
ARTICLE

Language Learning Affordances And Constraints Among English Teachers In Japan And Korea

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Every year, many first-language (L1) English speakers move abroad to teach in international contexts. However, studies have not focused on these teachers as language learners themselves or considered how the ecology of L1 English Speaking Teachers (ESTs) workplaces may afford or constrain their access to speaking opportunities within the various communities of practice they participate in. This study attempts to fill that gap by examining the experiences of L1 ESTs in Japan and Korea to determine the roles that the workplace and co-workers play in the development of these teachers' competence in Korean and Japanese. Quantitative survey data were collected from 40 L1 ESTs based in Korea and Japan, and qualitative interviews were conducted with a subset of 15 volunteers from the larger data set. Results show that various stakeholders such as co-workers and students as well as the physical environment serve as gatekeepers to the L1 ESTs' legitimate peripheral participation as Japanese and Korean speakers in their workplaces. Affordances for language learning in the workplace included speaking the target language (TL) with coworkers, in the classroom, with students, in social activities with TL speakers, and situational factors like the location of their desks within their workplaces. Constraints, on the other hand, included speaking English with coworkers, social activities with other English speakers, the location of their desks, and TL speakers speaking English to them.

INTRODUCTION

The status of English as a global lingua franca has created a multibillion-dollar international market in which first language (L1) English speakers can leverage their L1 speaker status as economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). In East Asia, programs such as EPIK (English Program in Korea) and JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching Program) provide L1 English speakers from a privileged set of countries (e.g., the United States, Great Britain) the opportunity to live and teach in Asia on short-term contracts with minimal qualifications. In their workplaces, these teachers are sometimes positioned as outsiders whose integration into the community is not expected because their role is to serve an access point to native-like pronunciation for local students and teachers. The "native speaker" identity is often privileged by the local community over other aspects of teachers' identities, such as a language learner. Consequently, many teachers have few opportunities to engage in the kind of legitimate peripheral participation in second language (L2) communities of practice (CoP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991) that may assist them in developing communicative competence in the local language.

The term “native speaker” is loaded with negative connotations and can be wielded for exclusionary purposes (Davies, 2003). Particularly in the case of English language teaching, international teachers who are considered native speakers of English based on their country of origin are sometimes believed to be better teachers than local teachers who typically have much more teaching experience. In the context of Korea and Japan, the concept of a native English speaker typically refers to people from ‘inner-circle’ without acknowledging many ‘outer-circle’ countries who also use English as a first or official language. EPIK, for example, in listing the requirements for eligibility in their program notes that teachers must “be a citizen of a country where English is the primary language,” and specifically “be citizens of one of the following countries: Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, United Kingdom, United States, or South Africa” (EPIK Website, 2019). While South Africa is typically categorized as an “outer-circle country,” it is included in EPIK list of countries in which English is the “primary language.”

While the literature on the experiences of these international teachers typically uses the terms native English-speaking teacher (NEST), native English teacher (NET), or native speaker teacher (NST), in this article we follow calls in SLA (Dewaele, 2018; Ortega, 2014) to avoid the terminology used around nativism in favor of more inclusive ones. In the context of the present study, we use the term *L1 English speaking teachers (L1 ESTs)* to refer to the international teachers teaching English in Korean and Japan, and *local English teacher (LET)* to refer to their Japanese and Korean colleagues. However, as the teachers themselves often reference native speakers when talking about their positions in their workplaces and larger Korean and Japanese society, we will use the term “native speaker” when quoting interview data and referencing previous literature. While acknowledging that English speakers from outer-circle countries are also legitimate English speakers, the requirements to participate in English teaching programs such as EPIK and JET resulted in a cohort of participants who were largely from inner-circle countries.

The research on L1 ESTs in East Asia has largely focused on co-teaching with local teachers (Ahn et al., 1998; Mahoney, 2004; Tajino & Tajino 2000) and L1 ESTs’ identity development as teachers and professionals (Charles, 2019; Gu, Jiang, & Ou, 2022; Howard, 2019; Kim, 2011; 2017). Studies that consider experiences learning the local language tend to center teachers’ motivation or demotivation over time and use a lack of language ability as a factor to explain interpersonal conflict with co-workers or difficulty integrating in the workplace. For example, Gearing and Roger (2018a, 2018b, 2019) and Gearing (2019) used the theoretical lenses of investment and (de)motivation to track L1 ESTs’ learning of Korean, but their participants were largely not proficient in Korean—and at times were actively discouraged from using it—and therefore did not describe their experiences of using the local language in the workplace. Casanave (2012) tracked her own experience learning Japanese while teaching in Japan through journal entries to investigate the ecology of effort which she found to include “psychological, biochemical, and emotional influences” (p. 647). To the best of our knowledge, however, previous research has not focused on how the physical and relational ecology of L1 ESTs’ workplaces may afford and constrain their use and learning of the local language. The current study attempts to fill this gap by examining the experiences of L1 ESTs in Japan and Korea to determine the possible roles that the workplace and co-workers play in the development of these teachers’ competence in the local language. In doing so, we hope to contribute a new perspective on L1 ESTs as language learners who are subject to relationships of power in their host countries that mediate the quantity and quality of opportunities for L2 use that are available to them. Our study is guided by two overarching research questions:

1. What factors do L1 ESTs report as contributing to their learning of the local language within the workplace?
2. What factors do L1 ESTs report as constraining their learning of the local language within the workplace?

LITERATURE REVIEW

L1 EST Programs in East Asia

Given the significant emphasis placed on English education in Korea and Japan, these countries serve as an appropriate context in which to investigate how L1 ESTs navigate speaking Korean and Japanese in their workplaces. L1 ESTs in Japan and Korea typically teach in private academies, public schools at the elementary and secondary levels, or in universities teaching English conversation classes. Private academies, known as *hagwons* in Korea and *eikaiwa* in Japan, are for-profit institutions that cater to students from pre-school to high school as well as adults and company employees. Working at private academies tends to provide a higher salary but longer working hours and a more demanding work environment. L1 ESTs who work in public schools typically gain employment through the EPIK program in Korea and JET program in Japan. As government workers, these positions tend to have fewer teaching hours and a less demanding workplace environment. Finally, L1 ESTs are also employed as English conversation teachers at the university level. Many university students in both Korea and Japan are required to take an English conversation class at some point before graduating; these classes are generally taught by non-tenured L1 ESTs who are typically not required to have a Ph.D.

Jeon (2020) notes that while English has never been an official language in Japan or Korea, both countries have experienced a demand for English language teachers due to the cultural capital the language carries. The demand for English language education has created a concomitant demand for L1 ESTs who are sometimes preferred over local teachers to teach conversation and culture based on the assumption that local English teachers will lack sufficient pronunciation skills and relevant cultural knowledge. Chun (2014), for example, surveyed Korean university students and found that the participants believed that L1 ESTs were “more competent at teaching reading, speaking and pronunciation” as well as “providing cultural knowledge about the target culture and preparing students to interact effectively with native speakers” (p. 569).

L1 ESTs’ Contradictory Native Speaker Privilege

Recent studies about the experiences of these teachers have largely centered on the development of their professional identities (Charles, 2019; Choi, 2022; Gearing & Roger, 2018a, 2018b; Gu, Jiang, & Ou, 2022; Ishihara, Carroll, Mahler, & Russo, 2018;

Kim 2011, 2017; L22 & Jang, 2023) and the often “contradictory experiences, whereby they [have] to navigate positions of both privilege as well as periphery and exclusion” (Choi, 2022, p. 5). As L1 English speakers from inner circle countries (i.e., countries which use English as a primary language), these teachers often benefit from native speaker privilege which positions monolingual speakers of English as the best speakers and therefore more valuable in the classroom than their local L2 teacher counterparts who often have better training in language teaching. They can leverage the cultural capital of being an L1 English

speaker to secure English teaching positions, sometimes without the experience or qualifications to do so. While their position of privilege gives them access to teaching jobs, their status as foreigners and assumptions about the extent to which they will, or will not, integrate into the community of teachers can also lead to exclusion and isolation in the workplace.

Although the literature on the experiences of these teachers has, in the past, tended to position these L1 EST teachers as passive participants in the marginalization of their local L2 teacher counterparts, more recent literature has begun to question that assumption and described L1 ESTs who are culturally adaptable and highly value their local co-teachers. In other words, in an increasingly multilingual and globalized world, the notion of the culturally incompetent L1 EST who does not attempt to learn the local language or cultural practices of their host country may be outdated. Choi (2022) notes that one of her participants expressed being uncomfortable with being positioned as the superior teacher compared to his local co-teacher based on his L1 English-speaker status. The participant goes so far as to recount saying to his co-teacher, “I think your students are luckier to have you, since you speak their native language and you have a strong command of English” (p. 5). Copland, Mann, and Garton (2020) also challenge the perception of L1 ESTs as culturally ignorant by showing they are often “bilingual, experienced, and qualified, and regard local English teachers (LETs) they work with as experts and in control” (p. 348). They note that because of the criticisms against native speakerism as an ideology, “discussions are generally unenthusiastic about NESTs and their influence (e.g., Bunce, 2016; Machia & Walsh, 2015; Wong, Lee & Gao, 2016) which has resulted in the term often exuding negative associations” (p. 349).

Due to this position of privilege, L1 ESTs may feel less external pressure to learn the local language. Gearing and Roger (2018) note that “the symbolic capital associated with the participants’ native English-speaking status in the Korean context assured them a level of economic and social security, while at the same time working as a disadvantage in terms of learning Korean” (p. 166). Not only can this position of privilege discourage L1 ESTs from learning the local language, but it can also hinder their integration into their professional communities (Yim & Ahn, 2018). Further, L1 ESTs can become demotivated because of a perceived lack of accommodations by locals they interact with, the temporary nature of their stay, and sometimes even being asked not to learn the local language or lie about any proficiency they have while at work (Gearing & Roger, 2018b; Lee & Jang, 2023; Gearing & Roger 2019; Gearing & Roger 2018a).

However, not all studies paint such a gloomy picture. Some L1 ESTs are highly invested in their workplace communities and use their local language skills to gain access to social and cultural capital (Ishihara et al., 2018; Grey, 2017). One of the participants in Ishihara et al. (2018), for instance, noted that her language ability gave her greater access to power and agency in her workplace where the ability to speak “Japanese with monolingual vice principals occasionally opened access to ‘the real seats of power’” (p. 86). Grey (2017) also found that, for some of his participants, speaking Korean gave them some degree of social advantage and a way to “distance themselves from the negative collective image of close-minded foreign teachers” (p. 15). While speaking Korean or Japanese may bring varying degree of social advantage in both countries due to the differing degree of “English fever” (Choi, 2018), it is clear that the ability to speak the local language can serve as a tool with which to resist negative positioning. In this sense, L1 ESTs may use their language skills to gain some control over how they are positioned and to achieve greater respect and power in their workplaces.

Isolation in the Workplace

Literature on L1 ESTs has described the experience of isolation in the workplace (Howard, 2019; Jeon, 2020; Yim & Ahn, 2018). Howard (2019) specifically targeted participants who could not speak Korean and were working in Korea and found that a major theme in their professional identities was that of a Distanced Other. She notes the participants expressed “sentiments of communicative disconnect from fellow Korean teachers and managers and instances of isolation in their roles” (p. 1488). Yim and Ahn’s (2018) report in their study of the co-teaching relationships between an L1 EST and his local Korean co-teachers that “although the NEST initially showed his desire to become part of the community, this desire weakened when his legitimacy as a teacher was questioned and he found himself isolated in the school system” (p. 213). Norton (2000) introduces the concept of investment as a way to make sense of how L2 speakers’ identities may be more or less valued in their learning context and lead to differentiated opportunities to invest in language learning practices. In other words, although L1 ESTs may have high motivation to learn Korean and Japanese, their identities as foreigners or English teachers may serve to restrict their opportunities to invest in language learning and therefore lead to feelings of isolation in their workplace communities.

Another reason for the isolation that L1 ESTs may experience in their workplaces is that more expert members of the community (e.g., co-workers and students) as well as the physical ecology of their environment may serve as gatekeepers to their participation in this CoP. For L1 ESTs, learning the local language may be one means by which they attempt to exert agency over this process of isolation and gain membership in their workplace community. Lave and Wenger (1991) emphasize the situated nature of learning and propose their concept of “legitimate peripheral participation” as “a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artifacts, and communities of knowledge and practice” (p. 29). Learning, then, is a process by which newcomers become competent members of a particular community by interacting with more expert members. In the case of L1 ESTs, those interactions with expert community members, however, may be restricted by their identities as “foreigners” or “English speakers,” thereby complicating both their language learning process and their ability to engage in legitimate peripheral participation and, eventually, more central participation in their CoP.

METHODS

Recruitment and Participants

This study uses quantitative and qualitative data from two sources. Quantitative data come from an online questionnaire completed by 40 L1 ESTs based in Korea ($n = 25$) and Japan ($n = 15$). Qualitative data are taken from interviews conducted with a subset of questionnaire respondents ($n = 9$ from Korea; $n = 5$ from Japan) who volunteered to be contacted by one of the researchers. This mixed methods approach was chosen as a way to capture both the broader beliefs about language learning held by a larger cohort of L1 ESTs as well as to provide a more detailed explanation of these beliefs through qualitative interviews with a smaller cohort of participants. More information about the questionnaire and qualitative interviews is provided below. Participant recruitment was done online using a combination of social media posts and emails to the researchers’ professional contacts who were asked to forward the questionnaire link to their colleagues who were L1 ESTs.

Participant ages ranged from 21 to 51 years old ($M = 30$ years). The L1 ESTs based in Korea tended to be slightly older ($M = 33$ years) than the L1 ESTs based in Japan ($M = 26$ years). All of the participants were university educated. 14 of the Korea-based L1 ESTs and 2 of the Japan-based L1 ESTs held advanced university degrees. The slight age and education level difference between the two data sets may be due to the nature of the participants we were able to recruit from Korea and Japan. All of our participants teaching in Japan were JET teachers, whereas those from Korea held teaching positions at a variety of institutional levels. In addition, the Korea-based L1 ESTs tended to be more experienced than the Japan-based L1 ESTs, having lived in Korea for an average of 6.8 years (min = 5 months; max = 27 years) versus an average of just over 13 months (min = 2 months; max = 4 years) in Japan.

21 participants self-assessed their proficiency in Korean or Japanese at the intermediate level, 9 rated their abilities as elementary, and 4 reported minimal ability. The remaining 5 participants self-assessed as advanced ($N=4$) or fluent ($N=1$) users of Korean or Japanese. These self-assessed proficiency levels were proportional across the Japan-based and Korea-based samples. In other words, despite the difference in average length of time spent in Japan or Korea, there is no meaningful difference in self-reported L2 Japanese or Korean ability in our participant pool.

Online Questionnaire

The online questionnaire (see Appendix A) consisted of two parts. The first focused on the L1 ESTs' background (e.g., age, location, experience living/teaching abroad, self-assessed L2 proficiency). The second part included 15 Likert-type questions related to language use (e.g., English vs Korean) and attitudes to language use and learning in and outside of the workplace (i.e., respondents were asked to rate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with 15 statements on a 5-point scale). At the end of the questionnaire, respondents were asked if they would like to be contacted for an interview with one of the researchers.

Qualitative Interviews

Respondents who volunteered to participate in an interview were contacted via email to arrange a Zoom meeting with one of the researchers, and fifteen interviews were conducted. The interviews were audio and video recorded for subsequent analysis. The interview protocol (see Appendix B) focused on participants' experiences learning Korean or Japanese and the contexts in which they used the language of the host community or used English. In addition to the questions listed in the interview protocol, the researcher asked follow-up questions and pursued topics proffered by participants. Interviews lasted approximately 1 hour each.

Analytic Approach

The analysis began by reviewing the survey results from the online questionnaire. This allowed for the identification of quantitative trends regarding participants' experiences learning the language of the host community and opportunities for using the language in professional and social contexts. The responses were then compared between teachers based in Korea with those based in Japan. One particularly important difference between the two groups of participants emerged in the quantitative data: opportunities for, and constraints on, language use in work settings. This observation allowed for a narrower qualitative analysis of the

interview data by focusing on workplace factors that teachers report as facilitating versus hindering their learning of Korean or Japanese.

SURVEY RESULTS

Mean scores and standard deviations (SD) for responses to the online questionnaire are provided in Table 1. Responses are based on a 5-point scale of agreement, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. Teachers based in Korea and Japan have been separated into two distinct groups because, as noted above, we found significant differences regarding workplace language use (Qs 2, 4, 6), which motivated our more focused analysis of the interview data. As the data show, in comparison to teachers based in Korea, teachers based in Japan appear to have significantly more opportunities to speak the L2 with coworkers (Q2, $t = -3.47$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 1.13$), there is stronger expectation to speak the L2 in the workplace (Q4, $t = -2.41$, $p < 0.01$, $d = 0.77$), and at the same time their coworkers are more willing to speak the L2 with them (Q6, $t = -2.46$, $p < 0.01$, $d = 0.79$). Table 1 shows the survey items along with the mean responses from teachers in Korea and Japan as well as notes for whether a statically significant difference was found between the two groups and their response.

Table 1

Results Of The Online Questionnaire

Question	Teacher based in...		Significance
	Korea	Japan	
1. I feel that learning the language of the country I'm living in is important.	4.3 (sd=0.9)	4.6 (sd=0.8)	–
2. I have many opportunities to speak with target language speakers at work.	2.7 (sd=1.1)	4.0 (sd=1.2)	✓
3. I have many opportunities to speak with target language speakers outside of work.	3.6 (sd=1.1)	3.5 (sd=1.2)	–
4. I feel that there is an expectation for me to speak the target language at work.	1.9 (sd=1.3)	2.9 (sd=1.3)	✓
5. I feel that there is an expectation for me to speak the target language outside of work.	3.1 (sd=1.2)	3.7 (sd=1.2)	–
6. My coworkers are willing to speak to me in the target language.	3.1 (sd=1.4)	4.1 (sd=1.1)	✓
7. People I meet randomly outside of work are willing to speak to me in the target language.	3.9 (sd=1.1)	3.7 (sd=1.3)	–

8.	I have many social relationships in which I use the target language.	2.8 (sd=1.3)	2.3 (sd=1.0)	–
9.	I spend a lot of time improving my fluency in the target language.	3.0 (sd=1.3)	3.5 (sd=1.2)	–
10.	I feel uncomfortable when I have to speak the target language at work.	3.0 (sd=1.2)	2.7 (sd=1.2)	–
11.	I feel uncomfortable when I have to speak the target language with strangers.	2.9 (sd=1.4)	3.4 (sd=1.2)	–
12.	There are many obstacles/challenges in my learning of the target language.	3.7 (sd=1.2)	3.9 (sd=1.1)	–
13.	Speaking with target language speakers is necessary to achieve fluency.	4.6 (sd=0.6)	4.7 (sd=0.5)	–
14.	I enjoy speaking the target language.	3.6 (sd=1.1)	4.1 (sd=1.1)	–
15.	I believe that I am capable of achieving fluency in the target language.	3.8 (sd=1.1)	3.6 (sd=1.2)	–

There were no other significant differences between the Korea-based and Japan-based teachers. For example, participants agreed or strongly agreed that it is important to learn the language of the country they are living in (Q1), that they enjoy speaking the language (Q14), and that they believe they are capable of achieving fluency in the language (Q15). In addition, they report having many opportunities to speak the language outside of work (Q3), that there is a modest expectation to speak the language outside of work (Q5), and that people they meet outside of work are willing to speak the language with them (Q7). However, the participants appear to have relatively few social relationships in which they use the L2 (Q8), and they report that there are many obstacles or challenges to learning the language (Q12). Thus, while the participants appear to be motivated to learn and have opportunities to use the L2 (e.g., in service encounters), there is a potential lack of opportunities to develop more intimate social networks in the L2. Indeed, this inference was borne out in our interviews (see below).

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS

The thematic analysis was done in three phases. First, the first author reviewed the interviews and transcribed whenever it was mentioned that using or learning Japanese or Korean occurred. Based on those excerpts, the second phase consisted of identifying different themes that were occurring across those excerpts. In the third phase, the first and second authors reviewed these themes together and came to an agreement on which were present in the excerpts, constructing a final list of affordances and constraints that appears in Table 2.

As can be seen in table 2, the domain of the workplace was a space that provided both affordances and constraints, with the top two of each category being related to interactions with coworkers. As such, the analysis is limited to those affordances and constraints related to the domain of the workplace and those which were mentioned by five or more participants.

The relevant themes appear in boldface in table 2. In presenting these themes, we have chosen interview excerpts that are most representative of what the other participants reported. Where possible, we have also included short quotes from other participants to serve as further examples. All participants' names are pseudonyms. Each excerpt begins with line 1 for ease of reading and are not indicative of where the excerpt occurs in the interview.

Table 2*

Affordances and Constraints to Learning the Target Language

Affordances		Constraints	
Speaks TL with coworkers	7	Speaks English with coworkers	10
Speaks TL in the classroom	7	Social activities with English speakers	8
Speaks TL with students	7	Location of desk	7
Social activities with TL speakers	6	TL speakers speak English to them	7
Location of desk	5	Nervous speaking TL	3
Living in the countryside	2	Regional dialect	2
TL speaking family members (in-laws)	2	Themselves	2
Desire to be abroad long term	1	Low level in TL	2
Immersion	1	Difficulty of TL	2
Taking a TL class	1	Discouraged from using TL at work	1
Machiavellian motivation	1	Living in the countryside	1
		Discouraged from using TL in the classroom	1
		Lack of need	1
		Negative reactions to foreigners	1
		Office atmosphere	1

*Frequencies refer to the number of participants who mentioned a particular affordance or constraint.

Language Learning Affordances

Speaking the TL with Coworkers

Participants often mentioned particular coworkers as being easy to speak to or directly helpful in their language learning. Interestingly, all five of the participants who were teaching in Japan mentioned their coworkers as being helpful in their language learning journey. By contrast, only two of the participants in Korea mentioned this. One reason for this difference could be the nature of the programs our participants worked in. For instance, as noted earlier, the JET program focuses on intercultural exchange (JET, 2015) in addition to English education. Because the JET L1 ESTs' position is not only one of an assistant English teacher but also a cultural ambassador, the Japanese teachers may see themselves as more involved in facilitating this cultural exchange. One way to accomplish that goal may be to help the JET L1 ESTs in their learning of the local language. Another reason for this could be Korea's greater emphasis on globalization and "English fever" (Choi, 2018), which may lead the L1 ESTs' Korean coworkers to value their status as L1 English speakers and teachers over cross cultural exchange that may be better facilitated through learning Korean.

In excerpt 1, Paul, a 28-year-old JET teacher, describes how his coworkers actively take part in creating opportunities for him to speak Japanese. When asked who he finds the

easiest to speak with in Japanese, he mentions two coworkers in particular. The first teacher, he says, is easy to communicate with because he actively invites Paul out to do things and will work to negotiate understanding in English when Paul's Japanese is limited. The second teacher he describes as being "kind," "patient," a "classic teacher," "helpful," "calm," and "understanding," which contributes to her being easy to talk to.

Excerpt 1

1	Interviewer	okay so among the people with whom you speak Japanese now
2		who do you find the easiest to communicate with
3	Paul	um there is probably two different teachers that I communicate with
4		one that consistently invites me
5		if I go out
6		when I like after school
7		it's because he has invited me to go somewhere
8	Interviewer	mhm
9	Paul	um and he speaks okay English and like
10		I can like speak Japanese
11	Paul	and he can like understand me
12		and like figure out kind of like what I'm trying to say
13		and if he doesn't we can have a conversation in English to figure out what I was trying to say
14	Interviewer	mhm
15	Paul	and then there's another teacher at school who her English is really good
16		but she doesn't think it's very good
17		and she's just kind and like patient
18		like classic teacher
19	Interviewer	mhm
20	Paul	like she wanted to be a teacher vibe you know
21		and she's very helpful in that way
22		so very calm and understanding
23		and it's very easy to talk to her

One affordance for L1 ESTs that can be seen in this excerpt is the fact that they are surrounded by colleagues who are sympathetic interlocutors. Andrew, for example, also mentioned a particular coworker as being easy to talk to because she is "very forgiving about [his] Japanese." These coworkers may be more able to provide help and "teach" the TL to L1 ESTs compared to professionals abroad in other industries. This provides an interesting contrast to what has been presented in the literature from L1 ESTs in Korea who reported feeling that "members of the local community were either unable or unwilling to accommodate participants' non-standard patterns of Korean pronunciation" (Gearing & Roger, 2017b, p. 160).

Speaking TL in the Classroom

Despite previous work in which L1 ESTs report being discouraged from using Korean at work (Gearing & Roger, 2017), seven participants in this study mentioned that they speak the TL in the classroom to facilitate classroom management or to build rapport with students. For instance, Joshua, a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant (ETA) working at a public middle

school in Korea, noted that he uses Korean when he has classroom management issues such as when students are avoiding listening to him. He states that they say “I don’t know” in Korean as a reason for not listening or following his instructions. In response to that, he says that he will try again in Korean to force them to engage with him.

Excerpt 2

1	Interviewer	what might be some kind of situation when you feel like you have to use Korean
2		to facilitate the lesson
3	Joshua	usually when I have some
4		classroom management issues
5	Interviewer	mm
6	Joshua	for instance if I have students who are actively avoiding listening to me
7		I may have to use Korean
8		because often their excuse is
9		I don't know
10		and they'll say that in Korean
11	Interviewer	mhm
12	Joshua:	and then I'm like okay
13		well
14	Interviewer	yes you do (laughs)
15	Joshua:	I know you know Korean
16		so (laughs)
17	Interviewer	(laughs)
18	Joshua	let's try this then one more time
19		eyes on me bud
20	Interviewer	mhm
21	Joshua	(laughing)

Here, the domain of the classroom creates a need and an opportunity for Joshua to speak Korean. His position as the teacher, and therefore his need to maintain control in his classroom, creates space for and legitimizes his use of Korean. In order to maintain this position as the authority, he periodically switches to Korean to ensure that the students know what they should be doing. Other L1 ESTs also mentioned frequently translating words or expressions to help the students better understand them. Paul even mentioned that he and his co-teachers try to structure his lessons so that he gets to practice his Japanese while the students practice their English. Dave stated that while he will not repeat instructions in both English and Korean, he gives commands such as *jigeum be (do it now)* in Korean to keep the class moving.

Speaking TL With Students

Outside of the classroom, participants also described using the TL in their interactions with students. Lauren, a 31-year-old kindergarten teacher, describes how her students are a resource in her learning Korean, as excerpt 3 demonstrates. She describes how adult Koreans seem to be unsure of how to interact with her in Korean and will either assume that she is completely fluent and speak in a way that is difficult to understand or assume she does not speak Korean at all. She also states that adults will, at times, change their Korean to be unnatural but easier to understand (i.e., foreigner talk). The kindergarteners, on the other hand, simply want to be

understood and speak to her in simple sentences just like they would to each other. She also notes that they cannot switch to English because they lack the proficiency, which creates an opportunity for a negotiation of meaning to take place between them in Korean.

Excerpt 3

1	Interviewer	um okay then
2		what do you think has facilitated your language learning the most
3	Lauren	hmm
4		I think um
5		honestly I think it's being around the kindergarteners um
6		they will
7		an adult will speak to me and either
8		just rattle off a whole paragraph expecting me to know what it is
9		or just expect that I don't speak any English uh Korean
10		and will just sort of speak in Konglish to me a lot of the time
11	Interviewer	mhm
12	Lauren	the kindy kids would use simple sentences like they'd used to each other
13		but then sort of expect me to know it
14		and if I didn't understand it
15		they obviously wouldn't switch because they didn't know how to
16	Interviewer	right
17	Lauren	at the start
18		but you know even now they'll
19		they'll just sort of point to something and be like
20		no no no this is what it is
21		this is what I'm talking about
22	Interviewer	mm
23	Lauren	and they'll even sort of try to teach me things
24		(laughs) it's pretty cute
25	Interviewer	yeah
26	Lauren	um so I think
27		I think that's what it is
28		because the children are sort of less judgmental
29		and they also don't try to teach strange Korean
30		um have you
31		have you seen
32		cuz you said you were here for a while too
33	Interviewer	yeah
34	Lauren	there are some teachers who come in and sort of change their English to help (finger quotations) the kids
35	Interviewer	ohhh yeah
36	Lauren	and it doesn't help at all their English
37		you know when they come in and they go
38		teacher want to know why you do that
39	Interviewer	(laughs, grimace)
40	Lauren	and it's like that's
41		not English
42	Interviewer	no hmmn
43	Lauren	not the reason they have native English speaker
44		because that's not the way a native English speaker speaks
45	Interviewer	right

46	Lauren	so to learn a language that's not helpful
47		some adults will do sort of a similar thing to me in Korean
48	Interviewer	yeah
49	Lauren	sometimes cuz they feel like that will make it easier but it actually doesn't
50		whereas the kids don't
51		like they they're not interested in helping you
52		they just want you to understand them

Because of her students' age and limited English ability, opportunities for Lauren to use Korean emerge that may not otherwise be possible. She also describes both L1 ESTs and adult Koreans as engaging in foreigner talk but suggests that the younger children do not do this because they're "not interested in helping you they just want you to understand them." Luke also notes this benefit of speaking with his students rather than his coworkers: "it's sometimes the best to speak with a student because if I absolutely butcher their language uh after a little bit of laughing they'll be like that was weird uh but we got what you mean," whereas his coworkers will often stop him mid-sentence to correct an error. The students of these L1 ESTs, then, can be seen as a separate affordance in their learning of the local language in addition to their interactions with coworkers. Interactions with younger TL speakers may also serve to expose them to different types of informal language and slang that may otherwise be difficult to acquire.

Location Of Desk

The final affordance mentioned by five participants was the location of their desk. In excerpt 4, Andrew, a 36-year-old JET teacher working in rural Japan, noted emphatically that his desk location does not negatively impact his use of Japanese because he is placed in a block with eight other teachers and thus able to constantly talk to them. He notes specifically that the Japanese language teacher is right next to him, which allows him to "always ask questions" about Japanese as he learns it.

Excerpt 4

1	Interviewer	okay then
2		if it does
3		how does the location of your workspace or your desk your office
4		affect your ability to communicate with other teachers
5	Andrew	(shakes head) it doesn't
6		I'm placed in a block of eight teachers
7	Interviewer	mhm
8	Andrew	like all eight of our desks are connected
9		so I have
10		I actually have the Japanese teacher sitting on my le- my right side
11	Interviewer	oh nice (laughs)
12	Andrew	and then across from me I have a home economics teacher
13		and then the other three desks in the block are my JTEs
14		so none
15	Interviewer	mhm
16	Andrew	I constantly talk to these teachers all the time
17	Interviewer	mhm
18	Andrew	and we'll talk about like my weekend or what they're doing in their classes

19		the Japanese teacher I always ask questions to her
20		because I always want to learn Japanese so I mean
21		and it's it's whole Japanese conversations
22	Interviewer	mhm
23	Andrew	it's not like it's part in English or something
24		unless sometimes the Japanese teacher will ask me
25		how do you say this in English

Other participants also described how the specific location of their desk contributed to their ability to speak with other coworkers. Luke noted that his position next to the kettle meant that he could chat with coworkers whenever anyone stopped by to make a coffee or tea. Paul said that because he is next to the office door, he can catch anyone as they come in and out of the room. Dave similarly stated that because he is seated directly between his two co-teachers, he is forced to join every conversation that they have. In this light, the physical space where L1 ESTs work can be seen as an affordance in their language learning. This is also strengthened by the fact that other participants, whose desk was in a sub-par location, noted that it limited them from having more speaking opportunities at work.

Language Learning Constraints

Speaking English With Coworkers

Ten participants mentioned that they speak English with their co-workers. For example, Elizabeth is a 30-year-old Fulbright ETA working in a foreign language high school in Korea. Throughout her interview, she described how being Chinese and speaking Chinese fluently limited the number of people with whom she spoke Korean in her workplace. The interviewer starts by asking Elizabeth if she is the only L1 EST in her workplace, to which she replied that she is one of four. As can be seen by the reaction of the interviewer this is an unexpected response given that public schools in Korea typically have only one L1 EST. Elizabeth then describes the language environment at her school and office. In her office, among twelve teachers, it is only the Japanese teacher with whom she must use Korean. All the other teachers in the room are English teachers with whom she speaks English and the Chinese teacher with whom she speaks Chinese. She concludes that there is “not a Korean environment in my office at all.”

Excerpt 5

1	Interviewer	Yeah um
2		are you the only native (finger quotes) English teacher
3	Elizabeth	I am not
4		I am one of four
5	Interviewer	wow okay
6		interesting
7	Elizabeth	yeah
8	Interviewer	how is that
9	Elizabeth	I'm one of four and they are all in my office
10		I think in total
11		last year
12		and I think this year

- 13 um I didn't really count this year
 14 but I think there's anywhere from fourteen to sixteen Korean English teachers at our school
 15 Interviewer wow
 16 Elizabeth yeah
 17 and my office this year it's twelve people um
 18 and I think that this year there's only
 19 three people in my office that are not English teachers
 20 including the Chinese teacher uh Japanese teacher
 21 and there's just one other teacher
 22 so there's only one person in my office that I can't speak to
 23 uh in English
 24 uh I can
 25 I can't speak to the Japanese teacher well
 26 Interviewer mhm
 27 Elizabeth unless we use Korean um
 28 but the Chinese teacher and I get along great
 29 Interviewer oh nice wow
 30 Elizabeth so I
 31 I have no like
 32 there's not a Korean environment in my office at all
-

Elizabeth's situation raises another point related to the language learning affordances and constraints that L1 ESTs may encounter and that is their limited choice in their placement. Although JET, EPIK, and Fulbright L1 ESTs can give preferences for cities and student level, their school placement is ultimately up to the programs. Elizabeth did not choose to be at a foreign language high school, to work with four other L1 ESTs, or to be at a school with 16 other Korean English teachers. Even if an L1 EST comes with the intention to learn the local language, they may be placed in a work environment that is dominated by English and therefore may also limit opportunities to use the local language. For example, when asked what obstacles prevent him from speaking Korean more, Joshua replied: "most of my coworkers don't talk to me and when they do they talk in English."

Location Of Desk

In contrast to the participants who noted desk location as affording opportunities to use the local language with coworkers, seven participants reported this factor as constraining opportunities to speak. For example, Frank, a 51-year-old teaching English at a university who has lived in Korea for 6 years, noted that the foreign English teachers are physically separated from the Korean professors in different offices. Additionally, within their office the desks are arranged to face the wall such that the teachers have their backs to each other, which hinders any communication at all: "there are sixty-five teachers so far I have actually spoken to maybe five of them." Catherine (excerpt 6) also describes how the way her desk is placed, facing directly toward the vice principal with her back to everyone else, limits the number of staff she can communicate with at her visit school, which elicited a surprised reaction from the interviewer. Catherine concludes that due to the location of her desk she is isolated.

Excerpt 6

1	Catherine	yeah it definitely kind of like limits me to who I talk to
2		and then with my visit school
3		I hardly have any time to talk to any of the staff either
4		and with how my desk is placed too I'm like just facing the vice principal
5	Interviewer	ho (laughs)
6	Catherine	my back is towards everybody else (laughs)
7		so I'm like isolated

In both Frank and Catherine's situations, they likely had little to no choice as to where their desks were located or what offices they would be placed in. For L1 ESTs this can be a significant variable in their ability to integrate into the community of teachers in their workplace and their opportunities to speak the local language.

DISCUSSION

This analysis has focused on the workplace as a space in which L1 ESTs' access to speaking opportunities in the TL are contested. While some factors such as speaking the TL with coworkers, using it in the classroom, speaking with students, and the location of their desk facilitated their learning of the TL, other factors hindered their learning. These constraining factors included speaking English with their coworkers as well as the location of their desk.

Through the survey responses, participants in Japan and Korea reported statistically significant differences related to the number of opportunities to speak the TL in their workplaces, the expectation for them to speak it at work, and their co-workers' willingness to speak to them in it. In the interviews, the role of space in the workplace was reported to be a mediating factor in participants' experience of using the TL in their workplaces. Even if their local co-workers are willing to interact with them in the TL, these speaking opportunities may be constrained by the location of their desks. At times, the physical separation of these teachers from their colleagues created barriers to speaking with them. While participants overwhelmingly reported believing that it is important to learn that language of the country they are living in on the survey, their descriptions of the contested nature of TL interactions in their workplaces show that this motivation is not sufficient. Similarly to the immigrant women in Canada in Norton (2000), despite reporting motivation to learn the language the participants in our study were often limited in their ability to invest in this process based on their position in their workplaces.

Expectations surrounding the language use of these L1 ESTs was also found to be a mediating factor in their opportunities to speak the TL at work. Participants in both Japan and Korea reported a lower expectation to speak the TL at work compared to outside of work. This lower expectation to speak it at work may be influenced by how they are positioned by relevant stakeholders, such as fellow teachers, students, and staff. The local teachers may position themselves as TL language experts in their interactions with L1 ESTs, which colors the nature of their interaction. As Luke reported, when his Japanese co-workers spoke to him in Japanese it was often accompanied by corrections, which interrupted the flow of the conversation. As reported in Shively (2016), there may be tensions between the goals of providing corrective feedback to L2 speakers in L1-L2 interactions and the goal of communicating for the sake of relationship building. In this sense, the local teachers can be

seen as orientating towards interactions with the L1 ESTs in the TL as teaching moments rather than purely for the sake of communication.

Students, on the other hand, were reported to orient towards the L1 ESTs as teacher and authority figures which led to their interactions in the TL being more focused on communication rather than correction. In the classroom, their position as the teacher legitimized their TL usage, which the students were reported to accept. Given students' orientation towards the L1 ESTs as teachers rather than learners, the goals of their interactions were communicative rather than educational. This could be seen in Luke and Laura's interactions with students. Luke's students, while recognizing that something he said in Japanese might be "weird," didn't offer corrections and just "got what [he] mean[t]." Similarly, Laura's students did not speak to her in "Konglish," or an amalgamation of the TL and L1; instead, they simply focused on being understood.

Finally, co-workers' willingness to speak to the L1 ESTs in the TL was also reported to be a mediating factor in their speaking opportunities. Interactions with co-workers, either in the TL or in English, were the most frequently reported affordances and constraints by participants in the interviews. While some local co-workers positioned themselves as teachers vis-à-vis the L1 EST, other teachers may have seen teaching the L1 ESTs as beyond the scope of their duties and decided to either disengage from interactions or to simply speak in English to facilitate faster and more efficient conversations. Joshua, for example, despite having at least some working proficiency in Korean, reported that his co-workers simply do not speak to him and when they do they speak in English. While on the one hand, the fact that his co-workers do not go out of their way to teach him Korean could be seen as simply accepting him as a regular staff member, this disengagement also limited his opportunities to speak and to integrate into the community of teachers in his office. On the other hand, those co-workers who did speak to the L1 ESTs in the TL were reported as creating speaking opportunities in the TL, either through their explicit language teaching and corrections or by accepting them into the community of local teachers.

Access to language learning and speaking opportunities in the TL should not be seen as a given, then, for L1 ESTs. Norton (2000) notes that "theories of the good language learning have been developed on the premise that language learners can choose under what conditions they will interact with members of the target language community" (p. 5). She goes on to argue that these theories "need to be reconceptualized in ways that will problematize the dichotomous distinctions between the language learner and the language learning context" (p. 5). In her study she centers identity as a mediating factor for how learners are able to invest in language learning opportunities given their particular contexts. Our study has similarly shown that L1 ESTs' access to speaking opportunities are mediated by the more expert members of their workplace community, namely co-workers and students. This access is also likely mediated by their identities as L1 English speakers. These conditions, both physical and interpersonal, under which they interact with more expert members of their workplace community are subject to relations of power that exist within their CoP. Their identity as L1 ESTs, then, at times serves to create opportunities to speak, such as with willing students and co-workers, while at other times their identity as L1 ESTs may lead to separation from members of the community who might otherwise be positioned to provide access to L2 CoPs. As shown in Ishihara et al. (2018), speaking the local language can serve as a tool through which TL teachers resist being positioned as simply sources of linguistic and pedagogic knowledge, instead gaining access to "the real seats of power" (p. 86).

Given the power that Korean and Japanese workplaces have in granting access to CoPs for these L1 ESTs, several policy changes could be implemented to facilitate their greater

integration into the workplace community. First, because the location of teachers' desks is an important factor in their ability to access speaking opportunities, programs such as JET and EPIK may consider adding recommendations for schools to either place the L1 ESTs in an office with other teachers, rather than in an isolated English classroom, or, if possible, allowing the teacher some input into their desk location. Second, if schools are open to the idea of both linguistic and cultural exchange, the EST and local English teachers could work together, as Luke described, to create lessons in which the students can learn English while also sharing elements of the local language and culture. Finally, formal, structured language exchange activities with local teachers (e.g., meet ups, social events) could help enhance L2 learning for ESTs as well as create bidirectional intercultural learning opportunities for all stakeholders.

Future research on the domain of L1 ESTs workplaces would benefit from a more diverse participant pool—specifically in Japan, as most of our participants in Japan have only been in the country for less than a year and all were JET teachers. Additionally, missing from this study but important to fully understanding the interactions that take place in the workplace are the perspectives of local coworkers and students. Research which includes their beliefs and practices will contribute to a more holistic understanding of language use and learning in this important domain.

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APPENDIX A

Background information:

1. What is your country of origin?
2. What is your age?
3. What is your level of education?
4. How long have you lived in the country where you currently reside?
5. What do you consider to be your first language?
6. How long have you been teaching your first language?
7. What other language experience do you have learning languages? (Even ones in which you are not proficient.)
 - Language 1: _____ 1 (minimal ability) 2 3 4 5 (fluent)
 - Language 2: _____ 1 (minimal ability) 2 3 4 5 (fluent)
 - Language 3: _____ 1 (minimal ability) 2 3 4 5 (fluent)
 - Language 4: _____ 1 (minimal ability) 2 3 4 5 (fluent)
8. What language do you typically use in the classroom?
9. What language do you typically use in individual communication with your students?
10. What language do you typically use with co-workers inside your department?
11. What language do you typically use with co-workers outside of your department?
12. How important do you think it is for you to be proficient in the language of your host country?
(Not at all important 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Very important)
13. In your relationships outside of work, what language do you typically use? With whom?
14. Would you be interested in being contacted for an interview about your language learning experience? If so, please leave your contact information.

Attitudes towards language use:

Please select the degree to which you agree with the following statements on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

- I feel that learning the language of the country I'm living in is important.
- I have many opportunities to speak with target language speakers at work.
- I have many opportunities to speak with target language speakers outside of work.
- I feel that there is an expectation for me to speak the target language at work.
- I feel that there is an expectation for me to speak the target language outside of work.
- My coworkers are willing to speak to me in the target language.
- People I meet randomly outside of work are willing to speak to me in the target language.
- I have many social relationships in which I use the target language.
- I spend a lot of time improving my fluency in the target language.
- I feel uncomfortable when I have to speak the target language at work.
- I feel uncomfortable when I have to speak the target language with strangers.
- There are many obstacles/challenges in my learning of the target language.
- Speaking with target language speakers is necessary to achieve fluency.
- I enjoy speaking the target language.
- I believe that I am capable of achieving fluency in the target language.

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

1. How much do you speak the target language at work? With whom?
2. How much do you speak the target language outside of work? With whom?
3. How do your co-workers react when you speak to them in the target language?
4. Among the people with whom you speak the target language, who do you find the easiest to communicate with? The most difficult?
5. Have you ever had any negative/positive reactions when you speak the target language?
6. Have you ever had any negative/positive reactions when you speak your first language?
7. How does the location of your workspace/office effect your ability to communicate with the other teachers?
8. When do you feel the most comfortable speaking the target language? The most uncomfortable?
9. With whom do you speak formally? Informally?
10. What do you think are some obstacles that prevent you from speaking the target language more?
11. What do you think has facilitated your learning of the target language the most?