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Baduk and Second Language Learning: Effortful study and Balanced Flow

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I. Introduction

Research into 'expertise' and ACT-R Theory (Adaptive Control of Thought-Rational) suggests that learning a language is similar to learning other activities such as chess, music, and math (Ross 2006), and that 'effortful study' (Ericsson 2005) is required in addition to extensive practice, in order to become proficient. Expertise takes time to develop in all these fields. In the case of chess, for example, it takes little time or effort to learn how to move the pieces (or stones), but becoming a grand master of strategy takes at least a decade of intense practice. Similarly, it doesn't take much to learn a few grammar rules and a small vocabulary, but becoming fluent in another language also takes at least ten years of intense practice.

Such 'effortful study' (Ericsson 2005) entails continually tackling challenges that lie just beyond one's competence, since players (and language users) do not improve simply by unfocused performance. Time spent playing chess (or Baduk), even in tournaments, appears to contribute less to progress than effortful study. The main value of such games is to highlight weaknesses for future study.

In the light of these findings, this paper examines similarities between learning a second language and learning the oriental board game, Baduk, with a view to discovering implications for ESL (English as a Second Language) and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) educators. In addition, the concept of 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi 1991) is identified as a factor in successful Baduk playing, and therefore as a potential tool for effective English language learning and performance.

The paper also asks why Korean students are quick to play Baduk at high levels of proficiency, but comparatively slow in becoming fluent in English, especially in view of the amount of time, money, and energy invested in the latter pursuit. Attention to flow is typically absent in traditional, test-driven second language learning. Hence, it is suggested that promotion of flow as part of an integrated, holistic teaching philosophy, would result in more meaningful and effective language learning.

1.1 Baduk

Visitors to Korea who find themselves browsing through the cable television channels often notice that at least one of these is exclusively given up to a board game called Baduk. This game is played with black and white stones on a wooden board which has a grid of 19 horizontal and 19 vertical lines (361 intersections). The two players take turns to place their stones on the intersections, aiming to surround as much territory as possible. Korea, China, Japan and Taiwan have professional leagues, and a number of international tournaments are held each year. Since 1981, when Cho Chi-hun became the first Korean World Champion, Korean professionals have figured significantly in world rankings and have become role models for many young people.

Baduk is similar to other international board games, such as chess, in that it requires a great deal of memory-based technical ability, along with higher-order thinking skills such as logical thinking, problem-solving, critical thinking, pattern-recognition, and creativity. Many parents in Korea send their children to Baduk institutes after school hours, since they believe that the development of problem-solving skills in this manner will help their children perform more effectively on the College Scholastic Aptitude Test (CSAT). In view of the "if it's not on the test, then why do we need to learn it-" (Beatty 2006) attitude found in high school English classes, it is interesting that this subject, which is not on the high school curriculum, and which is not tested in the CSAT, is studied by a significant number of students in order to perform more successfully on that test.

In contrast, it is notable that subjects that used to be taught in high schools, but which do not appear on the CSAT (e.g. music, art, drama, etc.) are gradually disappearing from high school curricula. This is despite research showing that students who take such 'creative' subjects benefit from the development of higher-order thinking skills and creativity that these subjects promote, and thus perform better than their peers on the tests (Weinberger 2000).

II. A Comparison

As already mentioned, the amount of time required to acquire expertise is similar for chess (Baduk), music, art, math, and language. This suggests

that for learning a second language: i) the crucial element is focused practice; and ii) the learning process cannot be accelerated (Ross 2006). Ericsson's 'effortful study' (2005), therefore, is reminiscent of Krashen's 'input hypothesis' (Krashen 1988), with its $i + 1$ comprehensible input requirement. On the other hand, lack of such effortful study can be seen as referring to 'fossilization,' in that learners who simply play the game (or use language) without reflection on their weaknesses are apt to stay on one level (plateau) irrespective of the time spent in communicating, or the number of games played.

Baduk and second language learning both require a great deal of rote learning and also involve the use of various strategies (gambits) when using this lexis in authentic situations. In the 'opening game,' for example, Baduk players draw from a databank (or vocabulary) of sequences, similar to the notional/functional utterances used in conversations. In the 'middle game,' Baduk is again similar to language performance, in that the players base their moves on strategies appropriate to the situation. In the 'end game,' further 'known' sequences help the players complete their negotiations and bring the game to a close.

Further similarities between Baduk and second language learning are summarized in Table 1:

TABLE 1: Similarities between Baduk and Second Language learning

Baduk	Second Language Learning
1. Performance is possible at any level of competence, but improves through focused practice and development of technique.	Proficiency and communication improve through focused use (performance) and usage (grammar, vocabulary, structure, drills).
2. The simplicity of the rules means that most moves are possible, though some are more effective than others.	There is freedom to create new utterances, judged by their effectiveness.
3. There are no 'correct' moves during performance. Players seek for the most appropriate move for the given situation.	Utterances and communication strategies are based on contextual appropriateness.
4. Players are interdependent, responding to each others' moves.	Language users are interdependent in terms of communication and negotiation of meaning.

5. General strategies and local tactics are used to achieve effective and efficient results.	General communication strategies and local conversation skills achieve the desired goals.
6. Knowledge of technique (logical thinking) is important, and functions alongside instinct, intuition, pattern-recognition, and creativity (lateral thinking).	There is a focus on form in the early stages of EFL learning, leading to fluency and linguistic intuition.

Taking this comparison further, it is notable that young Korean Baduk players are the best in the world. Korean professionals won 47 of the 66 World Major Titles between 1991 and 2007, and 24 of these wins were achieved by the youthful Lee Chang-ho (17) and Lee Sae-dol (7). Ever since Lee Chang-ho entered the world of Baduk as a middle school student, he has been followed by more and more young professionals, who are ensuring Korea's place at the top of international competition. When we look at English acquisition in Korea, on the other hand, youngsters are not as skillful as might be expected from the huge amount of time and money invested in EFL learning. English is taught from Elementary school to University, yet students rarely achieve fluency (Sunder 2007). The remainder of this paper examines this issue and attempts to make recommendations concerning appropriate EFL teaching approaches.

III. A Prognosis

The concept of flow, as a means of promoting effective language learning is examined in this section, in addition to associated topics – learning through play, rote learning, motivation, form-focused interaction, and pattern-recognition.

3.1. Flow

In addition to similarities between Baduk and EFL learning that have been described so far, there is another important factor which is rarely acknowledged in the test-driven EFL classroom. This factor has been identified as ‘flow’ by Csikszentmihalyi, and is defined by him as “the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it

even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it” (Csikszentmihalyi 1991: 4).

This is not to say that flow occurs in relaxed, passive, or comfortable situations. In contrast, such moments “ usually occur when a person’ s body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile” (1991: 3). The key words in these two citations are ‘ involved,’ ‘ enjoyable,’ ‘ voluntary,’ and ‘ worthwhile,’ and these highlight an important difference between Baduk and EFL learning. Baduk is a flow activity which immerses players of every age and level, to the extent that time has little meaning for them while playing. Indeed, one of the many Baduk stories tells of a woodcutter who sees two old men playing Baduk in the forest. The woodcutter decides to watch the game, and to continue on his way after it is over. When the game is over, he sees that the handle of his axe has rotted away with the passing of time. This quality of timelessness is one of the eight major components in Csikszentmihalyi’ s phenomenology of enjoyment – the psychological conditions that make the flow experience possible:

- 1.The experience usually occurs when we confront tasks we have a chance of completing.
- 2.We must be able to concentrate on what we are doing.
- 3.The concentration is possible because the task undertaken has clear goals.
- 4.The concentration is possible because the task provides immediate feedback.
- 5.One acts with a deep but effortless involvement that removes from awareness the worries and frustrations of everyday life.
- 6.Enjoyable experiences allow people to exercise a sense of control over their actions.
- 7.Concern for the self disappears, yet paradoxically the sense of self emerges stronger after the flow experience is over.
- 8.The sense of duration of time is altered; hours pass by in minutes, and minutes can stretch out to seem like hours. (Adapted from Csikszentmihalyi 1991: 49)

If we accept that students experiencing 'flow' learn effectively and efficiently, then it is interesting to investigate how these conditions might be applied to second language learning, with a view to promoting the 'flow' experience. In such a case, students would be given language tasks at their appropriate level (condition number 1), which they would be allowed to complete without excessive teacher intervention or restriction (condition 2). This learning task would be clearly scaffolded by the teacher

(condition 3), and evaluation and achievement would be self/peer-assessed in terms of the outcome of the task (e.g. language performance, presentation, report, etc.). It is interesting to review Skehan's definition of 'task' at this point, since it shows similarities with Csikszentmihalyi's first four conditions:

A task is taken to be an activity in which: i) meaning is primary; ii) there is some sort of relationship to the real world; iii) task completion has some priority; and iv) the assessment of task performance is in terms of task outcome. (Skehan 1996: 38)

Condition 5 deals with 'effortless involvement that removes from awareness the worries and frustrations of everyday life.' Such worries for EFL students are often related to competitive, grammar-based preparation for high-stakes tests, so that it seems difficult to realize this condition without significant testing-reform. However, teachers can introduce elements of this factor by using language-learning projects, such as making newspapers. These encourage meaningful development and use of language skills, in addition to a focus on grammar and essay-writing (Fried-Booth 2002).

Condition 6 calls for enjoyable experiences, confirming that enjoyment is not simply desirable for learning, but is a vital factor (Harms, 1994) (see section 3.2), while condition 7 can be seen as referring to the importance of collaboration and group work in language learning (Vygotsky 1978), since development of interpersonal responsibility in groups can lead to enhanced intra-personal responsibility: "A positive group atmosphere can have a beneficial effect on the morale, motivation, and self-image of its members, and thus significantly affect their learning" (Hadfield 2004: 3). Finally, flexibility of time is mentioned (condition 8), suggesting that students should be allowed to immerse themselves in meaningful tasks for as long as they find appropriate, rather than being told "You have 2 minutes to do this activity."

If these eight conditions were promoted in the EFL classroom, encouraging students to become involved in the 'flow' experience, then it is proposed that they would be completely committed and involved in meaningful, challenging learning. Students at all levels would perform to the best of their abilities and language-learning would be seen by them as 'enjoyable,' 'voluntary,' and 'worthwhile,' as well as a means of getting into university or finding a job.

3.2 Learning through play

It could be argued that Baduk 'is just a game' and that second language learning is 'serious.' However, research has shown that non-competitive play is an effective method of learning (Kohn 1992: 95). Play promotes and enhances the flow experience, with the result that youngsters are successful, motivated learners when they start attending school.

Play, art, pageantry, ritual, and sports ... help participants and spectators achieve an ordered state of mind that is highly enjoyable. (Csikszentmihalyi 1991: 72)

Many researchers have pointed out the effectiveness of using language games in the EFL classroom (e.g. Gorea 2005). Matching games (e.g. Bingo), word-games (e.g. Scrabble), puzzles, quizzes, and vocabulary-based card-games, are intrinsically enjoyable and provide a relatively painless method of acquiring lexis and grammar. This approach to language-learning makes use of the fact that children (and adults) learn most naturally through play. Thus, when asked, "How do you keep a balance between your serious intentions and your sense of play?" the author, Max Apple, replied, "Playing is the most serious thing I do: Always." (Ohanian 1999: 101).

Play is thus a powerful learning medium, utilizing authenticity (real-life situations), meaning, relevance, intrinsic motivation, enjoyment, and success. The success of young Baduk players in the international stage proves this point, showing that intrinsically motivated, meaningful play (enhanced through effortful study) can produce profound levels of learning and creativity. It is only when children enter school that they are told that play is not an appropriate way of learning anything of 'value.' Learning in school and learning in 'real life' can become separated, and education can become a means of passing examinations in order to get a job, rather than an exploration of the meaning and the significance of the human condition (Krishnamurti 1981: 14).

3.3 Rote learning

Rote-learning does not contradict the concept of flow, but can in fact help to facilitate it, as can be seen, once more, in the case of Baduk. It is

common amongst western educators to criticize the rote learning method in general use in Korean schools, because it "does not allow the establishment of meaningful relationships in the existing cognitive structure or prior learning and experience in the learner" (Ausubel & Novak 1978). This attitude can be traced back to educational reform in the U.S.A. early in the 20th century, which saw rote learning as an inefficient way to store and acquire information and as a result, caused rote learning to be phased out of schools. In contrast, Csikszentmihalyi (1991) extols the virtues of being able to remember complex information:

But if control of consciousness is judged to be at least as important as the ability to get things done, then learning complex patterns of information by heart is by no means a waste of effort. It is a mistake to assume that creativity and rote learning are incompatible. Some of the most original scientists, for instance, have been known to have memorized music, poetry, or historical information extensively. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991 p. 123)

Another argument states that Korean students prefer rote learning to other methods (Samuelowicz 1987; Kember & Gow 1990). According to this argument, it would be culturally inappropriate to offer student-centered approaches (e.g. task-based language teaching [TBLT], group-work, or autonomous project work) to such students. As Littlewood points out, however, Asian students do not prefer rote learning; it is the 'educational contexts' that are responsible for the learning styles of the learners.

The stereotype of Asian students as 'obedient listeners' does not reflect the roles they would like to adopt in class. They do not see the teacher as an authority figure who should not be questioned; they do not want to sit in class passively receiving knowledge. (Littlewood, 2000, p.33)

In this context, Baduk offers an example of the efficacy of a balanced approach to rote learning as a means of acquiring an extensive database of technical information. Just as Koreans used to rote-learn thousands of Chinese characters in order to be able to read a newspaper, rote learning provides an effective means of storing all the necessary technique needed to be able to play Baduk well. This database can then be accessed in the lateral-thinking stage, when intuition and pattern-recognition come into

play.

A 'fluency first' approach can appear to be superior to rote learning, since even basic learners are able to communicate in the target language. However, the proficiency of such learners is apt to plateau when they achieve 'survival' level, and development of vocabulary and advanced concepts can be sacrificed to ease of communication (Harmer 2001: 44-45). Once the learner has memorized a technical or lexical database, however, it can be relatively easy to become fluent and proficient, and to continue developing advanced language skills.

3.4 Motivation

Current English learning environments in Korea tend to preserve traditional teacher/student roles, measuring success in terms of knowledge-based, multiple-choice examinations. This approach can produce low self-esteem and low motivation to learn any more than the grammar and vocabulary required to pass the relevant high stakes test. However, motivation is one of the key issues in language learning and skills to motivate learners are crucial for language teachers (Dörnyei 2001: 1). As Corder states, success in language learning "has to do with variations in motivation, attitude, and so on; that's where the variation is" (Corder 1990: 115). Any attempt to help students maximize their learning potential must, therefore, positively affect such factors. The current extrinsic, instrumental motivation for learning English must be changed, so that students acquire English for the love of learning it, or for its inherent cultural and linguistic value. As Csikszentmihalyi (1991) notes:

Most people give up on learning after they leave school because thirteen or twenty years of extrinsically motivated education is still a source of unpleasant memories. Their attention has been manipulated long enough from the outside by textbooks and teachers, and they have counted graduation as the first day of freedom. (Csikszentmihalyi 1991: 141).

Baduk, on the other hand, is free from test-preparation restrictions, and does not function as a means of university gate keeping. Although students study Baduk in order to improve their higher-order thinking skills, and thus indirectly, their test-taking skills, the main motivation is intrinsic. Because of this, their learning is meaningful, relevant, and long-lasting.

3.5 Form-focused Interaction

Although essentially creative in its middle stages, it can be said that Baduk follows a process of Form-focused Interaction (FFI), especially in the early and late stages of a game. Similarly, in second language learning: "The best guess we can make at what differentiates 'good' second language learners from the rest is their active, independent involvement with the target language" (Dickinson 1992: 61). This is not to ignore form in favor of fluency. As Willis points out, " There is now quite a large body of research carried out with different ages and levels that suggests a focus on form at some point within a TBI or CBI course can help learners achieve greater levels of accuracy" (Willis 2004: 12). Learners need to attend to and become aware of linguistic form (even in the process of making meaning), in order to prevent fossilization (Ellis 2003: 319; Candlin 2001: 230).

Many educators agree that a balance of form and function is essential to language learning. A communicative approach cannot hope to produce proficient learners unless the students acquire lexis and structure, and a grammar-translation approach cannot aspire to producing communicatively competent learners unless it gives attention to interaction and development of performance skills. Baduk also exemplifies this truth, since it requires an equivalent balance of technique and performance for the participants to get the most out of the game.

3.6 Pattern recognition

Baduk and second language learning thus require a balance of form-focused rote-learning, intrinsic motivation, effortful study, play, and performance, if they are to be performed at any level of proficiency, and if the flow experience is to occur. This is not the whole story, however. Rote learning is used effectively and efficiently by Baduk students, but once they know the required shapes and sequences, they are told to forget them, and to concentrate on playing the game. This introduces an interesting aspect of Baduk – the use of instinct, based upon a largely unconscious database. There is a saying that there are two types of Baduk players: those who choose a move by its ' feel' and those who choose a move by its ' shape.' In other words, the proficient player has internalized the database of technique and set positions, and is able to access them at an

instinctive or intuitional level. This allows perfect freedom to create and experiment, based on a solid grounding of knowledge.

The implications for teachers of EFL are clear. Language is performed at advanced levels by accessing a large database of grammar, lexis, and form, which has, over time, become intuitional on the part of the user. In order to reach this point, a balance of form (technique) and interaction (effortful practice) is indispensable during the acquisition process. It is therefore inappropriate for teachers to focus on form to the exclusion of performance, and vice versa. In addition, language is acquired most effectively when students are intrinsically motivated. This means that the learning should be enjoyable and meaningful to the students, who should be allowed to interact, experiment, and reflect as much as possible.

IV. Conclusion

Korean students are notable for their ability to work diligently, to work for long periods of time, and to achieve distinction in whatever they do. These characteristics are evident in the rankings of Korean students in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA 2006). These figures are supported by the fact that Korean youngsters are the best in the world at playing Baduk, currently changing the face of the game with their innovative ideas and applied technical skills. As already mentioned, there are at least two Baduk television channels available in Korea, and these are amply supplemented by a number of official domestic and international Internet sites. It seems fair to conclude that Baduk, which demands a balance of rote learning and higher order thinking skills, is quickly mastered at a significant level of proficiency by Korean students. On the other hand, an equivalent mastery of the English language, which requires similar learning processes and thinking skills (Ross 2006), is not nearly as common in Korea, despite the enormous amount of time and energy devoted to it by parents, students, teachers and government officials.

One answer to this situation would appear to be to examine the state of English teaching in Korea. If Korean students are generally efficient at learning in an associated field (Baduk), then it seems possible that English teaching might be improved by emulating the flow-based approach of that field. In this context, it might be instructive to investigate the project-based school system in Finland, especially in view of the high standing of Finnish school children on the PISA ratings (PISA 2006). Van

den Branden (2006) has also provided a successful working model of second language teaching in his description of how a low-performing Dutch as a Second Language (DSL) educational system was positively transformed through the introduction of a regional task-based curriculum.

Rather than continuing to be “houses of detention rather than attention,” (Postman 1994: 151, quoting Marshall McLuhan), therefore, a comparison of Baduk and second language learning in Korea suggests that schools could become true fonts of learning, in which students would discover the love and excitement of applying their natural abilities in flow-based problem-solving and self-discovery. This would involve teachers taking a leaf out of Baduk’s textbook, and inspiring their students to become ‘involved’ in flow-based learning that is ‘enjoyable,’ ‘voluntary,’ and ‘worthwhile.’

If education can become a ‘flow’-based journey of personal discovery, we can anticipate much more satisfactory results for the economy, in addition to achievement of the true humanistic goals of education in Korea – a win-win situation for everyone.

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Baduk and Second Language Learning: Effortful Study and Balanced Flow

Andrew Edward Finch

Abstract

This paper examines the concept of 'flow experience' and in this context, compares the oriental board game, Baduk, with foreign language learning. Implications of this comparison for English education in Korea are also investigated. The excellence of young Baduk players indicates that school children in this country show a surprising capacity for the higher-order thinking skills that are demanded by this game. However, the same skills (problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, inference, etc.) seem lacking in their English abilities. This paper suggests that one of the factors behind this contradiction is the phenomena of 'flow.' Students playing Baduk are typically happy to learn the large amount of technique necessary, because this technique allows them to concentrate fully on the game, and to actively 'enter the flow' while doing so. In this state, learning is an enjoyable challenge. However, English language learning in schools is often passive, boring and restricted. This paper therefore suggests that English language teachers (and schools in general) should make learning a stimulating experience, by facilitating a sense of flow in their classes.

[Key words: Flow, EFL, Baduk, motivation]