

CULTURE AND CONFIDENCE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION:
A STUDY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION OF EAST ASIAN STUDENTS

A THESIS

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On my honor, I have neither given nor accepted unauthorized aid on this thesis.

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Abstract

Linguistic anthropologists argue that communicative abilities of a foreign language can only be acquired when the learner understands the culture that is entwined within the language. Previous research has found international students to face difficulties with linguistic, social, and cultural barriers when living abroad in the United States. A mixed methods research was conducted in two parts in order to study not only the English language curriculum through which East Asian students have acquired English language skills, but also their experiences in communicating with native English speakers. Part I consisted of a personal narrative that explored the cultural elements associated with learning additional languages. Part II included findings from non-experimental quantitative data gathered through survey questionnaires and ethnographically grounded qualitative data found through semi-structured interviews. Participants consisted of ten university students in Seoul, South Korea who had either little or no experience living in an English-speaking country and ten East Asian international students at Colorado College, a private liberal arts college in the United States. Although the quantitative data did not present significant findings due to the small number of participants, contrastable mean responses between the Korean university and Colorado College students were supported by findings of the interviews and the review of literature. In addition, the interview data presented ten themes of common responses found among the participants. The main findings revealed that nearly all participants were dissatisfied with their communicative abilities and some even lacked communicative confidence due to an exam-oriented, grammatical focus in the English language curriculum of their home countries. Additionally, the participants suggested a stronger focus on speaking and cultural lessons in order to promote a greater communicative and cultural competence and thus, improve their confidence to socially interact with native English speakers.

Culture and Confidence in English Language Acquisition:

A Study of the English Language Education of East Asian Students

When a student spends years learning a foreign language in her home country and then visits the country in which the language is primarily spoken, she often finds herself falling short in her ability to communicate with natives. This finds cause in that the foreign language curriculum of many exam-oriented countries fails to instruct students with a communicative competence (Barratt & Huba, 1994, p. 429; Bennett, Bennett, & Allen, 2003, p. 240; MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1998, p. 558). Due to high stakes exams, students of East Asia in particular learn English with a preeminent focus on the tested contents of reading and writing (Yim, 2015, p. 60). Instruction is primarily focused on vocabulary quizzes, fill-in-the-blank grammar problems, and short written responses. Although students excel in these areas, rarely do they leave a course of instruction with an adequate communicative ability necessary to naturally converse with a native English speaker, nor do they have the cultural understandings necessary to achieve fluency in the language (Barratt & Huba, 1994, p. 433; Wright & Schartner, 2013, p. 121; Ying & Liese, 1990, p. 843). Therefore, international students, particularly from East Asia, oftentimes do not socially integrate with American students on college campuses (Sias et al., 2008, p. 6). International students experience not only social, but also linguistic and cultural barriers when living abroad in the United States and as a result, face difficulties in adapting to the new environment (Hayes & Lin, 1994, p. 9; Wright & Schartner, 2013, p. 119).

Immigrant students from non-English-speaking countries who have a strong English proficiency are more likely to acculturate into American society with greater ease (Lee, Park, & Kim, 2009, p. 1223). Further, students who have a high self-perceived confidence in English, but not necessarily high exam scores, have greater success in building friendships and

understanding social norms and cultural codes (Barratt & Huba, 1994, p. 429; Ying & Liese, 1990, p. 841). Thus, those who are more confident in speaking English integrate more effortlessly with American students.

In addition, language acquisition theories have circulated through discussions of international students and the difficulties of assimilating into American culture and forming relationships with American students (Brody, 2003, p. 40; Damen, 2003, p. 72; Saville-Troike, 2003, p. 5; Wright & Schartner, 2013, p. 119). Saville-Troike (2003) claimed that learning a second language should fall in accordance with the social context in which the language is used and that without understanding the culture embedded within the language, fluency cannot be successfully acquired. By discussing the intertwinement and coexistence of language and culture, Saville-Troike (2003) presented the necessity of teaching the cultural component of a language in order to cultivate communicative competence. However, most English language curricula of exam-oriented countries neglect to teach students of cultural elements such as humor, idioms, and social norms (Bennett et al., 2003, p. 244).

For this study, mixed methods research was conducted to gain insight into the experiences of East Asian students in both learning and using English. Surveys and interviews were conducted in order to explain and explore the linguistic, social, and cultural barriers that cause a lack of deep and meaningful interactions between East Asian students and native English speakers. Additionally, the self-perceptions of English ability and confidence were compared between university students in Seoul, South Korea and East Asian international students at Colorado College, a private liberal arts college in Colorado Springs, to understand the experiences of those who live among native English speakers and those who do not. The participants of Colorado College identified their first languages as Korean, Japanese, Chinese,

and English. Due to the disparity between the Germanic nature of English and the Altaic root of Korean and Japanese and the Sino-Tibetan root of Chinese, the participants of this study present an intriguing experience of learning a linguistically foreign language. The present study aims to answer three main questions: 1) How does culture play a role in communicative competence and what linguistic cultural understandings are necessary to achieve fluency in English in particularity to the United States? 2) How have students of East Asian countries learned English and what are their self-perceptions of their ability and confidence in English? 3) How do the self-perceptions of ability and confidence in English of East Asian students affect their social integration with native English speakers?

Review of Literature

Linguistic anthropologists often argue that language cannot exist on its own. Rather, language occurs only in interconnection with culture (Brody, 2003, p. 40; Damen, 2003, p. 72). Because culture is exhibited through language, and language codes cultural values, the two are entwined entities (Brody, 2003, p. 40; Saville-Troike, 2003, p. 8). Additionally, linguistic relativity, previously referred to as the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, argues that culture is manifested through language and that a language learner's cultural viewpoint of reality depends on the mindset that has been conditioned by language itself (Brody, 2003, p. 41). A language learner solely dependent on knowledge of the vocabulary and grammar necessary to construct a sentence cannot simply know how to respectfully and naturally converse with a person of a foreign country (Bennett et al., 2003, p. 244). She must also understand how to address someone in a respectable manner—particularly in the societal norms of the country in which the language is spoken. Furthermore, communication does not depend exclusively on linguistic competence but also on the nonverbal codes and patterns used when speaking with another person (Brody, 2003,

p. 76). Numerous components of culture are delivered through language: jokes, phrases, turn taking in dialogue, silences and pauses, addressing those of superiority, etc. Saville-Troike (2003) identified three main categories of culture that underline communicative competence: “(1) the social structure, (2), the values and attitudes held about language and ways of speaking, and (3) the network of conceptual categories which results from shared experiences” (p. 12-13). In a broader sense, the phrase cultural competence, often used by linguistic theorists, is defined as the culturally appropriate interaction with those of another culture, often in terms of communicative and behavioral actions (Brody, 2003, p. 42). However, as found by MacIntyre et al. (1998), the exam-oriented foreign language curricula of many countries neglect to facilitate communicative or cultural competence. Therefore, learners are not confident to communicate in the new language and thus, unwilling to converse with native speakers. Numerous studies have found an understanding of culture and a confidence in ability to be the most vital elements of building communicative competence in an additional language (Bennett et al., 2003, p. 240; Brody, 2003, p. 40; Damen, 2003, p. 72; MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 558; Saville-Troike, 2003, p. 5; Wright & Schartner, 2013, p. 120; Ying & Liese, 1990, p. 843).

The terms first language (L1), second language (L2), native language, and mother tongue have been used to identify a person’s linguistic abilities. According to Bloomfield (1984), the criterion for identifying a person’s first language falls within the standard of being exposed to the language either since birth or during the critical period of a child’s development. This becomes the language with which she can read, write, and communicate most fluently. The Critical Period Hypothesis is explained by linguistic anthropologists to be the stage in which a child is most susceptible to acquire a language if placed in a stimulating environment (Breathnach, 1993, p. 43). If a child is to learn a language during this period, she is more likely to speak the

language with a native accent as she develops a natural compilation of phonemes during the developmental period (Bloomfield, 1984, p. 84). Saville-Troike (2013) indicates that first language learning not only familiarizes a child's world through communicative codes, but in relation to linguistic relativity, also serves as an enculturation into a native speech community. Therefore, those who learn a language post-development are unlikely to become fully fluent in understanding the social and cultural elements of the language. Even more so, acquiring fluency is particularly difficult when learning a language outside of the language's speech community. Saville-Troike (2003) identifies such a language as a foreign language and states that a foreign language learner is less likely to reach a level of fluency necessary to achieve bilingualism or multilingualism—the ability to communicate, read, and write in two or more languages. When an additional language is in fact learned in the setting of a native speech community—often the case for immigrants, children of immigrants, or adopted children—the language is labeled as a second language. While foreign language learners have little basis to learn native language norms, second language learners are exposed to a cultural environment and therefore able to familiarize themselves with the cultural components of the language and as a result, achieve communicative competence (Saville-Troike, 2003, p. 6).

The majority of countries now mandate English language instruction as part of their education system. In fact, almost all students in East Asia find English to be a compulsory constituent of their national curriculum (S. Lee, 2013; Yue, 2015). As the global business language, English ability is tested in college and career entrance exams, and as East Asian countries are strongly exam-oriented, English carries a prominent weight in the curricula (FlorCruz, 2010; S. Lee, 2013; Yue, 2015). However, instruction predominantly emphasizes grammar and vocabulary in order to build a linguistic competence necessary to achieve high

exam scores (Yim, 2015, p. 60). The learning objective of passing an exam is categorized into a social efficient ideology of curriculum as students simply gain knowledge to meet the requirements of the society (Shiro, 2013, p. 66). In fact, Yim (2015) found that 95% of the South Korean middle school participants in her longitudinal study were only motivated to study English due to its significance in higher education and the college entrance exam. Few participants were motivated to learn English by their own personal interest in the language, namely future careers that required an adequacy of English skills, the wide spread of American media, the increasing presence of English as the global business language, or a desire to study abroad in an English-speaking country. An alternative social efficient ideology of curricular focus presents a case for the value of educating a learner to implement her knowledge into action (Shiro, 2013, p. 69). In terms of language acquisition, this would be epitomized through an ability to communicate in the language through both written and verbal skills. However, the exam-driven motivation to learn English in East-Asian countries often overlooks the value of gaining communicative competence (Yim, 2015, p. 60).

Student ability is commonly determined by standardized assessments not only in East Asian countries, but also throughout other developed countries. Oftentimes, curriculum is taught to the test so that students are prepared to attain high-achieving scores and showcase their knowledge when applying for colleges and jobs (Yim, 2015, p. 60). Many students of East Asia face three main English exams: the TOEFL, the TOEIC, and their home country's college entrance exam. Students of non-English-speaking nations are tested on their English abilities through the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) in order to study abroad in an English-speaking country. While the tests are composed of reading, listening, speaking, and writing sections, the speaking portion simply requires the student to respond to a prompt in 45

seconds (TOEFL, 2017). The question prompts an essay-like response, rather than a natural response as if sharing a dialogue with a native-English speaker in person. Similarly, students are tested with the TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) when applying for positions in the working field. Both the listening and reading test and speaking and writing test can be taken, dependent on the requirements of the employer. The speaking portion of the exam lasts about 20 minutes out of the total 230 minutes and again prompts the test-taker to answer questions in an essay-like manner (TOEIC, 2017).

In regards to the college entrance exams, the home countries of the participants in this study were identified as South Korea, China, and Japan. The college entrance exam of South Korea is officially named the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT), or *Suneung* (S. Lee, 2013). Subjects include mathematics, history, science, Korean language, and English language. The exam is only available on one day per year and lasts over eight hours (S. Lee, 2013). As one can imagine, this is the most stressful and critical day for high school seniors across the nation. In fact, the exam has been linked to the country's standing as the top nation with the highest adolescent suicide rate (J. Lee, 2011).

China's college entrance exam is known as the National College Entrance Examination, or *Gaokao*. Much like South Korea's *Suneung* exam, the *Gaokao* lasts over nine hours, but over two consecutive days. English language ability determines a great portion of the exam score as one of the three compulsory sections of the exam—the other two sections being Chinese language and mathematics (FlorCruz, 2010). However, only a minimal fraction of the English exam is focused on comprehension and speaking abilities as only a few provinces include listening exams and only one province tests speaking (Yue, 2015).

Similarly, as described by the National Center for University Entrance Examinations (2016), Japan's college entrance exam holds high stakes for students seeking university admission. Held over two days, the National Center Test for University Admissions, also known as the *Nyūshi*, lasts for a total of 10 hours: 4 hours and 50 minutes on the first day, and 5 hours and 10 minutes the next. Students are able to choose between English, German, French, Chinese, and Korean for their mandatory foreign language section. This portion determines nearly 20% of the overall grade and if a student chooses English, she must also partake in an additional hour-long listening exam (National Center for University Entrance Examinations, 2016).

Due to these high-stakes exams that test a student's English abilities, curriculum is oftentimes paralleled to the exams' primary focus in grammar, vocabulary, reading, and writing. Although South Korea in particular has transitioned their primary English language education to a communicative language teaching (CLT) approach, secondary education remains centered on grammar and vocabulary (Yim, 2015, p. 59). Most students also learn English through private tutors in preparation for high school English and college exams. However, "while [these exams test] English structure and grammar, listening comprehension, and vocabulary and reading, [they do] not examine ability and courage and ease in conducting conversation, which are crucial..." (Ying & Liese, 1990, p. 841). MacIntyre et al. (1998) found that when language instruction did happen to incorporate a communicative focus, it was rarely taught in a genuine manner. Rather than guiding students to learn authentic communication skills, communicative curriculum lay within the structured borders of prompted dialogues. However, prompted and recited dialogues rarely take place within a natural conversation. In fact, Barratt & Huba (1994) found that because English language learners were not educated to authentically communicate with another

person in English, they were often unable to participate in a full dialogue with a native English speaker.

Additionally, communicative competence itself does not guarantee that a person will be willing to communicate in the language. MacIntyre et al. (1998) suggested that increasing a language learner's willingness to communicate should be a crucial component of L2 language education. A person's willingness to communicate represents the probability of her desire to engage in a conversation as determined by her confidence in her communicative abilities. If a student is motivated to increase her willingness to communicate, she will have a greater probability of using the L2 and becoming communicatively competent. Foreign language learners should be able, and wanting, to communicate in the language. After all, the social and political goal of learning additional languages should be to bring cultures and nations together—a social efficient purpose in gaining communicative competence (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 558).

Nonetheless, Yim (2015) found that students would rather learn grammar and reading, the content found on the exams, than listening and speaking. English was viewed more as a test subject than a tool of communication—an emphasis towards exam-oriented rather than communicative curriculum. However, Barratt and Huba (1994) found that students who were interested in the culture of the language became more fluent than those who simply learned the language to satisfy an educational requirement. Additionally, a person's willingness to communicate in her L1 did not directly predict her willingness to communicate in her L2. Her willingness to communicate was susceptible to a multitude of factors, including situational and personal interests in the language or culture (Barratt & Huba, 1994, p. 429). In other words, the education system of these exam-oriented countries fails to foster a motivation to learn English through actual interest in the language but rather through future-defining exams and thus,

produces non-communicative English learners. Without an interest in the holistic elements of language acquisition, including learning the culture and building a confidence in ability, students gain nothing more than a simple linguistic competence in a foreign language.

The majority of language teachers in the U.S. have long understood that language and culture are embedded within one another and that language instruction must involve cultural learning (Damen, 2003, p. 72). In fact, Brody (2003) argued that when learning a new language includes developing communicative abilities, culture cannot be removed from the learning experience. Therefore, cultural competence is necessary for fluent acquisition of a new language. However, the interconnection between culture and language presents a complex relationship. Damen (2003) found that when learning about culture in a removed environment, meaning the student learned the culture outside of a native speech community, cultural understandings became idiosyncratic and selective. The learner simply selected the components of the culture that she cared to learn about rather than being exposed to everyday elements of the culture had she been surrounded by the cultural environment. One issue in particular has found that as students are taught about the culture of the country in which the language is used, a stereotypical image is illustrated into the curriculum and therefore, the minds of the learners. The majority population of a country is then perceived through a typical stereotype rather than the multitude of constituents that produce an appreciation of the culture (Damen, 2003, p. 75). Additionally, cultural teachings are limited in curriculum because teachers are hesitant to educate students about cultures that they themselves are not familiar with. They feel that they are inadequate to teach culture or that the lessons are a waste of time and too difficult to teach (Bennett et al., 2003, p. 240).

In order to understand one's cultural competence, Bennett et al. (2003) introduced the Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, also known as the Bennett scale, to differentiate the six stages in which a person can identify herself. These six stages fall within two overarching stages: ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism. The three stages within the *ethnocentric stage* move from *denial* (of cultural differences among people), to *defense* (of their own culture above all others), and finally, to *minimization* (of cultural differences and rather believing that all people are the same regardless of differences). In the *ethnorelative stage*, the three stages move from *acceptance* (of the existence of cultural differences), to *adaptation* (to different cultural frames with an empathetic mind), and lastly, to *integration* (across cultures). Most individuals who have had limited contact with other cultures, namely students who have gained an inadequate knowledge of a foreign language, find themselves in the *ethnocentric stage*. Those who fall within the *ethnorelative stage* have often experienced cross-cultural interactions either within a diverse community or by traveling abroad (Bennett et al., 2003, p. 251). In order to acquire fluency in a new language, students must understand the culture embedded within the language and on that account, must find themselves within the *ethnorelative stage*—particularly for those who will travel and live abroad in the country in which the language is spoken (Brody, 2003, p. 40; Damen, 2003, p. 72; Saville-Troike, 2003, p. 5).

Some students choose to attend school abroad rather than continue their education in their home country. However, these students are taken from their comfort zone and placed in an unfamiliar setting of foreign language, culture, people, and societal norms. Although they often experience culture shock (feeling disoriented by an unfamiliar culture) and are in the process of adjusting to an entirely new environment, they must also balance academics and self-care (Hayes & Lin, 1994, p. 4; Ying & Liese, 1990, p. 842). Particular to this study, most East Asian

countries are of a homogenous race and language and students of these countries often experience strong culture shock when coming to the U.S., as found by Barratt and Huba (1994). Therefore, East Asian students who live abroad must be culturally ethnorelative in order to ensure a successful acculturation and adapt to the foreign environment of the new culture.

A study by Lin, Rancer, and Lim (2003) found that Korean students who studied abroad in the U.S. reported a greater ethnorelativism—but a lower willingness to communicate—in comparison to students of the U.S. The Korean students may have been more ethnorelative because studying English, and even the wide spread of American media, introduced them to a greater cultural awareness of diverse languages and cultures. In contrast, students of the U.S. have spent minimal curricular time on foreign language education and have had less exposure to foreign media. The lower willingness to communicate of the Korean students may find cause in that a lack of confidence in communicative abilities has inhibited their desire to converse with students in the U.S. (Barratt & Huba, 1994, p. 424; Bennett et al., 2003, p. 244; MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 546; Saville-Troike, 2003, p. 12; Ying & Liese, 1990, p. 841). Although a person may have a high level of ability to communicate in their own cultural environment and L1, their willingness to communicate and confidence are not always directly translated to a foreign culture and language (Lin et al., 2003, p. 121; MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 558). A socially active person in one environment may not act the same in another if they are not confident in their foreign language abilities or do not understand the cultural elements of speech (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 546). As presented by their lower willingness to communicate, Korean students may feel uncomfortable to communicate as easily in American social settings as they would in a linguistically and culturally Korean-prominent environment. Thus, they face difficulties in forming cross-cultural relationships with students of the U.S. or easily adapting to the unfamiliar

country (Lin et al., 2003, p. 121). Although the Korean students were more ethnorelative than the U.S. students, a willingness to communicate was also necessary for successful acculturation.

As found in a study by Sias et al. (2008), international students were more likely to become friends with other international students, even ones that were not from the same country, because they were able to bond over their similarities of feeling foreign in the U.S. Although international students primarily preferred to create social relationships with people of the same language and culture, when building cross-cultural friendships, it was easier to socially connect with other international students rather than students from the U.S. (Furnham & Alibhai, 1985, p. 714). Some students in the study by Sias et al. (2008) explained their preferred friendships by commenting on the cross-cultural connection created by an intrigued perception of American slang. They found that U.S. students had less patience in explaining their dialogue and cultural references in an understandable manner. Because these international students did not have a mastered fluency of communicative English, conversations were hindered or stagnated from effective communication. In contrast, international students were more understanding amongst each other and even bonded over their cultural differences (Sias, 2008, p. 6).

However, not all students who enter a foreign country as an international student believe their English to be inadequate of communicative competence. Wright and Schartner (2013) found that some international students believed their academic English skills to be sufficient in their home countries, but were shocked by the extremity of difficulty in the real-world usage of English in an English-speaking nation—particularly due to communicative limitations in socio-cultural adaptations and building friendships. Certain barriers included different accents, the speed of speech, and the use of slang in conversation, as explained by Brody (2003) to be elements of cultural communication. Some students even expressed being at a loss for a topic of

conversation due to cultural differences (Wright & Schartner, 2013, p. 124). These students had not fully developed an ethnorelative intercultural competence—the ability to “relate effectively and appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts” (Bennett et al., 2003, p. 244).

Barratt and Huba (1994) found that international students who were able to speak English fluently were less likely to be self-conscious of their English abilities and therefore presented a higher level of self-esteem and smoother adjustment to an American community. Further, a student’s success in building relationships with Americans relied less on her abilities as determined by English exam scores or fulfilled language requirements, as exam-oriented countries prioritize, but rather on her own self-perceived confidence in written and oral skills (Barratt & Huba, 1994, p. 429; Ying & Liese, 1990, p. 841). However, Ying and Liese (1990) found that those who were less fluent in English faced greater difficulty in adjusting to the U.S. International students of non-English-speaking nations were inclined to find challenges in communicating within American social environments due to their limited fluency in English. Although some students had high-achieving TOEFL scores, they did not perceive themselves to be confident in their English speaking abilities and therefore had trouble adapting to the cultural setting of an American college campus. Regardless of actual ability, it was the English learner’s own confidence that created a stronger self-esteem and interest in culture and thus, a willingness to communicate with American students (Ying & Liese, 1990, p. 842).

The study of Ying and Liese (1990) also found that higher confidence in English skills proved to predict the student’s adjustment, and even happiness, in the new country. Depression was significantly predicted by poorer self-assessments of the students’ English abilities. When socializing became difficult due to a lack of communicative ability, the depth of conversational exchange necessary for developing a relationship was impeded, and social connections were lost

(Ying & Liese, 1990, p. 842). Other findings found students to face stress, frustration, fear, and pessimism in addition to depression (Hayes & Lin, 1994, p. 9).

The linguistic, social, and cultural limitations that international students often face due to an underdeveloped communicative and cultural competence find cause in a dissatisfying education of the English language. Although students are capable of passing the English exams necessary to acquire admission to foreign educational institutions, they often lack the ability to communicate in English-spoken social settings. The present study seeks to understand the self-perceptions of English ability and confidence of East Asian tertiary students who have studied English in their home countries by comparing those who stayed in their home country for university to those who chose to study at a college in the United States. In addition, their experiences and opinions of the English language curriculum are analyzed in order to comprehend the students' ideas on cultural understandings and its necessity in language acquisition.

Methods

Supplementary to the mixed methods research conducted in this study, a personal narrative was analyzed to provide an in-depth account that presents the importance of acquiring communicative and cultural competence in accordance with learning additional languages. The personal narrative embodies the theories expressed in the review of literature that emphasize the necessity of cultural focus and confidence-building in second language instruction.

In addition, research was conducted to study East Asian students' experiences of learning English and the effectiveness of their education in preparing them to communicate in American social settings. In order to comprehensively assess the participants' experiences of studying and communicating in English, data was collected through a mixed research approach. By analyzing

both quantitative and qualitative data, the study was capable of investigating a statistical comparison between Korean university students and East Asian international students at Colorado College (CC) while also gaining a deeper understanding of each participant's experiences. Non-experimental quantitative data was obtained through survey questionnaires and ethnographically grounded qualitative data through semi-structured interviews. The data was compared between the two groups of participants to note trends and contrasts between the Korean university students who have studied English but do not use it in everyday settings and the CC students who live in social environments in which the language is a required daily practice.

Part I: Personal Narrative

As a second-generation Korean and a first-generation American, my personal experiences as a Korean-American and as a child of two immigrant parents have shaped me to have a bilingual and bicultural identity. The observations that I have collected stem from both my everyday experiences of living as a Korean-American, in aspects of both language and culture, and during my previous semester in which I studied abroad at a university in Seoul, South Korea. In addition, I touch on my time learning Spanish in the U.S. and learning Danish while studying abroad in Copenhagen, Denmark. My experiences of these accounts were collected through a naturalistic observation with myself as the participant.

Part II: Mixed Methods Research

Participants. The total twenty participants of this research are categorized into two groups: ten Korean university students and ten East Asian international students at Colorado College. Convenience sampling was used to gather the ten Korean university participants. The participants were native Korean students interning as language and culture exchange partners

with foreign study-abroad students enrolled in a study-abroad program in Seoul. Each participant was individually contacted and asked to participate in the study. While all ten participants were university students in Seoul, they studied at multitudinous universities—representing a total of eight universities throughout the city. All participants identified their race as Asian/Pacific Islander and Korean as their L1. Of the ten participants, four identified as female with ages ranging from 19 to 23 and six identified as male with ages ranging from 20 to 28. Because male citizens of South Korea are mandated to serve a minimum of 21 months in the military before the age of 29, the male participants had a greater range of age than that of the female participants, as male students often take a leave of absence during their academic studies to fulfill their military service.

The remaining ten participants were students attending Colorado College—a private liberal arts college located in Colorado Springs, Colorado. In order to compare data with the ten participants of Korean universities, the target demographic was centralized to international students from East Asian countries. Because Colorado College has a small number of international students specifically from South Korea, the target was widened to East Asian countries as the cultures are most relatable to Korean culture, and the languages share a commonality of a non-Germanic based origin. Of the total 2131 students in attendance at Colorado College during the spring semester of 2017, 183 were international students—91 of whom were from East Asian countries (Colorado College, 2017). Although East Asia consists of Japan, Taiwan, Mongolia, North Korea, South Korea, and China (including Hong Kong and Macau), only students from South Korea, China, and Japan, who all identified their race as Asian/Pacific Islander, participated in this study. Participants were contacted in a convenience sampling through emails sent to the Asian Student Union, Korean American Student Association,

Chinese Student Association, and East Asian International Student mailing lists. Participants volunteered to be surveyed and interviewed. Of the ten participants, six identified their L1 as Chinese, two as Korean, one as Japanese, and one as English. The participant who identified her L1 as English considered herself to be bilingual in English and Japanese as she lived the first 18 years of her life in Japan but learned English by attending an international school. Five of the ten participants identified as female with ages ranging from 19 to 21 and five as male with ages ranging from 18 to 25. The higher range of male participants was also due to a Korean participant who had returned to school following his mandatory military service.

Instruments. A questionnaire was developed to gather quantitative data about each participant. The questionnaire included close-ended questions that categorically measured the participant's gender, age, race/ethnicity, L1, the age that the participant began studying English, and the number of years that the participant studied English. The participants' abilities and confidence in writing, reading, and communicating in English were also self-rated, and agree/disagree opinions on statements about the understanding of cultural references and integration with American peers were categorically measured (Appendix A). The abilities and confidence levels of the participants were rated using a Likert scale with possible responses of poor, fair, average, good, and excellent. The agree/disagree Likert scale provided possible responses of strongly disagree, disagree, neither disagree nor agree, agree, and strongly agree. In addition, a qualitative questionnaire was conducted through an in-person interview. The questionnaire for the participants of Korean universities inquired about their experiences with learning and speaking in English (Appendix B). For the participants of Colorado College, the questionnaire was expanded to explore their experiences with learning and speaking English both

prior to moving to the U.S. and in relation to their time living in the U.S. and adapting to the language and culture of the country (Appendix C).

Procedures. Participants were invited to an interview session in which they were first prompted to answer the questionnaire of quantitative responses in the form of an online survey. Following the survey, participants were interviewed through a semi-structured interview consisting of open-ended questions.

Each of the ten interviews with CC participants were conducted and directly transcribed in English. Of the Korean university participants, eight of the ten interviews were conducted and transcribed in English while two were conducted in Korean due to the participants' limited English communicative abilities. The two Korean interviews were conducted in Korean and transcribed directly into English.

Results & Discussion

Part I: Personal Narrative

Initial observations were collected through my own first-hand experiences with learning additional languages. Defining my L1 and L2, as well as my cultural identity, does not come as an easy task. The first language that I heard and spoke was Korean, as my parents were immigrants and raised me in a household of both Korean language and culture. When I enrolled into preschool, I began to learn English for the first time. I learned the alphabet, grammatical rules, vocabulary words, and how to speak. I found myself surrounded by English words and American culture for hours everyday. But when I came home after school, I transitioned back to speaking and listening to Korean in a linguistically and culturally Korean environment. My days were shared between two native speech communities and therefore, I found myself in two environments that fostered fluency in two languages. In addition, I developed an ethnorelative

intercultural sensitivity from an early age. Because I found myself in two very different cultural environments everyday, I was constantly adapting across cultures and integrating the two into my own understanding of the world.

Despite being the first language through which I was socialized, I learned to read and write Korean in a non-formal manner—often through small lessons from my parents or attending Saturday Korean school with fellow first-generation Korean-Americans. However, the most I ever learned was the alphabet and how to read. As explained by the findings of Saville-Troike (2003), my English soon exceeded my Korean as I found myself in a greater variety of social settings and native speech communities in which I wrote, read, and conversed in English. I spoke English formally to my teachers, casually amongst my peers, and freely with the friends of my church mesosystem—a main social environment in my life. Although the church was Korean, the children my age shared a similar relationship with Korean and English and socialized primarily in English. However, I spoke in a strictly formal Korean with my parents as well as with the adults of my church. Although Korean has various levels of formal and informal language dependent on hierarchical relationships, I only practiced the formal speech, as my Korean peers, whom I would have conversed with in an informal Korean, socialized in English. Upon living with Korean foreign-exchange students for a year during high school, I was able to practice my informal Korean for the first time because my Korean native speech community expanded to include a new social environment of younger Koreans. Although I was nervous of speaking incorrectly in this unfamiliar community, adapting to the environment allowed me to grow in confidence in my Korean abilities and therefore, as similarly found by Barratt and Huba (1994), develop meaningful friendships with my housemates. My Korean greatly improved because, as supported by the culturally linguistic findings of Brody (2003), I not only practiced

using informal speech but also familiarized myself with social phrases that were used by a younger generation of Koreans. However, my understanding of grammar and vocabulary and my abilities in reading and writing were nonetheless limited at an elementary level.

Although I did not begin speaking English and Korean at the same time, I began speaking both languages within in my early stages of development and therefore identify myself to be bilingual in English and Korean, as both languages fall into Bloomfield's (1984) criterion for identifying a first language. Nevertheless, I am more comfortable in reading, writing, and communicating in English despite the fact that the first language that I came into association with was Korean. As previously mentioned, a critical reason for my bilingualism in the two languages, regardless of the fact that my written Korean abilities may be shortcoming of perfect fluency, is because, as explained by Saville-Troike's (2003) linguistic theory, I was immersed in the native speech communities of the languages from an early age.

My home and church were the mesosystems where I not only learned the phrases used for scolding and for expressing appreciation and love, but also where I was exposed to Korean media, cultural norms, and the understanding of social hierarchy—a critical element of Korean culture. As explained by Bennett et al. (2003), cultural understandings are necessary to effectively communicate in a language without mistakenly showing disrespect and rudeness due to cultural ethnocentrism.

Similarly, my experiences of learning English and interacting with Americans in the social setting of school created the native speech community through which I acquired English fluency. Transitioning into an American environment, however, began as a confusing and uncomfortable time replete with culture shock. I felt awkward not having to bow to my teacher although I had greeted every other adult in this custom prior to entering school. I tried my best to speak to my

teachers in a formal speech, but soon realized that English did not have a completely different structure of language used to communicate with adults as did Korean. I was even shocked by the tone with which my White American friends spoke to their parents and mistook the seemingly friendship between parent and child as being disrespectful to an elder. Although I encountered difficulties in understanding the words, tones, and formality of the language that was spoken by White Americans, I would not be so confident in my English abilities and understanding of the culture had I not grown up in the native speech environment and been exposed to the American culture since an early age, as supported by the theories of Saville-Troike (2003). Although I faced numerous cultural barriers when adapting to American environments, by coming to understand cultural codes, I was able to acculturate and become both culturally competent and ethnorelative. If I had simply learned the two languages without being immersed in the corresponding cultures, I would likely not feel as comfortable and familiar in an American social situation to know when and how to share an authentic dialogue with another person in an ethnorelative manner.

In contrast, I learned Spanish every year from grades 3 to 11 and am barely able to hold a simple conversation with a native Spanish speaker. Much like Yim's (2015) portrayal of the grammar-oriented English language education in East Asia, my Spanish education was primarily focused on memorizing vocabulary lists and conjugating grammar rather than learning to communicate. Just as Damen (2003) highlighted the shortcomings of idiosyncratic cultural teachings, our cultural lessons focused on nothing more than the food, dances, and clothes of Spanish-speaking countries. Although an attempt was made to incorporate an ethnorelative approach to teaching culture in correspondence with the language curriculum, the superficial lessons ultimately failed to reach so much as Bennett's (2003) *acceptance* stage. In addition, our

classroom represented an American environment and the majority of spoken language within the room was English. The foreign language education I received was just that: foreign. The classroom facilitated neither a native speech community nor a focus on communicative competence to foster confidence in my Spanish abilities. I was never surrounded by native Spanish speakers and had very little idea what an authentic Spanish conversation sounded like and consequently, was unable to attain either a communicative or a cultural competence of Spanish.

Comparatively, I studied Danish while studying abroad in Copenhagen, Denmark for four months. I learned the language much quicker and much more naturally because, as theorized by Saville-Troike (2003), I was constantly surrounded by Danish conversations and culture. My environment was filled with Danish words: I had to learn the names of food to make sure I knew what I was buying at the grocery store, and every time I ordered a meal or asked for directions, I was forced to remember what I had learned in class and use it in communication with Danes. In addition, my instructor spoke primarily in Danish and facilitated conversation throughout the class. In contrast to MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) findings of common grammar-oriented language curricula, at least half of the language course was devoted to lessons about the history and culture of Denmark. We learned about the traditions of holiday celebrations in which we partook and also learned that Danes were not simply reserved because they had little interest in interacting with strangers, but rather respected the privacy of others. Additionally, we not only learned about *hygge*, the untranslatable Danish word best described as “a quality of cosiness and comfortable conviviality that engenders a feeling of contentment or well-being”, but also experienced it in our homestays and restaurants and the atmosphere of the city itself (English Oxford Living Dictionaries, 2017). Because the class fostered a truly ethnorelative

comprehension of the culture embedded in the Danish language, I understood the family and friendship dynamics of the Danes. I felt comfortable to join in conversations and practice my Danish because I understood when to contribute to the conversation and when to laugh along. I understood when to honor silence and the respectful amount of time to pause before responding. Simply put, I was educated in Saville-Troike's (2003) three main categories of communicative competence and therefore felt much more confident to converse in Danish than I ever had in Spanish. Additionally, I had reached the *ethnorelative stage* prior to learning the Danish language and culture and was consequently able to acculturate more smoothly to the new and foreign environment as compared to many of my peers. My homestay father was impressed by my quick acquisition of the language and even my accurate pronunciation because, as explained by Bloomfield (1984), I possess a wider variety of developed phonemes due to my bilingual tongue. Because I had been raised in two highly contrastable cultures and languages, my developed ethno relativism allowed for an accelerated acculturation to the Danish environment.

During the previous semester, I studied abroad in Seoul, South Korea. For five months, I lived surrounded by the culture and language of South Korea and enrolled in a Korean language course, much like I had in Copenhagen. Although I had been speaking Korean for nearly twenty years, and quite well by the comments of native Koreans, I learned elementary-level grammar and vocabulary for the first time. I excelled at speaking and pronunciation in my class, but my essays were handed back with far more grammatical and spelling errors than the non-Korean students in the class because I wrote in the colloquial phrases through which I had acquired the language. I had learned Korean through social settings by simply listening and repeating, whereas my classmates had learned the written language through a formal instruction of the language. Until I studied the language in South Korea, I had not learned basic grammar rules,

the appropriate spelling of vocabulary words that I had been saying (incorrectly) since I was a child, or proper sentence structures. Not only was I passively surrounded by the written and spoken buzz of Korean, but I was also forced to actively interact with people in the language. In fact, I finally learned how to respectfully introduce myself to someone I perceived to be my own age and how to move from formal to informal speech if they happened to be of the same birth year. I even learned the respectful practice in asking someone her name—a social interaction that demands a greater degree of respect in the Korean culture as compared to the American culture. By interacting in a variety of social situations that were replete with the culture and language of Korea, my Korean greatly improved and I had a much stronger ethnorelative bond with Korean culture during my time in Seoul, as supported by the findings of Bennett et al. (2003). For both cases of Denmark and South Korea, living in the country in which I was studying the language far improved the growth of my linguistic abilities in both the written and communicative use of the language because, as explained by Saville-Troike's (2003) linguistic theory, I was living in a native speech community and familiarizing myself with the culture.

Even as an American-born citizen of the U.S., the social groups with which I primarily engage with are Korean-Americans and American minorities. Although I am able to connect with White Americans, I am most comfortable among Korean-Americans with whom I share similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds. I share my story because I find that my experiences draw multiple similarities with the students whom I interviewed—particularly the ten Colorado College students who have lived and studied in at least two countries.

Part II: Mixed Methods Research

Surveys. The survey results were analyzed by finding relationships between the mean responses of the Korean university participants and the Colorado College participants (Table 1).

Because the responses were selected through Likert scales, each response was coded with a number in order to quantitatively calculate the mean response for each group (Table 2). For the rating scale of poor, fair, average, good, and excellent, poor was coded to 1, fair to 2, and so on. As for the rating scale of strongly disagree, disagree, neither disagree nor agree, agree, and strongly agree, strongly disagree was coded to 1, disagree to 2, and so on. In order to compare the mean responses of Korean university and Colorado College participants, an independent-samples t-test was conducted. No significant difference was found ($p < 0.05$, 2-tailed) (Table 3). However, mean scores that either had a difference greater than 0.4 or showed Korean university participant ratings higher than CC participant ratings were analyzed with support of interview data and the review of literature. The latter criterion presents interesting findings as one might presume that the CC students, who have spent considerable time in a native English speech community, would rate their abilities to be greater than the Korean university students who have not often found themselves in such an environment. For the former criterion, three questions fell into this category, each in rating abilities and confidences: 1) How would you rate your ability to write in English? 2) How confident do you feel in writing in English? 3) How would you rate your ability to communicate in English?

The Korean university participants responded with a mean response of 3.3 to the first aforementioned question—meaning that they responded with an overall self-perceived writing ability rated between “average” (coded as 3) and “good” (coded as 4). The Colorado College participants, however, responded with a mean response of 3.8. While they also rated themselves to be between “average” and “good” in their self-perceived writing abilities, their responses were generally higher. This trend is similarly found in the students’ perceived ratings of writing confidence, the second of the aforementioned questions, in which the Korean university students

responded with a mean of 3.2 and the CC students with a mean of 3.6. The disparities between the self-perceived ratings of writing ability and confidence of the two groups may find cause in that Korea's *Suneung* exam is graded in accordance with extremely high standards (S. Lee, 2013). As a result, the Korean university students may have felt inadequate of their abilities and rated lower responses in accordance with a lower confidence.

In regards to the third question, the Korean university participants also rated their self-perceived ability to communicate in English slightly lower than the CC participants with a mean response of 3.3, closer to an "average" rating, while the CC students rated their abilities at 3.9, nearly an overall "good" rating. The CC students may have rated their abilities higher because they have been forced to communicate in English much more than the Korean university students who, as found by the interview responses, did not have many native English speakers with whom to practice and develop their English communication skills. In fact, every Korean university participant commented in their interviews that they did not have many native English-speaking friends prior to joining the study-abroad program internship (K01-K10).

Interestingly, the Korean university participants rated their communicative confidence with a mean of 3.4, similar to their communicative ability of 3.3. The CC participants, however, rated their confidence with a 3.5, much lower than their mean ability of 3.9. This is particularly intriguing as the Korean university and CC students were similar in their confidence, although the CC students have lived in the U.S. for some time and been exposed to much more English social situations and opportunities to practice their English communication. Additionally, CC participants rated their communicative confidence to be 0.4 points lower than their ability. Although the students had high self-perceptions of their abilities, they did not have a strong confidence in communication. Much like the participants of Wright and Schartner's (2013)

study, exposure to native English speech communities may have caused the CC students to actualize the difficulty of communicating with native English speakers and accordingly rated their confidence with greater accuracy. Further, as found in the interviews, the English conversations in which the Korean university students partook were often ones in which English speakers visited Korea and spoke with an adjusted vocabulary and use of cultural references knowing that non-native English speakers struggle to understand difficult words and phrases (K06, K09). The CC students, on the other hand, have interacted with native English speakers in the U.S. who assumed that the international students were able to fluently communicate and understand cultural phrases and therefore did not eliminate difficult vocabulary and phrases from their speech (CC07, CC09, CC10). As emphasized by the review of literature, a foreign language learner's confidence in ability greatly affects her willingness to communicate and therefore, her communicative competence (Barratt & Huba, 1994, p. 429; MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 558; Ying & Liese, 1990, p. 841). The participants' low confidence in English communication is crucial to understanding that the students who learned English in East Asia did not receive an English language education that fostered communicative competence or confidence and thus, a well-rounded fluency in the language.

The second criterion used in identifying notable data identified responses in which participants of Korean universities rated their English abilities higher than the participants of Colorado College. These two particular occurrences were found in response to the two following statements to which students ranked their level of agreement: 1) I understand American cultural references (phrases, idioms, sarcasm, jokes, conversations about American media, etc) in all social situations spoken in English; 2) Interacting with American students has helped me to have a stronger understanding for American cultural references.

The Korean university participants rated their agreement to the first statement mentioned above, regarding their understanding of American cultural references, with a mean response of 3.4 between “neither disagree nor agree” (coded as 3) and “agree” (coded as 4). The CC participants responded with a mean response of 2.7 between “disagree” (coded as 2) and “neither disagree nor agree” (coded as 3). Although the CC students have found themselves in far more American social settings with cultural references used in dialogue, the Korean university students rated a much stronger agreement to the statement with a difference in means by 0.7. This may similarly find cause in that, as previously mentioned, Korean university students have conversed with native English speakers who accommodated their speech by using less cultural references, whereas CC students have interacted more with native English speakers in native speech communities where cultural references were heavily used. The interview data also found that CC participants often noticed a frequent use of cultural references when interacting with a group of native English speakers in social environments in which the participant was the minority (CC04, CC08, CC10). Because the native English speakers were familiar in speaking with a high volume of cultural references, they may have been less likely to eliminate cultural references in their speech whereas a native English speaker in Korea would be aware that few people in their audience would understand the use of cultural references (K06, K09).

Similarly, although not as significant in statistical contrast with only a difference in means of 0.3, the Korean university participants rated their response to the second previously mentioned statement with a mean response of 4.6, between “agree” (coded as 4) and “strongly agree” (coded as 5), and CC participants with a mean response of 4.3. The mean response of the CC students symbolizes an overall opinion that they do in fact agree with the aforementioned statement that interacting with American students has improved their understanding of cultural

references, although Korean students are stronger in their agreement. This is particularly interesting as Korean university students have had much less interaction time with American students as found in the interviews when commenting on their minimal friendships with native English speakers (K01-K10). In addition, the Korean university students mentioned that they often interacted with native English speakers who were eager to share and explain cultural references with Koreans as they themselves travelled to Korea to learn about cultural diversity (K07, K09). Furthermore, the interviews with CC students found that their social groups were often homogenous in sharing the same L1, meaning that some students rarely interacted with American students in a social setting, similar to the participants of Sias et al.'s (2008) study, and therefore would not have had the interactions necessary to improve their understanding of cultural references. Much like Sias et al. (2008) found in their study, the lack of understanding American cultural references caused international students to prefer friendships with others of similar language and culture.

Interviews. The interviews were coded to find common themes among the twenty participants in order to highlight descriptions of the participants' experiences of both learning and using English. The interview transcripts were analyzed with In Vivo, using descriptive and causation coding to identify significant segments of speech. These codes were then grouped accordingly into a total of ten themes (Appendix D). The first theme found that the English language curricula taught in the participants' home countries focused primarily on grammar, vocabulary, and reading. A minimal percentage of time was spent on writing and listening, and even less so on speaking. A CC student from East Asia estimated that "it was 50% grammar, and then 10% listening, 20% writing, and then 10% speaking, 10% reading" (CC03). A Korean university student stated, "In school, most important thing is grammar and vocab. Not speaking"

(K08). Each of the ten Korean university participants and eight of the ten Colorado College participants mentioned the dominance of grammar, vocabulary, and reading in their English language curriculum. The other two CC participants attended either an English international school or grew up in a cram school that heavily emphasized speaking within the curriculum. Similar to Yim's (2013) study of English language curriculum in South Korea, the English language curricula of these East Asian countries were found to be mainly grammar-oriented. The reason for the lack of curricular focus in writing and listening, and even less so in speaking, is explained by the following theme.

The second theme found that English was taught to the test—specifically to the contents of the TOEFL, TOEIC, and each country's respective college entrance exam. Eight of the ten Korean university participants and six of the ten CC participants commented on the exam-oriented curriculum during their interviews. A pattern was found through a causation code that began with the weight of English exam scores when applying to both colleges and jobs. “English is really important in Korea no matter what you do” (K09). Therefore, the learning objective of English language curricula was simply learning how to score well on the exams. However, because speaking could not be scored through a computerized or standardized method, the impracticality and lack of resources to evaluate every high school student in the country on their speaking abilities led to an exam that was only geared towards assessing the students' abilities in grammar, vocabulary, reading, and listening, and consequently, the curriculum became exam-driven. A CC student from South Korea explained that curriculum depended on what's going to be important for the exam. Heavily vocab memorization everyday. That's what I did everyday. Vocab for TOEFL, TOEIC, that score mattered. And how much vocab you know correlates to how high the score is. There's a test for your

listening, grammar, comprehension, vocab, but there's never test for oral presentation.

And even if there is, there's lower priority, less of a weight on it (CC10).

A Korean university student stated, "Many classes focus on grammar but not the conversation or reading skill because we have to take the *Suneung* and it's much about the grammar so many classes focused on the grammar" (K05). Just as Yim (2015) found that the great majority of her Korean student participants were motivated to learn English for the sake of higher education and the college entrance exam, the interviews found that by the influence of the high stakes exams, English was not taught to achieve communicative competence, but rather to enhance college and job applications.

The third theme identified a common code found amongst the responses in which students suggested that the English language curricula of their home countries should incorporate more speaking instruction because some students were "...not really happy with [their] education" (K07). "I think it's better to ask the cultural things and speaking because in the reality the speaking is important" (K02). "I think [learning to speak] is more important than learning grammatical things" (K04). "I wish they would have put more hours in the English conversation class" (K07). Although seven of the ten CC participants believed in the need for speaking instruction, the fact that all ten of the Korean participants supported this belief is particularly intriguing. One of the CC students who did not believe that the curriculum should include communication skills stated that a student must go to an English-speaking country in order to learn to communicate. The other two CC students believed that their home country should only teach English to those who have a desire to learn the language. The majority of CC students highlighted the necessity of learning to speak as they later found themselves struggling to fluently communicate in the native speech community of the United States, a native English-

speaking country. As for most of the Korean university participants, their internship with the study-abroad program was the first medium through which they interacted with a social group of native English speakers. Many of them realized the importance of learning to communicate in English when they were forced to do so with the study-abroad students and found their communicative abilities to fall short of competent (K03, K04, K05, K08). Their underdeveloped communicative abilities find cause in that the Korean university participants were deprived of English speaking lessons and were instead instructed through a grammar-oriented curriculum. According to the language acquisition findings of Saville-Troike (2003), a second language learner must be exposed to a native speech community, or the social and cultural environment of the language, in order to achieve fluency. However, the East Asian students rarely found themselves in communication with a native English speaker during their secondary education, or in an environment in which English was spoken, and were therefore dissatisfied with their communicative abilities.

The fourth theme found that the participants rarely learned about cultural components of the English language in their home countries, although imperative to acquire fluency as presented by Saville-Troike (2003). A Korean student at CC stated that “Korean [schools] usually [focus] on English grammar. They don’t really care about cultural differences or cultural learnings” (CC09). Each of the ten Korean university participants and seven of the CC participants mentioned that the exam-oriented curricula of their home countries did not spend much time on culture and included few lessons on communicative norms. When the students did happen to learn about the culture embodied in the English language, the lessons were “not enough. [They just learned] some very stereotypical things” (CC05). This problematic approach to teaching culture is referenced in Damen’s (2003) findings that foreign language curricula

oftentimes illustrates a stereotypical understanding of another country's culture. Rather than gaining a deep and personally relatable knowledge of another culture, students only receive an idiosyncratic understanding of a foreign country. When the student later finds herself in the foreign environment, the limited grasp of culture and ethnocentrism can cause the student to either misinterpret certain interactions or create assumptions of non-verbal communications (Damen, 2003, p. 73).

However, the fifth theme highlighted that all twenty of the participants believed that a person can only be fluent in English if they also understand the culture. "Communication doesn't work well when we realize culture difference" (CC06). "[Knowing the] culture is helpful to know how to use the language" (K02). Another participant expressed his frustrations with the lack of cultural education and stated,

Most of Korean guys have studied the English for over twenty years if they follow the regular system in Korea. They should speak English well considering the time. But most of Korean guys can't speak well and I think handful of them have a fearness of conversation communicating with the foreigners [who visit Korea] (K06).

The interview statements highlight the necessity of cultural competence, and confidence, in cultivating communicative ability. This theme shows that the East Asian students were limited in their communicative abilities because, as also explained by Brody (2003), language is deeply integrated with the cultural usage of jokes, idioms, sarcasm, etc. Although the participants were able to read and write the language in an academic setting, communicating with native English speakers in a social setting produced difficulties in understanding speech—particularly in relation to cultural references. The participants themselves realized that communicative ability

relies heavily on their ability to understand the cultural codes that are so often used in social communication.

This happens to constitute the sixth theme that in which the most notable cultural references that the participants find difficulty in understanding are jokes, idioms, sarcasm, expressions, slang, phrases, and particularly for the CC students, references to American media.

“Cause that’s not something I grew up with. I don’t know anything about it” (CC03).

“Background is different and what I grew up with is different from what Americans grew up with. So media, that was a hard one” (CC06). In addition, a Korean university participant mentioned that she misunderstood American jokes for impolite behavior and another stated that she found Korea to be much more conservative in their jokes and expressions (K02, K04).

Others were also shocked by the crude content of American dialogue, highlighting a disconnection in cultural understandings and an absence of strong ethnorelativism (K04, K07, K08). As explained by Bennett et al. (2003), communicative competence does not simply require the factual knowledge of creating sentences based on appropriate vocabulary and grammar. Rather, a speaker must also understand the culture that is communicated through the language. However, as found in the first theme, the participants received lessons based mainly in grammar and vocabulary and limited teachings on speaking or cultural understandings and thus, did not possess the background knowledge necessary to understand the cultural references that were often used in native English speech. Because culture is strongly engrained within language, as found by Brody (2003) and Damen (2003), the participants of this study found challenges in fully communicating in English without an adequate grasp of the cultural references that were commonly woven throughout conversation.

The seventh theme, which branches from the root problem identified in the previous theme, found that when the participants did not understand a cultural reference used in an English conversation, they generally laughed or nodded along and acted as if they understood the situation. Only when they conversed with a close friend and did not understand a cultural reference did they ask for clarification. The code was found in seven of the interviews with Korean university students and seven of the interviews with the CC students.

I think for anyone who has lived in a place where they sometimes understand what they're saying but don't understand, I think they can develop a skillset where you understand people's body language and face and I react to that and I know in the conversation when to laugh. Or when to be like, 'Yeah, I agree.' (CC08).

"Sometimes I do ask...but if it's someone that you aren't close, I would just ignore it and keep going" (CC09). The theme finds that the East Asian students in this study were not generally confident to ask for an explanation of an unfamiliar cultural reference and therefore, did not understand many culturally embedded conversations. This creates a basis of understanding for the following two themes: most of the participants belonged to social groups with friends that shared the same first language and while most of the CC students were generally confident in their English, none of the Korean university students expressed confidence.

The former of the two aforementioned themes found that all ten of the Korean university participants were predominantly friends with people who shared the same L1. This was not surprising when considering that all ten of these Korean students lived in South Korea—a homogenous nation with a primary language of Korean. However, only four of the ten CC participants described their friends to be diverse in their L1, and even then, about half of their friends still shared the same L1. A causation code found that as the participants did not

understand jokes and cultural references in American social environments, they refrained from contributing to the conversation. Feeling uncomfortable or isolated, the East Asian students often found it hard to socialize with Americans and therefore did not enjoy spending time with them. Because the participants did not feel culturally related or ethnorelative to the dialogue of the native English speakers, they did not feel closely connected with them and chose to associate themselves with a social group in which they could better communicate with their friends.

“When speaking, culture can influence dialogue. And I think jokes can make close friends. So think understanding jokes is important” (K08). “I felt some kind of disconnections like if I try to get very close but there’s some walls between me and them” (K04). As found by Sias et al. (2008), when a cross-cultural disconnection exists between two people, sharing deep conversations that build meaningful friendships are much more difficult and therefore, individuals generally connect with others who share the same culture. “In order to integrate with other people and join their conversations, you have to know some of the cultural references. You want to find a common ground between you and your friends” (CC09). In addition to a cultural similarity or ethnorelativism, an English learner’s willingness to communicate, as determined by her confidence in her English abilities, determines her likelihood of creating friendships with native English speakers (Barratt & Huba, 1994, p. 424; MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 546; Sias et al., 2008, p. 9; Ying & Liese, 1990, p. 841).

The latter theme was derived from responses that highlighted all ten of the Korean university participants to lack confidence in their English speaking abilities. In contrast, nine of the ten CC participants stated that they were confident to speak in English, contingent on the topic of conversation. For example, they were much more confident to speak up in class if the discussion topic was one in which they held a deep understanding. If they did not understand the

topic, or found themselves in a social situation where they did not understand a cultural reference, they no longer felt confident to join the conversation. Additionally, the CC participants expressed a stronger confidence in speaking during class discussions than conversing with native English speakers in social settings because their vocabulary background derived from an academic rather than a social context. “I’m more confident in class than social conversations. Speaking up in class is more academic and speaking to them is more colloquial” (CC07). As found in a study by Ying & Liese (1990), confidence, more so than ability, was a key factor in socially integrating with native English speakers. However, the surveys found that CC students rated their confidence in communicating to be lower than their ability (3.5 and 3.9, respectively). As a result, the students faced challenges in communicating outside the boundaries of scholarly and culturally independent conversations.

The final theme found that living in an English-speaking country helped the participants improve their English because, as stated by a CC student, “You are now understanding the culture” (CC08). Eight of the CC participants and the five Korean university participants who traveled to either the U.S. or Australia pointed out that because “[they were] forced to talk with people” (CC07), the situations helped them to practice English and therefore become more fluent. “Language is all about using it, right?” (CC07). The participants reported that they had limited opportunities to use English in their home countries, apart from interacting with the occasional native English-speaking teacher, but believed that their English improved when they were forced into situations where using English was their only choice of communication. The benefit of learning English in a native speech community caused a greater understanding and communicative competence in English because the participants were exposed to the cultural environment of the language, as supported by Saville-Troike’s (2003) theory of fluent language

acquisition. “[The] environment really helps cause what you hear and what you see are all in English and that really improves your language context” (CC06).

Limitations

Although this study concluded results and findings, further and deeper analyses were restrained by limitations. Participants of this study were gathered through small sampling pools. The Korean university participants were involved in a study-abroad internship and were therefore already interested in practicing their English with native English speakers. Their self-perceptions of their English abilities and enthusiasm to reflect on their English language education may have been skewed compared to Korean university students who do not, and do not desire to, have any contact with native English speakers. Thus, the participants of this study are not representative of all university students in South Korea. Likewise, the ten Colorado College participants with whom the responses were compared were only selected from one private liberal arts college in a suburban city in the United States. East Asian international students at large state universities in an urban metropolis or small colleges in rural towns may have a different experience of integrating into the society and culture of the U.S. The participants from Colorado College, therefore, do not represent all East Asian international students studying in American tertiary institutions. The general conclusions of this study do not represent the English language educational experiences of East Asian students beyond the boundaries of this study.

Because the students who were interviewed in Seoul, South Korea were all Koreans, an ideal study would have compared the data exclusively with South Korean international students at Colorado College. However, only a handful of international students from South Korea were enrolled at CC during the time of the study, and therefore, the participant criterion was expanded

to include international students from East Asia. Nevertheless, the situation provided benefits to the study, as the English language education system was studied in a broader context rather than solely focused on a single country. Extending the research beyond South Korean participants resulted in finding similarities in South Korea, China, and Japan to have social efficient, specifically exam-driven, approaches to English language education. Further, the findings were limited by the narrowed pool of participants in the U.S. as compared to the Korean university participants. While the ten participants of Korea attended eight different universities throughout Seoul, all ten of the U.S. participants studied at a single liberal arts college. Therefore, the responses and opinions of the CC participants are not representative of all East Asian international students in the United States.

Additionally, a few confounding variables were identified in the research. Some students were perceived to hold resentment and bitterness towards either the education system of their home country, the culture of Colorado College, or both. Resentment was an extraneous variable identified through the interviews. One participant from a Korean university stated, “I’m not really happy with my education” (K07). Another said, “I believe that Korean curriculum really sucks” (K10). These subjective statements highlight a negative disposition towards the education system of the home countries of the participants. In addition, a CC student commented on her frustrations with the lack of diversity and integration among social groups on campus (CC08). The difficulty of creating relationships with American students may have caused negative responses during her interview. This confounding variable may have caused dissatisfaction towards the participants’ English abilities and induced lower self-ratings in the survey responses. Another extraneous variable may have been caused by the pressure and stress that students have felt from the English language education of their home countries. South

Korea has been found to have the highest suicide rate among adolescents. With 200 student suicides in 2009, an average of 10 hours spent in academia everyday, and highly competitive college admissions, the pressure to perform academically presents an understandable resentment towards the education system (J. Lee, 2011). One participant shared that her English language education simply comprised of being tested on three-hundred vocabulary words each day rather than learning how to actually speak the language. She expressed her discontent with the educational methods as she stated, “When I was in high school, I always, always try to talk about it that we had to change our curriculum” (K04).

Further, anonymity could not be guaranteed. Therefore, participants may have been unwilling to share personal and confidential information, which may have caused biased responses in data collection.

If this study were to be redesigned for further research, an ideal situation would present a larger pool of participants in order to depict a broader representation of East Asian students. If participants were selected from various colleges throughout East Asia and the United States, the data would present a more holistic understanding of experiences in learning and using English. In order to account for confounding variables, the questionnaires would be revised to inquire about the participants’ disposition towards their English language education and the pressures they felt while studying English.

Suggestions

By analyzing the survey and interview data of this study, suggestions are provided for improving the English language education of East Asian countries in order to ensure communicative and cultural competence for students. First and foremost, the findings emphasized the necessity of allocating a greater amount of attention in the English language

curriculum to cultural ethno-relativism and the communicative instruction of the language. If curriculum were to veer away from a strictly exam-oriented teaching of merely grammar, vocabulary, and reading, students would be better prepared for the alternative social efficient practicality of communicating in the language. English language curriculum should rather focus on increasing the students' interest in the culture and desire to communicate in order to foster the confidence necessary to achieve fluency.

However, the interviews in this study found that the curricula of South Korea, China, and Japan were fundamentally designed for the purpose of preparing students to achieve high exam scores. A number of the participants even noted that due to the heavy weight of exam scores in applying to colleges and jobs, the English language curricula would never change unless the top-down influences of the exams were modified. A recommendation is proposed to alter the method of assessing student knowledge and ability by eliminating high stakes exams. Rather, performance-based assessments would provide a well-rounded evaluation of the students' abilities. This can only be changed by new policy. The exams should be geared more towards the everyday utilization of communicative English rather than consist of highly complicated grammatical questions that only assess complex understandings of the English language. This would not only avoid teaching unnecessarily difficult levels of English that not all students have an interest in learning, but curriculum would instead be adjusted to teach more appropriate English that would prepare students for a practical comprehension of the foreign language.

Additionally, schools in East Asia would benefit if they were to hire more native English speakers, as this is a topic on which the majority of the participants had commented. Because native English-speaking teachers provide a natural accent when speaking English, students would be better equipped in learning English with an accurate pronunciation. Furthermore,

participants noted that native English teachers taught them common ways of conversing in English—with proper use of idioms, phrases, jokes, and communicative norms.

Although the following suggestion is contingent on school budgets and interest, students would greatly benefit from studying abroad in an English-speaking country. The participants reported that their English greatly improved once they found themselves living and learning in an English-speaking country or in a native English speech community. Alternatively, a greater focus in creating a native speech community within the classroom, perhaps by a native English-speaking teacher, would facilitate a greater communicative competence for the students. While a few of these suggestions will take time and great effort to implement into the English language education of East Asia, a change must take place if East Asian countries thrive to produce students who are confident in their English abilities and culturally ethnorelative to form relationships with native English speakers of an unfamiliar culture.

As for the colleges and universities that have international students from East Asia, students might acculturate with greater ease if better supported by their institutions. Many of the CC students expressed gratitude for academic support centers—particularly in essay-writing. However, the majority of the participants were not found to be socially integrated with the American students on campus. Colleges and universities may find greater integration through an implementation of language partners or cross-cultural residential programs, as this would intertwine the social groups of international and American students. Further, international students may find themselves more interested and comfortable in building friendships with American students if American students were encouraged to strengthen their ethnorelativism. In addition to fulfilling foreign language requirements, American students should be exposed to more cultural awareness possibly through mandated courses regarding diverse race, ethnicity,

and culture. American students may also find a greater understanding of diverse cultures if they participated in cross-cultural events and programs. After all, as stated by MacIntyre et al. (1998), the purpose of learning new languages should be to bring cultures and nations together.

Summary

The present study set out to answer three main questions: 1) How does culture play a role in communicative competence and what linguistic cultural understandings are necessary to achieve fluency in English in particularity to the United States? 2) How have students of East Asian countries learned English and what are their self-perceptions of their ability and confidence in English? 3) How do the self-perceptions of ability and confidence in English of East Asian students affect their social integration with native English speakers? In response to the first question, language does not, and cannot, exist without culture. As found by the stories of both the participants of this study and the personal narrative, social environments and conversations are embedded with culture. The participants were particularly frustrated by their lack of understanding in jokes, idioms, sarcasm, expressions, slang, phrases, and particularly for the CC students, references to American media. Therefore, foreign language curriculum must incorporate teachings of culture, especially within speech, in order to ensure effective and fluent language acquisition. In regards to the second research question, East Asian countries have primarily taught English through exam-oriented curricula concentrated on grammar, vocabulary, and reading. The participants of the study generally perceived their abilities in writing, reading, and communication to be between “average” and “good”. In addition, their confidence was rated within similar boundaries. The reason for their lack of confidence in conversing with native English speakers, as discovered in the interviews, was found to be strongly dependent on their inability to communicate in English outside the perimeter of academic speech, as this was the

field of English vocabulary that the students had learned. Analysis of the data answers the third question by finding that many of the participants found difficulty in socially integrating, or even sharing a conversation with native English speakers, due to a lack of knowledge in cultural references and a low confidence in their English abilities. Therefore, the majority of the participants were hesitant, unwilling, or had little interest in socially integrating with native English speakers. Those who did often failed to understand cultural references in speech but simply acted as if they did in order to avoid uncomfortable situations of asking for clarification. Ultimately, if South Korea, China, and Japan are interested in fostering students of fluent English abilities, their curricular approach must change. English language curriculum should not depend solely on constructing written knowledge, but also aim for promoting communicative and cultural competence, as well as a strong confidence in ability. If so, students of these countries who choose to live abroad will have a stronger—and happier—adjustment to native English-speaking countries.

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Table 1
Average Survey Responses

Survey Question	K	CC
How old were you when you first began to learn English?	6.25	4
How many years have you studied English in an academic setting (in school or privately)?	10.25	9.5
How would you rate your ability to write in English?	3.3*	3.8*
How confident do you feel in writing in English?	3.2*	3.6*
How would you rate your ability to read in English?	3.8	3.9
How confident do you feel in reading in English?	3.7	3.9
How would you rate your ability to communicate in English?	3.3*	3.9*
How confident do you feel in communicating in English?	3.4	3.5
I understand American cultural references (phrases, idioms, sarcasm, jokes, conversations about American media, etc) in all social situations spoken in English.	3.4*	2.7*
I feel as though I am able to communicate efficiently with my American peers.	3.6	3.8
Interacting with American students has helped me to have a stronger understanding for American cultural references.	4.6*	4.3*
Because English is not my first language, I will never fully understand American cultural references (phrases, idioms, sarcasm, jokes, conversations about American media, etc).	3.2	3.1

***significant data discussed in Results & Discussion**

In order to compare the mean responses of Korean university and Colorado College participants, an independent-samples t-test was conducted. No significant difference was found ($p < 0.05$, 2-tailed). However, mean scores that either had a difference greater than 0.4 or showed Korean university participant ratings higher than CC participant ratings were analyzed with support of interview data and the review of literature.

Table 2
Likert Scale Codes

Rating Ability & Confidence		Agree/Disagree Statements	
Rating	Code	Rating	Code
Poor	1	Strongly disagree	1
Fair	2	Disagree	2
Average	3	Neither disagree nor agree	3
Good	4	Agree	4
Excellent	5	Strongly agree	5

Table 3
Statistical Analysis Between Korean University and Colorado College Participants

Question	Group	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error Mean
Age Began Learning English	Korean	10	2.3000	.67495	.21344
	CC	10	1.8000	.63246	.20000
Years Studied	Korean	10	3.0000	.66667	.21082
	CC	10	2.7000	.67495	.21344
Writing Ability	Korean	10	3.300	.8233	.2603
	CC	10	3.800	.7888	.2494
Writing Confidence	Korean	10	3.200	1.0328	.3266
	CC	10	3.600	.8433	.2667
Reading Ability	Korean	10	3.800	.6325	.2000
	CC	10	3.900	.7379	.2333
Reading Confidence	Korean	10	3.700	.8233	.2603
	CC	10	3.900	.7379	.2333
Communication Ability	Korean	10	3.300	.6749	.2134
	CC	10	3.900	1.1005	.3480
Communication Confidence	Korean	10	3.400	.9661	.3055
	CC	10	3.500	1.1785	.3727
“I understand American...”	Korean	10	3.400	.6992	.2211
	CC	10	2.700	.8233	.2603
“I feel as though...”	Korean	10	3.600	.9661	.3055
	CC	10	3.800	.7888	.2494
“Interacting with American...”	Korean	10	4.600	.5164	.1633
	CC	10	4.300	.6749	.2134
“Because English is not...”	Korean	10	3.200	1.2293	.3887
	CC	10	3.100	.8756	.2769

Appendix A

Survey Questionnaire

1. With which gender do you identify the most?
 - a. Female
 - b. Male
 - c. Non-binary
 - d. Other (please specify)
2. What is your age?
3. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?
 - a. American Indian or Alaskan Native
 - b. Asian/Pacific Islander
 - c. Black or African American
 - d. Hispanic
 - e. White/Caucasian
 - f. Multiple ethnicity/Other (please specify)
4. What is your first language (the language with which you are most fluent)?
5. How old were you when you first began to learn English?
6. How many years have you studied English in an academic setting (in school or privately)?
7. Please rate the following questions:
 - 1) poor 2) fair 3) average 4) good 5) excellent
 - a. How would you rate your **ability to write** in English?
 - b. How **confident** do you feel in **writing** in English?
 - c. How would you rate your **ability to read** in English?
 - d. How **confident** do you feel in **reading** in English?
 - e. How would you rate your **ability to communicate** in English?
 - f. How **confident** do you feel in **communicating** in English?
8. Please respond to the following questions:
 - 1) strongly disagree 2) disagree 3) neither disagree nor agree 4) agree 5) strongly agree
 - a. I understand American cultural references (phrases, idioms, sarcasm, jokes, conversations about American media, etc) in all social situations spoken in English.
 - b. I feel as though I am able to communicate efficiently with my American peers.
 - c. Interacting with American students has helped me to have a stronger understanding for American cultural references.
 - d. Because English is not my first language, I will never fully understand American cultural references (phrases, idioms, sarcasm, jokes, conversations about American media, etc).

Appendix B

Interview Questionnaire for Korean University Participants

1. What university do you attend?
2. Did you learn English in grade school? (K-12)
 - a. Was it required in school or did you learn it privately?
3. Through what type of educational setting did you learn English? (Bilingual program/international school/immersion school/traditional school)
 - a. Did you attend any cram schools or meet with private tutors for English?
4. Would you describe your friend groups here in Korea be homogeneous or diverse in their first language?
5. Through what mediums do you interact with native English speakers here in Korea? (If you do not, why not?)
6. When you learned English in the classroom setting, did you also learn about the culture of the United States or other English-speaking countries? If so, what did you learn?
 - a. Did these cultural lessons include the usage of language in social settings?
 - b. Were your teachers native English speakers?
7. In casual conversations with native English speakers, have you found difficulty in understanding the cultural references used by American students (phrases, idioms, sarcasm, jokes, conversations about American media, etc)?
 - a. What do you do when you don't understand it?
8. In response to the 4th survey question on the survey, what is the reason behind your response?
Because English is not my first language, I will never fully understand American cultural references (phrases, idioms, sarcasm, jokes, conversations about American media, etc).
9. What are your thoughts on the relationship between language and culture in terms of achieving fluency?
10. What might you suggest be added to the curriculum of teaching English in foreign countries in order for students to be better equipped in using the language in a conversational manner?

Appendix C

Interview Questionnaire for Colorado College Participants

1. How long have you now been in the U.S.?
2. Can you describe your schooling experience prior to coming to CC? (Were all years spent in your home country? Did you go to public or private school?)
3. Did you learn English in grade school? (K-12)
 - a. Was it required in school or did you learn it privately?
4. Through what type of educational setting did you learn English? (Bilingual program/international school/immersion school/traditional school)
 - a. Did you attend any cram schools or meet with private tutors for English?
5. When you learned English in the classroom setting, did you also learn about the culture of the United States or other English-speaking countries? If so, what did you learn?
 - a. Did these cultural lessons include the usage of language in social settings?
 - b. Were your teachers native English speakers?
6. Would you describe your friend groups here at CC to be homogeneous or diverse in their first language?
7. Through what mediums do you interact with native English speakers here at CC? (If you do not, why not?)
 - a. How is it different in a social conversation vs. in class?
8. How often do you speak up in class discussion? Do you feel confident in doing so?
9. Why did you choose to come to the U.S. for college?
10. Please describe your experience of integrating into a primarily American social environment. Were there any social, linguistic, or cultural barriers?
11. In casual conversations with native English speakers, have you found any difficulty in understanding the cultural references used by American students (phrases, idioms, sarcasm, jokes, conversations about American media, etc)?
 - b. What do you do when you don't understand it?

12. In response to the 4th survey question on the survey, what is the reason behind your response?
Because English is not my first language, I will never fully understand American cultural references (phrases, idioms, sarcasm, jokes, conversations about American media, etc).
13. What are your thoughts on the relationship between language and culture in terms of achieving fluency?
14. How has living in the country in which you are learning the language affected your language learning? (i.e. How has living in the U.S. affected your English skills?)
15. What might you suggest be added to the curriculum of teaching English in foreign countries in order for students to be better equipped in using the language in a conversational manner?
16. Are there any on-campus resources that have assisted you in your time at CC with linguistic, social, or cultural difficulties? Do you have any suggestions for better resources for international students?

Appendix D
Themes, Interview Quotations, & Codes

Theme	Participants	Quotations	Codes
English classes tend to focus primarily on grammar, vocabulary, reading; then listening and writing; then speaking	K01 K02 K03 K04 K05 K06 K07 K08 K09 K10 CC01 CC02 CC03 CC05 CC06 CC07 CC09 CC10 K: 10/10 CC: 8/10	<p>“In the school, maybe almost 90% of classes are for reading and listening and the 10% is for speaking.” (K02)</p> <p>“There were rare time to practice speaking English.” (K06)</p> <p>“The teacher would tell us like open a page and she would start translating every sentence by sentence.” (K07)</p> <p>“In school, most important thing is grammar and vocab. Not speaking. And reading grammar and vocab. Speaking is not important in school but I don’t know why. Because I think speaking is more important for living in my life so not important grammar. I think grammar is not more important than speaking. I know much grammar. I’m good at grammar but I can’t speak English very well-fluently.” (K08)</p> <p>“Almost all reading and grammar.” (K09)</p> <p>“I didn’t know when to use what I’ve learned in what situations. When I was conversing with someone, I never knew what to say.” (K09)</p> <p>“I felt like I wasn’t learning a language. I felt like I was just solving problems. So no matter how well you solve it, it won’t come out your mouth and you can’t hear it well.” (K09)</p> <p>“It should be holistic in learning grammar, writing, reading, speaking, listening. Those five should be used together all equally 20%, 20%, 20%... But our country’s curriculum is not like that. Grammar 70, reading 20, the rest 10. Or it’s all almost reading and grammar. The rest doesn’t matter.” (K09)</p> <p>“Definitely less on speaking.” (CC01)</p> <p>“In most Chinese public schools what we learn and practice in English class is reading and writing. We don’t speak that much.” (CC02)</p> <p>“It was 50% grammar, and then 10% listening, 20% writing, and then 10%</p>	<p>In Vivo & Descriptive Codes:</p> <p>“reading and grammar”</p> <p>“grammar and vocab”</p> <p>“but speaking is more important”</p> <p>“reading and writing”</p>

		<p>speaking, 10% reading.” (CC03) “I wouldn’t say any speaking. Up until high school. So high school would be the first time we would start practicing conversations and kind of have the idea of ‘Oh, we really need to learn English.’” (CC06) “There was [a cram school] that focused on reading and listening for the test. And also I went to [cram school] for <i>Suneung</i> stuff so more reading and writing.” (CC09)</p>	
<p>English curriculum teaches to the test</p>	<p>K03 K04 K05 K06 K07 K08 K09 K10 CC01 CC05 CC07 CC08 CC09 CC10 K: 8/10 CC: 6/10</p>	<p>“Korean <i>Suneung</i> use very complex English vocab so it would be helpful if they changed it to easier words that are used in speaking.” (K03) “In high school every Korean student has to learn English for college entrance exam so they don’t have to speak English. They just learn how to read English for the test.” (K04) “Many classes focus on grammar but not the conversation or reading skill because we have to take the <i>Suneung</i> and it’s much about the grammar so many classes focused on the grammar.” (K05) “The Korean we learned was mostly tailored on <i>Suneung</i> questions and how to solve the problems.” (K07) “I felt like I wasn’t learning a language. I felt like I was just solving problems. So no matter how well you solve it, it won’t come out your mouth and you can’t hear it well.” (K09) “English is really important in Korea no matter what you do.” (K09) “That’s our country’s curriculum. I really wonder why too. The <i>Suneung</i> is mostly solving problems. There is some listening.” (K09) “Instead of listening the English, it’s just figuring out what’s missing and learning how to pass the test.” (K09) “In Korea, if you go into college, all your English scores matter. So it was never about communicating but that’s what’s more important.” (K09)</p>	<p>In Vivo & Descriptive Codes: “never practical” “for the test” Descriptive Code: Learning English was more about passing the test than communicating Causation Code: English scores matter for colleges and careers > it’s just learning how to pass the test > cannot score speaking abilities for all students in the country > the test is mostly about grammar and vocabulary > students just learn how to read English for the test</p>

		<p>“Koreans are good at preparing for the test.” (K10)</p> <p>“You can’t rate speaking one by one cause there’s too many students and they’re standardized exams.” (K10)</p> <p>“They teach students how to score higher on TOEFL and <i>Suneung</i>.” (CC05)</p> <p>“The reason I chose to go to America, I just don’t want to take the exam.” (CC07)</p> <p>“They are heavily exam oriented.” (CC08)</p> <p>“But in Korea, there’s too many focus on tests and results. But the tests is not on how you speak English. But it’s how you answer grammar questions. That’s how Korean government have decided to level English.” (CC09)</p> <p>“Mostly we have textbook that have some chunk of paragraphs and we repeat after teacher. She points out the grammatical points cause that’s going to be on the exam. Not only, but also stuff like that. But it was never practical. Cause I knew how horrible my English was when I came to [the U.S.]” (CC10)</p> <p>“What’s going to be important for the exam. Heavily vocab memorization everyday. That’s what I did everyday. Vocab for TOEFL, TOEIC, that score mattered. And how much vocab you know correlates to how high the score is. There’s a test for your listening, grammar, comprehension, vocab, but there’s never test for oral presentation. And even if there is, there’s lower priority, less of a weight on it.” (CC10)</p>	
<p>Curriculum should focus more on communication (speaking practice, communication topics (culturally through</p>	<p>K01 K02 K03 K04 K05 K06 K07 K08 K09 K10</p>	<p>“I think it’s better to ask the cultural things and speaking because in the reality the speaking is important.” (K02)</p> <p>“When I was in high school, I always, always try to talk about it that we had to change our curriculum.” (K04)</p> <p>“I think speaking is more important than learning grammatical things.” (K04)</p> <p>“Our cause should focus on speaking rather than grammar.” (K06)</p>	<p>In Vivo & Descriptive Codes:</p> <p>“important to know how to communicate”</p> <p>“speaking rather than grammar”</p> <p>“change our curriculum”</p>

<p>media), pronunciation, with native English- speaking teachers)</p>	<p>CC01 CC02 CC04 CC05 CC06 CC07 CC10 K: 10/10 CC: 7/10</p>	<p>“When [Europeans] were child, they just speak and practice each other and there are many chances and opportunities to speak and practice their English skills. Yeah I think high impact on English abilities.” (K06) “I’m not really happy with my education.” (K07) “I wish they would have put more hours in the English conversation class.” (K07) “When you learn a language, it’s important to know how to communicate with others. So in order to communicate, it’s important to know how to listen and speak.” (K09) “There should be some sort of immersive conversational practices that really mimics the native speaking situation.” (CC01) *“But first why do you want to make them speak English. Every school teaches English but they don’t teach English speaking. But it’s up to their will. If they want to speak English but if they want to study just grammar, it’s their choice.” (CC09)</p>	
<p>Students rarely learned about culture in English classes</p>	<p>K01 K02 K03 K04 K05 K06 K07 K08 K09 K10 CC01 CC03 CC05 CC06 CC07 CC09 CC10 K: 10/10 CC: 7/10</p>	<p>“Only small parts about culture, not very deeply, mostly teach grammar and reading.” (K01) “Very only a little. Like holidays.” (K04) “I think it’s more prone to language based, grammar based stuff.” (CC01) “It’s not enough. We were just learning some very stereotypical things.” (CC05) “I wouldn’t say any speaking. Up until high school. So high school would be the first time we would start practicing conversations and kind of have the idea of ‘Oh, we really need to learn English.’” (CC06) “Korean middle school usually focuses on English grammar. They don’t really care about cultural differences or cultural learnings. I think high schools teach the more practical setting but they don’t teach speaking. Mostly you learn about grammar and vocab.” (CC09)</p>	<p>In Vivo & Descriptive Codes: “focuses mostly on grammar” “only small parts about culture”</p>

		<p>*“So we used this textbook written by American people and they have a lot of conversations dialogues in textbooks and in certain American contexts. So we definitely learned more slang or idioms than anywhere else in the country I say. But still it’s not enough to live in the United States.” (CC08) (attended a high school taught in English)</p>	
<p>Believe that culture and language are intertwined</p>	<p>K01 K02 K03 K04 K05 K06 K07 K08 K09 K10 CC01 CC02 CC03 CC04 CC05 CC06 CC07 CC08 CC09 CC10 K: 10/10 CC: 10/10</p>	<p>“Every language has their own culture because if you want to learn language, you have to be like that country’s culture.” (K01) “Culture is helpful to know how to use the language.” (K02) “I felt some kind of disconnections like if I try to get very close but there’s some walls between me and them.” (K04) “Yeah from time to time the idioms or paragraphs usually by the local is based on or rooted from their cultures so it is very natural to them but it is unfamiliar to us. So if I understand more of their cultures or their own systems, it will be more helpful to understand their conversation or their idioms.” (K06) “Most of Korean guys have studied the English for over twenty years if they follow the regular system in Korea. They should speak English well considering the time. But most of Korean guys can’t speak well and I think handful of them have a fearness of conversation communicating with the foreigners [who visit Korea].” (K06). “When speaking, culture can influence dialogue. And I think jokes can make close friends. So think understanding jokes is important.” (K08) “You learn more about their culture and know when you can use certain phrases.” (K09) “I mean it’s not really about the language itself but it’s more about the culture that’s behind this language.” (CC01) “So you definitely need to learn or know</p>	<p>In Vivo & Descriptive Codes: “more about the culture that’s behind the language” “rooted from culture”</p>

		<p>some culture to live a decent life in a culture, but what's beyond that in jokes or phrases, I don't think that's necessary to everyone. It's important to fit into a society but it's also important to be yourself and preserve your native culture." (CC02)</p> <p>"Well I feel like those media that they watch is part of the culture and what they find funny is also part of the culture so I think it's different from each country and that's what the language is made up of." (CC03)</p> <p>"There will be many misunderstandings and sometimes other people speaking don't get their meaning." (CC05)</p> <p>"Communication doesn't work well when we realize culture difference. So background is different and what I grew up with is different from what Americans grew up with. Like when they talk about Scooby Doo. So media, that was a hard one. A lot of things are different in references." (CC06)</p> <p>"Basically you will just misunderstand if you don't understand the culture. I just translated the sentence, 'He drinks flower wine,' and you can know what he drinks: flower. And what wine can mean, but if you don't understand the culture, you can't understand what that sentence means. So you have to know what's behind it. It means he goes to brothel." (CC08)</p> <p>"People often talk about social issues like what other celebrities did or what sports player have done. In order to integrate with other people and join their conversations, you have to know some of the cultural references. You want to find a common ground between you and your friends. So in order to have a conversation I think that's necessary." (CC09)</p> <p>"I think you have to know culture to be interactive rather than just answering and reply. So instantly you become really shy because you don't know how to initiate. Only respond." (CC10)</p> <p>*"But if you just want to be speaking</p>	
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		fluently in class, I don't think there's any reference to culture." (CC06)	
Most difficult cultural references to understand		<p>K01 sarcasm, lingo, jokes K02 mistook jokes for impoliteness K03 phrases K04 Korea is conservative compared to US K05 idioms, slang K06 expressions, idioms K07 jokes, sarcasm, memes K08 jokes K09 idioms K10 jokes, idioms, sarcasm CC01 media CC02 media CC03 media CC04 media, idioms CC05 idioms, jokes CC06 sarcasm, idioms CC07 slang, media CC08 idioms, sarcasm, puns CC09 satire, sarcasm, jokes CC10 sarcasm, media "Cause that's not something I grew up with. I don't know anything about it." (CC03) "Background is different and what I grew up with is different from what Americans grew up with. So media, that was a hard one." (CC06)</p>	
Participants act like they understand cultural references when they don't and only ask for an explanation if with a close friend	<p>K02 K04 K05 K06 K08 K09 K10 CC01 CC03 CC05 CC06 CC08 CC09 CC10 K: 7/10</p>	<p>"I say pardon or just pretend to understand." (K08) "I just act like I do and move on. If I meet with someone one on one, they speak slower and I feel more comfortable asking them to repeat themselves." (K09) "And if I'm not really close to them, I can't ask back what it is. I just pretend to understand." (K10) "Sometimes I will ask and sometimes if I can sort of guess what's going on, I'll just laugh through it." (CC01) "I think a little shy to ask them to stop to explain the joke to me." (CC05) "I think for anyone who has lived in a place where they sometimes understand what</p>	<p>In Vivo Code: "I just pretend to understand" Descriptive Code: ask if comfortable</p>

	<p>CC: 7/10</p>	<p>they're saying but don't understand, I think they can develop a skillset where you understand people's body language and face and I react to that and I know in the conversation when to laugh. Or when to be like, "Yeah, I agree." Or I just be like, "That's cool, that's awesome." Say stuff like that that everyone understands. Which makes me feel crappy too because I feel like I'm being safe but honestly there's not much I can do about it. Now I just learn to live with it." (CC08)</p> <p>"I pretend to understand it. Sometimes I do ask. Like if you're close friends are right next to it, I'll ask, 'What does that mean?' But if it's someone that you aren't close, I would just ignore it and keep going." (CC09)</p> <p>"Just smile and laugh and make sure I don't show them that I didn't get it. They make a joke, and then make a joke out of that joke and it becomes really cultural. And I sometimes find myself laughing with their laughter, not with their jokes." (CC10)</p>	
<p>Most friends share same L1</p>	<p>K01 K02 K03 K04 K05 K06 K07 K08 K09 K10 CC04 CC05 CC07 CC09 CC10 K: 10/10 CC: 5/10</p>	<p>"I felt some kind of disconnections like if I try to get very close but there's some walls between me and them." (K04)</p> <p>"When speaking, culture can influence dialogue. And I think jokes can make close friends. So think understanding jokes is important." (K08)</p> <p>"Before [the study-abroad program internship], all friends were Korean and only spoke in Korean." (K09)</p> <p>"Homogenous. Mostly I just hang out with Chinese friends. Well first of all, I think it's a cultural thing. Maybe there is some language thing as well. But I think mostly it's about culture. When like I'm sitting with American friends and they're talking about something funny and maybe they tell a joke and I don't get it. And I think I'm a little shy to ask them to stop to explain the joke to me. So usually I just don't enjoy hanging out with them that much." (CC05)</p>	<p>In Vivo Code: "I think it's a cultural thing"</p> <p>Causation Code: Doesn't understand joke > doesn't say much in the conversation > hard to hang out with American people > doesn't enjoy hanging out with them as much</p>

		“In order to integrate with other people and join their conversations, you have to know some of the cultural references. You want to find a common ground between you and your friends.” (CC09)	
Social group diverse in L1	CC01 CC03 CC06 CC08 K: 0/10 CC: 4/10	“I would say diverse.” (CC03)	In Vivo & Descriptive Code: “diverse”
Not confident in speaking English	K01 K04 K06 K07 K08 K09 K10 CC03 K: 7/10 CC: 1/10	“Most important growth is confidence.” (K01) “I think it’s okay to make a mistake.” (K02) “I feel like I’m okay with reading, writing, and listening at university level, but with speaking I just sometimes can’t find the right words like appropriate words or I make grammar mistakes when I’m talking.” (K07) “I don’t have confidence in speaking English. I can read English or solve problems in figuring out the sentence but I don’t have confidence in speaking. I try to gain it usually.” (K08) “I’m not confident if they’re talking about American references.” (CC07)	In Vivo & Descriptive Code: “don’t have confidence in speaking”
Confident in speaking English, depending on topic and context	CC01 CC02 CC04 CC05 CC06 CC07 CC08 CC09 CC10 K: 0/10 CC: 9/10	“If I know a lot about what they’re talking about.” (CC02) “I’m more confident in class than social conversations. Speaking up in class is more academic and speaking to them is more colloquial.” (CC07) “As a speaker whose language in Korean, I’m definitely more confident in speaking English [than other Koreans.]” (CC09)	In Vivo & Descriptive Code: “confident”

<p>Living in an English-speaking nation has improved their English</p>	<p>K01 K02 K06 K07 K10 CC01 CC02 CC03 CC05 CC06 CC08 CC09 CC10 K: 5/5 (students who went abroad) CC: 8/10</p>	<p>Living in the U.S. helped the participant to understand culture through experiences with culture shock (divorced couples, being cordial to an ex-partner, living with a boyfriend, relationships with elders, not bowing to teachers, students interrupting teachers). (K01) “It’s quite helpful for understanding because I went to the France with my family and that’s very helpful for understanding their culture so I went to the America and it was helpful.” (K02) “It’s very good circumstance to practice English even if I can’t understand fully what they are speaking at first.” (K06) “I think I improved a lot.” (K07) “If I didn’t go, I feel like I don’t know about language itself but just communicating in English would have been harder.” (K07) “Even though I was there for a year, [my English] was a lot better.” (K10) “I feel much better comparing to half a year ago. So I think it will get better and better.” (CC05) “Environment really helps cause what you hear and what you see are all in English and that really improves your language context.” (CC06) “You’re forced to talk with people.” (CC07) “Language is all about using it, right?” (CC07) “You are now understanding the culture.” (CC08) “So much better. Still not enough.” (CC08) “So cultural experiences, you have to go to the country. You can’t learn the culture from books and stuff. You have to actually go and experience what’s going on in the country.” (CC09) “You get to get more chances of speaking, cultural references to integrate with people. (CC09) “You get to see their face and understand the context. So I think best way to learn a language is go to that country and become a silly person. And that kind of attitude makes</p>	<p>In Vivo & Descriptive Codes: “improved/better” “cultural experience”</p>
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		it easier for learning. You're humble, you're crazy. Everyone thinks you're foreign so they give you extra excuse. You can laugh it off." (CC10)	
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*The quotation presents an opinion in contrast to the theme.