

## Korea 10 Years Ago...

By Mike Duffy

The Korea that I came to as a college teacher a decade and a half ago, in 1988, was very different from the country that we see today. More than a decade ago, few Koreans held passports, and it was very rare to meet a student who had traveled abroad for sightseeing or study. There was a widespread recognition of the importance of English, but students who were keen to improve their proficiency attended language schools (*hagwon*), formed private study groups, or buttonholed foreigners on public transport.

My arrival coincided with an exciting time for Korea, which had just emerged from a long period of dictatorship and was preparing to put itself on display to the world in the Seoul Olympic Games. Even so, the late 80s and early 90s were still troubled times; demonstrations and class boycotts, in protest against either the government or the school administration, were still common events on college campuses. In one incident during my first term of college teaching, students blockaded the school's entrance, imprisoning the professors in their offices for two nights; in another, demonstrators smashed all the windows of the main building. The students ended the semester by boycotting their final tests, and the college obligingly held the tests in the week after Christmas. Similar incidents occurred all over the country.

In the intervening years, much has happened both to Korea and to English education in Korea. One change is the vast increase in the numbers of native-speaking teachers in colleges, schools, and hagwons. In 1988, I was the first full-time foreign teacher to be hired by my college; today, the same school employs a dozen. The "hagwonization" of universities started to happen towards the mid-90s, when President Kim Young-sam's government promoted the idea of "globalization," and Korea became a popular destination for teachers, especially from Canada and the US. An inevitable side effect of the increased supply of

teachers was a deterioration in salaries and conditions for native speakers.

The English teaching infrastructure was not well established before the mid-90s. Korea was not yet recognized as a major market for ELT materials, and not many textbooks were available. I recall taking a trip to Hong Kong to stock up during my first term. The first publisher-sponsored event I attended, in October 1989, had been a one-day mini-conference-cum-book fair with three Japan-based speakers. The 1991 conference of AETK, one of the predecessors of Korea TESOL, had as its theme "Meeting the Needs of Korean Students," and compared with today's large, glossy events, was very low-key indeed. It included just 18 presentations, all but three from Korea-based speakers, over its two days.

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*Edited by David E. Shaffer*

One of those speakers was David Kosofsky, whose book "Common Problems in Korean English" was a big seller at the time. Looking through that book now, I am struck by just how uncommon many of the cited problems have become these days. I am sure there are still learners who say, for example, "Do you have a schedule?" or "I have a promise tonight", but I don't seem to have heard them for a long time. I think this change is symptomatic of the overall vast improvement during the intervening period in the quality (as well as the quantity) of English spoken in Korea.

This has come about for many reasons. One of them, I think, is an upgrading of the level of teaching, especially in elementary and middle schools. Another is the enhanced opportunity for learning from foreign teachers both at home and abroad. The rapid growth of young-learner

teaching which started in the 90s will ensure the continuation of this trend; not only have all children learned English from the third year of elementary school since 1997, but now there are more and more foreign language hagwons dedicated to teaching children, and even kindergartens have English on the curriculum.

In addition, Korea has become (excuse the cliché) globalized, to an extent that seemed unimaginable a decade ago. The phenomenon is visible in many ways: foreign travel, cable TV, international restaurants (It was well into the 90s before McDonalds and Pizza Hut made their first appearance here in Busan). Koreans have got used to having foreigners in their midst, and no longer do children hide when they see a foreigner. Servers in fast food outlets no longer haggle nervously over which one is going to deal with a foreign customer; instead, they take the order with a confident "Eat here or take out?" This may seem unremarkable to a newcomer, but for this old hand, it represents an enormous change.

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This is the first article in the series Korea of Decades Past. Next issue: "Korea 20 Years Ago."

## Campus Life in Korea 20 Years Ago

By Steve Garrigues

1984! Well, George Orwell might not have recognized it, but it was an exciting time to be in Korea nonetheless.

One of the things that stands out the most in my mind is the fact that student life in the 80s was motivated as much by ideology as it was by the pursuit of education, or possibly even more so. In many ways, those days reminded me of the US in the 60s, with all the enthusiasm and optimism, the anger and hope, the idealism and naivete. "Struggle" and "democracy" were the words of the day, and the military dictator Chun Doo-hwan was the most despised man around.

Student demonstrations were a normal facet of campus life. It was a common sight to see a group of students collecting empty beer and soju bottles to make petrol bombs or

exercising their newfound freedom after the grueling "examination hell" of their last year of high school. Juniors and seniors were too busy worrying about their grades and job prospects to devote much time to student activism. So even during the afternoon demonstrations at the main gate, you could see most students going about their normal routine, holding handkerchiefs to their noses to filter out the teargas fumes.

A stroll across campus was not what it is today. The university roads were mostly for pedestrians, and there were few cars to be seen. Certainly no students had their own cars, and even many of the professors relied solely on the bus. Parking congestion was a problem that no one could even imagine a university would have. Students walked leisurely here and there, arm-in-arm only if they were

fantasy too foreign to even think about.


The English boom had not quite yet come to Korea, and the few foreign language teachers were mostly from the US, so when a gaggle of schoolboys would shout out "Miguk-saram" when coming across a westerner on the streets, they were more than likely correct. There was a

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song that had been popular on the radio that went, "Hello, hello, Mr. Monkey, you are so fast and funky." Elementary school students had picked up only a few English words in those days, but for some reason that song was a big hit among the kids. When passing a group of children, almost inevitably came the chorus "Hello Mr. Monkey!" behind one's back.

Ah, those were the days. If you can remember being greeted "Hello Mr. Monkey," then you have been in Korea for a long time.

### The Author

Steve Garrigues first visited Korea in 1966, and returned in 1982 as an educator. After three years at Cheju National University, he moved to Kyungpook National University in Daegu, where he has remained ever since. He has been active in KOTESOL from the very beginning, and is currently the President of the Daegu-Gyeongbuk Chapter. 

*In our next issue, David Shaffer, another long-time Korea resident, will give us a glimpse of what life and learning was like in Korea three decades ago - during the Fourth Republic of Park Chung Hee. - Ed.*

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*"Student life in the 80s was motivated as much by ideology as it was by the pursuit of education..."*

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breaking up the concrete tiles of the sidewalk to make handy-sized stones to throw at the riot police during the scheduled afternoon "demo." A "normal" spring day on any university campus in Korea often included the acrid sting of teargas wafting through the trees, and the "crump" of teargas canisters exploding. Afternoon classes in buildings near the campus main gate, where the set confrontations with the riot police inevitably took place, would often be hastily cancelled, depending on which way the wind happened to be blowing.

Life on campus was not all demonstrations and rallies, of course. Other than the rather small group of committed radical students, most of the participants were freshmen,

the same sex. No doubt there were some "campus couples" even in those days, but they were very circumspect about it, and no one was bold enough to hold hands in public.

The fashionable color of the day was basic black, and although there were plenty of blue jeans to be seen, not one had ragged holes in the knees - that was a fashion that was still many years away. People need to be a bit more affluent before they can feel comfortable looking poor, I suppose.

During the 80's, summer was HOT and winter was COLD, regardless of whether you were outdoors or inside the classroom. No classrooms had any heat in those days, and the very idea of an air-conditioned class was a

# Korea: 30 Years Ago, in the Fourth Republic

Flying into Korea 30 years ago, one would be greeted by mountains - old mountains speckled with young vegetation. The roadways, many unpaved, running through these mountains sported slogans made with large stones on their slopes that faced the roadways. As the plane approached Kimpo, Korea's only international airport, passengers were instructed to close the blinds on their windows - no exceptions, no peeking allowed. This was the Korea of Gen. Park Chung Hee. We will take a glimpse at life, education, and technology in the early years of his Fourth Republic.

## **The Perceived Northern Threat**

Much of what happened in the Korea of three decades past was directly related to heavy authoritarian rule, justified as necessary to defend against the Communist North. The roadside slogans read "Anticommunism - Counterespionage" and "Crush Communism." The threat from the North was considered real, very real. Airplane blinds had to be pulled to hide the military facilities at the airport from possible spies onboard. Pill boxes dotted roadways and other essential facilities, to be manned in case of invasion. The midnight-to-4-a.m. curfew, designed to counter infiltration by North Korean spies, was strictly enforced by sentries with rifles. Young men with anything resembling the long hair of the hippie culture were hauled

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***“Life was still hard and people had more pressing things to do than challenge the government.”***

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into the nearest barber shop by police for a free military haircut. Long hair was thought to breed anti-government, i.e., communist, thoughts. As preparation for military service, physical education in secondary schools and colleges consisted of military drills with wooden rifles. The mandatory school uniform of the middle and high school male student was a black military-style uniform. Similar uniforms were just disappearing at the college level. The monthly siren of civil defense drills not only stopped traffic and emptied buses but also emptied classrooms, having students, including college students, running to the hills for cover. Few got out of the three years of compulsory military service; most put it off until after college because of its harshness. All this because of a perceived threat of invasion from the North.

Today, such conditions would cause the populace to rise in revolt; then they provided a sense of security and stability. The memories of the

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Korean War were vivid for many, as were those of the Colonial Period. Life had been very harsh; the mountains, stripped of their wood as the only source of fuel in those times of want, were just beginning to green. Censorship was strong. The only information the populace had on North Korea was government-controlled, as was information on the South's own affairs. All news was censored - even my weekly Time magazine had large sections blackened out or pages torn out before it got to me. Life was still hard, and people had more pressing things to do than challenge the government. College students had done this earlier in the 1970s, but with the advent of the Fourth Republic, such anti-government action was met with harsher laws. It was in 1974, too, that a bullet meant for President Park from the pistol of a Korean gunman from Japan fatally wounded the First Lady, Yuk Yeong-su.

## **Education**

The desire for education in Korea was as strong three decades ago as it is today. The infrastructure to support it, however, was much weaker. Only six years of elementary schooling were required. Many did not have the financial means to send their children on to secondary school. There were some alternatives though, such as the six-month courses at the provincial rural vocational training center where I was an instructor through the US Peace Corps. Electrical, agricultural, and mat-weaving skills were taught. The newest thing at the time was the rotary tiller, destined to replace the oxen-drawn plow once one learned how to operate and maintain it.

Those who did go on to secondary school spent their time in large classrooms. High school classes of 72 students were not considered surprising. Classrooms were hot in summer and cold in winter. "Air-con" had not yet entered the Korean lexicon, let alone a Korean school. Winter heating consisted of a small, coal briquette-fueled space heater, used to warm the lunch-time rice in the students' tin lunchboxes. "Rice" is a misnomer. Because of its scarcity, eating pure rice was outlawed. It had to be mixed with over 50% barley or other grains. Student lunchboxes were checked to make sure that parents were complying. Every Saturday was a no-rice day; restaurants could serve no rice. Rice bowls were filled with barley, millets, and beans.

Secondary schools, at this time, began installing expensive government-funded ALM language laboratories - technological trophies that were so valued that schools forbid their students to use them. At the tertiary level, however, language laboratories were used. It was a general curriculum requirement to take at least one two-credit laboratory course and learn the skills of a parrot (listen and repeat) for at least two hours a week. The English book most popular for teaching conversation to English majors was *Lado English Series*.

Although 90% of high school students go on to college today, that was not the case 30 years ago. Less than half of the college-aged population gained entry to college. There were only 150,000 students attending the 70-some colleges throughout the nation - an average of only 2,000 students per college. This lower attendance rate translated into a considerably higher level of ability for the average college student of 1974. A college student was considered a member of the elite. The number of college campuses was less than half of what it is today and student populations much lower. The percentage of people studying English and the intensity with which it was studied was lower. Children were not pushed into learning English before gaining their required exposure to it in middle school. English hagwons were scarce, and those that did exist did not employ native English speakers.

The main impetus for changes in ELT that were to occur came from the Peace Corps, which placed thousands of volunteers as EFL instructors in middle schools and colleges, making it Korea's main link with outside

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teaching methods. (It is upon the Peace Corps that Korea's present-day EPIK program is modeled.) Three decades ago, travel abroad was impossible for the average citizen. The government issued passports only to high-level government officials, politicians, and conglomerate officials. Korea was still a Hermit Kingdom in the 1970s. It was rare for one to be allowed to go abroad for graduate work in ELT. Colleges outside of the capital had very few PhDs on their faculties. Openings on faculties were filled

from the ranks of secondary school teachers, usually with master's degree. The Peace Corps volunteer in the middle school and at the college level left an impression on their Korean colleagues. Change in English teaching methodology did not come fast, but the seeds were sown.

### ***Technology***

Thirty short years ago, Korea was far from the technological wonder of today. It wasn't one of the most wired nations in the world, nor one of the most wireless. Indeed, "computer" and "handphone" had not yet been borrowed into Korean. There weren't even any electronic calculators. To be a bank teller, excellent abacus skills were required. The office telephone was the magneto type (hold down the receiver and crank). Private telephones were very expensive, and there was a long waiting list; those in higher positions were placed higher on the list to get a phone. Televisions were to be found only in the neighborhood tearooms, with programming from 6 p.m. to 12 midnight - black and white only. Nevertheless, there was standing room only for international boxing matches and high school baseball tournaments.

Much of the freight was moved by "man-power." Small cargoes were carried on A-frames, a wooden frame carried on the back. Larger loads were pulled on two-wheeled carts. The more well-off transporter had his own ox or pony to draw the cart through the city streets. Bicycles, too, were piled high with goods - they were even used for taking the pig to market. The tri-wheeled pickup truck did exist, but they were few and far between. Transport over long distances was difficult, as many roads were still unpaved. Indeed, the only road from Jeonju to Gwangju, in the Jeolla Provinces, in the early 1970s was a narrow unpaved road over the mountains. The rest stop was at a secluded wooded area near the ridge. The bus door opened and passengers quietly filed out - women to the uphill side and men to the downhill side, with newspaper in hand or toilet paper in pocket.

### ***Lifestyle***

Life in Korea in 1974 would be extremely difficult for the young adult of 2004 to bear. The common city dwelling was a one-story, tile-roofed house, though thatched-roofed houses were not uncommon, and were the norm in rural areas. Houses had no indoor plumbing - there may have been a hand pump or water faucet in the front yard. Toilets were detached from the house, containing a hole in the ground which one straddled. Contents of the pit stayed solid or frozen in winter but became a maggot-infested slop in the heat of summer. Sitting, eating, and sleeping were done on the floor, heated with carbon dioxide-producing coal briquettes. On summer nights, tent-like nets were set up over one's bedding to protect

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provide greater opportunity to meet individual learner needs through access to multiple intelligences. Even learners with a waning interest in English will find something special in the sweeping span of creative projects.

Activity-based learning is not so simple to implement. Both parents and teachers expect classrooms to be neatly lined up in rows and discourse to follow I-R-F patterns. Even our students expect this - that is the way it has always been. It is also not easy to allow content and activities to upstage

target language objectives. Thirdly, teachers need to have the creative ingenuity and time to plan projects. And finally, the materials and space must be available. Admittedly, activity-based learning is not an everyday occurrence in my classes, but it is becoming a much more utilized approach in my lessons. If it's good enough for Lev Vygotsky, it's good enough for me.

To get started with activity-based learning, fill in the table below and go from there.

<b>Theme: World Cup Soccer Solve</b>				
<b>Bloom's Taxonomy</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Function</b>	<b>Vocabulary</b>	<b>Grammar</b>
Label Predict Solve Explain Modify Conclude				

**Continued from page 29.**

one from the hoards of mosquitoes as they slept. Refrigerators were a thing of the future; they were not to appear until every household already had a TV set. What little refrigerating was done was done with ice boxes. One had to be especially careful of what they ate in the summer to keep from getting sick. In addition to mosquitoes, rats were everywhere - in the bedroom ceilings, in the trash piles outside the house, in the corners of the neighborhood bar, running down the aisles of the movie theater. Rat poison was available at no cost at the local drugstore. If one's house had no water, the wash was done by a nearby stream. Even women who had water would still congregate at the stream to do the laundry and gossip. They also got together for kimchi-making in the fall - a major undertaking back then.

Prices were much cheaper three decades ago. City bus rides were 10 won; the almost unaffordable basic taxi fare was 70. I thought the rice meal *baekban* got its name because it cost *baekwon* (100 won). Ready-made shoes, shirts, trousers, and suits were not to be found but could be custom-made at reasonable prices. Many workers were envious of my monthly Peace Corps "salary" - a massive 25,000 won, of which 15,000 won went to my landlady for room and board. That gave me all of 10,000 won to live on each month. Salaries were paid in 500-won notes, the largest denomination printed at the time. Other notes were of 50- and 100-won values. There were 50-,

10-, 5-, and 1-won coins.

City streets have changed, too. Thirty years ago, almost every passing taxi was a Hyundai Pony - painted Saemaoul green, President Park's favorite color. There were many buses and a few jet-black government or company cars carrying high-ranking officials. The private-car rush was still 10 years off. Storefronts and companies sported their names in Chinese characters, even more so than English is used today. Pedestrians did not eat or smoke on the streets out of deference to their elders. Many streets did not have sidewalks, and were instead lined with open ditches.

Life in Korea thirty year ago was definitely harder than it is today, but people complained no more than they do today. Korea has drastically changed in education, technology, and lifestyle in those 30 short years, so much so that it is hardly recognizable. It is easy for one to say: You've come a long way, baby!

**The Author**

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# Korea 40 Years Ago: Coups and Black Rubber Shoes

By Yangdon Ju

The 1960s in Korea were filled with big changes in the political, economic, and social situation with numerous significant incidents and events. The year 1964 is a long 40 years in the past, but a short 11 years after the end of the Korean War and only 18 years after the end of Japanese colonial occupation. These two events stripped the country of any economic wealth that they may have had earlier. I was a secondary school student at the time and remember that the country was as politically unprepared to govern itself as it was economically unable.

## **The Political Situation**

Politically, a rigged presidential election in March, 1960, placed Rhee Syngman back in power. Barely two months later, he was ousted by a popular uprising beginning on April 19, 1960, fueled predominantly by Seoul University students and their professors. General Park Chung Hee then led a coup against the new government on May 16, 1961. His new government lasted until October 26, 1979, when he was assassinated. However, during his reign, the general tried to implement reforms in many areas. For instance, when I was in middle school, I observed women wearing skirts with hemlines above the knees being caught by police and soldiers.

In June, 1965, when I was in high school, we took part in a

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**"students walked  
4 to 5 km to school...  
in black rubber shoes with  
no socks"**

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demonstration against the Treaty on Basic Relations Between the Republic of Korea and Japan. To try to minimize the size of the demonstration, schools were closed in an attempt to prevent propaganda from spreading among the students. As a result, we all had a prolonged summer vacation.

In 1965, the first Korean soldiers were sent to the war in Vietnam and the deployment continued until 1973 when the war ended. Students were mobilized to send off the soldiers at the Busan and Incheon Ports, waving national flags as teary-eyed girls looked on.

The year 1968 is an unforgettable one for the South Korean people. On January 21, North Korean soldiers crossed the DMZ and unsuccessfully tried to take over the Blue House, the home of the South Korean President.

## **The Social Situation**

The country and the people were very poor since the

Korean War's three-year struggle ended in 1953. A GNP per capita of US\$100 in 1963 and US\$210 in 1969 illustrate the extent of the

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the poverty in South Korea at the time. In attempt to better South Korea's economic disposition, Park Chung Hee's government tried to industrialize the country. The First Five-Year Economic Development Plan was established over the five-year period between 1962 and 1966. In general, he undertook the task of picking up the broken pieces of South Korea left by the devastating war and ineffective government.

In the early 1960s, many areas in the countryside did not yet have electricity; therefore, we had to use oil lamps. It wasn't uncommon for students to accidentally burn their hair on the lamp flame while studying or dozing off. Transportation was also difficult during those times. Bus and streetcar fares were both 2.50 won in Seoul and Busan. Students would usually walk the 2 to 3-kilometer journey to school to save their bus fare and buy pastries with it instead. In the countryside, even young elementary school students walked 4 to 5 kilometers to school. Back then many walked in black rubber shoes with no socks - even on cold days - because their families just couldn't afford socks.

During the planting and harvest seasons, there was often a shortage in the workforce. As a result, students would skip school to help their parents on the farm or to take care of infants. Some of the more unfortunate ones, even elementary school students, would carry their little brothers or sisters on their backs and took care of them while attending class. Schools often closed for a week for this reason. I remember we used to cut and collect grass for cows in the summer. When we became hungry, we stole some potatoes from a nearby field and baked them near the creek. We often stole watermelons as well because we were so hungry. In the winter, as elementary school students, we would go to the mountains to gather firewood.

All the students in secondary schools as well as universities wore school uniforms and caps when they went to school and came back home. Students often wore them even off campus because they didn't have any other presentable clothes to wear. As a result, when students walked around the city, people were easily able to recognize what school they were attending because they wore school insignias on their uniforms and caps. University students were envied because a very low percentage of high school graduates were chosen to go and so few could afford it. They were easily recognized by their four-cornered caps.



### **The English Education Situation**

The Grammar-Translation Method had been the main teaching method since the early years of English teaching in Korea. I remember that English teachers who were well accomplished in grammar were popular among students and were thought of as good English teachers. Students thought that if they mastered grammar and vocabulary, they could be good in reading. Thus, some students tried to memorize all the entries in the dictionary, which was of course impossible to accomplish. I remember memorizing the words for every unit of my English text in the streetcar on my way to and from school. English teachers didn't focus on speaking, listening, and reading comprehension because they lacked the skills. We were not able to get any English reading materials except for the English textbooks we already had. Some higher-level college students studied *The Korea Times*, *Reader's Digest*, *Guideposts*, and other similar magazines to improve their reading comprehension skills.

Some English teachers used British English while others used American English. However, some of them spoke English with a heavy Japanese-style accent because their English teachers were Japanese during the period of Japanese occupation. We often said that British English was for diplomatic jobs, while American English was for

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### **"Going abroad to study was unimaginable in those days."**

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business. Later on, American English supplanted British English. Just after the liberation of Korea from Japan, the Audio-Lingual Method was introduced. Language laboratory facilities were installed in some national universities and leading private universities from the early to mid 1960s. The University Language Laboratory Association of Korea, which is the present-day KATE, was founded in 1964 by English professors of universities that had language laboratories. The number of organizations with language laboratories increased over the next six years. By 1970, there were 34 universities, 10 secondary schools, 7 special organizations, and 12 educational organizations that had the prestige of having state-of-the-art language labs (Kwon, 1995).

There were some institutes (*hagwon*) for high school and university students in those days, too. Only a few students went to private institutes, while the majority could not afford to attend them. Regarding English education, mostly grammar and some translation were taught. Students studied in the public library or private study rooms called *dokseo-sil*, which students still use. Unlike today, however, the rooms for girls and boys were not separated. When studying in a *dokseo-sil*, I often had girls sitting next to me,

making it difficult to concentrate. One day, I took a seat that had boys on the right and left. However, I realized that one girl was studying in front of me. Even though there was a board between us, our feet sometimes touched under the table. As a result, I concentrated more on our feet and less on the book I was trying to study.

As far as I can remember, there was only one English institute, ESS, in Busan in 1966. One day I attended an open class there. Though I wanted to study at the language school, I couldn't afford the tuition. Going abroad to study English was unimaginable in those days. We couldn't hear any native English speakers' voices, not even recorded ones in class. Most of the middle and high schools didn't even have cassette players or tapes. However, some of my classmates and I got permission to visit a US military camp, giving us the rare chance to talk to native English speakers.

Students were not allowed to go to the movies by themselves even though the movies were appropriate for students. Instead, students sometimes went to the movies as a class during school hours. I remember watching spectacles such as *Ben Hur* and *The Ten Commandments*. Watching English movies was the only time to hear English, except for AFKN (American Forces Korea Network), which was broadcasted in some large cities. However, students in those days didn't care about listening to English. Instead they cared about the grammar and words that would be useful for translation questions on general school exams and the university entrance exam.

The advent of the Peace Corps in 1966 brought big changes to English education in Korea. In September of that year, Peace Corps volunteers from the USA started to be assigned to secondary schools and universities. In August, 1967, Chonnam University got a whopping 10 Peace Corps volunteers and had teacher training for 50 English teachers (Shin, 1994). Korean has not been the same since.

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