Raising Awareness of African-Americans and Their Culture in EFL Reading Classes

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This paper aims to raise awareness of Korean students and teachers about African-Americans and their culture and presents a model lesson plan of one of their traditional holidays for teachers to use in their reading class. Through a broad overview of African-American's history and pointing out misleading stereotypes of African-Americans, the extorted images of them are challenged. In addition, the characteristics of African-American English are presented in order to dispel myths about this particular dialect being ungrammatical and malformed. Also, as one way of understanding their culture correctly, a model lesson plan for a reading class that integrates vocabulary, reading, writing and culture based on style-and-strategy-based instruction is presented. The topic of the lesson being Kwanzaa, an original African-American holiday that shows the rich heritage and culture of African-Americans. This paper suggests that the presentation of culture in the EFL classroom should not only be limited to mainstream culture but also should encompass minority culture through an unbiased, holistic perspective.

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to raise awareness of Korean students and teachers of African-American culture in order to bring a positive perspective into English class. There are several reasons why it is important to raise cultural awareness in Korean class about African-Americans. For and foremost, it is often observed that Korean students usually have negative and extorted images of African-Americans, and Korean teachers also have stereotyped points of view about African-Americans and their culture.

In addition, in reality, it is basically almost impossible for students to learn
English from African-Americans in Korea because schools will hesitate to hire them as teachers. This situation perpetuates students' prejudiced points of view of African-Americans. Furthermore, few Korean students and teachers know about or indicate any interest in African-American history in the U.S. The lack of knowledge, negatively formed stereotypes, and avoidance of hiring African-American teachers all contribute to the misconceptions on African-Americans and their culture. Therefore, raising cultural awareness about African-Americans should be included in EFL reading classes in Korea.

To this purpose, this paper will begin with an overview of significant events in African-American history including slavery, the Underground Railroad, the Civil War, and civil rights movements in the 1960s. Then, some aspects which reflect slavery history today in modern society will be addressed. The topics to be challenged are stereotypes about African-Americans both in everyday life and media, misconceptions of oral literacy or illiteracy, and African American English Vernacular. Finally, this paper suggests a model lesson plan that teachers can use to inspire students to have positive and balanced points of view about African-Americans and their culture.

II. BROAD OVERVIEW ON AFRICAN-AMERICAN HISTORY IN THE U.S.

The history of African-Americans in the U.S. is fundamentally a part of the history of slavery. From about the 1640s, whites in the U.S. legally enslaved black people from Africa. Racial slavery became gradually common in every part of the U.S., and the slavery system lasted until 1865. The roles of slaves in the north and the south were different. Slaves in the north usually did work in homes while slaves in the south usually worked on farms and plantations.

What permeated all of slavery was their harsh treatment by owners. It was common for plantation slaves to be whipped and brutalized by slave overseers on plantations. If they were caught after trying to escape, many of them were maimed or killed. It was not unusual for the slave owners rape their enslaved African-American women, and it was possible for the owners to sell members of slaves' families, so that the members were scattered. In other words, they were treated as property, not as people, and they had no rights and no voice.

From the beginning of the 1750s throughout the first half of the 19th century,
there were several slavery abolition movements throughout the U. S. Some uprisings used force, and others used the legal system. For example, all the Northern states passed emancipation acts between 1780 and 1804. On the other hand, there were several rebellions against slavery. One of them was taking control of the Spanish slave ship, Amistad in 1839. In addition, thousands of enslaved African-Americans resisted slavery by trying to escape. The Underground Railroad was an organized secret system set up to help enslaved people escape from the South to freedom in the North or Canada. Harriet Tubman was the most famous conductor. She helped 350 slaves escape from the South.

As a result of consistent abolition movements, in the 1820s, some Midwestern states decided not to allow slavery. And most Northeastern states became free states through local emancipation. However, the demand for slave labor greatly increased in the South as the cotton industry grew explosively. The gap between North and South including issues on slavery grew further.

In this tense situation, Abraham Lincoln, the Republican and Northern leader, won the 1860 presidential election, and the South seceded from the Union. The conflict between a new southern nation, The Confederate States of America, and the Union resulted in the American Civil War beginning in 1861. At first, the Civil War was not a war against slavery. However, Lincoln began to believe that he could save the Union only by making the abolition of slavery a goal of the war. On January 1, 1863, President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation promising freedom for slaves in the Confederacy as soon as the Union armies reached them. Many slaves were freed in 1865 during the Civil War, but finally and completely by the 13th Amendment to the Constitution.

III. CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

The country faced many difficult challenges after the Civil War ended, including rebuilding the South and protecting the rights of newly freed African-Americans. Segregation in many public places continued, especially in the South. There were many segregated schools and segregation on public buses. Naturally, African-Americans have struggled to gain civil rights and equal opportunities. Especially in the 1950s and 1960s, there were reform movements in the United States to abolish racial discrimination of African-Americans and they were led by
famous African-American activists.

For example, Rosa Parks was a pivotal figure in the fight for civil rights. On December, 1955, a bus driver in Montgomery, Alabama, ordered Mrs. Parks to give up her seat to a white man. When she refused, she was fined and arrested. This incident prompted a city-wide bus boycott, which eventually resulted in a Supreme Court ruling that segregation on city buses was unconstitutional.

Martin Luther King, Jr. was a great man who worked for racial equality and civil rights in the U. S. He led protests and marches in many parts of the country for civil rights and racial equality during the late 1950s and early 1960s. He devoted himself for the right of African-Americans to vote, to go to good schools, to get decent jobs, and to have all the opportunities and freedoms enjoyed by other Americans. King believed that nonviolent protest was the best way to bring change. He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. In 1968, he was assassinated at the age of 39.

Another activist in this movement is Malcolm X. He argued that white Americans would never fully support equal rights for black citizens, so that African-Americans should develop the means to rely on themselves. He was shot and killed while speaking in New York City in February 1965.

As a result of efforts not only by the people mentioned above but also by many other African-Americans and Americans, the Civil Rights Acts were issued in 1965 and 1968. The law banned segregation in all public places, discrimination in employment practices and public accommodations, and discrimination in the sale or rental of housing in the United States.

Since the Civil Rights Movement, the situation of African-Americans continues to improve dramatically, in the economic, educational, and societal realms. However, African-Americans have faced discrimination, segregation, and second class citizenship in varied forms to a much greater extent than other ethnic groups. Still, African-Americans struggle to end such racist injustice, but their efforts have been often distorted by misleading stereotypes. Also, there are misleading perceptions considering African-Americans as oral and illiterate people. Those misleading perceptions reflect past slavery history in the modern society showing subconscious racist mind on African-Americans, which teachers and students should be aware of.
IV. AFFECTS ON MODERN SOCIETY OF PAST AFRICAN SLAVERY

1. Stereotypes

African-Americans in modern society often have to overcome with negative stereotypes many people have. African-Americans have been stereotyped as animalistic brutes in American popular culture. Stereotypes of African-Americans have included arrogance, athleticism, deviousness, dishonesty, addiction, rhythmic talent, incompetence, inferiority, laziness, unintelligence, noisiness, passivity, poverty, primitiveness, untrustworthiness, and violence. They are often portrayed as physically rather than intellectually oriented. They are more likely to be portrayed as unrestrained, hot-tempered, and more profane than whites or others in movies and television shows. African-American males are commonly seen in media singing, rapping, scoring a touchdown, dunking a basketball, hitting a home run, or committing a crime.

The stereotypes of African-Americans dating from the time of slavery are so powerful and omnipresent that they have negatively affected not only African-Americans but all Americans. Also, so much negative conditioning has resulted from these stereotypes such as mistreatment on African-Americans.

Therefore, one of the roles of EFL teachers in Korea is to raise questions and provoke thoughts on the extorted stereotypes on African-Americans. For example, they need to aware the negatively extorted images on African-Americans and expose differences concerning the treatment of African-Americans in the media to the students. By doing this little and important effort, African-Americans receive equal exposure, and Korean students can have balanced and unbiased perspective on African-Americans when they read about them and see them in everyday life or in the media.

2. Assumptions concerning oral ability and illiteracy

One of the misleading beliefs about African-Americans is that they are exclusively an oral people. For example, folk tales, proverbs, rapping, and the verbal performing arts in African-American culture are often widely recognized as oral in nature. In addition, since the 1960s, public arts performances, media
portrayals, and scholarly articles and books have celebrated and demonstrated the rich and varied oral culture of African-Americans (McHenry & Heath, 1994, p. 262).

It is, however, a misperception to consider African-American culture as oral in nature as McHenry and Heath strongly claims. One of the important consequences of focusing on oral communication of African-American culture is that it causes misperceptions about African-American history as one of an absence of reason and permanence. As McHenry and Heath presents, there have been literate habits including sermon, hymns, and spiritual narratives among African-Americans at various times and places. In other words, it is highly misleading to treat African-American culture as oral in essence. African-Americans' communication have been based on writing and reading to a great extent.

One of the reasons why the literate presence in African-American culture was not reported triggering a misleading perception on them as an oral people is related to the mass illiteracy of African-Americans throughout their slavery history. Slaves had little opportunity to become literate. Only five percent of them could read and write in the early of slavery history (Graff, 1987). There were severe penalties for literacy included whipping, loss of fingers, branding, and sale or segregation. Therefore, the African-American culture was maintained generation by generation by oral means.

However, after emancipation, the illiteracy rate of adult blacks had dropped from 93 percent to 10 percent by 1950 (Graff 1987, p. 227). Literacy levels among African-Americans rose continuously, and literacy changed not only African-American culture but also their mind. Even though there still exists discrimination against African-American students which has resulted in unequal education for them, it is evident that the distinction between an oral African-American culture and a literate white culture is disappearing.

Therefore, what teachers in EFL classroom should do is strive to ride misperceptions about the African-Americans culture, the misperceived "oral only" communication or illiteracy. Rather, EFL teachers and students should be aware of segregation and inequality in the past including fewer schools, teachers, inferior schooling, higher concentrations of children per school, and inadequate materials to African-American students in public education, especially in the South.
Another strong misconception of African-Americans is related to the language they use. Many African-Americans use African American Vernacular English (AAVE, hereafter), a form of American English spoken primarily by African-Americans. There are many salient features in AAVE including consonant cluster simplification, final consonant simplification, [theta] > [f] in word/syllable-final position, [ð] > [d] in word/syllable-initial position, [v] > [v] in word/syllable-medial position. There are several distinctive syntactic features such as copula deletion, multiple negation, future be, future perfective be done, and so on (Smitherman, 1977; Wardhaugh, 2002).

An AAVE speaker may exhibit all or only a few of these features, and because of the features different from those of Standard English, some consider AAVE as a bad English. They consider AAVE as an intrinsically deficient form of speech. They believe that AAVE is not acceptable in most cultural contexts, and it is socially limiting. Others, however, believe that AAVE is the result of a creole derived from English and various West African Languages. They believe that AAVE became a variety of the English language, particularly American English.

Depending on which hypothesis one stands on, the point of view on AAVE in public school education is also different. For example, proponents of AAVE as a bad English claim not to use AAVE in schools. They believe that using AAVE in schools would only impede the academic progress of young African-American children. Proponents of AAVE instruction in public education, however, accept AAVE as a distinct variety of the English language. They argue that African-American students would perform better in school and more easily learn standard American English if textbooks and teachers acknowledged that AAVE was not a substandard version of standard American English but a legitimate speech variety with its own grammatical rules and pronunciation norms.

In these two extreme situations, the biggest problem that AAVE speakers face is prejudice. Many people believe that AAVE is substandard to Standard English due to its lack of refinement. Because of this prejudice, many African-Americans are forced to be fluent in Standard English while maintaining their culture by being also fluent in AAVE. In stride with this prejudice are the Korean schools that will avoid hiring African-Americans since they are afraid students may pick up AAVE.
pronunciation or grammar.

However, as many scholars advocate (Delpit, 1995; Delpit & Dowdy, 2002; Smitherman, 1977, among others), AAVE is just as legitimate as American English. Therefore, teachers have to make their own points of view on how to deal with such issues when they teach students in a foreign language classroom. They need to know power elite’s perceived insignificance and rejection of Afro-American language culture (Smitherman 1977, p. 209). Teachers must understand that to even try to teach a dominant discourse to students who are members of a non-dominant oppressed group would be to oppress them further (Delpit, 1995).

V. A MODEL STRATEGY BASED INSTRUCTION LESSON PLAN

This paper challenges and calls attention to the extorted perspectives on African-Americans and their culture by overviewing their history, negative stereotypes, misperceived myths such as African American English Vernacular or illiteracy. It is commonly observed that most Korean teachers and students possess these biases and prejudices just as many Americans do as well. One of the reasons is that teachers mostly focus on teaching literacy skills in a narrow sense teaching vocabulary and comprehension of the text. Literacy is much more than reading and writing. One never learns simply to read or write, but to read and write within some larger discourse, and therefore within some larger set of values and beliefs (Gee, 1989). Therefore, it is important for English teachers to be aware of and invite African-American culture into their classrooms while teaching English to their students. It is important that this be done, and it would not be a difficult process for teachers to implement.

More specifically, as one effort of implementing positive and balanced points of view about African-Americans and their culture while reading, the following model lesson plan is presented. The lesson plan concerns the topic of an African-American holiday, Kwanzaa. Teaching principles of goals to be achieved will be broad sense of literacy education, task-based teaching and learning, cooperative teaching and learning, and student-centeredness.

Mainly 3 strategies for instruction were chosen—reading strategy including skimming for the main idea and strategically summarizing material, writing strategy for making test questions, and vocabulary strategy for self-selecting key

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vocabularies. Also, other skills such as listening and speaking are integrated in reading instruction to enhance students' reading capability. Especially, Framework #3 (Cohen & Weaver, 2006, p. 141) was applied for strategy training for this purpose. Language learning strategies taught are marked in [ ] below. Overall, over the course of the lesson, students will be able to read and understand in a collaborative manner the passage about an ethnic holiday of African Americans.

1. A Model Lesson Plan

1) Materials
   ② Clustering graph
   ③ Crossword puzzle
   ④ Reference list of Kwanzaa (Appendix B)

2) Steps
   (1) Preparation (5 minutes): The teacher asks students to predict what their story will be about based on the cover and title of the book. The teacher asks students what traditional holidays celebrated in America they already know about. The teacher asks students if they know about any African American holidays. [predicting + brainstorming]
   (2) Presentation (6 minutes)
      ① Read Aloud (2 minutes): The teacher reads aloud the text (see Appendix A). [Listening strategy for becoming familiar with the sounds of the language]
      ② Think-aloud (4 minutes): The teacher does think-aloud the first paragraph to model how to predict a vocabulary meaning, how to summarize, and how to come up with questions of the passage. [modeling + think-aloud strategy]
   (3) Practice
      ① Vocabulary self-selection/ clustering graph (6 minutes): The teacher divides students into groups of five and allots 2 or 3 paragraphs to each group.

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Each group focuses on the paragraphs to self-select key vocabularies that are essential to understanding the paragraphs. After discussion in small group about the terms, students share their lists with the entire class. The teacher draws a clustering graph on the board with the word 'Kwanzaa' in the center of the graph and puts key words in the graph based on students' lists they have generated. [guessing + recalling new vocabulary + interacting with other learners]

2 Storytelling (18 minutes): Students pair up with others and relate the given story in an alternating pattern summarizing one paragraph at a time. They write down questions they generate while reading and clarify for each other when one gets lost. The teacher should remind the students not to read the paragraph the same as in the text, but to summarize or paraphrase the paragraph. Also, students should share equal time and use English as much as possible. After the time is up, the teacher asks students which story elements, vocabulary, or other parts they still do not understand. As much as possible, other students respond to the questions of other pairs of students. [skimming + summarizing + practicing speaking + social strategies for asking questions for clarification in collaborative manner]

3 Make Your Own Test (12 minutes): The teacher divides the students into groups of three. The teacher assigns each group 1 or 2 paragraphs. Each group creates their own test questions including true/false questions or comprehension check-up questions about the text. After the time is up, each group presents their questions to the class. The class answers questions as a group. [identifying questions + writing questions + answering]

4 Expansion (3 minutes): The students will solve the crossword puzzle for today’s story [vocabulary reviewing + writing]. Students will receive resources of Kwanzaa where they can get more information (see Appendix B). [gathering + retaining information about language material]

Evaluation

1) Language objective: Do the students make educated guesses about the meaning of unfamiliar words? Do the students write down questions that are
relevant to the text? Do the students actively participate in graph clustering, making questions, and storytelling?

(2) Strategy objective: How helpful was it to watch teacher to think aloud to model what students should do? Was it useful for you to use clustering chart to remember the key words? Was it useful for you to summarize the passages orally? Was it useful for you to work in pairs or in group? Was it useful for you to make questions by yourself? Was it useful to review vocabulary using crossword puzzle? What helps you most to understand the reading well?

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper aims to raise awareness of misconceptions of African-Americans and suggests one way to guide students to have a balanced perspective on African-Americans by presenting a model lesson plan. Alongside the traditional American holiday mentioned above, English teachers can modify the model lesson plan to include other ethnic holidays such as Black History Month, Martin Luther King Day, Emancipation Day, and Malcolm X Day. In addition, students may research the numerous African-Americans who have broken out of the stereotypical confines of their history and succeeded in spite of them. To develop critical thinking strategies, teachers may have the students read biographies about the people who broke the myths and analyze how they were able to overcome the racial stereotypes and become successful in spite of prejudices.

By challenging extorted images of African-Americans and by introducing some useful ways to build correct understanding their culture in classrooms, teachers and students may begin to reduce the existence of subconscious negative attitude toward African-Americans and their culture. Only by abandoning many long-held stereotypes will one become able to shape a healthy perspective for African-Americans whose real life is far more complex and interesting than our persistent misperceived myths.

REFERENCES

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APPENDIX A

The Essentials of Kwanzaa: A Summary

The Origins
Kwanzaa is an African American holiday celebrated from 26 December through 1 January. It is based on the agricultural celebrations of Africa called "the first-fruits" celebrations which were times of harvest, ingathering, reverence, commemoration, recommitment, and celebration. Therefore, Kwanzaa is a time for ingathering of African Americans for celebration of their heritage and their achievements, reverence for the Creator and creation, commemoration of the past, recommitment to cultural ideals and celebration of the good.

Kwanzaa was created out of the philosophy of Kawaida, which is a cultural nationalist philosophy that argues that the key challenge in Black people's life is the challenge of culture, and that what Africans must do is to discover and bring forth the best of their culture, both ancient and current, and use it as a foundation to bring into being models of human excellence and possibilities to enrich and expand our lives.

It was created in the midst of our struggles for liberation in the 1960's and was part of our organization Us' efforts to create, recreate and circulate African culture as an aid to building community, enriching Black consciousness, and reaffirming the value of cultural grounding for life and struggle.

Kwanzaa is celebrated by millions of people of African descent throughout the world African community. As a cultural holiday, it is practiced by Africans from all religious traditions, all classes, all ages and generations, and all political persuasions on the common ground of their Africanness in all its historical and current diversity and unity.

The Fundamental Activities
Kwanzaa, like other African first-fruits celebrations, is organized around five fundamental activities. And these activities are informed by ancient views and values which reaffirm and reinforce family, community and culture.

First, Kwanzaa is a time of ingathering. Based on African first-fruits celebrations, it is a harvesting of the people; a bringing together of the most
valuable fruit or product of the nation, its living human harvest, i.e., the people themselves. It is a time of ingathering for the family and of the entire community to renew and reinforce the bonds between them. Kwanzaa promotes rituals of communion, of sharing and renewal of peoplehood bonds which strengthen mutual concern and commitment. And it stresses the need to constantly seek and stand together on common ground in the midst of our differences and diversity.

Secondly, Kwanzaa is a time of special reverence for the Creator and creation. It is a time of thanksgiving for the good in life, for life itself, for love, for friendship, for parents and children, the elders and youth, man and woman, and for family, community and culture. As a harvest celebration, Kwanzaa is also a time of thanksgiving for the earth and all that is on it, humans, birds, animals, plants and all living things, water, air, land and all natural resources. At the same time it is a time for recommitment to protect and preserve the earth and relate rightfully to the environment.

Thirdly, Kwanzaa is a time of commemoration of the past. It is a time of honoring the moral obligation to remember and praise those on whose shoulders we stand; to raise and praise the names of those who gave their lives that we might live fuller and more meaningful ones. It is also a time to appreciate our role as "heirs and custodians of a great legacy" and to recommit ourselves to honoring it by preserving it and expanding it. We are, as African people, fathers and mothers of humanity and human civilization, sons and daughters of the Holocaust of Enslavement and authors and heirs of the reaffirmation of our Africanness and social justice tradition in the 60's. Each period leaves a legacy of challenge, struggle and achievement. We honor each by learning it and living it. And Kwanzaa is a focal point for this.

Fourth, Kwanzaa is a time of recommitment to our highest ideals. It is a time of focusing on thought and practice of our highest cultural vision and values which in essence are ethical values, values of the good life, truth, justice, sisterhood, brotherhood and respect for the transcendent, for the human person, for elders and for nature. It is here that the Nguzo Saba (The Seven Principles) serve as the central focus of Kwanzaa in thought and practice.

Finally, Kwanzaa is a time for celebration of the Good, the good of life, community, culture, friendship, the bountifulness of the earth, the wonder of the universe, the elders, the young, the human person in general, our history, our

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struggle for liberation and ever higher levels of human life. The celebration of Kwanzaa, then, is a ceremony of bonding, thanksgiving, commemoration, recommitment, a respectful marking, and honoring, a praising, and a rejoicing.

In terms of inclusion, Kwanzaa has two basic kinds of celebrations, family-centered and community-centered, although public celebrations are also held. Family-centered celebrations may be any activities that the family chooses to introduce, reaffirm, teach and express the Nguzo Saba (The Seven Principles) in particular and African cultural values and practices in general. For example, at a chosen meal, one or more members can explain the principle for the day and say how s/he practiced it, or discuss an issue, event, or person of African history and culture, or organize an activity around the principles or other cultural focus.

Community-centered activities can be the collective African karamu (feasts) especially on 31 December, various school activities or any other collective activity which calls for in gathering of the people, reinforcing their cultural values and the bonds between them as a people, and sharing the beauty, richness and meaningfulness of African culture.
Useful Resources of Kwanzaa

<Books>

<DVDs>

<WWW resources>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kwanzaa
http://www.holidays.net/kwanzaa/

Key words: African-Americans, stereotypes, illiteracy, African American Vernacular English, learning strategy, task-based learning

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