

Understanding and learning difference

Prof. Gord Sellar
By Chang hyunhye
Journalistic Writing 2

“.....”

My friendly ‘Hello’ was ignored. She just gave me a short glance! There were just only two people in elevator, one Russian and me. The elevator at that time moved very very slowly like an old turtle. Finally, after the door closed behind me, one image of Russian flashed across my mind, that is “unfriendly and blunt.”

The students of catholic university, and especially dormitory students like me, are facing a new change. Korean students often see many foreign students in the campus then before, thanks to establishment of ‘International Hub.’ My roommate, Ju-yeon, said about this change to me. “You know, the Philippine friend talked about the most famous and fantastic place in the Philippine! Until now I only knew that Manila is the best one. I’ll go there someday. Anyway, I realized that the more I talk with the foreign friends, the more I learn about their country, culture and people. It is quite fresh.”

At first, this new circumstance was like a fish out of water for me; however, it becomes natural, and finally, it leads me to go shopping with two Chinese friends. We had lunch together and hit the road. On our way, we shoot the breeze with poor English (and little Chinese), and got shopping mall at Express Bus Terminal Station. In full swing of shopping, the Chinese friends said to me. “Are all kinds of clothes in here fashionable in Korea?” “Yeah, as you can see, many Korean come here and both price and quality are reasonable.” “I can’t understand Korean fashion style. Most of clothes are very small size, and even childish characters are on some clothes.” By that time, I thought that the fashion style in Korea is pretty popular with all foreigners, but not always. Fortunately, my friends ran cool clothes to earth, and this experience reminds me of ‘cultural difference.’ From now on, I’ll write about some kind of cultural differences and problems based on their life as foreign students in our university. I do not want to count all kinds of cultural episodes, experiences (Are cultural differences based on personal character?) as commonsense stuffs or personality in certain country. But I think there is something to distinguish from each country.

I talked with one French student about his life in Korea. The first difference between Korea and France is degree of ‘freedom.’ The dormitory has not single rooms, and men and women are separated into two parts. Even includes elevators. In France, most of dorm rooms are single rooms and women and men can live on same floor. The curfew hour is also very stringent for him. “I have to return the dormitory by 1 a.m. That is so awful (Originally, the curfew time is 11 p.m. for most of dorm students except a graduate student!)” In Western university’s dormitories, including France, have no curfew time for university students.

I asked other question. "Does Korean food fit to you?" Frowning, he shook his head. "I can't eat Korean food, so I eat out with my friends. I usually eat pizza, spaghetti, something like that. And yesterday, I ate Korean barbeque at Sinchon." "Are there some difficulties to adjust to class?", "Everyday I take Korean class, but there is no Korean professor who can speak French. Learning Korean is more difficult."

I met one Japanese student at O.B.F.. She said, "Korean people always have a meal very fast so, I think, it seems that they do not enjoy their meal and conversation with friends." I want to ask, "What sort of friends did you have a meal together?" But I realized that most of Korean tend to eat fast, without talking, comparing to other country's people. She continued to say about general university life in Japan. "Many Korean university students who are junior and senior study very hard but freshmen and sophomore are not study hard and they usually drink beer and hang out with their friends But Japan is totally opposite. Junior and senior kick up their heels with friends or attend various seminars."

Let's return to elevator episode. I got an answer from, Elena, a Russian student,. "Hyunhye, it just means that people do not want to be interfered. When you say hello to someone who had a bad day, are pondering serious thing or are tired out, it makes him or her irritate. The reaction is different from people to people and situation to situation. For example, at the airport, I was so burned out from long journey that I could not do anything. But one Korean stranger spoke to me and talked in English without caring my situation. It was terrible experience." "And you said before that Russian people are crazy about Vodka. But all of the Russian people do not love Vodka. It is impossible to define or generalize one culture. We should not consider one culture in fixed frame."

I learned that I should respect their various cultures first, and then understand their way of thinking and their style. Korea becomes multicultural society and is already at the center of a new change. That is a 'cultural diversity.' As time goes by, we may face delicate and subtle situations. When you think "I don't like that sort of thing, it goes against the grain for me", you try to keep an open mind and respect other's culture independently.