

**BELIEFS ABOUT ENGLISH: KOREAN POSTSECONDARY SHORT-TERM STUDY
ABROAD LEARNERS IN CANADA**

by

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Abstract

English has been associated with “development” and “globalization” (Pennycook, 2007; Phillipson, 2008) and the importance of English education has been emphasized in many countries including South Korea. As the notion of “English as a global language” spreads, skills in English are emphasized as compulsory to live in a global world and an increasing number of students leave their home countries to acquire such skills (Park & Bae, 2009; Waters, 2006). Their motivation to pursue language learning is closely related to their beliefs about the target language; these beliefs are not neutral or objective but ideologically shaped. However, English language learners’ beliefs in relation to ideologies have not been sufficiently explored.

Drawing on the concept of language ideology (Thompson, 1990; Woolard, 1998), this study investigates the beliefs of English language learners—specifically, postsecondary Korean adults who participate in short-term study abroad in Canada—toward English, learning English, and using English. It also examines how these beliefs influence the learners’ notions of their mother tongue and study abroad experiences. The study identifies two core values that such learners place on English: (1) English is a competitive tool which enables them to get a job in Korea and (2) English is a global language which enables them to connect to other foreigners throughout the world.

The study found that the participants viewed Korean—their mother tongue—as a local language only for Koreans. In addition, they believed they would acquire English skills at a native speaker’s level of fluency through simple exposure and in a relatively short time. Thus, they struggled with negative self images as ashamed and inferior learners. These results indicate a need for a critical approach to English education.

Preface

Ethical approval was required for this research and approval was issued on April 19, 2010 by the Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB). BREB number is H10-00420.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background and purpose of the study

As English spreads in such arenas as business, popular culture, and education, it is increasingly seen as a global language. This notion of “English as a global language” supports the perception that skills in English are compulsory in order to communicate with people of different cultures. Not only is English used as a medium for communication, it is also regarded as an essential tool for economic development, globalization, career opportunity, and democracy (Abbot, 1992; Appleby et al., 2002; Bruthiaux, 2002; Pennycook, 2007; Phillipson, 2008; Vavrus, 2002). As English is associated with these agendas, English education has been emphasized in many countries (e.g., Castillo, 2003; Cheah, 2003; Honna & Takeshita, 2003; Hu, 2009; Jung & Norton, 2002; Nunan, 2003; Smotrova, 2009; Wood, 2001) and a great number of individuals move to English-speaking countries in order to improve their English skills. Almost half of all international students move to one of five English-speaking countries (i.e., Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States [Waters, 2006]). The largest population of these international students is Asian (UNESCO, 2005 as cited in Waters, 2006).

Most research on study abroad has focused on cognitive psychology perspectives that overlook social factors related to language learners (Amuzie & Winke, 2009; Freed, 1995; Joe, 2005; Llanes & Munoz, 2009; Tanaka & Ellis, 2003; Trenchs-Parera, 2009). The naturalized notion that “English is an important language” has led only to discussion of how people can improve English skills rather than to questioning the real need for the language or problems caused by an overemphasis on English learning. Few studies have asked why English is important enough for so many students to feel the need to leave their homes and come to a new

environment, investing substantial amounts of money and time in the process. Beliefs about language are a major impetus of language behavior (Silverstein, 1979). Clearly, it is important to investigate students' beliefs, especially about language and language learning.

In addition, equating English with “development” and “globalization” has caused a divide between English and other first languages. The notion of privileged English—that “English is for better students”—has been reported in a few studies (Choi, 2003; Ramanathan, 2005) and can lead to the depreciation of the mother tongue (Pennycook, 1998). This needs to be explicitly addressed in order to raise awareness of inequality in English education. Pennycook (1999) points out that this awareness is an essential part of the push for change.

To explore these issues, I interviewed Korean postsecondary short-term study abroad English learners in Canada, a group I selected for several reasons. First, Korean study abroad students are the largest group of international students in Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2009). Moreover, according to Cho (2007), studying English has been taken more seriously by Koreans than other nationalities. Such short-term study abroad learners who attend private institutions comprise the largest population among study abroad Korean English learners (Kim, 2007). Many already have selected a major—one rarely related to English—at their universities in Korea. Unlike students attending formal schools, the short-term study abroad students attend non-degree language learners programs. Their goals do not include receiving formal certification. Finally, my personal background and experience have led me to this study; as someone who has been educated in Korea, as someone who chose English as a major, and as someone who has studied abroad, I was motivated to investigate the views on English that other Koreans share.

1.2 Research questions

Using a qualitative approach, specifically interviews, this study focuses on Korean postsecondary English learners who participate in short-term study abroad programs in Canada. It investigates their views on English and English language learning as well as the influence of English on attitudes toward their mother tongue, Korean.

The following questions have guided the study:

- (1) What beliefs do short-term study abroad Korean postsecondary students in Canada have about English, learning English, and using English?
- (2) How are these beliefs about English related to the view of their mother tongue (i.e., Korean)?
- (3) How do these beliefs shape their study abroad experiences?

1.3 Theoretical lens and significance of the study

English has been emphasized in many countries, a fact not unrelated to societal phenomena. The importance of English is constructed at a macro level through policies, institutional curricula, and mass media (Park, 2010; Pennycook, 2001; Phillipson, 2008; Piller & Takahashi, 2006; Tollefson, 1995). However, as Piller and Takahashi (2006) point out, research efforts to learn “why and how people around the world desire to learn English are largely lacking” (p. 60). In addition, as Canagarajah (1999) demonstrates, not everyone follows macro societal ideologies. Therefore, how individuals’ beliefs about English have been shaped in their daily lives is worthy of investigation.

Once a belief is naturalized, it is taken as truth, and thus, not questioned. There needs to be more discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of learning English. There is also more to

learn about how the enormous value placed on English as an ideology is reflected in individual learners' consciousness and how it influences their language learning experiences. Scrutinizing commonly shared ideas toward English may provide awareness of counter-views (Seargeant, 2008) such as questions about the "necessity of English." In addition, as Kroskrity (2000) explains, "language ideological research may provide some useful conceptual tools for better relating often simultaneous and pervasive processes of linguistic nationalism and the production of social inequality" (p. 28). I hope that this study on English beliefs reflected in Korean students' views will contribute to an awareness of the unequal societal phenomena relating to English education and its practice.

Therefore, through in-depth interviews, this study explores Korean short-term study abroad English learners' general perceptions and beliefs toward English and their influences on English learning and on their notion of Korean, their mother tongue. In order to understand general perceptions people have toward English, it is useful to discuss how English is constructed in Korean society, to which I now turn.

1.4. Status of English in Korea

1.4.1 Emphasis on English education in Korea

In light of the rising importance of English on the world scene, in 1997 the South Korean government initiated a new English education scheme mandating that English be taught as a compulsory subject beginning in grade three (see Jung & Norton, 2002). English is seen not as one of many foreign languages but as *the* international language for people to connect with each other. In the 7th Amendment of the National Education Curriculum (2007), English is introduced as follows:

English is the most widely used language and plays an important role as an international language in communicating and connecting with people of different mother tongues. Therefore, communication skills in English are an essential skill to teach at schools for elementary and secondary school students who will live in the future. That is, it is necessary to understand and communicate in English to contribute to social and national development, to play a leading role as a global citizen, and to enjoy a broad cultural life. Communication skills in English are an important bridge to connect countries and an impetus to develop our country through mutual understanding and trust among various countries and cultures (translated from Korean by the author of this paper).

In Korea, English is seen as a vital tool for development and broader world participation, not only for the nation but also for every individual to be a global citizen. English is regarded as the language of the future and of the global community. In order to live in the future or to access the global community, skill in English is essential.

According to the 2008 Amendment Curriculum, English is to be taught for a minimum of 68 instructional hours per year (i.e., for 34 school weeks) in 3rd and 4th grades, 102 hours in 5th–8th grades, and 136 hours in 9th–12th grades. One instructional hour equals 40 minutes for elementary schools, 45 minutes for middle schools, and 50 minutes for high schools (see the Table 2.1 below). Only in the 11th grade may students learn a foreign language other than English.

Table 2.1 The National Common Basic Curriculum (English)

School	Elementary school				Middle school			High school		
Grade	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th
Number of classes/year	68		102				136			

(Source: 2008 Amendment Curriculum, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2008)

The emphasis on English education continues in Korea as the government has decided to hire teachers specialized in English communication in public schools, and each elementary and secondary school will have a special English classroom filled with English materials by 2011 (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2008).

English is a major subject in the high-stakes national college entrance exam. Most high schools offer extracurricular English classes in addition to regular daily classes and most students attend private English-language institutions. According to Shim and Baik (2003), more than 90% of elementary school students had received some form of private English education before they started Grade 1. English is among the skills on which Korean parents spend the most money. The private English institutes are a big market; in 2008 it was estimated to be worth about seven trillion *won* (about 6 billion US dollars)¹ (Statistics Korea, 2009),² a figure that refers only to elementary and secondary students. The total is likely much higher when adult English education, including for college students and professionals, is taken into account.

As government policy emphasizes communication in English (see Shin, 2007), parents in Korea are spending even more money on English education (Nunan, 2003; Shim & Baik, 2003). Some parents send their children to or even temporarily migrate with their children to English-speaking countries so that their children can improve their English skills (Park, 2009; Park & Bae, 2009; Song, 2010).

¹ Given a Korean exchange rate on June 18, 2010, of 1 US dollar = 1,170 *won*.

² The total amount of money spent on private education in Korea was estimated at 20.9 trillion *won* (about 17.9 billion US dollars) in 2008. The average monthly cost on private education per person is 233,000 *won* (about 199 US dollars), of which about 76,000 *won* (about 65 US dollars)—that is, one third of all of private spending on education—is spent on English instruction.

This emphasis on English continues even after Koreans enter university. Although university courses are not unified like primary and secondary schools, all colleges and universities in Korea require the completion of 3-12 credits in English (Nunan, 2003). Furthermore, many universities recently began requiring students to take English-immersion classes (Gim,³ 2010; Lim, 2010).

1.4.2 Importance of English in job markets

It is widely known that TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) and English interviews are mandatory for most employees seeking higher paying white-collar jobs. According to YBM, a conglomerate English institution which administers TOEIC, 928 out of 1,000 companies required a TOEIC score in 2008. It is reported that 23% of those companies inquired about a specific score.⁴ Where the test is used to screen potential employees (Prey, 2005), a good TOEIC score is perceived to be one of the most important elements of the job application. In 2009, 1,936,379 individuals took TOEIC in Korea (Song, 2010).

TOEIC is composed of 100 multiple choice questions of Listening Comprehension (LC) and Reading Comprehension (RC). In addition, as communication skills are stressed, many companies now require job applicants to take TOEIC-Speaking which is a separate test. Scores are considered valid only for 2 years, adding to the financial and psychological burden on test-takers. Even after obtaining a job, many workers keep studying English because they believe that their skill in English plays an influential role in their career (Kang, 2010).

³ The revised Romanization system (which went into effect in July, 2000) is used for the translation of Korean. Korean personal names follow the Romanization the person uses him or herself.

⁴ See http://exam.ybmsisa.com/toEIC/status/recruit_company.asp.

In fact, it is not difficult to find articles that discuss the importance of English in Korea (Park, 2009; Park, 2010). The Korean mass media consistently reports that English is related to success at work and in one's personal life (Gim & Yi, 2007). Moreover, surveys recently conducted demonstrate people's belief that English has a great impact on the job search. For instance, one employment portal site (www.career.co.kr) shows that 79.1% of 1,465 workers surveyed viewed a lack of English skills to be a hurdle in their career. They also considered English competence to be a main factor in moving to bigger companies and receiving salary raises (Bak, 2009). At the same time, a survey conducted by another job portal site, Job Korea, reports that 27.2% of 2,042 workers chose "their lack of English skills" as a main regret (Seo, 2009). In a similar vein, 22.2 % of 1,026 job applicants regarded their lack of English as a main reason for their unemployment (Yi, 2009). In sum, the media overwhelmingly emphasize that English competence has a direct connection to job success and is essential to obtain. This emphasis is linked to the growing interest in study abroad among young Koreans.

1.4.3 Going abroad to pursue English

There is a common assumption that one's English skills will improve dramatically if one is immersed in an English-speaking context. English-speaking countries are regarded as places where one will be exposed to English in natural settings (Park & Bae, 2009). With this conception, a great number of Koreans head to English-speaking countries to gain English skills.

According to Statistics Korea, (2010b), more than 50% of all Korean study-abroad students are heading to five English-speaking countries: Australia, Britain, Canada, New Zealand, or the United States. When Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines are included, the percentage goes

up to about 65%. In 2008, South Koreans spent about \$4.5 billion (US) dollars on study-abroad education.

Korean students usually choose between two types of study-abroad education: formal educational institutions or private language institutions. So many Koreans go abroad to acquire language skills that there is a specific term—“*ehak yeonsu*”⁵—to indicate non-degree language study abroad. Although many elementary and secondary students use *ehak yeonsu* programs during summer or winter breaks, Statistics Korea (2009) reports that a greater number of college students go abroad for *ehak yeonsu*. As competition for employment intensifies, the perception that “the more equipped you are, the better chance you have” is salient among job applicants. Considered one of the essential qualifications for employment, most college students take one or two semesters off for *ehak yeonsu* before graduation. *Eohak yeonsu* is deemed to be beneficial not only for language acquisition but also for diverse cultural experiences (Choi, 2009). In short, *ehak yeonsu* has become one of the rites of passage for Korean college students (Joe, 2005).

This study focuses on how English is viewed at an individual level within this social milieu. Using in-depth interviews, I investigate perceptions about English and its learning by postsecondary Korean English learners who attend short-term study abroad programs at private institutions in Canada. The study will focus on the influence of English language and learning on the notion of Korean, their mother tongue.

1.5 Organization of the thesis

This thesis has five chapters. Following the introduction in this chapter, Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature concerning language ideologies and diverse meanings attached to

⁵ *Eohak yeonsu* literally means “language study training.” It usually refers to short-term study abroad to acquire language skills in the embedded contexts where the language is naturally used.

English language learning, with a focus on how the notion that English is a global language influences English education in Korea. It is important to review how English is viewed in Korean society, as this affects the ideologies of the study participants.

Chapter 3 describes the ways in which this qualitative research was conducted. Information to inform the research context includes profiles of participants, the recruitment process, ethical considerations, data collection and analysis procedures, and the trustworthiness of the study.

Chapter 4 presents findings as to how English is viewed by each participant. It also identifies salient themes in the interview data across participants with regard to beliefs about English-speaking countries, English learning, and their mother tongue.

Chapter 5 provides analytical discussions of the findings described in the previous chapter. The chapter—and the thesis—end with suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided into four sections. First, I describe the theoretical lens of this paper, language ideology. From the critical perspective of ideology, I discuss the issue of power in language use. Second, a review of Bourdieu's (1986) notion of capital, particularly in relation to language, is followed by a discussion of types of language learning. Language learning can be regarded variously as an investment for symbolic and material resources (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000), desire-seeking for fantasies and dreams about the target language and culture (Kramsch, 2005), or leisure in order to socialize with people (Kubota, 2009). Third, I also discuss the notion of "English as a global language" from diverse perspectives. While some scholars praise the spread of English, others critique the idea and question its dominance. In the final section, I focus on English ideologies in Korea. I also identify gaps, including a lack of investigation into the diverse backgrounds of Koreans and their diverse study contexts. As study abroad becomes popular with younger people in Korea, the research emphasis has shifted to children and not much attention seems to be paid to Korean adult learners. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of the need to investigate the beliefs of Korean adult English learners at private language institutions in Canada.

2.2 Theoretical framework: Language ideology

In her explanation of ideology, Kathryn Woolard (1998, pp. 6-7) provides the following useful concepts: (1) Ideology is not necessarily conscious, deliberate, or systematically organized thought, or even thought at all; it is behavioral, practical, prereflective, or structural; (2) Ideology represents the interests of a particular socially, politically, economically powerful position; (3)

Ideology follows social, political, economic power; and (4) Ideology might be distortion, illusion, error, mystification, or rationalization. These concepts apply to language ideology as well.

Language ideologies are defined by Silverstein (1979) as “sets of beliefs about language articulated by the users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use” (p. 173). Although beliefs about language can be constructed by power and may not be explicitly acknowledged among groups who share the notion, those beliefs act as an impetus for people to behave in a certain way. For instance, beliefs shared by group members (Irvine, 1989) have the capacity to change actual practices such as language use (Silverstein, 1979). Shared notions toward language may be taken as universal truths but still contain the hidden agenda of a dominant group.

As Fairclough (1995) states, “the relations of power are best served by meanings which are widely taken as given,” (p. 58) suggesting that constructed meanings play a core role in sustaining the power of the language. Irvine (1989) points out that linguistic differentiation and social groups are interrelated: a certain type of language marks a particular social group. Languages label social groups and in return, qualities of those social groups are predicted by the languages their members use. Likewise, “language varieties that are regularly associated with (and thus index) particular speakers are often revalorized... not just as symbols of group identity, but as emblems of political allegiance or of social, intellectual, or moral worth” (Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994, p. 61). Woolard (1998) also notices that people “envision and enact ties of language to identity, to aesthetics, to morality, and to epistemology. Through such linkages, they underpin not only linguistic form and use but also the very notion of the person and the social group, as well as such fundamental social institutions as religious ritual, child socialization, gender relations, the nation-state, schooling and law” (p. 3).

Domination involves inequalities and asymmetries of power, and it functions as a means to exclude other groups from accessing resources; the act of employing and deploying symbolic forms—i.e., constructed values—is crucial to maintaining power. The language of the dominant group is considered to have more value than other languages. Thompson (1990), who also regards ideology as a shared belief closely related to power domination, argues for an investigation of how values and meanings are constructed to sustain power in social contexts. He notices that people are most directly affected by power relations in the social contexts in which they live out their everyday lives (home, workplace, classroom); that is, in the peer group rather than the political organization. As individuals are consistently involved in social relations through everyday actions, symbols, and words, the constructed meanings are taken as “truth.” Drawing on Foucault’s notion of “truth,” which is constituted only within power-sustained discourses, Woolard (1998) argues that truth is constituted by ideology, when ideology is seen as power-related discourse. Pennycook (2001) also notes that “what we assume to be background knowledge or common sense in fact are always ideological representations; that is to say, what we assume to be common everyday knowledge is in fact always the particular worldwide (ideology) of a particular social group” (p. 81).

In order to understand the ideologies that influence Koreans’ beliefs about English, it is useful to review how socially perceived values of language and language use are theorized and how these theoretical discussions are adopted in the field of second language education. More specifically, I briefly discuss Bourdieu’s (1986) notion of capital and review how this notion is used to explain language learning and how other concepts are necessary to theorize language learning.

2.3 Language values and various types of language learning

2.3.1 Language as capital

Bourdieu (1986) identifies four kinds of power in society: economic (e.g., money and other forms of property rights), cultural (e.g., knowledge, skills, and educational qualifications), social (e.g., connections and membership), and symbolic capital (e.g., recognition, honor, nobility, and prestige). He notices that these forms are closely interrelated. For instance, cultural capital such as knowledge can be converted into symbolic capital such as honor or economic capital such as a salary.

The social, linguistic, and cultural competences of upper-middle and middle class people, which Bourdieu sees as cultural capital, are characterized as normalized and legitimized knowledge and skill, and are reproduced through power structures such as school institutions. This cultural capital, including linguistic competences, plays as a class indicator and a basis for exclusion from jobs, resources, and high status groups (Lamont & Lareau, 1988).

Bourdieu (1991) also notes that language is seen to possess a symbolic capital, *a recognized power* (p. 72). That is, utterances are not only signs of communication, but “they are also *signs of wealth*, intended to be evaluated and appreciated, and *signs of authority* intended to be believed and obeyed” (p. 66, emphasis in original). He acknowledges that people pursue symbolic profit in everyday language use rather than as a pure instrument of communication (i.e., in addition to the message delivered, the style in which it is communicated takes on a social value).

However, Bourdieu notes that the symbolic value of language is not only given as a correct linguistic product. Rather, linguistic exchange is a symbolic interaction in which the power

relations between speakers are actualized. In other words, the value of the utterance is influenced by the power of the speakers rather than the linguistic form. In order for the words to be recognized by society, the speaker must be recognized as legitimate. This legitimacy can be granted by institutions. In short, the power which authorizes utterances to be recognized lies in the social condition of the institution rather than in the language itself.

2.3.2 Language learning for investment

When a certain language is recognized to possess cultural and symbolic capital, the purpose of language learning is explicated as an investment (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton 2000). Drawing on the notion of identity, Norton argues that learners invest in language learning in order to achieve multiple desires in society. Language learners expect that they will get symbolic and material resources as a result of language learning.

Drawing on the notion of imagination developed by Anderson (2006) and Wenger (1998), Pavlenko and Norton (2007) discuss the role of imagination in second language learning. For Anderson (2006), nation-states exist as imagined communities, whereas for Wenger (1998), imagination is a form of belonging to a particular community. As Norton (2001) and Pavlenko and Norton (2007) point out, imagination enables humans to perceive a connection beyond the immediate context the learners are engaged in, and learners invest in language learning in order to engage in their imagined community, where they desire to belong beyond current time and place. Wenger (1998) set a positive tone insofar as the imagined community is a new image of possibility, but it is crucial to investigate what learners desire, why they engage in language learning to relate to their imagined community, and whether the imagined community actually conforms to such desires.

Moreover, people do not always learn languages as investment in an instrumental sense. Rather, people associate diverse longings with language learning. Different kinds of desires are involved in language learning.

2.3.3 Language learning for desire

Another factor in language learning is highlighted by Kramsch (2005). She argues that not everyone learns a language for communicative success or professional profit as tangible investment. She notes that foreign language learners pursue varied desires in language learning. In her study, some learners showed the desire to identify with native speakers of the target language; others demonstrated that they feel more intelligent and more educated while learning a target language. They placed on the target language such meanings as “beauty,” “elegance,” “logic,” and “intelligence.” Although some learners highlighted challenges and frustration in language learning, many others expected language learning to bring self-enhancement, newness, and access to a community of native speakers. Kramsch (2005) points out that such anticipations are “not always based on the direct experiences of learning the language, but rather, on *fantasies and dreams*” (p. 312, emphasis added). She stresses that fantasies and dreams about the target language and culture, which are strong motivating factors to learn the language, are discursively accumulated through films and TV, trips, dreams of escape, romantic aspirations, and perceptions of self.

By linking relations between power and desire, Piller and Takahashi (2006) investigate how the romantic desire of Japanese women for white men is constructed at the macro level of ideology, and how that ideology is enacted at the micro level of conversation. Japanese women in their study were influenced by media discourses about the “new life” and “dreams” one can

pursue while associating with white men in study abroad contexts. Although the women in the study pursued their dreams and imagined themselves fluently talking in English with white people, they soon found gaps between their imagination and the reality. For some of these women, their broken dreams of being fluent in English, fully participating in society, and getting a desirable boyfriend combined negatively, resulting in depression.

2.3.4 Language learning for leisure

Kubota (2009) also points out that Norton's concept of investment in a second language context does not entirely explain the goals of language learning in foreign language contexts. Through in-depth interviews with English learners in Japan, she found that their learning is a type of leisure activity. Rather than seriously investing in learning English, they joined English conversation classes to socialize with people, including white teachers. Considering her participants' desire and imagination toward English society and white people, Kubota illustrates that English learning can be explained with the notion of consumption rather than investment.

This leisure type of learning is also noted in Kobayashi's (2007) study with three Japanese female learners in Canada. The three quit decent jobs in Japan to go abroad to study English. These short-term study abroad learners did not expect any noticeable return from learning English given their social positions in their home countries. The informants were all serious about learning English, but they were aware that English would not play a significant role in their employment in Japan. They preferred Western movies and wanted to experience Western culture. Despite a lack of interest in assimilating into the Canadian mainstream society, they seized a lifetime opportunity to experience life overseas.

To summarize, there are various values attached to language. As a certain language is seen to possess varied types of capital, language learning is perceived to be a logical and feasible investment. However, it should be noted that there are other motivations in language learning. Learners' desires or imaginations are also deeply involved in language learning. As Piller and Takahashi (2006) demonstrate, learners' wishes do not necessarily lead to positive results. In the next section I provide diverse perspectives on a newly arising value attached to English, the notion of "English as a global language," which constitutes a major stimulus for many English learners.

2.4 English as a global language

As globalization is widely interpreted rather positively as "advancement," "development," and "a unified global network of peoples" (Smith, 2000), English has a strong alignment with the idea of globalization.

2.4.1 Supporting the notion of "English as a global language"

Crystal (1997) celebrates that English has been "accepted" as a global language since the "English language has repeatedly found itself 'in the right place at the right time'" (p. 69). He claims that English should be learned from a young age because it has been proven to benefit communications among people of diverse backgrounds. He acknowledges political, economic, and cultural power as a cause, but does not recognize conflicts from hegemonic dominance, neutrally explaining as if it were the consequence of natural events. Crystal advocates the lingua franca function of English, insisting that English and local languages can "happily co-exist" (p. 19).

2.4.2 Critiquing the notion of “English as a global English”

This blind celebration of English is called into question by several critical linguists. For instance, Phillipson (2009) asks a noteworthy question in the title of his article, *English in globalization, a lingua franca or lingua frankensteinia?* He warns that the notion of lingua franca can lead to a false assumption that “the language is neutral, free of cultural ties, and serves all equally well” (p. 337). He argues that English stratifies people between haves and have-nots in Europe; when local languages lose linguistic capital, they lose their dominance in areas such as higher education, business, and international relations.

Revealing how English has been politically involved, Phillipson (2008) argues that linguistic globalization has been a wishful project. That is, accompanying economic and military power, the British Council and later the United States have promoted their education, culture, and language. Equating English with wealth, prestige, and new mental capacity, the United States has tried to disseminate English teaching all over the world. These ambitions are also closely linked to the roles of U.S. foundations active in funding for English research and promoting English as *the* global language. Thus, as Phillipson critiques, the misperception of English education as apolitical is used as a weapon of cultural imperialism. In fact, the superiority of English is abetted by local elites as well to keep their power aligned with those Western powers. In this way, “English as the *lingua economica* and *lingua Americana*” (p. 25, italics in original) has been uncritically adopted. Ignoring the linguistic hegemony and asymmetrical hierarchy of languages, English use is justified to serve personal interests. As Phillipson observes, linguistic and cultural diversity has been under heavy pressure of Americanization, hidden under the term “globalization.”

Pennycook (2001) also critiques Crystal as an advocate of liberal laissez-faire positions. He criticizes how laissez-faire liberalism justifies English becoming a global language, ignoring unequal social power, and represented as if accepting English were an individual choice. Pennycook states that colonialism is produced not only by economic and political exploitation, but also by colonial cultures and ideologies. The assertion that English is global can be seen as another colonial idea.

By investigating certain discourses linked to English, Pennycook (1998) has argued that the spread of English has been interwoven with colonialism. He addresses how the colonial discourse has continued to the present with the new name of global English. He argues that the global spread of English has been justified and promoted with the constant construction of positive images of English (e.g., the richness and diversity of English has caused it to be a global language) and at the same time, devaluing of other local languages. He has cautioned that the notion of global language also stratifies speakers of the language:

A construction of English as a superior language, when coupled to a belief that to know English is to have available a better way of describing the world, makes of the native speaker of English not merely a supposedly better teacher of English but also someone endowed with superior knowledge about the world (p. 156).

Another scholar, wa Thiong'o (1986), argues that African elites naturalized the notion of English as a superior language with slogans such as "English unites African peoples"; laments that people do not question why African authors need to write in English; and calls for a "decolonizing the mind." To equate the use of their own language with stupidity and humiliation and at the same time associate English with intelligence and admiration is, he declaims, "psychological violence" (p. 9).

In the book titled *Power and Inequality in Language Education* (Tollefson, 1995a), several scholars (e.g., Pennycook, Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, and Garcia) and more authors in other spaces (e.g., Appleby et al., 2002; Muthwii, 2004; Vavrus, 2002) debunk widespread ideologies such as “people gain equal opportunity through English” and “English brings development.” They have demonstrated that English has, rather, been “part of wider social, political, and economic processes that contribute to economic inequalities” (Tollefson, 1995b, p. 2).

Kubota (2002) also notices how the notion of globalization has created unequal relations between American and other cultures in Japan. She points out that globalization equates with Americanization in Japan, that “foreign” language means English, and that international or intercultural understanding cannot be achieved through any other language but English. Moreover, people suppose that logical thinking and self-expression, which are imagined to be important for international communication, can be learned only through English. Hence, as Kubota cogently indicates, this ideology leaves us blind to the existence of other languages and other cultures. In this regard, globalization privileges English and American culture and at the same time, prejudices other languages and cultures.

2.4.3 Questioning the notion of “English as a global English”

A further question is whether English truly is the *de facto* global language. For instance, by examining how myth is constructed as reality, Pennycook (2007) observes that the construction of myth produces metalanguage rather than language itself. In other words, the discourse created by talking about English as a global language reinforces the supposition of its existence, but it does not produce the reality that English is the global language. For instance, arguments such as “the spread of English is apolitical and natural,” and “it is for communicative benefits for all

people” invoke the idea that “global English” actually exists. Pennycook argues that the myth of “English as global language” has been invented through this process.

This process of linguistic globalization is further explained by Phillipson (2008). Arguing that linguistic globalization is a goal rather than a reality, he explains how the notion of “English as a global language” is produced by using—in his terms—product, process, and project:

The processes and project [of “global English”] are dependent on use of the product [i.e., the diverse forms of English], and on ideological commitment to the project. There is a strong measure of wishful thinking in the projection of those who claim that English is “the world’s lingua franca,” since maximally one-third of humanity have any competence in the language at all. Likewise, the notion that English is *the* language of science...serves both to constitute and confirm English dominance” (p. 4, emphasis in original).

However, as Pennycook (2007) warns, this construction becomes reality and has effects on people and society. With respect to how the myth influences individual subjectivities and social practices, it is worth taking a close look at Kubota and McKay’s study.

Kubota and McKay (2009) examine people’s language use and attitudes toward language in a diverse multilingual city in Japan. Faced with growing numbers of foreign residents from diverse countries, mostly Asia and South America, the Japanese people held rather contradictory views on internationalization. Some welcomed the diverse national populations; others thought that those foreign residents would not help internationalization, linking internationalization to Whiteness and English. Some imagined that internationalization could be achieved only with English; therefore, Japan benefits from the presence of English-speaking Americans. Even acknowledging that English was not so beneficial to communicate with the diverse ethnic groups in their local community, they still held to the view that English is for all people.

Kubota and McKay (2009) critique the promotion of English for internationalization, arguing that it works against multilingualism, marginalizes non-English speakers, and creates “unequal racial, linguistic, and cultural relations of power not just between L1 [mother tongue] and English but also among other contact languages” (p. 615). They argue that people feel “overwhelmed by the gap between the [English-speaking global] *imagined* community... and the *real* community of non-English-speaking newcomer” (p. 616, emphasis in original) and point out that “English is not an international lingua franca in many multilingual contexts yet it exerts invisible symbolic power” (ibid.). Park (2009) also reports that the idea that English is crucial for survival has spread in Korea.

2.5 English ideologies in Korea

With analyses of Korean-English humor on the Internet, Korean television entertainment shows, and face-to-face communication, Park (2009) identified some common ideologies that Koreans share about English, including English as a necessity, English as the language of the Other, and Koreans as bad speakers of English. Park notices the notion that every citizen needs English skills for global success is repeatedly echoed in newspaper and magazine articles in Korea. At the same time, the notion that English is a language of the Other and that the prevalence of English in Korea threatens Koreanness is constructed by emphasizing the Korean language and Korean identity. Thus, English is an eternally foreign language to Koreans. The third ideology addresses the notion that Koreans as a whole are not competent in English: Koreans are not legitimate English users. Despite the existence of competent Korean English speakers, incompetence in English is essentialized and highlighted to all Koreans.

Park (2010) also discusses how English skills can represent human qualities for the Korean learner. In other words, competence in English is regarded as the result of the individual's entrepreneurial spirit and self-actualization. By associating English skills with the endless hard-work of self-development and at the same time, by erasing the link between English and a privileged social background, Park cogently demonstrates how English has successfully rendered a project of self-fulfillment. In this way, ideologies are forged: English competence is acquired by diligent work and people with good English skills are praiseworthy.

Shin (2006) also points out that “English is constructed as *the* language of the imagined global elite community” (p. 155, emphasis in original) in Korea. Affiliated with the desire to belong to this elite community, Shin explains, English is constructed as a superior and more progressive language, and people who have English skills are constructed as cultivated global citizens.

Notions of the global citizen differ across socioeconomic class in a study by Park and Abelman (2004). Three mothers from different socioeconomic classes all agreed with the belief that English is more than a language; it provides imaginary opportunities abroad or serves as a tool for cosmopolitan membership. However, the three mothers did not agree across socioeconomic class about cosmopolitanism. The mother from the lower socioeconomic class had only a vague sense of cosmopolitanism as a possibility for her children since her economic status prevented her from providing them with English-learning opportunities. The mother in the average socioeconomic class, a former teacher abroad, showed a more ambivalent attitude toward cosmopolitanism. She raised a cynical opinion, that English does not always guarantee a good life abroad, but still considered it to be a necessary language to learn regardless of the actual communicative need to use the language. The mother in the upper middle class celebrated

cosmopolitan membership regardless of any pragmatic function of English. With the privilege of her economic status, she was able to stay abroad for her children's education. Moreover, she had a sense of personal achievement since she was able to experience a life beyond Korea and meet people of different backgrounds. Although her life abroad was about more than English, she attributed all her satisfaction to English.

Such ideologies of English are also demonstrated in a survey of Korean university students' beliefs about language learning (Truitt, 1995). Of 204 students, 94% wanted to learn English, with 74% of students concurring that English would provide better job opportunities. Most respondents agreed that important components of spoken English include cultural awareness of English-speaking countries (85% agreed) and excellent pronunciation (81% agreed); 44% predicted that they could become fluent in a language within 3 to 5 years given 1 hour per day of study and 11% in less than 2 years. Fully 90% agreed with the idea that "it is best to learn English in an English-speaking country."

These prevalent ideas that "English is a crucial language for opportunities" and that "English is learned best in English-speaking countries" encourage English learners to physically move to English-speaking countries (Waters, 2006). In fact, some families in Korea migrate to English-speaking countries specifically in order to facilitate their children's English learning. Such "educational migration" families have been interviewed by Park (2008), Park and Bae (2009), and Song (2010) to investigate their shared ideologies about language.

Interviewing two mothers of families newly arrived in the United States to learn English, Park (2008) explored beliefs about English. His respondents concurred that English is a must for globalization. Park proposes that an overemphasis on English education and numerous cases of

young children studying abroad are caused by prevalent perceptions which regard English as social capital in Korea. By investigating the motivations of the interviewees, Park found that “for Koreans, English competence is not simply a foreign language used as a tool for communication or a medium for learning; it is, rather, a symbol of a means for success” (p. 128). Knowledge of English is recognized as one way for people to differentiate themselves from others at school and work. English skills have become a component of competition in Korea. English, as Park (2008) points out, has become popular based on the logic of competition.

By interviewing short-term—at most a year—study abroad migrant families in the United States, Song (2010) found that they shared ideologies with many people in Korea, including the notion that English is a global, thus necessary, language; that as a marketable commodity English has value as an investment; and that learning English provides access to a cosmopolitan lifestyle. The mothers shared the view that to learn English is to gain economic capital. The mothers regarded language learning as an investment which would generate more capital for their children’s lives and careers in global and local markets. In addition, English was believed to implement global citizenship which would enable the children to go beyond national borders and explore the world.

Park and Bae (2009) argue that “language ideologies ...that link language and geographical space serve as a fundamental basis for a migrant’s imagination of the world” (p. 367). That is, migrant families have a certain imagination of place and space: “*imagined* geographies” (p. 366, emphasis added). Different locations are constructed with different meanings. Singapore, for instance, is seen as a location where English can be acquired rather than a place where diverse and multiple languages are shared. However, Park and Bae (2009) also point out that the lived experiences of the families “provide a backdrop against which reproduction of such hegemony

must take place” (p. 375). The dominant hegemonic ideology is reshaped and altered through experience and negotiation. For example, one student in the study recognized the importance of another form of English, Singlish, with Singaporean kids. The other family acknowledged the value of investing in learning Mandarin.

Despite diverse perspectives in academia about “English as a global language,” the notion seems to have been widely accepted. Many Korean people try to gain the capital aligned with English. In particular, the necessity of English seems to be naturalized for Koreans who participated in the studies mentioned above. While a number of studies have focused on early study-abroad students attending formal primary schools, they focus on the views of mothers of young students, excluding the voices of the young children (i.e., the language learners). Moreover, very few studies have explored the experience of people from diverse backgrounds and diverse contexts, particularly postsecondary English learners at non-degree seeking institutions. Research has yet to present a full picture of the study abroad experience and related ideologies.

Therefore, this study seeks to explore the beliefs about English of short-term study abroad Korean students at private institutions. Probing short-term study abroad from social perspectives, I seek to understand what values these learners place on English and its acquisition.

2.6 Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed some characteristics of language ideology. Language ideologies, or beliefs about language, are constructed in the interest of power. Language tends to be affiliated with the values people place on such concepts as identity, beauty, and morality. As the belief is related to power, the values placed in language are also asymmetrical according to

power. However, since ideology is always in the process of being naturalized, the value of the language is also naturalized.

I also reviewed Bourdieu's (1986) notion of capital which helps identify values associated with language: economic, knowledgeable, and worthy. In this regard, language learning can be seen as an investment seeking those values. On the other hand, some language learners pursue positive images of the target language and target culture, not necessarily for specifically good results, but as a desire-seeking activity (Kramsch 2005; Kubota, 2009).

I have discussed the notion of "English as a global language" from viewpoints that range from celebrating the notion to questioning it. In the final section of this chapter, I have focused on the spread of such ideologies in Korea. The notion of English as an important language for the global community encourages many learners to move to English-speaking countries to obtain English skills. English is believed to lead to successful life as global citizens. Finally, I have addressed gaps in the literature that require further investigation. In the next chapter, the research questions and methodology of my study will be discussed.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the methodology used for the study, which follows a qualitative approach—specifically, interviews. I also provide information on the research context and general profiles of the participants. Then I describe the recruitment process as well as data collection and analysis. Finally, after addressing the question of trustworthiness, I discuss the limitations and delimitations of the study.

3.2 Qualitative research

To investigate the beliefs about English of short-term study abroad students (*eo hak yeonsu*) who are learning English, I employed a qualitative approach—specifically, interviews. Qualitative research allows researchers to focus on the meanings placed by participants and form a holistic picture that situates the participants within society (Creswell, 1994, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, 2003; Holliday, 2007; Strauss, 1998). Creswell (1998) defines qualitative research as follows:

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explores a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (p. 15).

As Creswell emphasizes, qualitative approaches enable researchers to provide a “complex, holistic picture” of the multiple dimensions of a social problem. In addition, qualitative research stresses “the socially constructed nature or reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such [qualitative] researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to

questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 13). Therefore, a qualitative method is appropriate in order to understand how English came to be a value-laden language in everyday Korean life.

Among various approaches in qualitative research, the interview has become one of the most prevalent tools of data collection for social inquiry (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004). The interview is used to “examine [interviewees’] own personal ideas, occupational ideologies, assumptions, common sense and emotions” (Johnson, 2002, p. 105). Although Creswell (2003) points out limitations of the interview due to its tendency to provide “‘indirect’ information filtered through the views of interviewees” (p. 186), such a limitation becomes (in this study) an advantage in that it focuses on an interviewee’s own *filtered* view (i.e., an emic perspective on the three research questions for this study).

3.3. Research context

This study took place in Vancouver, Canada, where a large number of study abroad students reside. The language education industry is huge in Canada, as demonstrated by the *Language Industry Survey* of Statistics Canada (2006). The total revenue for classroom and online language training services reached \$193.2 million in 2004, with another \$23.1 million spent on accommodation fees associated with language study. Asia was the area of origin for most foreign students, composing nearly 73% of the schools surveyed.

Canada is a place preferred by Koreans to study English because ‘standard English’ is believed to be in use there. Canada is also less expensive compared to the United States. Therefore, a considerable number of Korean students have come and continue to come to Canada.

Koreans have comprised the largest population among study abroad students in Canada since 1999 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2009).

A great number of Korean *eo hak yeonsu* students come to Canada without a study permit,⁶ making it difficult to estimate their exact number. Kim (2005) estimated that about 47,000 Korean students with a study permit were studying at private language institutions in Canada and about 70,000 without a study permit.⁷

Among the major cities of Canada, Vancouver has been the most popular destination for foreign students (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2009). Although the exact number of private language institutions is not available, the number must be large given the prevalence of study-abroad agencies in Vancouver which connect students and private language schools. For instance, one website called the Vancouver Study Abroad Information Center (see http://education.onestoprealty.ca/yuhakwon/van_yuhakwon.htm) listed 88 agencies located in Vancouver which target Korean students as their main clients.

Vancouver is a multicultural city where diverse languages are spoken by various ethnic groups (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2009; see also Gunderson, 2007). Koreans make up the fourth largest non-European immigrant community in Vancouver (Kim, 2008). It is not unusual to see signs in Korean on the streets in Vancouver.

⁶ Korean nationals are allowed to stay in Canada up to 6 months without a visa.

⁷ Kim (2005) cites the Canadian Associations of Language Schools (2003) estimate that among 142,731 international students studying at private language institutions, 30% are Korean.

3.4 Participants

3.4.1 Recruitment and informed consent procedures

For this research, I recruited non-degree seeking, short-term English learners from Korea who attended private language schools in Vancouver. I posted recruitment advertisements for *eo hak yeonsu* students on several Internet sites where many Korean ESL students share information. The recruitment advertisement was displayed in Korean. Since my interest lies in unique Korean contexts where English has been emphasized beyond its practicality, I recruited only students who planned to return to Korea after they finished their language study. Students who planned to stay in Canada after completing their study were excluded since their different target communities would not be my focus. Those who planned to attend college after language study were also excluded as the degree itself might fulfill their aims of study. In order to accommodate diverse views from both genders, I interviewed three male and three female students who showed interest through email in response to the research invitation. For ethical considerations, I followed the procedural guidelines of the university's research ethics boards (REB).

3.4.2 Participant profiles

The participants were three male and three female Koreans in their early and mid-20s who came to Vancouver for *eo hak yeonsu*: they were Eun-gyeong (female, age 22), Huijeong (female, age 23), Hyeonjeong (female, age 26), Jinyong (male, age 26), Seokhyeon (male, age 26), and Seongjae (male, age 26).⁸ Their main purpose in coming to Vancouver was to study English. Despite the shared purpose, they had various types of visas (e.g., visitor, student, and working

⁸ All names are pseudonyms.

holiday). All the participants came to Vancouver with a plan to stay less than a year. They attended private language schools in Vancouver, mostly in the downtown area. This was the first study abroad experience for all participants except Eun-gyeong, although most had traveled abroad before. Eun-gyeong had been to the Philippines for 2 months to study English. Hyeonjeong and Seokhyeon graduated from university and then worked; the rest were fourth-year university students. Among the four, Jinyong had gained work experience as an intern before coming to Vancouver. General profiles of the participants are provided in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 General Profile of the Participants

Name	Gender	Age (years)	Length of stay in Canada (months)⁹	Length of intended stay in Canada (months)	Major at home university
Eun-gyeong	Female	22	2	8	Drama
Huijeong	Female	23	7	9	Design
Hyeonjeong	Female	26	3 weeks	8	Computer
Jinyong	Male	26	3	6	Economics
Seokhyeon	Male	26	5	12	Camera and Digital Content
Seongjae	Male	26	6	10	Engineering

Although my intention was to interview *eo hak yeonsu* students from diverse backgrounds, most of my participants turned out to be fourth-year college students. The interviews indicated that

⁹ At the time the interview was conducted.

they feel they need a good TOEIC score to be hired, especially for highly considered jobs; in addition, *eo hak yeonsu* experience is believed to have a positive influence on successful employment (Choi & Lee, 2008; Yim & Yang, 2006). Considering employment practices in Korea, where fresh graduates have a better chance to get hired (*Chosun Ilbo*, 2010, June 1), *eo hak yeonsu* is regarded as a required experience for college students before they graduate.

3.5 Data collection

3.5.1 Individual interviews

To seek answers to the research questions, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Interview data were collected during May to June, 2010. Quiet places near the participants' language schools suitable for audio-recording were selected. Because the interviews were unstructured and participants were willing to discuss their experiences in both Korea and Canada, the interviews often took longer than I had originally planned for. In general, each interview ran from 3 to 6 hours. Seongjae's interview was divided into 2 days; each lasted about 3 hours. After sharing personal background information, questions concerning such issues as participants' general conceptions of English and influences on their view of their mother tongue Korean were asked. All dialogue was audio-recorded with the participants' permission. Follow-up interviews, email correspondence, and telephone interviews were conducted for further elaboration and clarification on recurrent themes. I could contact all the participants except Huijeong. All interviews were conducted in Korean, and later transcribed. The quotations presented in this thesis were translated into English from Korean.

3.6 Data analysis

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to interpret recurrent themes in the interview data. Compared to inductive analysis—a process of coding the data without a preexisting coding frame—a ‘theoretical’ thematic analysis was useful in this study since it tends to “provide less a rich description of the data overall, and more a detailed analysis of some aspect of the data” (p. 84). As my inquiry is specifically related to the participants’ notions regarding English, this method provides more detailed description within the area of my interest.

After the interviews, I transcribed the interview data paying special attention to the content rather than linguistic details. The coding process and coding strategies of the study are guided by Given (2008). At the initial stage of coding, a close line-by-line reading was done to identify as many ideas and concepts as possible. At the same time, I made notes as to what underlying meanings were implied. Then the process was moved from open coding to a more focused coding. Multicolor pens were used to identify specific categories (e.g., ideologies of English reflected in the participants’ accounts, the relationship between their learning experiences and their view of the mother tongue, their cultural experiences in Vancouver).

After this stage, I re-listened to the individual interview data several times, trying to understand the contexts in which the participants’ accounts occurred. I searched for significant events in their personal history which might have influenced their current beliefs. While considering individual differences, I also identified similarities shared among participants.

3.7 Trustworthiness

3.7.1 Member checking and peer debriefing

As a definition of objectivity, Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose that “the usual criterion for objectivity is intersubjective agreement; If multiple observers can agree on a phenomenon their collective judgment can be said to be objective” (p. 292). Following this definition, the study used strategies to enhance agreement among the views of both insiders and outsiders of the study (i.e., using member checking from interviewees and inspection from a peer colleague).

An advantage of member checking as explained by Duff (2008) is that it can “enrich an analysis, help ensure the authenticity or credibility of interpretations, or shed new light on the analyses” (p. 171). Since my focus is to explore perceptions about English and learning English, member checking is a significant and necessary step to ensure the legitimacy of my interpretation. After the data analyses were completed, I sent an e-mail to the participants asking them to send me their feedback on the findings and discussion. In particular, I sought to ensure that their intended meaning was properly delivered. All interview data were translated from Korean to English.

Moreover, during the course of the study, regular meetings with a peer in the same field took place. By discussing theory, data, and methods of analysis, I tried to enhance the reliability of the data analyses.

3.7.2 The role of researcher and clarification of researcher bias

Credibility can be strengthened when the positioning of the researcher is clarified (Creswell, 2003; Holliday, 2007). Holliday and Aboshiha (2009) succinctly explain that “scientific rigour does not therefore reside in methods such as interviews per se, but in the manner in which

researchers manage their subjective engagement with the world around them” (p. 673). By using the principle of reflexivity (i.e., acknowledging the presence of the position or bias of the researcher), the transparency of the study contexts can be increased.

I was fully aware of the dynamics of the interview. As noted by a number of scholars (Baker, 2003; Gubrium & Holstein, 2002; Johnson, 2006; Roulston, 2001; Talmy, 2010), an interview is comprised of interactions between an interviewer and an interviewee. As Holstein and Gubrium (2004) put it, “both parties [interviewers and interviewees] to the interview are necessarily and unavoidably active. Meaning is not merely elicited by apt questioning, nor simply transported through respondent replies; it is actively and communicatively assembled in the interview encounter” (p. 141). Interviewees are, contrary to the image of passive fact-holders, active agents who continue to negotiate with the context and revise their response during the interview. The interview also constitutes complex power relations between an interviewer and an interviewee (Talmy, 2010). I struggled between my positions as a researcher who shows similar experiences to elicit more responses (cf. Abell et al., 2006) and at the same time as someone who wishes to problematize the beliefs of the participants. Because I noticed that my interviewees hesitated to answer and changed their accounts when I problematized their ideas, I could not actively do this. Yet, I could not show agreement with their ideas in order simply to elicit more responses.

Moreover, while conversing with diverse participants, I came to realize that I brought my own assumptions and biases to the interview contexts. For instance, I had the presumption that Korean *eo hak yeonsu* students would leave Korea with vague curiosity about white people and with a desire to associate with white people. It turned out, however, that their motivation was

rather pragmatically oriented and that their focus was not only on white people. I continuously reexamined my initial assumptions during the interviews.

Although interviews were conducted just once or twice per participant, I was amazed by the strong rapport formed between me and the participants in a relatively short time. We shared *eo hak yeonsu* experiences, including advantages and difficulties, as well as personal stories involving our girl/boyfriends and family relationships. When some interviews went over the intended time, I had a meal with some of my interviewees. During those times, we shared our personal stories not as an interviewer-interviewee, but more as friends. Even after the interview(s) were done, I sometimes talked to participants over the phone to share personal stories. I believe that this rapport helped me “open the doors to more informed research” (Fontana & Prokos, 2007, p. 46), by gaining insights into the participants’ ideas.

3.8 Limitations and delimitations

As Marshall and Rossman (1999) agree, no research project is without limitations. Likewise, given the research context, there are also some limitations to this study. First of all, the small sample size of six participants—even given in-depth interviews—does not represent all Korean adult *eo hak yeonsu* students in Vancouver. However, I believe that readers will determine the *transferability* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of this study (i.e., the applicability of the findings to other contexts; Duff, 2006, 2008).

Second, this study is based on one or two interviews per participant rather than longitudinal data. However, because the aim of the study is to explore current beliefs rather than investigating changes over time, I was able to collect enough data from the interviews.

3.9 Summary

In this chapter I have described the methodology I employed for the study. As qualitative research allows understanding of a value-laden society, and as the interview allows for the sharing of personal ideas, assumptions, or filtered views, I have argued that a qualitative approach, particularly the interview method, is appropriate to investigate people's shared beliefs.

I also have provided information about the research site, Vancouver, where the interviews were conducted. Vancouver, a multicultural city, has a large language industry which attracts a great number of study abroad students. Korean students comprise a large population of these study abroad students. The process by which I recruited six short-term study abroad students was discussed and general information about the participants included. In addition, I also discussed the data collection process and an analysis method, namely thematic analysis, employed in the study.

Furthermore, in order to enhance trustworthiness of the study, I sought member checking from the participants and feedback from a peer colleague. I also clarified my role as a researcher and biases I brought to the research context. Finally, I concluded with limitations and delimitations of this study. In the next chapter, findings of the data will be revealed followed by discussions.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter consists of three sections: (1) I investigate the beliefs about English of the six participants. Following a brief introduction of each participant, I discuss how English has been constructed as an important language through their lives in Korea; (2) I explore the influences of their beliefs about English on their mother tongue; and (3) How the beliefs shape life experiences in Vancouver. I compare their notions about English and Korean and highlight how their beliefs about language learning shape their experiences in Vancouver.

4.2 Recognition of the significance of English

The analysis identified two values the participants place on English. When asked whether English is important to Koreans, all the focal participants critiqued the current status of English learning in Korea. They all agreed that the emphasis on English is excessive. However, they all also agreed that—for various reasons—English has been a very important factor in their own lives. Two themes were shared by all participants. Their justifications are divided into two: (1) English is an important language for a job search in Korea; (2) English is a global language for the people in the world to communicate with each other.

4.2.1 The importance of English for a job search in Korea

In Korea, English has been associated with getting a white-collar job. All the interviewees believed that the rank of their job would depend at least partly on their skill in English. Most conglomerate companies, which many young college students prefer over small or medium-sized firms, ask that college graduates obtain a specific TOEIC score (Prey, 2005). As English skills are usually measured by TOEIC in a number of companies, English skills are often considered

equivalent to a TOEIC score. All the participants planned to take the TOEIC exam after returning to Korea. In what follows, I shall introduce three participants who especially emphasized English for their employment in Korea.

4.2.1.1 “I will gain something nice through English”: Hyeonjeong’s story

Hyeonjeong worked as a computer programmer for 2 ½ years. When she decided to look for a job at another company, she realized that her TOEIC score had expired.¹⁰ When she joined the medium-sized company she previously worked for, she managed to pass a minimum requirement of 700 on the TOEIC.¹¹ Hyeonjeong had a hard time when she prepared to receive the score and worried that even if she got a satisfactory TOEIC score this time, she might have to repeat the same effort every 2 years. The English language interview was another burden for her when seeking a job. Observing friends who had been to Canada, Hyeonjeong assumed that they would have good English skills and in fact they did not seem worried about TOEIC and English interviews. Moreover, because she assumed that many have *eo hak yeonsu* experiences, she felt the need to obtain the same kind of credentials or risk falling behind the others. Hyeonjeong decided to come to Vancouver because she thought she could be better prepared in seeking a job through an *eo hak yeonsu* experience.

In addition, Hyeonjeong assumed that acquiring languages was closely related to the amount of money people earn. At a previous company, it seemed that people who were in charge of foreign buyers received better salaries and had higher positions than computer programmers like her. She attributed their higher positions to their English skills, pointing out that she knew

¹⁰ TOEIC score is valid only for 2 years (see Chapter 1).

¹¹ A TOEIC score of 700 is equivalent to 530 on the paper-based Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). See http://exam.ybmsisa.com/toEIC/toEIC01_1-65.asp

more about the program since she had designed it herself. Yet, when I inquired further, she revealed that they had more work experience, and were more dedicated and competitive than most workers, likely much more vital than having good English skills.

Moreover, when she was dispatched to Seoul Transport Operation Information Service, a government transportation service organization, she saw workers struggling with English. For example, when groups from foreign countries such as China and Saudi Arabia visited the center, the staff there seemed to have difficulty communicating in English. Such visitations were casual and the people in charge were temporary workers at the center. Although she revealed that higher positioned people did not need to use English as much as the temporary workers (i.e., the lower-positioned people), these events convinced her of the necessity of English skills to her work.

Despite her observations, Hyeonjeong herself had a difficult time just once owing to a lack of English skills. It was when her supervisor requested that she prepare a PowerPoint preparation in English for his international conference. She felt it was unfair because it was not her job in the first place and she also had a hard time preparing it. She blamed her insufficient English skills for having had such a hard time. In addition, in spite of her belief that English is considered to be an important factor at work, she received rather surprising—negative—responses from her supervisors regarding her decision to study English. As a result, she felt uneasy telling the people around her about her decision.

During the interview, Hyeonjeong could not identify in what particular ways English would help her advance in her career. Rather, she just stated that overseas study experience would add one more line on her resume. Since many people have *eo hak yeonsu* experiences, she felt the need to obtain the same kind of credential. Hyeonjeong equated learning English with investing

in some potential, albeit uncertain, opportunity. According to her, learning English is “something people should prepare in advance because it might be needed in future, just in case.” Perceiving English—the global language—to be a stumbling block in her life, she expected to have more job options with better English skills. Her view that “English is a necessary factor for a job” is commonly echoed by the participants, including Jinyong who also had work experience.

4.2.1.2 “English is to show off”: Jinyong’s story

Jinyong is a fourth-year economics student at a high-ranking university in Korea. He did not feel difficulties studying English before he entered the university. In fact, when he first took TOEIC, he received a relatively high score of 885,¹² with a perfect score in the Listening Comprehension section. He was assigned to the highest level in his language institution in Vancouver and he still felt that his class was too easy for him.

One of Jinyong’s motivations to come to Vancouver derived from his work experience as an intern at a media company in Korea. Jinyong had to use English several times at work during his 7 months there but found it difficult to communicate with his counterparts in Hong Kong. He was uncertain that he could reach a company’s basic requirements even after he gets a real job. Jinyong also observed different attitudes among his Hong Kong counterparts toward two supervisors who had different kinds of English pronunciation. Although both supervisors were fluent in English, the Hong Kong counterparts seemed to avoid communicating with the supervisor who had a strong Korean accent. Despite having a higher position, the supervisor had to ask the other (lower-position) supervisor to get information on the work process. From this

¹² An 885 TOEIC score is equivalent to 600 on the paper-based TOEFL.

experience, Jinyong came to the conclusion that he would have many chances to use English skills at work and that English is a significant factor in job success.

Jinyong strongly associated English with getting an edge in the job market: the better English skills people have, the better jobs they can get. As Jinyong correlated English with socioeconomic status, English skills were perceived as something he needed in order to survive in Korean society although he did not enjoy studying. He actually felt English to be a burden which is necessary but difficult to obtain. He persistently mentioned words like “stressful,” “burdensome,” and “irritating” during his talk. Jinyong considered learning English as the most distressing thing he ever experienced in his life:

I have never felt I lacked knowledge while conversing with my friends. [Even if I do,] I can say it comes from differences of interest. For instance, if I lacked knowledge in politics, I can say I’m just not interested, and that’s the case. I can say I know better in other fields, so it doesn’t matter. But English is not regarded as interest because it has a big influence on jobs. I also agree [that English is not a matter of interest]. People would think “English is something you should be good at, but you are not?”

As the interview progressed, the reasons for Jinyong’s stress about English became clearer. His university is one of the top ranked schools in Korea. Although he had never felt stressful about English, he became aware of his friends’ better English skills at university. Most of his friends at university are from privileged elite English-medium schools and had study abroad experiences when they were younger. His friends seemed at ease during English lectures.¹³

For Jinyong, peer pressure seemed to play an important role in his study of English. Despite his confident expectation in obtaining a good TOEIC score and his positive self-assessment to his communication skills, he repeatedly compared himself to his friends, stating

¹³ It is compulsory to take at least one English-medium lecture at his university.

that his friends' English was better than his. He actually revealed that he would not have felt a strong need to have a good job if not for the competition with his friends.

Jinyong has just continued studying English since English in Korea is “something people are competing for to show off who is better.” Thus, “correct” English is more important in Korea than in Canada because “Korean people focus on others' mistakes in English rather than on communication per se.” The most necessary part of learning English for Jinyong is to show that his English is better than others. He also thought that good English skills are dependent on people's evaluation: e.g., “oh, he has good pronunciation,” “he has quite sophisticated vocabulary,” and “I can see that he worked hard learning English.” For Jinyong, studying more complicated vocabulary and difficult structures is crucial. As English is recognized as knowledge what people can show off—i.e., cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986)—Jinyong was aware that his reasonable English communication skills would be assessed as insufficient in Korea. He confessed to being more comfortable in using English with foreigners (including native English speakers [NESs]) in Vancouver rather than with his friends in Korea. This view is also echoed by Eun-gyeong.

4.2.1.3 “English is something everybody is learning”: Eun-gyeong's story

Eun-gyeong is a fourth-year university student majored in drama. She considered English as the most significant factor in getting a job in Korea. Because Eun-gyeong viewed English as a required basic skill when people step into society, she had to deal with English even though she did not want to. In this regard, English became the most important element in her current life. For her, English was burdensome and stressful but necessary. She was expecting that she could use English skills after getting a job at an entertainment company.

Like other participants, she also reiterated the sense of need to follow the English trend since it is what “everyone is learning.” One of her motivations to come to Vancouver to learn English was due to a past embarrassing experience concerning her lack of English. She once participated in a mini beauty contest for college students. When Eun-gyeong was with three other Korean students, one of the press media came to conduct an interview. When the reporter asked them to converse in English, they were all fluent except Eun-gyeong. At that time, she felt so ashamed and thought that “now English is a basic skill that everyone has.” Then she learned that those girls had had study abroad experiences when they were younger. Recognizing English as an essential skill to acquire, or cultural and symbolic capital, she also tried to gain the credential. She asserted that “English is something you should learn even though you do not want to, since everyone else is learning it,” “English is like a second mother tongue to Koreans now,” and “all Korean people will be good at English in near future.”

As English is regarded as cultural capital in Korea, English seems to be essential when considering other Koreans. The comment that “English skills are necessary; otherwise, you will fall behind other Koreans” was repeated by Hyeonjeong, Jinyong, and Eungyeong. They commented on the need to speak in more correct and longer sentences in the presence of other Koreans. They also felt the need to “roll the tongue (elaborate pronunciation)” in order to sound more native-like English.

4.2.2 English as a global language

The notion of “English as a global language” was recognized by all my participants. While it was not the main reason behind studying English for Hyeonjeong, Eun-gyeong, and Jinyong, it was regarded as a key reason for Seongjae, Seokhyeon, and Huijeong. English was considered as

an important language to communicate with diverse ethnic groups. In the following section, I shall introduce the stories of Seongjae, Seokhyeon, and Huijeong.

4.2.2.1 “English means opportunities and friends”: Seongjae’s story

Seongjae is a fourth-year engineering student who likes outdoor activities and mountain climbing. He came to Vancouver after he stayed at his aunt’s place in Edmonton for 4 months. He was planning on actively seeking a job after returning to Korea. When we started to talk, he talked exclusively about TOEIC. According to him, all companies require a certain TOEIC score. Even small and medium-sized companies require a minimum of 600 for engineering students. Yet, even 600 seemed almost unattainable for him. Seongjae in fact was advised that he would not need English skills but a TOEIC score, since people in the field do not use English at work. Nevertheless, as the interview continued, Seongjae mentioned benefits other than job opportunities:

My reason for studying English is not to get a job. I can live without using English but the difference is really significant. If you speak English, you can take more opportunities in the wider world. Even though you don’t speak English, you can travel using gestures. You can just communicate with “discount, discount!” or “how much?” But if you speak English you can make friends and find more opportunities. You don’t need to look for opportunities only in Korea. It makes a big difference if you speak English. The scope of opportunities is different. That’s why I am learning English and I will learn English. My goal is to travel around the world.

Seongjae was drawing a clear line between Korea and the wider world. His strong belief that all people would communicate in English led him to expect that using English would provide chances to make friends and to have more opportunities in a wider society. In contrast, if someone does not communicate in English, the chance to see the world will be narrow or restricted.

Although he complained that there were not enough chances to speak English in Vancouver,¹⁴ he imagined he would have difficulty if he could not speak English adequately:

Since I like traveling and mountain climbing, there are always risks of an emergency. I once imagined if the accidents happen all of sudden and I could make the situation worse because of my English. [For example,] I [might] happen to know that there is a crisis that people should escape and I have to tell everyone to get out. I know this is funny, but if someone asks me “why should I evacuate?” I should be able to give a detailed explanation of an emergency situation in order for them to understand. Or if someone gets hurt in the middle of the mountains and it is an emergency situation. I need to call 911 and tell them where we are and how the person got hurt, [or ask] what I should do for the injured person, but what if the person dies because I can’t communicate?

Although Seongjae’s scenario is imaginative and perhaps unrealistic, he was certain that English gave him a chance to meet “English” friends in Vancouver. Seongjae regards Chinese and Japanese people as English speakers. He wanted to have more English-speaking friends such as Chinese and Japanese people, so I asked if he had considered learning Chinese or Japanese but he answered that those languages are “limited.”

In fact, Seongjae appreciated the role of English in enabling him to learn things he would have never learned in Korea. He claimed he had new cultural experiences thanks to English. He noted:

I learned a relaxing lifestyle from Canadians. There were [white] old couples in the conversation club meetings I joined. I learned from them that Koreans are really busy running around. If I had stayed only in Korea, I wouldn’t know this. I thought that being laid-back is just a waste of time in life. But it is a part of life here. People take time to enjoy. Having family time is one example. In Korea, we consider it a luxury. But, having time with family and having dinner together is already a common practice here. I thought it was unique. In Korea, looking at our family as well, if my dad comes home late, we just start our dinner without him. But they [the family of the white old couples] all waited and started

¹⁴ When the participants left for Vancouver, many of them anticipated that they would be forced to use only English in Vancouver; however, they found themselves actually having to choose to use English, meaning they have another option of using Korean in many occasions.

a meal together [in Edmonton]. Well, maybe because that was a special family gathering. I thought of my family at that time. I thought, “will I be able to live like this after I get old?”

Despite Seongjae’s claim that he “learned” new concepts of life, he compared one elderly Canadian couple in Edmonton with busy city (and probably economically active) people in Korea. Moreover, he went on comparing two seemingly incomparable events (i.e., his daily family dinner to one Canadian family’s special dinner gathering). However, Seongjae’s reasons for learning English—traveling the world, learning new things, and meeting new people—are shared by Seokhyeon and Huijeong.

4.2.2.2 “I have to become friends with English”: Seokhyeon’s story

Seokhyeon worked as an English instructor intern at a large private institution in Korea for about a year right after he graduated from university. Although he majored in camera and digital content, English became important after he traveled to Europe. He shared his experience as follows:

In Europe, I met one Korean guy who spoke good English. Seeing him, I thought, “wow, I wish I could be like him.” My dream is to travel all around the world. But I thought I wouldn’t be able to travel if I don’t speak English... We once had to reserve all the tickets for our itinerary. It was so complicated since we had so many tickets. At that time, the guy led us. He looked so cool. [I thought to myself] “ah! I would be able to solve difficulties if I speak fluent English while traveling. But what if I don’t speak English? I might encounter many disadvantageous situations if I don’t speak English.” So I thought that I must study English.

Seokhyeon was certain that most people in Europe were able to communicate in English. However, when questioned about any difficulties using English with local people in Europe, he confessed that he did not have many chances to communicate with them. After returning to Korea, Seokhyeon began studying English. He also believed there to be more job opportunities in English education compared to the job markets in his major. After a year of English instructor

training, he became an intern instructor. Although Seokhyeon received a good evaluation as an English instructor, he was not confident in himself.

For Seokhyeon, the importance of English is beyond question. According to him, he has had a love/hate relationship with English; English is something that he hates, but feels he needs to develop. He thus focused on what people should do to improve English such as, “people need to find their own way to have fun studying English,” “people need to be friends with English in order not to be exhausted from studying,” “people need to fall in love with English,” and having “a foreign girlfriend or boyfriend is the best way to learn English.” He also emphasized the importance of practicing English until “the body gets used to it.” When asked about the reasons to practice to that point, Seokhyeon gave the common answer that “it is because English is a global language.” He further claimed that having English skills would help him obtain wider and deeper knowledge.

In order for Koreans to have more chances to use English, he believed that Korea should adopt English as an official language. Then Koreans could use English in a more natural context without spending tremendous money on *eo hak yeonsu*. His view reflected a widely discussed contention that adopting English as an official language would help the Korean economy in various ways (see Park, 2009).

Seokhyeon also believed that his cultural experiences in Vancouver broadened his views through conversing with diverse ethnic groups. He often expressed witnessing an international marriage as quite a surprising experience:

Coming here to experience life is not a bad idea because it helps to broaden our views, the thoughts you have never had in Korea. This is one of many examples, but for example, I’ve never thought I can marry a foreigner. That was impossible for me. Although I have only

been here for just a few months, I think it is possible now. [I thought to myself] “ah, it can happen. I could marry a non-Korean woman.” I personally know one person who is married to a Japanese. They live well. This is one of the examples, but it opens new ways of thinking. Things I’ve never seen as possible are possible here.

Seokhyeon stated that he gained a new idea he could marry a non-Korean, and developed an idea that he might live in Vancouver if he finds his spouse in the city. During the interview, he expressed curiosity about non-Korean women. He vaguely assumed that non-Korean women would be different from Korean women. He was actually interested in a Thai woman at the time of the interview.

Concerning international marriage rates in Korea, it was quite surprising to hear Seokhyeon’s insistence that he had never imagined an international marriage nor seen one in Korea. According to Statistics Korea (2010a), more than 10% of the marriages performed in Korea since 2004 were between Koreans and non-Koreans. Particularly, about 75% of the marriages are between Korean men and other Asian brides. Seokhyeon’s view that English offers chances to communicate with people from diverse backgrounds is also followed by Huijeong.

4.2.2.3 “English gives more chances to meet new people”: Huijeong’s story

Huijeong is a fourth-year design major. She has been interested in fashion since high school. She admired Western people, longed to live abroad, and enjoyed surfing street fashion on websites and watching American dramas. She looked for chances to talk with Westerners through websites such as MySpace.

Huijeong’s main purpose in coming to Vancouver was to escape the daily routine, not to learn English; and although she did not appear to be eager to learn English, Huijeong emphasized

the importance of English in positively influencing her job. Above all, she stressed the importance of English in her personal life since it provides an opportunity to meet foreigners.

For Huijeong, English enables her to socialize with foreigners, which constitutes a leisure activity (cf. Kubota, 2009). She mentioned that she had fun meeting new people in Vancouver:

It is fun. I go out every day. I meet new people. I feel excited with different cultures. Everything is the same in Korea. I almost never went out in Korea because it was not exciting. But I go out with the determination that I will meet new people here [in Vancouver].

For Huijeong, “new” people were only non-Koreans. Because she believed that she knew everything about Koreans, Koreans were not new to her. Positive images toward foreigners as “new” and “fun” helped English became a crucial language to Huijeong. Expecting English to be the first foreign language most people learn, she believed English would grant more chances to meet “new” people.

Nonetheless, she was aware that English did not provide full access to all people and she expressed her interest in learning Chinese in order to communicate with Chinese people.¹⁵ Besides, with English the language “every Korean can speak,” knowing a different language such as Chinese would give her an advantage. Despite her emphasis on the importance of English, she seemed to have more relaxed attitudes toward English compared to other participants.

The notion of globalization encourages people to experience “different” cultures. As English is seen as a global language, one of its benefits is the opportunity to socialize with diverse ethnic groups. Seongjae, Seokhyeon, and Huijeong assumed that English would be a

¹⁵ As she almost went out with her Chinese classmate, she was interested in learning Chinese.

prevalent language everywhere in the world and help them to access diverse ethnic groups with new insights and new knowledge.

4.3 Discrepancies between having pride in Korean and needing to use English

Most participants communicated in English even with their Korean friends in Vancouver. They explained that they were doing so because they were eager to practice English, not because they did not like the Korean language. Jinyong had decided to use only English in Vancouver, so he answered in English even when his friends talked to him in Korean. Seokhyeon as well conversed with his Korean roommate in English. However, when he realized that they could not share their innermost feelings except in Korean, he used both Korean and English to talk with his Korean roommates.

When asked which language they would choose as a mother tongue if they could, the participants mentioned how proud they were about their Korean language. Seongjae, who often mentioned that he had learned crucial values of Koreanness in Vancouver, said he would choose the Korean language because he was proud of being Korean and felt pleasant while speaking Korean. When he had a hard time studying English as a secondary student, he once blamed Korean for being his mother tongue. He wondered why Koreans insist on speaking Korean rather than choosing English. Yet, later he learned the value of the Korean language and admired Koreans for having their own language. Hyeonjeong could not think of choosing any other language than Korean. While she mentioned her pride in the Korean language, she also expressed shame toward excessive emphasis on English in Korea. She regretted haphazard mixes of English on street signs in Korea. Huijeong also chose Korean as she felt that it would be the most difficult language to acquire. She also perceived Korean to be a richer language than

English. While teaching Korean to other Asian friends, Seongjae and Seokhyeon also learned that Korean was a difficult language to acquire, helping them see Korean from a new perspective than as their given language.

In contrast to Seokhyeon's pride in Korean, he said he would choose English as a mother tongue if he could. Seokhyeon considered it to be unfair that Koreans spend a substantial amount of money and time on learning English and still have a hard time in Vancouver due to English. He expressed his hope that Korea become a strong country so that he would not need to learn English. Yet, if it does not happen, he noted, he would choose English. Eun-gyeong also chose English as she believed that she was having such a hard time in Vancouver due to English study. Likewise, Jinyong also chose English because he believed that English would be the strongest and the most efficient language to communicate among different ethnic groups in the world. He added that although he liked Korean, and he was not interested in the United States, he would choose English for "efficiency" reasons.

With the exception of Huijeong, who believed that Korean would be the most difficult language to acquire, most of the participants chose English as the mother tongue of their future children. Seongjae expected English to grant a wider society and more opportunities for his future children; Jinyong again claimed that English is the most efficient language in the world; Seokhyeon thought he had no options but to choose English since it is the most powerful language. Eun-gyeong and Hyeonjeong each gave a rather interesting answer: they would not choose just one language for their children. Because Eun-gyeong believed that English would be a second mother tongue to Koreans, her children would learn a unique language beyond Korean and English. Eun-gyeong expected that knowing a language that most people do not would bestow a special skill upon her future children. Hyeonjeong also hoped that her children could

speak many languages because she had an idea that “the more languages they speak, the better income they would have.”

When explicitly asked to compare the benefits of English and Korean, the participants listed the benefits of English as follows:

- English is “more useful” and it gives “an image of being smart”: Eun-gyeong
- It provides “more opportunities to meet people”: Huijeong
- It helps me “find a job and educate my children in the future”: Hyeonjeong
- It provides more “options to choose” and it allows “more things people can do”: Jinyong
- It enables one to “gain a wider knowledge”: Seokhyeon
- It enables one to “experience a wider society”: Seongjae

By contrast, the interviewees could not immediately describe the benefits of Korean. All recognized it as a language reserved for only Korean people, saying:

- “Korean is useful only in Korea”: Eun-gyeong
- “It will help me to meet Koreans”: Huijeong
- “It is natural that Koreans speak fluent Korean language”: Hyeonjeong
- “It is useful when living in Korea”: Jinyong
- “It will help communication in Korea”: Seokhyeon
- “Korean is the language that we surely should be good at”: Seongjae

Although all participants, except for Eun-gyeong, valued Korean as the most significant language to them, Jinyong, Hyeonjeong, and Seokhyeon suspected English to be the most useful language in the world. Therefore, they mentioned that they would focus on English education for their children. Although they were strongly against English immersion schools in Korea (calling them “insane” and “senseless”¹⁶), they vaguely considered early study abroad to be effective. Seokhyeon was the only one strongly opposed to early study abroad: he thought it could affect children’s emotions negatively. Hyeonjeong, who had critiqued haphazard mixes of Korean and

¹⁶ When the presidential transition committee of the current government proposed English immersion for teaching subjects such as math and science, people strongly opposed the idea and it was retracted (January, 2008).

English, also predicted that she would speak as much English as possible, by mixing English and Korean, to increase her children's exposure to English.

English is valorized as a superior global language (Pennycook, 1998) so the participants struggle, despite pride in their mother tongue, with constructed images of "English as a global language" and "Korean as a local language only for Koreans."

4.4 Beliefs about English learning

This section explores how beliefs about English learning shape the six participants' study-abroad experiences in Vancouver. The interviewees believed that they could acquire English, an additional language,¹⁷ in the way they had acquired the Korean language, their mother tongue. In essence, they viewed exposure to English as the most significant factor in English learning. They also considered NESs to be *the* monolithic standard and, perhaps naively, expected to achieve NES-like fluency in a relatively short time.

4.4.1 Learning English through exposure

Although Hyeonjeong, Jinyong, and Seokhyeon mentioned that they considered all four types of language skills—speaking, listening, reading, and writing—to be crucial, all the participants tended to emphasize only spoken skills in their interviews. They commented that they could manage to learn written English skills in Korea but not spoken English skills. They believed that exposure through communication would be the best way to improve spoken skills and sought out chances to interact with non-Koreans, especially NESs.

¹⁷ I follow Block's (2003) suggestion to use the term "additional" instead of "second" language as the former indicates the notion of "the ongoing accumulation of linguistic knowledge" (p. 57).

Seongjae, in particular, had a hard time with the listening section of TOEIC. In his opinion, all Koreans can manage to get a certain score in the reading section but not in the listening section. Since one of the main goals of *eo hak yeonsu* is to be exposed to spoken environments, he could not understand *eo hak yeonsu* students who studied English at libraries in Canada. In order to practice his speaking skills, he tried to speak even when he did not fully understand others. In a similar sense, he believed that being active and not concerned about losing face was the most important factor in learning English. One way he sought opportunities to use English was through participating in volunteer activities and conversation clubs.

Seongjae considered personal attributes such as an “active” personality and “not being concerned about losing face” to be important factors in language learning, regardless of the profile of the interlocutor. By the same token, Eun-gyeong blamed her personality (i.e., her not being “active”) for her failure to take chances to communicate with white Canadians.

For Huijeong, even coming to Vancouver to study English seemed like a waste of money. She assumed that talking with non-Koreans while traveling would be the best way to learn English and that watching American dramas would be helpful in learning English. In fact, she mostly tried to talk with non-Koreans and watch American dramas.

Seokhyeon concurred that speaking was the only skill people could not acquire in Korea. He had even refused a Korean friend’s suggestion that they go to Vancouver together in order to have full opportunities to be exposed to English. He highly admired people who put themselves in English-speaking environments through “not having Korean roommates” or “having a non-Korean boyfriend or girlfriend.” Indeed, he seemed quite successful in putting himself into situations where he was forced to use English. He confessed, however, that he still felt the need

to speak with Koreans; otherwise, he would be so lonely that he might “go crazy.” He nevertheless still hoped to become friends with English-speaking people.

Many participants viewed other Koreans as barriers to English exposure. For example, in Jinyong’s view, Koreans who are not interested in English are the main obstacles to his learning English; Eun-gyeong considered a large population of Koreans enrolled in her language school to be problematic; and Seongjae was not happy to see so many Korean signs on the street in Vancouver. All the interviewees said they would rather converse with non-Koreans in order not to use Korean.

In short, many participants believed that they would improve their English-speaking skills by being immersed in an English-speaking context. They misunderstood, however, that skills in an additional language are not acquired by simple exposure (Krashen, 1985; Obondo, 1997; Williams, 1996).

4.4.2 NES as a monolithic standard

A native English speaker has been described as someone who understands all the expert terms, who can be understood without gestures, or who always speaks accurately (Firth & Wagner, 1997). The NES standard is more often emphasized regarding pronunciation. Most participants mentioned the “bad” pronunciation of nonnative English speakers (NNESs), including Koreans. By contrast, only white NES pronunciation was considered “correct” and “good.” When Eun-gyeong stayed in the Philippines for 2 months to learn English, she did not expect to improve her pronunciation since Filipino English is not “perfect.” When she was in the Philippines, some students even demanded to change the teacher whose pronunciation was not “like here in Canada.” When she headed to Vancouver, she envisioned that she would improve

her English pronunciation by conversing with NESs. In Vancouver, Eun-gyeong once avoided conversing with Japanese and Chinese English learners because she was afraid that she might pick up their “weird” pronunciation. Like Eun-gyeong, Jinyong also expected that his pronunciation would improve while listening to NESs’ pronunciation in Vancouver. He predicted that he would produce “good” pronunciation with exposure. He was equating NES pronunciation to “good” and “accurate” qualities.

Seongjae also heavily relied on NESs in the matter of pronunciation. Although he had not struggled in India (because people there had “bad” pronunciation), he had a hard time making Canadians understand his pronunciation of “health.” It seemed quite a dreadful incident for him. He stated:

It was the first time I have ever felt a big wall between me and a foreign country. Who doesn’t know the word “health”? I knew the meaning and spellings, so I thought I knew the word. But I didn’t. It turned out that I didn’t know the word.

In other words, his knowledge of the word “health” is determined by the standard of NESs. Although he knew the meaning and spelling of the word, he could not claim true knowledge unless NESs understood him.

Indeed, the NES standard seemed to motivate the participants’ learning goals. For instance, Seongjae struggled to compare his own English fluency to the fluency of a native speaker:

It is awkward and funny even when I hear my English. I think to myself “do I need to speak English even with this [incompetent] skill?” Then, I’m afraid that other Koreans would think my English is too poor. [I think to myself] “I’d better speak after I master it and I should study harder”... Koreans would look down on me if I don’t speak fluent English even after studying in an English-speaking country. Just like I did [looked down others] before. Something like this: “Even with his poor English, he keeps talking. How odd!”

When comparing his English pronunciation to NESs' pronunciation, he felt that his English was "awkward and funny." Furthermore, he assumed that other Koreans would look down on his English skill just like he had before. In short, the "correctness" of English was determined by an NES standard.

4.4.3 Desire to be like an NES

Not only did interviewees admire NESs' fluency, they also aimed (despite an uncertain definition of "NES-like") to achieve NES-like fluency. One of Hyeonjeong's goals in coming to Vancouver was to understand English medical or criminal investigation dramas without relying on English subtitles. Having been in Vancouver for 3 weeks at the time of the first interview, she was confident that she could achieve that level of understanding within 5 or 6 months. She could not understand people who were not fluent even after long stays in Canada. Being an NES was her goal in learning English. In fact, she showed a strong desire to be an NES, saying that "I even envy beggars here. They speak better English than I do."

Seokhyeon also showed a strong desire to be like an NES. At the time of the interview, he was considering entering a Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) program at a community college because he hoped to take classes with NESs. He mentioned:

I'm not satisfied with my English. Because I have to compete with and win over Canadians, simply being comfortable with English is not enough. Would adequate English be good enough when you have to get a good score competing with Canadians? Don't I need to be really good?

Not wanting to feel intimidated in his English skills, he desired to be like an NES. Seokhyeon believed that a TESOL certificate would give him a sense of pride because he expected that he would get it after he "won in competition with NESs."

Seongjae also once believed that within a year of arriving in Canada he would gain NES-like fluency to the point that he could dream in English. However, he soon changed it to a life goal after realizing it as a difficult task. His realization made him admire NESs even more as special people who have been using English throughout their whole lives. By equating English to NESs' lives, he regretted that he "just tried to learn their lives so easily." Meanwhile, he was still looking for ways to "become an NES." Like Seongjae, Huijeong also believed that people could become NES-like in a short time and felt embarrassed with her English level. When her English skills did not match her expectations, she mentioned: "I feel ashamed to say that I have been to Canada because I can't speak fluently, without a hesitation."

Although the participants discovered that their English did not improve as dramatically as they had expected in an English-speaking country, they were aware that other people would still expect them to. They struggled from the gaps. Eun-gyeong assumed that people in Korea would expect her to be a fluent English speaker because she had stayed in Canada. Seongjae shared the same view:

One of the burdens people have coming abroad is that they imagine advancement of their English level when they go back to Korea. Something like "I'm going back with a great level of English" or "now I can talk with NESs and understand all TOEIC sentences." But one of the burdens people have going back to Korea is that they are going back even though their English didn't improve much. English didn't seem to improve as much as friends' expectations in Korea, something like, "you've been to English-speaking countries. [Thus, your English must be excellent.]" I think this is a struggle most people have.

Like Huijeong, many of the participants were not satisfied and had to struggle with shame because they did not reach goals.

4.5 Summary

In this chapter, I have found that the participants regard English as an important factor to survive in Korea, especially in relation to job searches. They strongly believed that English skills would be useful for employment. However, they seemed to struggle to identify other reasons to learn English. For instance, although Jinyong felt that he had sufficient English skills, he had to struggle with a sense of inferiority compared to friends at his university. Eun-gyeong also needed to study English not to fall behind others.

English is also valued as a global language. Huijeong, Seokhyeong, and Seongjae emphasized its importance as a communication tool with diverse ethnic groups. They expected that they could meet “new” people and learn “new” cultures by acquiring the global language of English.

The influence of English on participants’ attitudes toward Korean has also been discussed in this chapter. The value added to English as “a global language” has led to a devalued notion of Korean as “a local language only for Koreans.”

Finally, this chapter also talked about beliefs the participants had toward English learning. Their beliefs influenced their life practices in Vancouver. Because the participants believed that they could learn English as they had acquired their mother tongue, they only tried to be immersed in English-speaking environments. Moreover, their belief in the possibility of becoming an NES made them keep struggling. In the next chapter, I discuss salient themes in the interviews.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I provide analyses based on the salient themes identified in the previous chapter. I first discuss the participants' beliefs about English, with a focus on what they expect from English learning. I then discuss how the participants' beliefs influence their experience studying abroad and their notions about their mother tongue. I also identify the great role that beliefs play in their language learning. As beliefs are constructed by power for their own political and economic benefit, I argue that a critical approach to English learning is crucial.

5.2 Motivations for learning English

As noted in Chapter 2, language learning can be explicated as investment (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton 2000), desire (Kramsch, 2005), and leisure (Kubota, 2009). The participants in this study also showed these attributes. All the participants expected English to have a great influence on their employment, motivating them to come for *eo hak yeonsu*. Moreover, for Seokhyeon, Seongjae, and Huijeong, desires to associate with non-Koreans led them to learn English. They held positive images like “new” and “fun” toward non-Koreans and expected that they could learn “new” insights from non-Koreans. Particularly for Huijeong, socializing with non-Koreans was regarded as fun, and constituted a leisure activity. Two of the additional motivations for learning English identified during the interviews were competition and imagination. These will be discussed in detail in the following section.

5.2.1 English as a competitive tool

At the beginning of the interviews, investments in learning English were a salient topic. The participants all emphasized the importance of acquiring English skills to be employed. These

reasons for learning English were expanded on as the interviews continued, with participants explaining that they pursued English study “not to fall behind others.” Hyeonjeong viewed *eohak yeonsu* as a credential to have; otherwise she would “fall behind others.” However, she could not articulate specific ways she would use English other than “adding one more line to [her] resume.” Jinyong also felt an urgent need to develop English proficiency. Although he felt that he had reasonable competency in English, he struggled with peer pressure and worried about falling behind his colleagues at the university. For Jinyong, even getting a highly respected job was considered crucial in relation to his peers. For Eun-gyeong, a belief that “everyone is learning English” in Korea was the main motivation. She regretted that it was the reason she had to keep studying English.

English has been viewed as a form of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). English is constructed as an essential knowledge that people should possess in Korea, where education has been an important determiner of social status and the possibility of upward mobility (Seth, 2002). Highly ranked universities are believed to provide such opportunities and competition to enroll in the best universities is severe (see Kim & Lee, 2006). English is an important component in the high-stakes national university entrance examination, so Koreans spend a great deal of money on English education (see Chapter 1).

In addition, positive images of competent English speakers being “diligent people” are consistent in the Korean mass media (Park, 2010). According to Choi (2003), Korean university students hold positive images like “intelligent” “diligent” or “high probability of success” toward good English speakers. Thus, English is associated with privileged social status (Park, 2010) and regarded as gate-keeping (Prey, 2005; Waters, 2006), making English competency a desirable acquisition.

Some studies (e.g., Choe & Gim, 2009; Yim & Yang, 2006) have analyzed how factors of one's personal background (e.g., gender and father's education) play a significant role in employment. Choe and Gim (2009) found that such personal factors do in fact have more influence on employment than skills in English. Because basing employment on personal background is now regarded as discrimination, Korean employment announcements no longer mention them (Ha, 2010). In contrast, skills in English may be emphasized as a consideration for employment because it is socially constructed as a crucial tool for national development (Park, 2009).

Fielding (1976) has identified two types of competition: object-centered and opponent-centered. When English is seen as an essential gate-keeping tool and determiner in job employment, competition to have competent English skills is strong. As I propose below, English is not actually used for work as much as the participants believe, and in cases like Hyeonjeong's, English learning does not involve a specific goal. The participants use English as symbolic capital—the tool of “showing off,” as stated by Jinyong—rather than as a communication tool, so English learning can be viewed as opponent-centered. The participants learn English to be better at it than others or “not to fall behind others.” In this regard, English has become a tool for competition.

Using mathematical formulae, Moen (1999) argues that job applicants' overinvestment in the level of education as a prerequisite may exceed the socially optimal level. Other studies have found the emphasis on English in Korea to exceed the necessity of English for work. For instance, the workers surveyed by Park and Jung (2006) reported levels of necessity for English skills that exceeded the frequency of actual English use. Among 300 employees surveyed, 96.4% of participants felt English is important to get a job but far fewer said they were actually tested

on English when they were hired (37.4 %). Although 74.9 % of workers believed that English is important for work, only 65.3 % reported actual use of English at work. However, those 65.3% of workers used English for reading only one or two times a month and for speaking or writing only three or four times a year. In short, although they rarely used English at work, most participants in the study held the idea that English is crucial at work.

Most participants in this study also expected that English would be useful in their future job. However, despite Hyeonjeong's emphasis on the need for English skills at work, she did not actually use English at her previous job. In fact, when she disclosed her decision to study more English, she received negative responses from people around her, especially her supervisors. English might not have been as important a factor for Hyeonjeong's work as she had assumed. She associated English with higher positions and salaries, observing workers dealing with foreign buyers, but the interview revealed that such a higher status was not obtained because of their English skills but because the workers were more experienced, dedicated, and competitive. In addition, her work experience at a government transportation service organization reinforced her view that being able to use English was significant. However, as she later admitted, higher-positioned people in her workplace did not need to use English as much as lower-positioned ones. In spite of these discrepancies, Hyeonjeong still imagined that English would play an important role at work. Seongjae also received advice from friends working in engineering fields that there are few opportunities to actually use English at work.

Choe and Gim (2009) warn that an overemphasis on English may damage the overall efficiency of Korea's economy. Even though many Koreans perceive English to play an important role in employment, the statistical analysis in their study shows no direct connection. That is, when other factors such as gender and parents' educational level are controlled for, skill

in English no longer shows an effect on one's employment. The positive correlation between higher TOEIC score and higher wage is not because competency raises productivity, but because competency in English signals competency in work skills. Choe and Gim conclude that an overinvestment in English only for signals rather than for increasing actual productivity may negatively affect Korea's economy.

Regardless of the actual gain (or non-gain) in productivity from having English competency, the notion of "English as an important language" has been continuously constructed in Korean society. As noted by Park (2010) and mentioned in Chapter 1, Korean mass media persistently deliver messages concerning the importance of English. As shown in the recursive surveys described in Chapter 1, the lack of scrutiny of the actual need for English reinforces the preexisting notion of the necessity of English at work and motivates people to pursue English. Another prevalent belief—that English is a global language—has encouraged Koreans to study English, to which I shall turn next.

5.2.2 Imaginaries about the world community and non-Koreans in learning English

The participants, particularly Seokhyeon, Seongjae, and Huijeong, believed that knowing English would enable them to communicate with non-Koreans everywhere anytime. Seokhyeon and Seongjae wanted to explore the world; their imaginaries that all foreigners speak English were tightly aligned with their motivation to study English. For them, English seemed crucial to gaining cosmopolitan membership (Park & Abelman, 2004; Song, 2010).

The participants reported that curiosity and abstract positive images of non-Koreans as "fun" and "new" inspired them to learn English. Unlike the "fun" and "new" non-Koreans, Huijeong had an idea that all Koreans were the same, thus boring. Seokhyeon expected non-

Korean women to be somewhat different from Korean women. In Seongjae's interview, he also commented that learning English would allow him to have non-Korean friends; indeed it seemed to be the single tool necessary to make foreign friends. In addition, the participants said that associating with non-Koreans would help them gain new insights.

These notions, however, failed to match the participants' experiences. Although Seokhyeon was convinced that "all people in Europe are able to communicate in English," it turned out that he did not have many chances to communicate with local people in Europe. Moreover, the participants complained about many situations in which, contrary to their expectations, they were not forced to speak English, even in an English-speaking country. In fact, in Vancouver they struggled to find more opportunities to be exposed to English through conversation clubs, churches, and volunteer activities. Huijeong also realized that English would not grant full access to all people in Vancouver and that she might need to learn Chinese to access Chinese people. The participants' belief that all people speak English did not hold true, even in an "English-speaking city."

Furthermore, the "new" insights they learned are not new. As discussed in Chapter 4, the experiences Seongjae had in Edmonton were not so surprising. The relaxing life of the old couple he met at the Bible conversation club in Edmonton would be similar in Korea given a similar context. In a smaller town in Korea, it would not be so difficult to meet such relaxed elderly couples, especially at Bible conversation clubs. Moreover, Seongjae thought the event—waiting for family members for a meal, particularly at a special one held infrequently—was unique. Yet, waiting for family members at a special meal would be a common practice not only in Korea but anywhere.

Seokhyeon also claimed that he learned a “new” culture of international marriage in Vancouver. As Piller (2007) succinctly puts it, “members of a culture imagine themselves and are imagined by others as group members. These groups are too large to be ‘real’ groups (i.e., no group member will ever know all the other group members)” (p. 211). The interviewees essentialized all Koreans versus non-Koreans. What they did not realize is that their knowledge of cultures of Koreans and non-Koreans might be limited by their imagination. For example, Seokhyeon insisted that he had never seen international Korean and non-Korean couples living in Korea, but it is clearly a misperception. International married couples have been a part of Korean society (see Statistics Korea, 2010a). Similarly, Huijeong praised foreigners as “new” and “fun” people. Yet, her interview accounts showed that her attitude changed in Vancouver. She confessed that she did not go out often in Korea, but in Vancouver she tried to go out every day, determined to meet “new” people.

Imagination about society has been extensively discussed in terms of nation, culture and social practices (Anderson, 2006; Piller, 2007; Taylor, 2004). Taylor (2004) notes that “social imaginary is not a set of ideas; rather, it is what enables, through making sense of the practices of society” (p. 3). He points out that the imaginary that most people share about their social surroundings enables them to act in a certain way and to have a sense of legitimacy. The imaginary the interviewees shared—English would allow them to communicate with non-Koreans and those non-Koreans are “new”—enables them to continue studying English and to have legitimacy about learning English.

The imagined community is constructed by macro society (Anderson, 2006). The imagination that everyone uses English in the world is ideologically constructed (see Pennycook, 1998, 2007; Phillipson, 2008) and at the same time the imagination that English is the only

global language to be used among diverse groups is constructed in Korea (Shin, 2006). Moreover, the constructed notion of Koreans as “a single pure-blooded race” has created the imaginary of Koreans as a homogeneous group (Park, 2009). These imaginaries have influenced the participants to believe that English use would allow them to socialize with diverse ethnic groups who were “different, thus new” people. This imaginary has also influenced the participants’ notions about Korean.

5.3 The belief about Korean language: “A local language only for Koreans”

As shown in Chapter 4, the interviewees stated that English had become an important language to them. However, it is noteworthy that they did not just accept the “necessity of English”; rather they struggled and sometimes resisted (cf. Canagarajah, 1999). For example, Seokhyeon expressed a feeling of unfairness toward learning English and many participants criticized English immersion classes in Korea as “insane” and “senseless.” The interviewees were rather ambivalent about English. English was considered both as a language which would give personal benefits and at the same time it was seen as an unnecessarily emphasized language.

A contradictory view was also identified in participants’ attitudes toward their mother tongue. Pennycook (1998) points out that the constructed notion of “English as a global language” devalues other local languages. The image of English as a global language has constructed the notion that other languages are local languages. Seongjae viewed other local languages as “limited.” The Korean language was regarded as only for Koreans. In short, English is associated with images like “useful,” “efficient,” “wider society,” and “wider knowledge” while Korean has been constructed as “useless (for global communication),” “inefficient,” “local,” and “narrow.” As a result, although the participants feel proud of their own mother

tongue as the most valuable language for themselves, they confessed that they would choose English as a valuable language owing to its efficiency in intercultural communication. In sum, it seems that an excessive emphasis on the notion of “English as a global language” has influenced the view of their mother tongue as less important.

King (2007) compared budget of Korean government spending on Korean language education and on English education. Korean government assigned about 21.5 million dollars to promote Korean language education for 2006 whereas about 182.8 million dollars to build three ‘English village’¹⁸ in one province, Kyeonggido, in 2005-2006. Additional 30.4 million dollars were spent for their annual operating cost. He cautioned that too much emphasis on English education in Korea has caused Koreans to feel the need to choose between English and their mother tongue. Indeed, as he noted, many Koreans leave their home country to pursue English and the question of whether Korea should adopt English as an official language has even been debated. The interviewees of this study stated that they would choose English over Korean if the options were given.

Overemphasis on English has resulted in a fatalistic and colonial view that, as Seokhyeon and many others manifested, they do not have any other choice but to learn English because it is a superior language. Although many participants revealed their difficulties and loneliness studying English in Vancouver away from family or close friends, they believe they should persevere with English. This belief has even led some Koreans, including Seokhyeon, to say that English should be adopted as an official language in Korea.

¹⁸ English villages are language education institutions which aim to create a language immersion environment for students of English in their own country (Wikipedia). The objective of Gyeonggi English Village is explained on the website as following, “to provide the public... with opportunities to put everyday English into practice and improve their language skills” (see <http://www.english-village.or.kr/eng/engintro/engoverview/engoverview.cms>).

The adoption of English as an official language was advocated by Bok (1998). Associating English language with being global, rational, open, and cooperative, and Korean language with being emotional and close-minded, Bok assumed that English would allow Korea to gain equal opportunities with other powerful countries.

However, the insistence on adopting English as an official language in Korea comes from a rather simplistic view. The underlying assumption is that people would just start speaking English once it is adopted as an official language. Seokhyeon, who supported the idea, might have not considered the other official language in Canada—French—which he never used in Vancouver. Another underlying erroneous assumption is that English skills will improve once a learner is exposed to English, just like the participants' belief that their English would improve to NES-like fluency once they were in an English-speaking country. However, listening to Seokhyeon's story that he and his roommate could not share their innermost feelings in English, or his feeling of unfairness to be forced to study English indicates the need to ask for whom this idea should be deployed. Recently Malaysia abandoned immersion classes teaching math and science in English as they impede students' understanding of the content and also their mother tongue development (Yi, 2009). This provides an important lesson for Koreans to consider.

As Bourdieu (1991) points out, the power of language does not come from language but from the power of the speaker. It is important to take the case of Singapore, where multiple languages; i.e., English, Malay, Mandarin Chinese, and Tamil are adopted for diverse ethnicity in the country. English as the home language has increased—it is now used by 23.9% of the ethnic Chinese homes and 35.6% of the ethnic Indian homes. Yet, the variety of English used by these people is stigmatized as *Singlish*. It is considered to have low socioeconomic value and the government has deployed a "Speak Good English Movement" (Stroud & Wee, 2007). Thus, if

English education continues to insist on the Eurocentric NES standard (Lee, 2009), Koreans will struggle, as the participants mentioned, from the stigmatization of Korean accents. More beliefs that shape their learning behavior and their living experiences in Vancouver are discussed in the next section.

5.4 Revisiting beliefs about learning English

Several publications point out misguided beliefs about additional language acquisition (see Johnson, 2008; King & Mackey, 2007). Johnson (2008) insists that popular fallacies are discursively disseminated and become prevalent myths. All the participants had some inaccurate understanding of language acquisition. For instance, they assumed that they would acquire English through simple exposure and that they could achieve NES-like fluency in a relatively short time. These beliefs shaped their living experiences in Vancouver.

5.4.1 Learning English through exposure

The participants believed that any exposure to English would help them improve their spoken English skills. They believed that talking with non-Koreans in English would help them acquire English. Seongjae tried to speak English even when he could not understand what his conversation partners said in English. Huijeong believed that she could improve her English skills through conversing with non-Koreans. They tried to spend as much time as they could to be exposed to spoken English.

At the same time, because the participants believed that exposure to the target language is important to improve their English skills, they avoided interactions with Koreans. Seokhyeon wanted to meet more English-speaking people although he thought he might go “crazy” from

loneliness, because he could not share his innermost feelings in English. Other participants considered Korean as an “obstacle” in their English learning (see also Jeon, 2007).

However, many researchers have demonstrated that simple exposure does not help language learning (Obondo, 1997; Williams, 1996). Learning takes place when the inputs are understandable (Krashen, 1985). In this regard, Korean can be an aid rather than an “obstacle.” As several scholars (e.g., Cummins, 2000, 2005; Sparks et al., 2009) argue, the mother tongue actually helps children learn an additional language, and the participants could also take advantage of Korean in asking other Korean friends about the meaning of a word or sentence, or sharing information about studying English, rather than unconditionally avoiding all use of Korean.

5.4.2 NES as a monolithic standard

The participants seemed to imagine a single monolithic standard for the native English speaker: to be an NES is to speak “perfect,” “good,” and “accurate” English, presumably based on the mainstream North American standard. Their NES norm made them regard other English learners and themselves as inferior speakers. Eungyeong considered the English pronunciation of Japanese and Chinese speakers to be “weird.” Seongjae called his pronunciation “awkward and funny” and feared others would look down on him because of his “poor” English.

English education in Korea has imposed this monolithic NES standard (Shin, 2007), failing to make students aware of diverse forms of English. Holliday and Aboshiha (2009) point out that this monolithic notion of NES is based on an ideological rather than linguistic rationale (see also Amin, 2004; Kubota, 2004). Holliday (2006) argues that the mythic nature of the NES or what he calls *native speakerism* is still a widespread ideology.

Seidlhofer (2004) argues that English education should shift from the NES standard to an emphasis on intercultural communication. By the same token, Canagarajah (2006) suggests that tests of English embrace new norms such as intelligibility rather than exclusively focusing on grammatical correctness and that they incorporate language awareness, sociolinguistic sensitivity, and negotiation skills. The lack of discussion about such issues in English education might cause the participants of this study and other Korean learners of English to desire NES-like fluency.

5.4.3 Desire to be like an NES

The participants headed to Vancouver hoping that they would achieve NES competency during their stay. Hyeonjeong and Seokhyeon still held to the idea, but Huijeong and Seongjae were struggling with the realization that it would be a difficult task within the time remaining. Their goal had been to achieve English competency, but they had to acknowledge the gap. For instance, Seokhyeon was not satisfied with his English skills even though he felt he made an improvement. Seongjae and Huijeong now recognized that NES competency was hard to achieve even in an English-speaking country, but they were aware that their acquaintances back in Korea would still expect them to have become fluent. Consequently, they felt ashamed to say that they had stayed in Canada to study English.

Cook's (2005) insightful question should be posed: "Is the native speaker target in fact attainable?" (p. 49). He points out that although only a small number of people achieve NES-like fluency, most additional language users are treated as "failed native speakers" (p. 50) rather than multi-competent speakers. As Piller and Takahashi's (2006) study demonstrates, learners' unrealistic desires to become like an NES may lead to a negative self image as an ashamed and inferior learner.

In summary, one's beliefs about language seem to play an important role in language learning. As Pennycook (2001) argues, English has been considered a “panacea” that will bring social development, motivating developing countries to encourage English language education. The participants in this study had several beliefs which played an important role in their English learning: (1) English enables them to be employed (imagined language); (2) all people in the world communicate in English (imagined community); (3) non-Koreans are “new” and “fun” (imagined people); (4) English will connect them to these “new” and “fun” people (imagined language); (5) English learners are “cosmopolitan members”—a sense of a part of the world (imagined self); (6) they will improve their English skills dramatically if immersed in English contexts (imagined geography); (7) NESs are “accurate” “correct” and “perfect” English speakers (imagined NESs); and (8) Canada is a place where these conditions are met (imagined country).

However, these beliefs are constructed at the macro level with political and economic underpinnings (Kubota, 2004; Pennycook, 2001; Phillipson, 2008; Piller & Takahashi, 2006). In order to uncover the political and economic dimensions of the contemporary demand for English, a critical approach to understanding the role of English is necessary (e.g., Canagarajah, 1999; Cummins, 2000; Freire, 1985; Kubota & Lehner, 2004; Pennycook, 1999). Such an approach reveals inequalities produced by English language education. Understanding unequal relations of power will provide learners with the opportunity to question common beliefs and pursue a sense of agency in a critical way.

5.5 Suggestions for further research

Because this study was based on one or two interviews per participant, it has only provided a slice of his or her views and experiences. It would be interesting to conduct a longitudinal study to investigate the trajectories of *eo hak yeonsu* students. Visiting their classes and investigating how their beliefs are constructed in language learning could provide interesting insights. Also, study abroad experiences in different locations could offer complementary or differing data on the topics explored in this study.

Considering that many participants are still seeking jobs, one could investigate how English is used at work and what kind of views workers have about English use. In contrast to surveys and other quantitative studies (e.g., Park & Jung, 2006), qualitative approaches help us understand the contexts in depth and obtain a holistic picture. In addition, a follow-up study on how the English skills that the *eo hak yeonsu* participants in this study acquired in Canada are recognized at work would be interesting.

Another valuable study would be to investigate language use among diverse ethnic groups in local language contexts other than English (e.g., language use between Filipinos and Vietnamese in Korea). As Block (2007) has pointed out, English is not necessarily the lingua franca among diverse language users even in an English-speaking country. Therefore, further research on this issue would provide some interesting insights into real language use at the daily micro level.

5.6 Concluding remarks

The aim of this thesis has been to explore the beliefs of short-term study abroad Korean postsecondary students about English, learning English, and using English. Some participants

believed that good English skills would provide more opportunities for employment, while others expected that they could meet diverse ethnic group members through English. With English regarded as the most influential factor in employment, some participants felt compelled to compete with other Koreans to gain good English skills. Also, as English was regarded as an essential tool to connect diverse people, using English was linked to an image of cosmopolitanism.

These beliefs were related to the participants' view of their mother tongue and their experiences in Vancouver. While they believed that English would be a global language for all in the world, they devalued their mother tongue as a local language useful only among Koreans. Moreover, because they believed maximum exposure to English to be the only condition for developing their English skills, they tried to use English as much as possible. Therefore, they believed that the Korean language interfered with English language learning. The participants also struggled with the myth that North American English is the standard and that NES-like fluency can be acquired in a relatively short time if they are immersed in the target language.

This study revealed that students' beliefs play an influential role in language learning. These beliefs are socially constructed and shared by members in the society, but may not necessarily lead to positive results. It seems that a critical approach to language learning is crucial for transforming the personal and societal belief system that privileges the hegemony of English. Moreover, it is important to encourage learners to realize that, as Park (2004) points out, Koreans themselves are at the center of this perpetuating the hegemony and it is up to them to subvert the power of English.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Notices

Recruitment Letter English Version

Beliefs about English among Korean short-term study-abroad adult learners in Canada

Dear student,

I am inviting you to participate in my research project entitled “Beliefs about English among Korean short-term study-abroad adult learners in Canada.” This research is part of a master’s thesis of You Mi Kim, a graduate student in the Department of Language and Literacy Education at the University of British Columbia (UBC). The purpose of the study is to explore Korean ESL (English as a second language) students’ views of English and Korean and their influences on English learning. The study is supervised by the Principal Investigator, Dr. Ryuko Kubota, Department of Language and Literacy Education at UBC.

Anyone is welcome to participate who came from Korea to Vancouver to learn English during a short-term stay (from 3 months to 1 year), is currently enrolled in a private English institution, and plan to go back to Korea after the study. There is no known risk.

If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed in Korean for no more than two hours about your views and experiences of learning English. After one month, you will be contacted by email about any changes in your views on questions you were asked before. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. You will also receive the analysis of the data to confirm its accuracy. This study would give you an opportunity to reflect on your English learning experience. You will be offered a \$20 gift card as a token of appreciation. Your participation is strictly voluntary, your name and identity will not be disclosed (pseudonyms will be used to protect your privacy), and you have the right to withdraw from the study whenever you wish. The data you provide will be accessible only by me and will be stored in a secure place.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact You Mi Kim at jlguwa@hotmail.com. If you wish, you may also contact my supervisor, Ryuko Kubota at ryuko.kubota@ubc.ca

Thank you.

Recruitment Letter Korean Version

“캐나다에서 공부하는 한국 단기 어학연수 성인 학습자들의 영어에 대한 믿음” 연구를 위한 참여자 모집

학생 여러분께,

“한국 ESL 학생들의 영어에 대한 생각과 학습에 끼치는 영향”이라는 저의 연구에 여러분을 초대합니다. 이 연구는 UBC의 Language and Literacy Education의 학생 김유미의 MA 논문과제의 부분입니다. 이 연구의 목적은 어학연수생이 영어를 바라보는 관점과 그것이 영어 학습과 한국어에 대한 영향을 인터뷰를 통해 알아가는 것입니다. 이 연구는 University of British Columbia (UBC)의 Language and Literacy Education의 교수님이신, Dr. Ryuko Kubota의 지도아래 이루어질 것입니다.

단기적으로 (약 3개월에서 1년 사이) ESL 학원에서 공부하고 계신 분이며 공부를 끝마친 후에 한국으로 돌아가실 계획이신 분이라면 누구나 환영합니다. 이 연구의 알려진 위험은 없습니다.

참여를 하시게 된다면, 여러분의 언어학습의 경험에 대한 인터뷰가 한국어로 약 2시간 정도 진행될 것이며 한 달 후에 이메일을 통해 한 번 더 연락을 할 계획입니다. 인터뷰는 녹음될 예정이며 여러분이 말씀하신 것이 맞는지 여러분에게 확인을 받을 것입니다. 여러분은 인터뷰를 통해 영어와 한국어에 대한 여러분의 관점을 다시 한 번 생각해 볼 기회를 가지시게 될 것입니다. 또한 여러분의 시간에 감사의 표시로 20\$ gift card를 드릴 것입니다. 여러분의 참여는 자의적인 것이며 여러분의 신분과 이름은 노출되지 않을 것입니다 (여러분의 사생활을 위하여 가명이 사용될 것입니다). 여러분이 원하지 않으실 때는 언제든지 인터뷰에 참여하지 않으실 수 있습니다. 여러분이 제공하는 자료는 오직 저만이 볼 수 있으며 안전한 장소에 보관될 것입니다.

참여에 관심 있으신 분은 저의 이메일 jlgwa@hotmail.com 으로 연락
주시기 바랍니다. 또한 원하신다면 저의 교수님 Ryuko Kubota 께
ryuko.kubota@ubc.ca 로 연락하실 수 있습니다.

감사합니다.

Appendix B

Consent Forms

Background Information English Version

Dear potential participant,

This letter is to invite you to participate in the research project entitled, “Beliefs about English among Korean short-term study-abroad adult learners in Canada.” The data collected through this study will be used by You Mi Kim to complete her master’s thesis.

Principal Investigator:

The study is supervised by the Principal Investigator, Dr. Ryuko Kubota, Department of Language and Literacy Education at the University of British Columbia (UBC).

Co-Investigator(s):

This research is part of a master’s thesis of You Mi Kim, a graduate student in the Department of Language and Literacy Education at UBC.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to investigate ESL (English as a second language) students’ views of English and Korean and their influences on English learning. You are being invited to take part in this research study because I am interested, in particular, to find out what English means to Korean ESL students who plan to return to Korea after they study abroad.

Study Procedures:

If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed in Korean for no more than two hours about your views and experiences of learning English. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. After one month, you will be contacted by email about any changes in your views on questions you were asked before. It will take no more than one hour to answer briefly.

Potential Risks:

There is no known risk.

Potential Benefits:

This study would give you an opportunity to reflect on your English learning experience.

Confidentiality:

Your identity will be kept confidential, and pseudonyms will be used in the final report. All data will be kept in a locked files and researchers will be the only persons who have access to the interview data. All the information you provide will be kept secure and then destroyed when the study is completed.

Remuneration/Compensation:

You will be offered a \$20 gift card as a token of appreciation.

Contact for information about the study:

If you have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact Ryuko Kubota at ryuko.kubota@ubc.ca. Also, you are always welcome to contact You Mi Kim at jlguwa@hotmail.com.

Contact for concerns about the rights of research subjects:

If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598 or e-mail to RSIL@ors.ubc.ca.

Consent:

If you decide to participate, please sign the next page of the consent form and return a copy of the page to me. Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study. You are advised to keep the consent form for your future reference. Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records. Thank you in advance for your participation in the study.

Korean Version

Background Information **동의서**

참여자 여러분께,

“캐나다에서 공부하는 한국 단기 어학연수 성인 학습자들의 영어에 대한 믿음”이라는 연구에 여러분을 초대하고 싶습니다. 이 연구의 자료는 저의 석사학위 논문을 위한 자료로 쓰일 것입니다. 목적은 한국 어학연수생의 영어에 대한 생각과 그것이 영어학습과 한국어에 미치는 영향을 조사하는 것입니다.

주 연구자:

이 연구는 University of British Columbia (UBC), Department of Language and Literacy Education 의 교수님 Ryuko Kubota 의 지도아래 이루어질 것입니다.

공동연구자:

이 연구는 UBC, Department of Language and Literacy Education 의 학생 김유미의 석사학위 논문과제의 부분입니다.

연구목적:

이 연구의 목적은 어학연수생이 영어를 바라보는 관점과 그것이 영어 학습과 한국어에 대한 영향을 인터뷰를 통해 알아가는 것입니다. 저는 특히 외국에서 공부 후 한국으로 돌아갈 어학연수생에게 영어의 의미에 대해 관심이 있습니다.

연구 절차:

참여를 하시게 되면, 약 2 시간 정도의 인터뷰가 진행될 것이며 이 인터뷰는 녹음되고 전사될 것입니다. 한달 후에 여러분의 관점에 대한 변화가 있는지에

대해 이메일을 통해 한 번 더 진행될 것입니다. 시간은 약 한 시간 정도 소요될 것입니다.

잠재적 위험:

알려진 위험은 없습니다.

잠재적 이익:

여러분께서는 이 연구를 통해 여러분이 가졌던 영어와 한국어에 대한 관점을 다시 한 번 생각해보는 기회를 가지실 것입니다.

신뢰성:

여러분의 신분과 이름은 노출되지 않을 것이며, 여러분의 사생활을 위하여 가명이 사용될 것입니다. 여러분이 제공하는 자료는 오직 저만이 볼 수 있으며 안전한 장소에 보관될 것입니다. 모든 자료는 연구가 끝난 이후에는 모두 지워질 것입니다.

사례금:

여러분의 시간에 감사의 표시로 20\$ gift card 를 드릴 것입니다.

연구에 질문사항:

이 연구에 관한 질문이 있으시다면 Ryuko Kubota 교수님께 ryuko.kubota@ubc.ca 로 연락하실 수 있습니다. 또한 저 김유미에게 jlguwa@hotmail.com 으로 언제든지 연락하실 수 있습니다.

연구참여자에 대한 권리:

연구 참여자로서 염려가 있으시다면 Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services 의 604-822-8598 혹은 RSIL@ors.ubc.ca.로 연락하실 수 있습니다.

동의:

참여를 결정하셨다면, 다음 페이지의 동의서에 사인을 하신후 저에게 돌려주시기 바랍니다. 여러분의 사인은 이 연구의 참여를 동의하신다는

뜻입니다. 나중에 참고하시기 위해 동의서는 가지고 계시기 바랍니다.
여러분의 사인은 이 동의서를 가지고 계신다는 뜻입니다. 이 연구에 참여해
주심에 미리 감사드립니다.

Dear You Mi Kim,

I am willing to participate in your research.

I acknowledge having received a copy of the consent form.

Signature: _____ Date _____:

Name (Print) _____:

Please provide contact information if you wish to receive a copy of the final report about our findings.

Email: _____ Tel _____:

Appendix C

Sample Interview Questions

Personal history

1. Name (will not be disclosed)/ Pseudonym you want to be called, why?
2. Age
3. Gender
4. Socioeconomic class
5. Parts of Korea you are from
6. Major in college
7. Years of study abroad experience in English-speaking countries, if applicable
8. Any other investment in learning English before coming to Canada
9. Period of time you have stayed in Canada
10. What did you do before coming to Canada?
11. Any plans for the future in relation to English and in general?

English ideologies

1. Do you think that English is important? If so, how important do you think English is in your life, and why? If not, why not?
2. How would you describe English in your life?
3. What adjectives do you associate with English? (e.g., cool, beautiful, easy, useful, difficult, irritating, burdensome)
4. What is your goal in learning English (how proficient)? Why?

5. If you could achieve your goals for learning English, what would be changed in your life?
6. Do you think English would help you at work? What kind of job are you expecting?
7. If English is not related to your work, in what way would English be helpful?
8. Are there any difficulties you have experienced due to English?
9. Are there any good experiences you have had due to English?
10. Do you think that English is important to Koreans?
11. What do you think good English skills are?
12. What do you think about the current English phenomena in Korea?

Influences on Korean

1. Have you avoided using Korean on purpose? If so, why?
2. Have you tried to speak English in situations where you could have communicated in Korean? Why?
3. Which language will you teach your children in the future? Why?
4. If you could choose a mother tongue, which language would you choose? Why?
5. If you could choose a mother tongue for your future children, which language would you choose? Why?
6. Do you think that learning English changes your attitude toward Korean? If so, how?
7. Would you send your child to a dual immersion Korean-English school?
8. What do you think is the most important language in the world? Why?
9. What are the advantages of speaking good English? What about Koreans?

Learning and using English

1. How long have you studied English (both formal and informal)?
2. How serious are you about learning English? Are there any reasons for that?
3. Have you had any notable personal experience related to learning English?
4. Was there a turning point for you in learning English?
5. What are your goals for learning English? (short- and long-term goals)
6. What have you done to improve your English?
7. What do you think the best way is to improve English?
8. How often do you need to use English both in Korea and in Vancouver?
9. What kind of friends (English, Japanese, Korean, Chinese, etc.) do you try to hang out with? Do you try to avoid friends of certain nationalities? Why?
10. When is it comfortable for you to use English and when is it uncomfortable?
11. What is your biggest concern in learning English?
12. How would you rate your English proficiency on a scale of 1 (poor) to 10 (excellent)?
Why do you consider so?
13. Have you learned other languages? Have you found any differences between English and the languages you learned?
14. What is the biggest obstacle in learning English in Canada?
15. Who influences you the most in terms of learning English?
16. Have you ever tried to stop learning English?
17. Why do you keep studying English?
18. Are you satisfied with your English skills? If not, why not?
19. Do you think that pronunciation is important? What kind of pronunciation is important?

ESL contexts in Canada

1. Why did you decide to come to Canada/Vancouver?
2. Have you traveled to other countries before?
3. Have your goals changed since you arrived in Canada/Vancouver? If so, how?
4. What is your general impression of Vancouver?
5. What was your expectation before coming to Canada?
6. Have your expectations changed since you arrived in Canada?
7. Do you think you have fulfilled any of your expectations? Which ones? If not, why not?
8. What do you think the advantages of coming to an ESL context are?
9. What do you usually do after school?
10. Do you have any difficulties living in Canada?
11. Considering opportunity cost, are you satisfied with your English learning in Canada? If so or if not, in what ways?
12. What would you recommend if someone asked your advice about *eo-hakyeonsu*?
13. Are there any difficulties in learning English in Canada? What is the most difficult one?
How did you try to overcome those difficulties? Why did you use that method?
14. Has the meaning of learning English changed from when you were in Korea?
15. Do you feel any changes of attitude toward English since you arrived in Canada?
16. Please complete the blanks:

In Korea, English is _____, and English is _____ in Canada.
17. How have your experiences in Vancouver changed your perceptions about
yourself/others/the world?
18. What do you think others would expect of you from this experience in Vancouver?

Appendix D

UBC Research Ethics Board Certificate



The University of British Columbia
Office of Research Services
Behavioural Research Ethics Board
Suite 102, 6190 Agronomy Road, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z3

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - FULL BOARD

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Ryuko Kubota		INSTITUTION / DEPARTMENT: UBC/Education/Language and Literacy Education	UBC BREB NUMBER: H10-00420
INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:			
Institution UBC Other locations where the research will be conducted: Quiet places such as a library		Site Vancouver (excludes UBC Hospital)	
CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): You Mi Kim Ryuko Kubota			
SPONSORING AGENCIES: N/A			
PROJECT TITLE: Korean ESL Students' Ideologies of English and Their Impact on Learning			
REB MEETING DATE: April 8, 2010		CERTIFICATE EXPIRY DATE: April 8, 2011	
DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:		DATE APPROVED: April 19, 2010	
Document Name	Version	Date	
Protocol: Research Proposal	N/A	February 9, 2010	
Consent Forms: consent form	N/A	February 9, 2010	
Advertisements: a recruitment letter	N/A	March 9, 2010	
Questionnaire, Questionnaire Cover Letter, Tests: Research question	N/A	February 9, 2010	
The application for ethical review and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.			
Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board and signed electronically by one of the following:			
_____ Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Chair			