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STRUCTURE, AGENCY AND THE “TEACHING ENGLISH IN ENGLISH” POLICY: THE CASE OF SOUTH KOREA

This chapter investigates whether, why, and how agency was exerted by a policymaker when designing a language-in-education policy (LEP), drawing on the realist perspective (e.g., Archer, 2012; Joseph, 2002; Layder, 1997). The agency of “implementers” of language-in-education policies, such as teachers and students, has often been investigated in the literature on LEP and policy processes in general. However, the agency or appropriation of the structural realities exhibited by those entrusted with decision-making powers has been under-researched. This chapter aims to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the agency of LEP actors, by providing insights into the agentive acts of this neglected group. It systematically analyses the policy-making structure which sets the background of their agentive acts, and how these acts utilize, resist or detour the structure.

Drawing on three in-depth interviews and over 20 e-mail exchanges with a government officer who translated the Teaching English in English (TEE) policy in South Korea into an in-service teacher-certification scheme—first introduced in 2009 in Seoul and then was expanded to the entire nation—the chapter sheds light on how a policy actor maneuvered through different forces and tensions relating to the scheme at different levels and spaces, thus revealing valuable insights into how LEP actors negotiate structural realities.

Thematic content analysis was conducted drawing on the agency framework suggested by Block (2012). This framework includes four dimensions through which to understand the agentive language practices of multilingual individuals in a particular context: time/history, culture, physical space, and semiotic resource use. The framework was slightly revised to suit the exploration of a policy actor’s agency in shaping the TEE policy in question. Of the suggested dimensions, the fourth, semiotic resource use, has been reformulated as the policymaker’s self-reported positioning of English as a semiotic resource.

Despite leaving clear fingerprints on LEPs, the agency of policy actors have not yet received due analytical attention. By systematically analyzing the agentive acts of the policy actor and exploring their theoretical and practical implications for policy formulation, it is hoped that the paper will contribute to a fuller understanding of language policy and its planning processes.

Key words: agency, structure, policy actors with decision-making power, policy formulation, South Korea, agency framework

Introduction

This chapter investigates the agency of policy actors with the power to formulate policy. Agency is often narrowly understood as individuals' power to act against structures that hinder their agentic movements. This paper, parting with the binary opposition between agency and structure, conceptualizes agency as a distinct layer of the social realm encompassing human beings' capacities to negotiate, in light of their goals, the constraining and enabling forces of structure (Joseph, 2002; Layder, 1997). Structure is conceptualized not necessarily as a hindrance to achieving one's goals, inasmuch as individuals can, at times and in certain contexts, draw from structural resources in their attempts to fulfill their goals (Block, 2012; Marginson, 2014). Agentic acts thus conceptualized as both personalized and situated, and contingent on interaction with distinct structural processes, would benefit from a detailed analysis of the structure.

The agency of policy actors has been researched ever since policy researchers started to pay attention to grassroots actors' mediation of policies (Hill, 2005; Püzl & Treib, 2007). However, these investigations were initially more focused on the mediation and translation of policies by the "implementers" or "subjects" of policies. In the case of language-in-education policies (LEPs), the literature has thus far focused on acts within schools and educational institutes by principals, teachers, and students, or, if beyond these boundaries, on agency practiced in homes and communities (e.g. Choi, 2017; Wiley & García, 2016). However, despite their crucial role in shaping the landscape of LEP processes, the acts of those who have decision-making powers have scarcely been researched. Howlett and Mukherjee (2017), for instance, observe that the relevant literature is "rudimentary and fragmented," especially regarding the degree and process of decision-makers' involvement in policy formulation (p. 4). This chapter aims to address this research gap.

The chapter starts with a conceptualization of agency. This is followed by a review of the research on policy formation and formulation. Previous studies on the agency of those with power in policy formulation will be discussed, with a particular focus on LEPs. The chapter then moves on to discuss findings from a case study on the agency exercised in relation to the Teaching English in English (TEE) policy in South Korea by a government officer entrusted with formulating an initiative to develop students' English proficiency. The TEE policy was an initiative proposed by the government to develop students' practical command of English, in the context of South Korea where English-language education is a central political issue and English is considered as an important social capital (Choi, 2017). The policy, which was first implemented in 2001, promotes English as the medium of instruction for English language teaching, as well as the communicative language teaching approach which postulates that language learning happens most when the target language use is encouraged rather than the language is studied as a subject. The policy has been enforced through different initiatives such as dispatching native-speaking English teachers to public schools, and running English villages for students and overseas immersion programmes for teachers (see Choi, 2015; Choi & Leung, 2017, for further details of the TEE policy and related initiatives). Drawing on three in-depth interviews and over 20 e-mails, the chapter will provide valuable and much needed insight into the agentic acts of a policy actor with decision-making power, negotiations with the various constraints and enablements of structure, as he worked towards realizing his ideal English-language education scheme through the LEP.

Literature Review

Agency and structure

Theorists of agency, despite their shared concerns with the relationship between structure and agency, have conceptualized agency differently. This has made it rather difficult to synthesize findings across studies. The debate on human agency not only dates as far back as the early Enlightenment era

(Emirbayer & Mische, 1998), but has been complicated by an accumulation of parallel and somewhat divergent terms. Layder (1997), for example, discusses agency in relation to creativity. He contends that creativity can help make sense of the productive and transformative nature of human behaviors as opposed to the social order. Archer (2012) relates agency to reflexivity: acts are made possible through reflexive analysis of the external circumstances within which one is situated when making decisions. These convergent yet diverse understandings of the concept and related terms sometimes lead to confusion.

In this chapter, agency refers to the negotiation process an individual engages in between their goals and external structural constraints and enablements (Joseph, 2002; Layder, 1997), rather than to an ideal capacity to execute one's will free of all restrictions, reflecting the perspective taken by realist thinkers (see Ch.1 for a detailed discussion of this perspective). Thus, agency and structure have a dialectical relationship, shaping and being shaped by each other (Ratinen & Lund, 2016), yet at the same time retaining distinct and emergent properties. In this sense, agency can thus be exercised and observed analytically through a particular "project," whereby an individual pursues his or her goals on a particular issue and must therefore deal with structural forces, resulting in a complex process of negotiation. This process may take the form of resistance when structure compels actions or states not aligned with agents' goals, and utilizing and appropriating structural resources when favourable to agentive goals.

In this sense of agentive acts, structure provides the context against which agentive acts acquire meanings. Structure refers to any elements, "relationship" among which constitutes a society (Archer, [2012]2017, p. 238), and is reproduced or transformed through agentive acts (Brock, Carrigan, & Scambler, 2017, p. xvi). It "constrains and enables" agents, that is, they can function as resources and tools for agentive acts or present hindrances and barriers (Block, 2012; Marginson, 2014). To fully understand this relationship between agency and structure, it is necessary to disaggregate the latter, for which purpose I will adopt Block's (2012) framework, which will be discussed later.

Policy actors and policy formation and formulation

Policy actors can be categorized in different ways, for instance, according to their pattern of engagement with a policy (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012), their official status, or their location (Lee, Lee, Kim, & Song, 2015). For this paper, however, I find Zhao's (2011) categorization most appropriate. He categorizes actors involved in language-in-education planning as those with power (e.g. the government), those entrusted with formulating policy (e.g. scholars), those who exert social influence (e.g. elites), and those with interests (e.g. users of the language). This paper focuses on actors with power.

Policy formation, which has been relatively neglected in research on the policy process, is currently gaining its due academic attention. The setting of policy agendas, in particular, has become a popular area of research. It is now well understood that the setting of policy agendas is not necessarily rational and information-driven, but rather an end result of political struggles (Ball et al., 2012; van Veen & Slegers, 2006). It has also been found that agenda setting is not necessarily a local event, but is often influenced by what happens outside a polity (Verger, 2014), even though the use and degree to which a global agenda is adopted differs across contexts (e.g. Forestier, Adamson, Han, & Morris, 2016).

Once the agenda is set, the details of the official policy must be decided. This process of policy formulation, or the "matching and often mis-matching, of goals and means" (Howlett & Mukherjee, 2017, p. 3), is the arena where dominant ideologies, the goals of different stakeholders, and contextual affordances and limitations meet and sometimes clash. It is very important to understand this formulation process, as how a set agenda will be dealt with is largely determined at this juncture. Here, however, as Howlett and Mukherjee (2017) observe, the relevant literature is "rudimentary and fragmented" at best (p. 4). Previous research has typically studied the policy formation or

transformation made by “policy subjects” or end-users of policies at the grassroots level. These studies show, for instance, that these actors’ beliefs and identities contribute to shaping the practiced policy (e.g. Choi, 2015; 2017; Spillane, 2004). However, little is known about how those with power shape a policy during the policy-formulation processes. The situation is not much different for LEPs, although there are a few exceptions, as discussed below.

Structure and agency of actors with decision-making power in LEP formulation

Zhao and Baldauf (2012) show how China’s socio-cultural setting has historically functioned as a structure shaping LEPs. Although their agency is mentioned in passing, the actors remain in the background, identified only as a group such as “the Ministry of Education” and “reform-oriented scholars.” How they exerted agency is not discussed. In contrast, Johnson and Johnson (2015) do focus on the agency of policy actors, particularly those with decision-making powers, and investigate how district-level policymakers function as arbitrators formulating policy agendas in a way they deem most relevant to school curricula. Their study shows that the factors affecting such arbitration were interaction with other actors, their own pedagogical beliefs, and their assumptions about languages and their expected role in society. Fenton-Smith and Gurney (2016) analyzed how structures at the macro and meso levels affected policy actors’ engagement with power while designing an LEP on academic English courses for international students in Australian universities. Structure was described from the perspective of staff in the case universities. It was analyzed at the macro level, in terms of national policy and expectations of international students, and, at the meso level, in terms of the attributes of university graduates and the attitudes of senior staff towards the policy.

Insightful as they are, these studies leave several questions unanswered. This shortcoming highlights a need in LEP research for comprehensive and systematic accounts of structural constraints and enablements. While Johnson and Johnson (2015) do not explicitly discuss these issues, Zhao and Baldauf (2012) broadly discuss them as the socio-cultural background, and Fenton-Smith and Gurney (2016) looked into diverse aspects of structure albeit without a systematic framework other than the three levels of macro, meso, and micro. In addition, except for Fenton-Smith and Gurney (2016), there has been no discussion of how actors with power exert agency or engage with the structural resources. This paper aims both to address these gaps and respond to Howlett and Mukherjee’s (2017) call to profile how policy actors create LEPs by negotiating the forces of structure.

Context

To set the background to the discussion, it should be noted that in South Korea, education, particularly English-language education, is a central political issue (Choi, 2017). Every new government, or new leader of an institute with the power to do so, initiates a new policy or revises previous policies. Because English proficiency is perceived as conferring important social capital, indicating people’s social standing and affecting their life chances, individual households have invested a considerable amount of financial resources. Based on a comparison with English education systems in other nations, some analysts, including Park (2009), have characterized the general approach towards English education in South Korea as “feverish”. Against this background, English education reforms are often initiated by politicians to raise their visibility and reputation. What has made matters more complicated is that each political party has a very clear stance on educational issues, including English education. These collectively have led to an extreme degree of instability and politicization of educational policy, in particular as regards to English education, and caused reform-fatigue among schools, parents and students, especially in relation to college entrance exams (Ahn, 2008; Yi, 2008). Accordingly, educational stakeholders have recently called for the establishment of a new institute independent of politics to oversee educational policy (Minbyun, 2017; Yi, 2017). (For further discussion of the role of English in South Korean society and related issues, see Chung & Choi, 2016 and Choi, 2017).

Furthermore, in Korea, all major educational agendas are centrally decided (Kim, 2002; Choi, 2017)—mostly by the Ministry of Education (MOE), although also by political figures, including the President or the Mayor. Once the chosen agenda has been communicated to the local educational offices, the relevant divisions in such offices formulate the details of a policy. This leads to variations in policy across regions. These regional divisions are accountable to the MOE for their policy details and how they have ensured the filtration of the policies to schools.

Finally, the organization of the regional offices that decide the executive plans of a policy is volatile and changes often. For instance, in the case of the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education (SMOE), the division in charge of LEPs is the Secondary Education Division. Within the past five years, this division has been renamed and reorganized twice, and the English Language Education Policies Department, which used to be a separate department under the division, has been dissolved (SMOE, 2016). The staff in regional educational offices are also very mobile. The majority of officers change their positions and move between the regional offices and schools, a career in the office often becoming a stepping stone for promotion to vice-principal or principal at a school.

It is in this context that the policymaker discussed in this paper was entrusted with formulating a policy based on the official agenda for English education, i.e. to develop students' English proficiency rather than their knowledge about the language (e.g. grammar and vocabulary knowledge). This agenda has been reproduced and reemphasized through initiatives following two interrelated themes: to use English as the medium of instruction, and to use communicative approaches for English teaching, even though these initiatives have been received differently at different times and by different people. Both of these aspects are to be discussed as part of the LEP, as pedagogy planning is an integral part of LEP (Choi, 2018; Liddicoat, 2004), and the two have long been paired in discussions of the LEP in the context of the current study.

Data and Research Methods

The data include three in-depth interviews and over 20 e-mail exchanges with a policy actor, a high-ranking government officer who used to lead the Secondary Education Division of the SMOE on English education-related policies. This officer, whom I will call Phillip¹, oversaw the translation of the TEE policy and developed an in-service teacher-certification scheme by liaising with different relevant organizations, organizing and leading a task force, and then revising the scheme after its initial implementation. The central roles Phillip played in formulating and implementing this TEE policy as well as his track record of agentive engagement with the structure as a policy maker makes him the best candidate to be analyzed for this research. Having worked as a policy maker through a number of presidencies and educational reforms, his experiences could also provide valuable information about how the agency of the policy actor was exerted and refined through different times. Phillip believes in an LEP that facilitates the development of students' English proficiency, and believes that using English as the medium of instruction for English teaching (EMI) will help achieve this goal. The EMI policy he wrote, however, does not promote exclusive use of English—a foreign language to most students—but allows for using Korean, most students' mother tongue, to enhance their learning. He has always added pedagogic prescriptions to the EMI policy, promoting communicative approaches, believing that the spontaneous use of English is necessary for developing students' command of the language. He also believes in English being an indispensable social capital, and that rather than just good marks in the subject, practical command of expressive skills is what ensures life chances. He has pursued equitable public education accessible to all students regardless of their socio-economic background, and LEPs that support students in developing their practical command of English within the public-education system, without relying on private tutoring. He has

¹ I chose an English name, as he often uses his English name when working.

confidence in the benefits of his LEPs, which improved a whole generation's English proficiency. As he observes:

It was often said that with 10 years of English education, students could not even express themselves. It was true for our generation, as education at that time was different, and so people could not speak English. However, the 6th and 7th national curriculum made communication the aim of English education, and thus some of those in their 20s and 30s are fluent, and if not, they can at least manage to express themselves in English . . . The IMD report, the report from Switzerland, shows that the English proficiency of Korea was worse than China and other countries, but it now performs better than China or Japan, in terms of TOEFL and others. After I left the post, however, there were a lot of complications.

The data were collected in Korean, and translated by two researchers to ensure consistency, and also minding cross-cultural understanding (Halai, 2007; Twinn, 1997). Literal translation was employed in principle, although when this was not plausible translation for meaning was also adopted. Thematic content analysis was conducted on the entire data, although, as specified earlier, Block's (2012) framework was adopted to make sense of agentive acts. This framework was proposed as a useful approach to exploring the multilingual practice of individuals—however, it seemed, with a slight revision, to be equally useful for analyzing the acts of the policy-maker in shaping a particular LEP. Block suggests analyzing agentive acts based on four dimensions: time/history, physical space, culture, and the role of language in the act. Of the suggested dimensions, the fourth has been modified to refer to the positioning of English as a semiotic resource by policy actors—as inferable, that is, from the policymaker's account of policy actors' understanding of English as a socio-cultural resource. The framework was expected to prove useful in systematically analyzing structural processes and how the policymaker interacts with it when making an LEP. Half of the data were analyzed by two researchers, including the author, using the same framework, thus ensuring to some extent analytical reliability and consistency. The few discrepancies in analysis of the data were discussed, and the author analyzed the rest of the data to reflect this discussion. Finally, it should be noted that the four dimensions are interrelated and interact with one another, and, therefore, some events which were analyzed from one dimension were also referred to while discussing another dimension.

Findings

The findings will be discussed organized by the four dimensions of agency framework as discussed above, which draws on Block's (2012) framework. An overview of the interaction between the TEE scheme and the constraints and enablements of structure, drawing on the framework, is presented in Figure 1. Regarding the first dimension, the timeframe, the policymaker associates with the TEE scheme, the focal LEP, covers five presidencies, from that of President Kim Young-sam [1993-1998] to that of President Park Geun-hye [2013-2017]. The spaces mentioned range from the policy division of the SMOE to the global context. Culture—another important analytical category—is conceptualized as constitutive of four distinct yet related levels. At the global level, this includes the trend whereby international educational organizations such as UNESCO set educational agendas; at the national level, for instance, the politicization of educational issues; at the regional level of Seoul, pre-service teacher education and the teacher-recruitment process, among others; and finally, in the SMOE office, the fact that appointment as a regional officer is seen as an opportunity to prove one's capacity as a school vice principal or principal, as well as the hierarchical, and inward looking culture. Finally, two conflicting approaches to English as a semiotic resource are observed. Both camps think that their own approach will improve students' life chances: one by ensuring all students' attainment

Table 1. Dimensions of structure and agentive acts of the policymaker

Dimensions of structure		Alignment with the policymaker's ideals	Acts of the policymaker in response to structural constraints and resources	Features of the policymaker's agentive acts
Time and history	Changes that came during the previous four presidencies	Yes mostly, but not during the IMF period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issued initiatives to support four presidents' educational visions and agendas, which were aligned with his own educational ideals. • Downsized the Native English Teachers scheme due to lack of resources during the IMF period. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read about emerging changes and appropriated them. • Predicted the changes and even introduced new changes that would be helpful in realizing his ideal LEPs.
	Changes under President Park's government	No	<p>[See the discourse section for changes within English education and his actions]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriated policies, e.g. Absolute Assessment policy, in response to the budget cut in English education. 	
Physical space and culture	Global context	Yes No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enforced foreign-born policies aligned with his own educational beliefs. • Resorting to task forces, he resisted excessive teacher accountability and evaluation, which are detrimental to teacher morale. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopted practical measures and used his English ability and trust in him to reach out and move across spaces both physically and symbolically. • Looked for new spaces to practice what he believed in. • Learned, incorporated, and defied "the culture".
	South Korea	Depends on how these are appropriated by other actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viewed issues from multiple perspectives, being aware of the politics around English education. • Made an LEP that provides all students with opportunities to develop English proficiency through state education, English proficiency being an important social capital. 	
	Seoul Metropolis	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revised the TEE scheme back toward his original design in respond to teachers' resistance which is aligned with his own position. 	
	SMOE	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reached out against the hierarchical and inward-looking culture and physical separation of institutions. 	
Discourses	All students should develop English proficiency; the priority of education	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriated the discourses on English education and education in general to support his own LEP and related initiatives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriated the favorable discourse while contesting a

	is to help students realize their potential			new discourse which debilitates his LEP upfront
	The role of English in society should be minimized; the priority of education is students' well-being and happiness	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contested the new discourses and sought new ways to fit his LEPs under the contexts and new discourses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adapted his strategies to fit the new context or waited for another change of discourse.

The policymaker's agency: Regarding time and history

Phillip, the policymaker, weaves time and the history of related policies into his story of policymaking. To him, political and other changes over time imply changes being imposed on LEPs, or create the need for LEPs to be revised accordingly:

It was the early 2000s when the concept of TEE was first developed, in alignment with the educational reform of 1995, started by President Kim Young-sam in 1994. The 1995 reform emphasized globalization, and thus, English was given primacy, and communication-oriented reform was started . . . Then, in 2000, or 1999, the government announced the TEE policy and asked the regional offices to implement that . . . As the educational context is changing, there are new needs now, immigrants from other countries, and changes coming from abroad.

The duration of the TEE project has spanned five presidencies, although the current analysis into agency mainly concentrates on processes taking place during two governments, those of President Lee Myung Bak [2008-2013] and President Park Geun-hye [2013-2017]. Phillip considers the first four presidents' tenures as favorable toward English-language education, and sees President Park's as a setback.

English-language education was emphasized from President Kim YS's presidency, and it reached its peak during the presidency of President Li MB. [Communicative approaches to English education] were strongly promoted, so native-speaking English teachers were again dispatched, and teachers were pressured, and there was a survey of TEE practice. Then came the National English Aptitude Test (NEAT), which again emphasized communication, and this led to great pressure for senior high school teachers . . . Teachers started to change their lessons . . . The TEE scheme was made along these lines. However, after Park became the President, English education was again touched on. It is on the wane. TEE lessons—as the English team has been dissolved in the MOE—are no longer emphasized . . . English education has regressed. The focus is once again on the college-entrance-exam type of reading; speaking and writing are no longer taught, and the college entrance exam has resumed its tyranny.

Phillip rode the tide during the first four presidencies by designing and implementing large and small initiatives that fitted each president's vision and agenda. These were aligned with the LEP he believes in, and included providing action-research funds that promote communicative English-language teaching, and organizing taskforces that designed and published a series of teaching-and-learning resources on topics such as teaching grammar through communicative activities and assessing students' English writing. He supported the NEAT Program that was planned to replace the English section of the national college entrance exam and measure actual speaking and writing abilities rather than receptive skills, but which was abolished later in Park's presidency. Regarding this adverse period, Phillip clearly expresses his disappointment with and disapproval of changes in policy discourse through the use of negative expressions such as “on the wane,” “regressed,” and “tyranny.” How he dealt with the changes that came with the appearance of new discourses on education in general and English education in particular (which were presented to him as budget cuts by the City Council, for instance) will be discussed further below.

It should be noted that Phillip did not just passively cope with changes brought in by the passage of time, but tried to exert his agency in different ways. These included predicting what the future would

bring, so that he is ready for it when the change actually arrives, and even by actively bringing new agendas into the LEP landscape at the time he wanted and before being asked to do so:

People say that the initiatives I started were adopted by the entire country two years later. For instance, collaborative language learning and emphasis on communication are now adopted by the whole country. How did I do this? I read publications from UNESCO, the UN, and the OCED, so I could foresee trends . . . Of course this was possible because I can read English, and I read a lot.

I read *English Next*, and I saw that the concept of native speakers was changing: accent does not matter anymore and it doesn't matter what dialect you use, as long as communication is possible . . . Native-speaking English teachers therefore needed not be recruited from the inner-circle countries either . . . What would be the direction for the era in which this new trend is realized? Communication-centered and content-based English lessons.

He thinks his agency over the temporal aspect of structure came from his efforts to read moves by international educational organizations leading global educational changes, and revising existing schemes to reflect the changes.

Another strategy he used was to appropriate new policies coming into the educational landscape. For instance, he showed his intention to appropriate the new policy of turning the national annual college entrance exam into an absolute assessment from a relative assessment, which is currently being developed. He sees the potential of this new policy, even though it might seem totally irrelevant to the LEP:

I personally support the absolute assessment policy. The NEAT was an absolute assessment. If the NEAT system was to be adopted, then you don't have the 9 grades any more, but only 5, which grants many students A or B. And then speaking tests or performance assessments get to have more weighting.

He sees how to appropriate the new policy. With the changes the absolute assessment policy will bring in, he cannot affect English education through the national college entrance exam any more. However, he can indirectly refocus language education on English proficiency by increasing the importance of the school-based assessments that have traditionally measured students' practical command of English.

In summary, his acts are situated within the time and history of English education and beyond. As a policy maker, he has to respond to changes that different times, which are punctuated by different presidencies, bring into his policy-making scene. In addition to being reactive, he has also proactively prepared for the expected and planned changes, and even brought in changes on his own timeline, creating new resources for himself such as being credited as a reader of the future, or acknowledgement of his expertise for a new policy as an experienced leader.

The policymaker's agency: Regarding the existing culture and physical space of education policymaking

This section discusses Phillip's engagement with two additional aspects of structure: its physical space and culture. While physical space simply refers to the space in which a body is situated, culture is more complex. In this chapter, culture is understood as a "set of values, conventions, or practices" (Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary, 2017) associated with schooling and education policymaking. The concept, however, refers limitedly to what Archer (2005, p. 18) termed the cultural system, and

not the socio-cultural interaction, thus, more focused on the idealized and assumed aspects of culture, rather than the practiced and enacted. Individuals seek to uphold their beliefs, vindicate their theories, and deem certain propositions true, resorting to the cultural system (Archer, 2005, p. 25).

Phillip situated the TEE project within four concentric spaces, from the outermost space of the world, to South Korea, Seoul Metropolis, and, finally, the innermost space of the Secondary Education Division in the SMOE. His agentive acts can be understood in terms of the boundaries set by the education or policymaking culture embedded within different spaces, and by how he exercised his agency in appropriating or defying them. He mainly located the TEE policy as appropriate to Seoul-based education, as other regions have their own versions. However, he often made efforts to transcend the limitations set by these spaces, considering the interrelatedness across spaces.

I will start the discussion from the outermost space of the world. Most of the policies related to English education are imported from countries where English is the mother tongue for most people (Choi, 2017). It is also notable that Phillip, as a policy actor with power, actively sought to learn about international trends in English education and appropriated them, as discussed earlier. However, Phillip noted conflicting trends at multiple levels. For example, the culture of accountability and the intensification of teacher evaluation, which his successor drew upon to justify his version of the TEE scheme (i.e. through the certification of teachers), were in opposition to Phillip's autonomous, developmental approach to realizing his LEP, that is, giving teachers opportunities to self-diagnose areas for development and providing support to help teachers work on them. To defend his LEPs, he often referred to the trends which were aligned with his own LEP in his work-related communications and publications such as circulars.

In the national context, where educational issues are popular political issues and English is of common interest, policies on English education have been subject to shifting political stances and to the whims and fantasies of politicians hoping to raise their visibility. Although interested policy actors such as parents and publishers have, as described in the Introduction, recently been leading a movement to place education beyond the reach of political influences, English education remains a political issue. This becomes clear when considering how the City Council debates and reallocates budget:

So different members of the council fight each other, with us [from the SMOE] waiting. The budget for English education should be cut—no, it should not. It should be expanded—no it shouldn't . . . Whatever their personal opinions are, though, the council members already have the conclusion in mind, and try to adjust the budget accordingly, in fact just reflecting the political position of their respective political parties.

The fact that, in Seoul, teachers go through a very competitive three-phase recruitment exam, as well as the requirement to obtain a teaching certificate on an education-related degree programme at the level of Bachelor or above in order to sit in such exam, played an important part in the evolution of the TEE scheme. Phillip, who has English teaching experience, understands the context and how different versions of the TEE scheme under discussion might be experienced by teachers. Although it required more work and time, he also adhered to the standard procedure for developing a policy by organizing task-forces, holding public hearings, and collecting feedback from experts and teachers. Based on the information gathered, he insisted that the scheme should be a developmental scheme where teachers identify their area of development, engage with professional development activities with support from the SMOE. His successor, however, bypassed these processes, missing the opportunity to see the scheme from teachers' point of view, and made it a re-certification of teachers, creating redundancies and undue exasperation of teachers (see Choi, 2017 for the limitations of this version). Later, after constant criticism, he was replaced once again by Phillip.

All these changes and tensions arising outside the SMOE clashed in the innermost space of the SMOE, where different positions were adopted by different actors. Phillip's job was to coordinate these different positions, whether or not the individuals were aware of their own positions and differences. In addition to these external issues, in his work, he had to coordinate different functional units outside of the SMOE. He found the separateness of these spaces rather limiting:

The link between the institutes has become lost. This is why the role of the chief is important—you have to link all the parties. When I was at the SMOE, I invited all related institutes to meetings, including the SMOE team, the SETI, KEDI, SERI, and district educational offices . . . The website linking different institutes related to English language education was also part [of the LEP project]. Communication solves many problems.

By physically gathering all concerned parties into a new “space” of a taskforce and establishing an online arena for inter-institute communication, Phillip overcame barriers presented by the divisions between institutes working together on an LEP. These institutes include the SMOE which formulates the LEP; the government-run training center for teachers in Seoul; the government-funded research center helping to calibrate the details of the LEP to align them with recent research findings; a teaching-and-learning resources center; and district educational offices which help disseminate the LEP to individual schools. He also reached out to individual experts and teachers:

When you are making a new policy, you should do several simulations with the draft, get advice on it from experts and practitioners, receive a research report, and then revise accordingly.

However, the barriers between spaces sometimes solidified, depending on the division leaders. When Phillip was appointed to work at another institute, the circumstances changed drastically. Although he was still asked to help with the LEP, his awareness of such barriers was still intact.

I had been helping with the cleaning-up, but then I was no longer welcome. To receive advice from a previous leader I don't think would be very pleasant. It turned out this way, as the current supervisor did not seek advice from the previous team leader.

This is partly due to the fact that SMOE officers consider their own visibility, often abandoning their predecessors' policies in favor of their own, partly because of the marked hierarchical culture within some, reflective of the hierarchical culture within East Asia.

As [the LEP] was not the new superintendent's own initiative, it was cut off . . . He thinks, “Well, it is good.” But as it is not his own, he doesn't continue it. And as the superintendent doesn't say “Hey, work on this,” the division leader doesn't want to do it either.

These cultural features were not exclusively constraining forces. Phillip, for instance, aware of the hierarchical culture and diverging goals amongst different actors within the hierarchy, utilized this knowledge to his advantage to work towards his LEP vision:

When I was working, everything clicked. The presidential election pledges, the support from the superintendent who wanted to please the president, and me who wanted to improve English-language education.

He seemed to have mobilised the support of the superintendent, the person at the top of the hierarchy within the SMOE through invoking the presidential address, and perhaps effectively silencing some

opponents or resisters with goals different from his own, utilising the hierarchical culture to his own advantage.

When his agency as an LEP policymaker was circumscribed, for instance, when he was physically removed from the division, Phillip still practiced what he believed in, in the space where he could exert his power, such as the school where he was working then, rather than becoming exasperated.

It's heartbreaking to see that what I have built [the LEP] is crumbling down . . . The SMOE is turning a deaf ear to my advice. Still, I practice my ideal English education in [the spaces] I can find.

In addition to his active efforts, Phillip's credentials helped him exert agency beyond the official administrative space of the SMOE. With his extensive expertise being recognized, his advice has been sought nationally, enabling him to move between spaces:

Each region should come up with its own plan. Still, the SMOE's TEE certification was used as a benchmark by the MOE, and it announced that the scheme would be expanded to other regions.

Other regional offices made calls to me. "I heard that the SMOE did this, and how did it go?" Other offices trust what the SMOE has done . . . If you become an expert in an area, it may form a boundary around your activities, but it also becomes the reason people seek you out.

The spaces he is located within and the cultures embedded in these different levels of spaces could sometimes become barriers and a hindrance to his ideal LEP. He could, however, exercise his agency through actively learning about them, utilizing them, and sometimes defying them by creating new spaces and cultures, mobilizing the trust in him from others and/or his authority. When those unfavorable special boundaries and cultures prove to be unnegotiable as well, he would look for other spaces or wait for another time where and when he can realize the LEP he believes in.

The policymaker's agency: Regarding discourses about English as a semiotic resource

The final element of structure with which Phillip had to deal with in realizing his goals regarding the LEPs was discourses about English as a semiotic resource, either independent, or forming part of a bigger discourse such as globalization, which enter the policy-making scene. Phillip would appropriate the discourse generated by the government—whether a given policy agenda, or the visions of presidents, e.g. English as a tool for the globalization of the South Korean economy—to promote the pedagogy he believes in as part of the LEP, when possible. For instance, when the government promulgated the TEE policy to regional educational offices, he gladly engaged with it, and added the communicative approach to the LEP:

When the TEE policy was presented to the regional offices, it was quite vague. Just "Teach English in English." There was no clarification of what lessons constituted teaching English in English, and no guidelines on how to conduct the lessons . . . It was the SMOE that defined a TEE lesson, discussed the kind of lessons that should be conducted, and provided models. The SMOE provided guidelines stating that these should be communication-oriented, interaction-rich, learner-centered. It is not just about teaching English in English, but also about communication.

It can be inferred that this translation of the policy represents Phillip's own pedagogic beliefs: several times during the interviews and exchange of e-mails he talked about his "motto for English

education,” or his ideal English education, in terms of language being used as a medium of communication and being taught through content integrated pedagogy.

The discourse, however, has not always paralleled Phillip’s beliefs. Recently, he has had to negotiate two rather conflicting discourses about the best LEP. Both present English as a key resource to ensure better life chances, while promoting two completely different LEPs. One stipulates that the best LEP is one that helps develop students’ practical command of English by using public education to provide what only the “haves” can otherwise afford, that is, by teaching English in English, and promoting the use of English in class. This is the position that Phillip takes. The other states that the best LEP is to minimize the significance of English in public education, arguing that not all can obtain a practical command of English, regardless of the amount of support given, so the best way is to give all a pass mark if they meet the very minimal standard. This opposing discourse promotes an LEP conceptualizing English as an academic subject.

Students who got private tutoring were far superior in English, so public education was going to provide such education to all. That was the direction of my policies. The purpose was to provide a level field for the students who cannot afford private tutoring . . . The Progressives say that English education is not needed for all . . . They think that English and globalization are for the elite . . . The representative of the new political party says that English should be taught to those with ability, not to all. The government budget should not be wasted on those who cannot become proficient anyway. Those who want to cut the budget for English education . . . don’t like the system where “haves” who have good proficiency in English succeed . . . They in fact know the power of English, but they don’t like a society where the Conservatives, the elite, are successful.

This position frustrates Phillip. To him, minimizing the role of English in public schooling does not change the fact that it plays a prominent role outside school in broader society. He also points out even those who promote this version of LEP to marginalize English education do not believe in it: this position is taken only when discussing English education as pertinent to others and not to their own children:

People like them are self-contradictory . . . the city-council member I just mentioned, he funds English education in the school his own child attends. So he knows English proficiency is indispensable.

The other discourse change affecting the LEPs was the new emphasis on students’ welfare and happiness during President Lee’s government, which became a full-blown policy during President Park’s government. It was translated into the Free Lunch policy, which prescribes schools to provide free lunches to all students to minimize the visibility of socio-economic backgrounds in schools, and the Free Semester policy, which mandates to schools to allocate one term when students’ performance is not assessed so that they freely explore and reflect on their future careers without any concern about the grades. These policies, however, require funding, something that affected English education:

When the Council was budgeting for the Free Lunch policy and the Welfare policy, they needed money. Budgeting for policies is like the shape of a balloon. If you push one side, the other side should bulge. So if you want to expand the expenditure for Welfare, you should cut something out. You need something big, and English education holds a big portion.

When Phillip notes policy changes unfavorable to his vision, he resists, notably by contesting the discourse of budget cuts. However, instead of only confronting structural constraints head-on, he also looks for ways to navigate around them by revising LEP strategies:

The city council is pushing for the cut. I am working my utmost against it, but not sure how much I can budge. But will do all I can . . . I will take this as an opportunity to increase efficiency, devising [LEPs] using less money.

He also tries to see positive aspects in his work in order to remain resilient, so that when another opportunity arises, he can be ready to reengage with his ideals.

When you are on a long journey, it is helpful not to think too much, and enjoy the process . . . I will slave for the cause if I am called in again [to the SMOE], but I appreciate what I have now.

Discourses on English and English education, implicit or explicit, constituted another aspect of policy-making structure. Phillip appropriated the favorable discourses to support his own LEP by evocating and circulating them. Regarding adverse discourses, he exercised his agency sometimes by contesting upfront the discourses, or their materialization such as budgeting or new policies which push his LEPs out of the policy scenes, and, other times, by adapting his strategies to incorporate the new context in consideration or simply waiting out for another favorable discourse to revive his LEP.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored how Phillip, a policymaker who is entrusted with the power to formulate LEP policies, exercised agency in relation to structure. In this attempt, structure and agency were conceptualized to be in a dialectical relationship, and the structure was disaggregated into the four aspects: time and history, spaces, culture embedded within the spaces, and discourses on English as a semiotic resource. As found in previous research, what guided Phillip's agentive acts with respect to the LEP was his goals, which, in turn, were shaped by his belief system, including his vision for English-language education and view of English as a source of social capital. In realizing these goals, he had to negotiate with various structural realities. At various times, he managed to transform structural constraints into enablements, while at other times he was able to align his efforts with LEPs favorable to his ideals.

Though different aspects of the structure were discussed separately, in practice, they were all dealt with in one act. For instance, during the presidencies when changes planned were favorable to his visualized LEP, he was very active and issued both broad and local initiatives that enabled his ideal LEP to be realized at the level of schools, evoking discourses which are favorable to his ideal LEP (e.g. English as the key to the globalization of the country), and packaging his policy to be palatable and desirable to other policy actors. Meanwhile, he situated his agentive acts within the spaces and cultures he was located within; for instance, within the SMOE, by learning of the various positions and goals of the actors within the hierarchy. This ability of LEP actors to navigate within and across discourses has also been noted in the Chinese context (Zhao & Baldauf, 2012). Phillip, however, refused to be limited by the structural boundaries set by time, spaces, culture, and discourses on English. For instance, he would proactively predict changes to come and act accordingly. He would physically and symbolically bring people from different spaces to work together through taskforces and online communication. Building up his credentials as an expert in LEP making, he could exert his power outside of the Seoul Metropolis throughout the nation.

He also knew when to retreat and wait for a better time. When structural constraints were considerable, such as when he was assigned to work outside of the SMOE, and when English

education was taken off the main policy agenda, he would do what he could, such as providing advice or appropriating policies outside of English education. Rather than focusing on whether his advice was accepted by the office, he would work on communicating his educational vision when and where possible. When the discourse turned and worked against his ideal LEP, he searched for ways to minimize structural constraints upon agency, including devising strategies to make the LEP less costly, and minimizing or bifurcating the influence of people supporting discourses contrary to his LEPs. Finally, by focusing on his past achievements and future goals, he could remain resilient, and readied himself for new opportunities to exert his powers as policymaker.

These findings have both practical and theoretical implications for LEP policy actors' agency. Policy actors can maximize their agency by creatively and reflectively engaging with the structure. Phillip, though he was physically located in the Secondary Education Division in SMOE, and although there was no precedent for gathering various actors from different institutes together, overcame physical boundaries when formulating the TEE policy. By using his credential as an LEP expert to influence the people at the top of the hierarchy, he turned the hierarchical culture to his advantage. In addition to being an actor with power, through continuous study he adopted the role of "actor with knowledge," and increased his powers as policymaker. He also reached out laterally across spaces, making all related parties in charge of different aspects of an LEP part of the taskforce. This strategy ensured to some extent the relative success of the LEP at the school level. For instance, teacher-educators were recruited to persuade teachers—the key agents who determine the degree an LEP is implemented at schools (Choi, 2017; Wiley & García, 2016). Teaching-and-learning-resource developers were involved to raise teachers' awareness and provide them with the necessary tools to realize his LEP, i.e. teaching and learning materials (Choi & Andon, 2014; Choi, 2015). Finally, the policy maker cared for his own emotional resilience when faced with nonnegotiable barriers by focusing on the possibilities for actions, which is a useful, and necessary strategy, for as Ball et al. (2012) underline, policy landscapes change continuously.

These findings may contribute to future theorization of the agency of LEP policy actors with power. First, agentic goals are central guiding elements for agentic actions, and such goals can help actors coherently navigate LEP landscapes marked by changes, and provide strong motivation for greater coordination between other actors involved in LEP. These goals are, in turn, guided by pedagogical beliefs held by various LEP agents including teachers and school leaders (e.g. Choi, 2015; 2017; Spillane, 2004). The actions taken sometimes defied the structural constraints through creative reinterpretation or detouring of the constraints. These findings highlight the need for further investigation into the relationship between agency and creativity (Layder, 1997), and between agency and analytical reflexivity (Archer, 2012). These findings also echo our current understanding of the dialectical relationship between structure and agency (Ratinen & Lund, 2016).

Additional insights were gathered about policy formulation, notably the notion that agenda setting constitutes an important step in policy formulation. In addition, the impact of broader political processes and struggles on LEP processes was also highlighted (Ball et al., 2012; van Veen & Slegers, 2006)—e.g. the TEE policy being subject to the power games between the Conservatives and the new political party. It was also noted that the policy formulation process is also subject to global educational discourses (Verger, 2014), though policy ideas from other societies are often used only selectively and partially (Morris, 2012), and undergo a process of localization (e.g. Choi, 2016). Further investigation into the localization processes, particularly with regards to how the local and the global interact, will also help provide a more comprehensive understanding of the policy formation process in this globalized and globalizing world.

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Figure 1 The TEE 'Project'

