, firstly, I introduce some characteristics of the institution AsiaNet, background and features of teaching Korean online in Finland. Secondly, I discuss course planning from two pedagogical concepts: the content-centred teaching and the learning-focused approach to teaching. Thirdly, the paper reflects technology and learning through discussing teaching online, evaluation and interaction with students online. Finally, issues encountered while teaching Korean online will be addressed.

Keywords: *online Korean teaching, learning-focused approach, technology, AsiaNet*

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	1
Introduction.....	2
Learning/Teaching language in Finland and AsiaNet	2
Pedagogical questions on course preparation	4
Technology and Learning	5
Issues of teaching Korean online in Finland.....	7
Conclusion	9
References.....	11

* Email: mahyso@utu.fi

Introduction

The purpose of this teaching report is to introduce an online Korean course by the Finnish University Network for Asian Studies (hereinafter referred to as AsiaNet), to illustrate processes of course preparation and teaching online, and to raise awareness on issues encountered while teaching Korean language online in Finland. Firstly, in the next section, I present general information about teaching Korean in Finland by describing various adult education and higher education institutions. From this information, I question whether the online Korean course was needed and why AsiaNet started one. I answer these questions by explaining the ideas and goals of the Finnish education system as well as features and goals of AsiaNet.

Secondly, I illustrate my course preparation and teaching online through two pedagogical concepts: content-centred teaching and the learning-focused approach to teaching. I describe how the contents of the course were planned from the beginning and how the contents have been modified and revised as the class has proceeded.

Thirdly, I discuss learning, especially Korean language online, evaluation and interaction with students through technology in the third section. This is the core discussion in this paper because the whole course was co-ordinated online. And this leads to the last section where I discuss issues I encountered while teaching Korean language online in Finland. Finally, I conclude that teaching Korean language can shift to the learning-focused approach only when considering the local education system, in this case, Finland.

The limit of this paper is that the process of grading final exams is missing. Although grading the final exams is a big part of the teaching process, it was inevitable to leave out because the final exams and the grading process are still ongoing at the same time as the author is writing this paper. Therefore, I decided to leave out the final exam grading part entirely, but instead focus on other evaluations such as assignment or participation during the online class. Nevertheless, I expect this paper to be useful not only for those who are interested in the Finnish education system in general but also for those who are developing e-learning/teaching for language acquisition, especially Korean language.

Learning/Teaching language in Finland and AsiaNet

Finland is one of the countries which language learners would love. There are an abundance of language courses at various learning institutions available from universities to adult education centres. There are various institutions for adult education depending on their purpose of foundation such as *Kansanopistot*, *Kansalaisopistot*, *Työväenopistot* *Opintokeskukset*,

Kesäyliopistot, etc (Opetushallitus webpage). Since 2013, I have been teaching Korean language and culture at the Summer University of Turku (*Turun kesäyliopisto*) which is one of the continuing education centres, where more than 20 languages are taught. There are other Korean language courses in the adult education institutions in several cities in Finland such as *Joutsenon Opisto*, *Helsingin Seudun Kesäyliopisto*, *Tampereen Seudun Työväenopisto*, and *Pohjois-Pohjanmaan Kesäyliopisto*. In most of the cases, it is possible to acquire credits from these institutions and include them in a degree from high schools to universities. Furthermore, in higher education, the University of Helsinki has been teaching Korean language for many years. And the University of Turku (*Turun yliopisto*) has Korean language courses since 2011 through the Centre for East Asian Studies.

Korean language courses seem to have more supply than demand in the “language teaching market”, so why did AsiaNet have to start the online Korean course? I find this was based on the ideas and goals of education in Finland and the specific characteristics of AsiaNet. The Finnish University Network for Asian Studies (AsiaNet) organizes e-learning courses on Asia at the Bachelor’s, Master’s and PhD level. The courses are offered to member universities which include Aalto University, University of Helsinki, University of Jyväskylä, University of Tampere, University of Turku, University of Vaasa, and Åbo Akademi University as of spring 2018.

Hence, the background of teaching Korean online in Finland is based on the Finnish education goal that education has to be reachable by everyone. Therefore, AsiaNet’s online Korean course targeted those students who live far away in remote areas in Finland, those who are writing their thesis to graduate soon, and/or those who want to learn Korean online even though their home university does not offer a contact teaching course. But, why Korean? Korean Language is the only East Asian language offered by AsiaNet and Elementary Korean (3 ECTS) has been taught during fall semesters since 2016.

The beginning of the online course for elementary Korean started from students’ feedback from the previous year. Students’ feedback indicated that they wanted language courses in general at AsiaNet. The director of AsiaNet knew that there had been online teaching of Japanese language before at the University of Helsinki, so she knew this was possible to arrange. When the choice came to Korean language rather than Chinese or Japanese, the reason behind this was because it is more difficult to learn Chinese or Japanese characters compared to Korean letters which are phonetic. And therefore, the decision to establish a Korean language course at AsiaNet was made.

Pedagogical questions on course preparation

After this decision was made, in summer 2016, I was asked to build an online Korean course on Moodle by AsiaNet. The requirements for course building were 1) to build a Moodle page, 2) to utilize online lecture courses available from Korea University, 3) to create lecture notes for each lesson, 4) to create possible assignments, and 5) to add useful information.

The online course materials include video clips available online from other Korean universities or related institutions as well as the lecture notes I created for each week. There are also quizzes to play for students to expand their vocabularies on Quizlet.com. I also created assignments such as writing, grammar review, and online quizzes.

At this course building stage, I was not the teacher who was in charge of teaching. After a year, I taught this course in fall 2017. Before I started teaching in summer 2017, I edited and revised the course contents according to feedback from the previous students. In this preparation time, my concern was very focused on what to teach. I had to select contents before the course started on what to include and what not to include in the course material. Moreover, I edited lecture notes to enhance understanding of instructions because many of the assignment instructions are given as a written form in the lecture notes or on the Moodle page.

When a teacher plans teaching, several factors are considered. Recently the focus of teaching has shifted from “what” to “how” (Trigwell and Prosser 2014: 141–142). At the beginning of this online course, or at the stage of preparing the course contents, I (as a teacher) write and explain what the contents of the course are and what students will learn in the course. In addition, I also explain what they will be able to do after finishing the course so that students can expect their own achievement at the beginning of the course. This kind of explanation is included in the instructions usually in the name of “the file all the students should read before starting the course”. I think this will encourage students to study harder. In this sense, my teaching plan was very fixed and it was more based on content-centred teaching. The amount of online contents is fixed. The goals are set.

Although the goals are set, I realised that there are flexibilities in this online course and I would like to figure out students reactions through communication. However, I was wondering how to get opinions on the course contents from the students who are online and not in front of my face as in the ‘traditional’ classroom setting. I remembered that many students who take a Korean language course at the Summer University of Turku are interested in Korean culture. Therefore, I also ask students to give suggestions on other contents than what it is given in the course contents. This is the learning-focused approach to teaching (Postareff and Lindblom-

Ylänne 2008: 113). Often students want to learn extra cultural knowledge, thus I make the class more flexible. This flexibility is stress-free because I have a 10-weeks of contact teaching to cover their suggestions for extra cultural knowledge.

However, this became difficult in the online course. The AsiaNet online course is heavily based on content-centred teaching (Postareff and Lindblom-Ylänne 2008: 110). Teaching material is already packaged, the course syllabus explains the objectives of the study clearly at the beginning of the course. This is included in the material which all the students are supposed to read before starting the course. The syllabus explains detailed contents of study and assignments for each week as well as useful link for studying the Korean language. Therefore, asking what students want to learn through the course was problematic for the AsiaNet online course.

Learning about my students before the course started was also tricky. I sent a survey about students who are taking the AsiaNet online Korean course to ask their basic background related to language acquisition such as their mother tongue or experience of learning other languages. However, the return rate of this survey with answering these questions was so low that I was unable to see the big picture of students' levels or expectations from students. In the 'normal' contact teaching setting, I usually print the survey and hand them out and recollect them. In this case, students instantly fill in the information and I could gather information about their language experience much easier. I created this survey to know more about students' level of Korean language or knowledge on Korean culture because there is no placement test for especially beginner's courses. Often in the beginner's course, some of the students already have enough knowledge to study the advanced Korean culture course due to their personal interests and others do not have any previous knowledge at all. Often, balancing these different levels of the students is challenging. In the AsiaNet online course, it was challenging to see the differences among students due to the lack of data from them.

Technology and Learning

Once the AsiaNet online Korean course begins, the course operates individually. Those students who applied for the course will get access to the Moodle page where all the course contents and assignments are included. However, each student may have different access to a computer, speakers, microphones, and printers. This may cause a problems for an individual student. This course can be a demanding course because students have to come and visit the Moodle page voluntarily every week to complete the learning and assignments. Lack of

contact-teaching may also cause problems for some students. I expect webinars can cover this at least in part.

I tried to solve the previously-mentioned problems by contacting students using technology such as webinars, weekly emails (from Moodle to students), individual emails (my personal email to a student), and creating local chatting groups. Webinars were given by each city. For example, two universities in Turku could participate in the webinar at the same time, and two universities in Helsinki could also merge into one group. Other universities participated in their own university precinct. Most of the universities could use Skype call through outlook, but one university did not have access to this. Therefore, the university offered a link to Adobe Meeting that I could attend as a guest. All the webinar schedules were pre-set and negotiated with administrators in each university due to the availability of classroom space. All the students got their notice through the class Moodle page as well as their emails.

In the webinar, I asked what they would like to learn in the course, any feedback or comments. Students could see me on their class screen, they could talk to me in real time and they could give me feedback or comments on the class. However, students tend to talk less in public especially in a classroom setting in Finland. More detailed feedback came through the feedback form after the whole course finished.

During the webinars, I could see students interact when I assigned conversation activities or reading-out activities. However, the local chatting groups we created during the webinars were not always active. Some groups talked more, other groups talked less. I encourage them to meet by themselves to practice speaking or review grammar, etc. However, it was not as active as I expected. Students seemed to prefer to study by themselves online rather than interact with other students through chat.

In terms of language acquisition, understanding can easily happen when students understand how the grammar system works, but another question still remains on whether students can utilise the language they understand in everyday life or not normally. When I explain the course contents at the beginning of the course, students are expected to learn these contents and they are tested in the exam and in the essay, or in their presentations to make the proper alignment in the course (Trigwell and Prosser 2014: 144). However, often language acquisition is evaluated by others in daily life as well. Moreover, the online course creates more difficulties in terms of checking on whether students learn in daily life or not without active interactions. Therefore, how much they utilise their learning in everyday life is often beyond my reach.

I emailed students who missed the webinars to do their supplement homework to pass the course. I also emailed every week on Friday to remind students of the deadlines for assignments and on Monday to encourage students to learn the new week's contents. However, this emailing is not any new technology, but rather an old school interaction. In addition, emailing can be often one way stimulation rather than interactions with students. Therefore, I had rather high expectations in the local group chat, but many students seem to feel too intimidated to chat with people they met only once during the webinars.

The online course is mere challenging. I comment on students' assignments instantly to get reactions from them so that their participations will be encouraged by my own replies. I realised that the online course could be a demanding job for teachers especially when there are too many students. I started this online course with 70 students at the beginning. Nevertheless, students are eager to use new technologies such as smartphone applications to learn or online meetings even though the teacher may be in another city. Therefore, planning classes for distant-learning university students is another challenge in the context of technology and learning.

Issues of teaching Korean online in Finland

Instead of finishing the paper with a hasty conclusion, I discuss some issues while teaching Korean online in Finland in this section. Lecturing has been the main method of university teaching for centuries. Finnish universities are no exception. It is a cost-effective way of teaching compared to seminars or workshops, especially for language classes. It is possible to increase number of students by using technology of connecting places online. However, sceptical questions on lecturing have been asked recently. Is lecturing valid? Is lecturing too passive to encourage students to learn? How can we make constructive learning during the lecture? My conclusion endeavours to answer these questions in language teaching.

Is lecturing invalid? Typical lecturing may be outdated. However, Charlton disagrees (2006). He says that "the lack of an accepted rationale for the method seems to make people feel guilty about using lectures" (Charlton 2006: 1262). He also argues that "[m]ore usually 'distance learning' methods are introduced, such as teaching by e-mail and internet; but this brings attendance-based universities into competition with cheaper, more convenient and (probably) better-quality distance learning institutions" (Charlton 2006: 1262). Although the AsiaNet Korean course was online, this course still included online lectures that students had to watch. Defining lecturing is confusing in this sense. Does lecturing mean that it happens online the same way as in a contact teaching class? Can lecturing be also online lecturing? In my opinion,

lecturing is lecturing whether it occurs in a class or online because of the way it delivers information. However, lecturing in contact teaching and lecturing online have to be defined separately according to where they take place, especially in Finland where distance-learning is inevitable for those who live in remote areas in Lapland or in Archipelagos. In this case, the discussion goes beyond lecturing. The question can shift to; do we need to meet for lecturing? Can teachers lecture without seeing students' faces and their physical presence in the classroom?

Moreover, defining lecturing is related to university. There are endless series of lecturing in the world in the name of 'Talk'. One of the best examples is TED Talks. There are also series of online talks/lectures on YouTube about whatever people know about their own knowledge. Are these also lecturing or "just" instruction how to do stuff? University students expect their lecturers to be professional in the field of what they are teaching. I am sure lecturers are qualified by university employment procedure and have several experiences of lecturing. However, does it mean that a university lecturer can deliver knowledge to students more effectively than YouTubers? The answer is fairly complicated to answer with Yes or No. So, is lecturing invalid or outdated? To answer this question, firstly we should know which lecturing, the lecturing in the classroom or online, and secondly which lecturer, professional university lecturer or professional YouTuber, and thirdly what kind of knowledge. Here, the focus is teaching and learning Korean. I think the language skill can be considered similar to the apprenticeship just as skills that need to be transmitted to students as "apprenticeship" (Charlton 2006: 1262).

However, it is difficult to persuade digital generation students to come to the lecture with contact teaching. Finland is one of the top ten countries which have the fastest internet connections in the world (Forbes). Many youth who are used to playing games online with advance technologies of 3D may think contact teaching is outdated and not encouraging students enough to learn through traditional methods of lecturing. They will be happily reading class materials from the class' website and learn more while doing this action because logging in online to access the material is also a demanding job as much as walking in the classroom for digital generation. Then, does offering all the class materials online function well? When I teach offline, I usually offer the class slides to my students to review, but this is definitely different from having been in the class because not every single word from the lecture is included. However, students may be tempted to think that reading slides may be enough and this can "damage the effectiveness of lectures" (Charlton 2006: 1263).

In the end, how can we make constructive learning during the language lecture? Students learn by reconstructing knowledge they learn in the class. However, interacting in the social context will give them more stimulation to reconstructing and reorganising the knowledge they have obtained. Lectures can be interpreted as “social events” (Charlton 2006: 1264). The online teaching I have at Asia Net had only one webinar session for each university. Although we meet online through a camera and a screen, students gather in the class in each university and make their own social event. Therefore, meeting people and gathering in a place together make humans as social beings.

On the teacher’s point of view, lectures are “performance art” (Jones 2007: 402). Actually I have been working as a performance artist for a long time in my career before. Therefore, teaching and performing are inseparable in my life. Both require similar skills to interact with audiences or students. Uplifting lectures can inspire students to learn better (Jones 2007: 402). Likewise, the performance artists’ role in contact meeting is the essential element to encourage students’ engagement in learning. It is possible that engagement can happen virtually (Jones 2007: 403). My Monday/Friday emails as reminders can function as motivating a significant context in students’ minds (Lonka and Ketonen 2012: 66). Students’ engagements usually happen online by writing about themselves, answering questions or commenting to one another online. Therefore, I agree that “[t]radition and transformation through technology can fruitfully coexist, if we have the will to allow them to do so” (Jones 2007: 404). Furthermore, “[w]e need to constantly reconsider and reconceptualise our educational practices” (Lonka and Ketonen 2012: 64).

Conclusion

Having been a teacher for several years may feel in vain occasionally, especially when conceptions and beliefs are often different depending on the situations. Meeting new kinds of students each semester brings another realm to teaching. What students have in their mind in terms of teaching and learning affects my teaching as well. In addition, teaching online is a new challenge for me this semester. This new environment of teaching often makes me think that my previous teaching experiences need to be completely refreshed in the new environment. Moreover, this void feeling can be deeper when teaching occurs in different disciplines because different disciplines approach learning and teaching in different ways (Parpala et al 2010: 270).

Some people think teachers can answer all the questions due to the aura that was created for teachers in human history. In my opinion regarding the university teaching, teachers have to be asked questions that they cannot answer. This often means students develop their thought

much further. Thus, more constructive learning can be done during the learning and teaching environment. And this is definitely reflecting my own learning from the university time of my study as the study reflects (Parpala et al 2010: 278-279).

In terms of teaching language, conceptions and expectations from students are various. Their conception on language learning is one thing, but knowing culture and understanding is also the other. Depending on students basic knowledge before they participate in the course, some students understanding can be much deeper and more academic than others who come without any knowledge at all. Due to the diverse students' background in the language course, teachers are often requested to balance between the gaps of students' previous understanding. Moreover, teachers can share their own ideas and opinions about teaching and learning with students more often to work on the same page together when we discuss cultural and linguistic knowledge. This is most unlikely to happen in an online course. The main purpose of the course itself also focuses on language acquisition rather than acquiring cultural knowledge and its background due to the mutual understanding or preconception that other classes on Korean Studies may cover cultural aspects. However, it is difficult to teach Korean language without explaining Korean language culture in the context of Korean society and culture for university level students who would achieve better language acquisition through grasping the context of Korean language in the Korean society and culture.

References

- Charlton, B. 2006. "Lectures are an effective teaching method because they exploit human evolved 'human nature' to improve learning". *Medical Hypotheses* 2006; 67: 1261-5.
- Eekelen, I., Boshuizen, P. & Vermunt J. 2005. Self-regulation in Higher Education Teacher Learning. *Higher Education*. 50 (3), 447–471.
- Entwistle, N. & Nisbet, J. 2013. The nature and experience of academic understanding. *The Psychology of Education Review* 37 (1), 5—14.
- Jones, S.E. 2007. "Reflections on the lecture: outmoded medium or instrument of inspiration?" *Journal of Further and Higher Education* Vol. 31, No. 4, November 2007, pp. 397–406.
- Lonka, K. & Ketonen, E. 2012. "How to make a lecture course an engaging learning experience?" *Studies for the Learning Society*, Vol, 2, Issue 2-3, 63–74.
- Parpala, A., Lindblom-Ylänne, S., Komulainen, E., Litmanen, T. & Hirsto, L. (2010). Students' approaches to learning and their experiences of the teaching-learning environment in different disciplines. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 80, 269–282.
- Postareff, L. & Lindblom-Ylänne, S. 2008. Variation in teachers' descriptions of teaching: Broadening the understanding of teaching in higher education. *Learning and Instruction* 18 (2008) 109-120.
- Trigwell, K. & Prosser, M. 2014. Qualitative variation in constructive alignment in curriculum design. *Higher Education* 02/2014; 67(2), 141-154.

Online Sources

- Forbes, <https://www.forbes.com/pictures/fhmf45fdef/no-10-finland/#1e23135223e3>
(Accessed on 20th February 2018)
- Opetushallitus, http://www.oph.fi/koulutus_ja_tutkinnot/vapaa_sivistystyo (Accessed on 23rd January 2018)