

# North American Academics in East Asia: Life in the English-speaking Enclave

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**Abstract:** While the hiring of international faculty is increasing among competitive universities, some universities face a major challenge in doing so: their foreign hires do not speak the primary language of instruction of that university. This study examines the host country language skills of expatriate academics in two countries: Korea and Japan. Specifically, this study investigates (a) the study effort invested and (b) the language proficiency achieved by native English-speaking professors on tenure track positions. Expatriate faculty had several predictors of their language learning success. Specifically, the well-known factors facilitating language learning played important roles. The findings are discussed within the framework of sociocultural adjustment and career prospects that exist for expatriate professors in Korean and Japanese higher education.

**Keywords:** cultural adjustment, expatriate faculty, language learning, sociolinguistic integration.

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## 1. Introduction

Internationalization has become a major heading in higher education, and universities worldwide have made efforts to strengthen their global competitiveness by hiring faculty members from abroad. The number of expatriate academics (i.e., internationally mobile academics employed full time on tenure track positions outside their home countries, see Trembath 2016), their ability to publish in international journals, and their teaching in foreign languages all play important roles for improving the global rankings of universities (Saisana et al. 2011). A recent increase of research universities has led East Asian countries to take advantage of academic migration and pursue hiring strategies in line with making faculty bodies of universities more international (McNeill 2008, Rose & McKinley 2018).

South Korea (hereafter referred to as Korea) started to put a focus on increasing the number of expatriate faculty members at universities around the turn of the millennium (Byun et al. 2013). Between 2003 and 2013 the country had achieved a four-fold increase in foreign hires, and by 2014 about 6.5% (=6064<sup>2</sup>) of faculty members came from outside Korea (Green 2015).

In Japan, internationalization of higher education dates back to the late 19th Century but has gained new momentum since the 1980's with the introduction of programs aimed at bringing large numbers of international students and teachers to Japan (e.g., JET, MEXT). Similar to Korea, Japan has pursued multifaceted goals with internationalization: for instance, introducing international standards into higher education and improving university rankings and global competitiveness, developing the quality of the educational system (e.g., through foreign-language courses), and increasing the number of international students enrolled (Whitsed & Volet 2011). By 2016, around 4% of tenure-track positions were held by

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<sup>2</sup> Note that this number includes non-tenure track native-speaker language instructors.

expatriate faculty, following a steady increase since 1980 (Huang 2017).<sup>3</sup> Challenges surrounding the integration of expatriate faculty in East Asian higher education have recently garnered scientific attention, and a growing body of research has started to investigate the work and life realities of foreign-born academics in Japan and Korea (e.g., Byun et al. 2013, Froese 2010, Green 2015, Gress & Ilon 2009, Huang 2017).

The present paper investigates expatriate academics' cultural integration as evidenced by their language learning in the host countries Korea and Japan. First, an overview of what is known about expatriate employees' linguistic integration in East Asian countries is presented. The majority of research in this area has been conducted on expatriate employees at multinational corporations; however, a smaller body of literature exists on expatriate academics and language learning. Next, the rationale behind the present study and the test variables is introduced, followed by the method section outlining the research design. After presentation of the findings in the result section, they will be discussed according to study populations (expatriate academics in Korea and Japan) and from the larger perspective of their motivations to integrate linguistically into their host societies. Lastly, limitations of the study are mentioned and final conclusions drawn with regard to the implications and significance of the present study.

## 2. Expatriate academics and language learning

The motivations of academics to migrate to foreign places can be described in terms of *self-inflicted migration* and, in such cases, job availability largely motivates migration (Ortiga et al. 2018, Peltokorpi & Froese 2009). A combination of personal and professional goals contributes to the researchers' choice of destination (e.g., location of family or desire to experience a foreign culture). Psychological motivations related to personal well-being in a foreign country have been identified as crucial impetus for career decisions in many professions, including academia (Froese & Peltokorpi 2011, Ortiga et al. 2018). Cultural adjustment is generally listed as a major predictor for expatriate academics' success (e.g., McClure 2007). If satisfaction with life in the host country is low, academics are more inclined to leave and find jobs elsewhere. Research on cultural adjustment of expatriates is crucial to help inform issues associated with recruitment and retention of foreign-born employees.

Three distinct facets of cultural adjustment have been proposed in the literature (see Black, Mendenhall & Oddou 1991): *general adjustment* to living in a foreign country, *interaction adjustment* with local people, and *work adjustment*. Whereas research on expatriate faculty integration has traditionally focused on work-related adjustment, general and interaction adjustment (also known as sociocultural adjustments) have received little attention so far. These concepts are, however, crucial for predicting the success of academic migration and thus deserve closer attention.

Interaction adjustment is centered on the notion of *linguistic integration*: i.e., learning the local language, and is considered the most problematic of all adjustment types (Froese 2012; Peltokorpi 2007, 2008; Selmer 2006). Even though English functions as the *lingua franca* of academia and expatriate faculty are generally hired to teach in foreign languages, life outside the university may be difficult without adequate local-language skills (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. 2005, Selmer 2006). In ethnically and linguistically homogenous countries such as Korea and Japan, cultural participation is seriously impeded by a lack of local language skills (Froese 2010; Froese, Peltokorpi & Ko 2012; Tsuneyoshi 2018). Expatriate faculty experience an impediment to their social lives when they have not learned the local

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<sup>3</sup> National and private universities underwent short periods of decline, whereas municipal/prefectural universities saw a steady increase.

language (Froese 2012; Takeuchi, Yun & Russell 2002). In addition, there are indications that lack of language proficiency may negatively affect career development (Lauring 2008; Wilczewski, Söderberg & Gut 2018).

A recent study of the cultural adjustment of expatriate academics in Korea showed that 76% of participants were experiencing problems that they attributed to their low Korean language proficiency (Froese 2012). Half of the participants stated that low language skills impaired their ability to participate in Korean culture. Insufficient Korean skills are likely a widespread problem among expatriate faculty there, potentially jeopardizing academic and cultural integration. Japan has had more success with cultural integration of expatriate faculty, as many foreign-born academics who are appointed to tenure-track positions hold (undergraduate or graduate) degrees from Japanese universities (approximately 44%; see Huang 2017).

With internationalization remaining a priority in Korean and Japanese higher education, the question of how successful linguistic integration is and how motivated foreign-born professors are to learn the local language is important (Welch, Welch & Piekkari 2005). Studies in the private sector have shown a complex relationship between the expectations of the host institution and the realities arising from expatriate employees' behavior in terms of learning the local language (Zhang & Harzing 2016). Low host country language skills frequently occur when the linguistic distance between the expatriates' native language and the host country language is great, such as for Western expatriates in Korea and Japan. This can cause severe adjustment problems for the expatriate community (Selmer & Lauring 2015).

As pointed out by Harzing and Feely (2008), when expatriates' language skill is low, the relationship between expatriates and host country nationals remains distant. Expatriates may experience situations where their colleagues are not able to or do not want to speak a foreign language with them or where companies encourage the use of the local language. When learning difficulties arise due to linguistic distance between native and target language, expatriates find themselves in a situation where language learning requires more time, effort, and resources. As this potentially comes at a detriment to spare time and work time, the question is how many expatriates are actually willing to incur this increased cost of linguistic integration.

Aside from actual language skill, readiness and willingness to learn the local language is also considered important in the context of multinational corporations, as it symbolically represents an aspect of trust formation between expatriates and local employees (Bordia & Bordia 2015). The study effort that expatriates invest in learning the host country language is a crucial indicator for expatriates' motivation to invest in their relationship with the host country's society or corporate society.

While a small body of research has investigated expatriate language learning of linguistically distant languages in the corporate world involving East Asian host countries (Froese et al. 2012; Zhang & Harzing 2016; Zhang, Harzing & Fan 2018), expatriate academics have remained underrepresented in this research (Peltokorpi 2007, 2008, 2010; Zhang & Peltokorpi 2015). In East Asian multinational corporations, Western expatriates frequently do not have adequate language abilities to integrate socially and professionally (Zhang & Harzing 2016; Zhang et al. 2018). A similar pattern can be found in expatriate academics (Froese 2012).

Previous research has focused on issues related to the problems – for the corporations and the expatriates – arising from low language proficiency (e.g., Selmer & Lauring 2015); however, the psychological and social motivations experienced by expatriates when faced with the choice of whether to learn the host country language have not been investigated. The present study aims to fill this knowledge gap by providing a detailed look at the personal

motivations and abilities behind expatriate academics' host country language learning and their resulting learning success.

The goal of the present study was two-fold. First, it investigates how proficient expatriate academics whose native language is (North American) English are in the local languages in their host countries of Korea or Japan. Second, it determines the readiness of expatriate academics to undertake language study, as evidenced by their study effort. Based on previous literature on expatriate language learning involving distant languages, it was expected that proficiency would be relatively low (e.g., Zhang et al. 2018).

According to traditional language learning theories, increase in proficiency is ultimately related to personal aptitude to learning languages, which can be defined as a special talent for language learning and a ceiling on success (Doughty 2019). When learning motivation and context are similar, while at the same time personality facets of the learners are controlled, differences in aptitude determine ultimate language attainment. So-called "good language learners" (Rubin 2005) show high aptitude, which means they excel cognitively at learning languages and can do so quickly, frequently accompanied by mastery of a number of foreign languages (Dörnyei 2005).

As with any learning task, spending a sufficient amount of time studying the language is also crucial for achieving high proficiency, and those students willing to devote more study time to language learning ultimately achieve higher proficiency (Bak, Long, Vega-Mendoza & Sorace 2016). Motivational aspects on the part of the learner, in particular so-called *instrumental motivation* – a sense that one needs a language for a certain task – constitute the basis for increased learner engagement and thus higher proficiency (Saito, Dewaele & Hanzawa 2017). In terms of increased study effort, it is expected that better language learners show more study effort, as learning success leads to increased study engagement (Rubin 2005).

A certain bondedness to a particular culture and thus language can also contribute to language learning effort. Willingness to integrate into a society is regarded as an important driver for language study, and people who desire to become part of a foreign culture – for personal or professional reasons – tend to prioritize learning the local language (Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie 2017).

In a similar vein, time spent in a foreign country increases the psychological bond to the culture and leads people to increase their study efforts to become more proficient in the host language. Language study – in particular the study of a language linguistically distant to one's native language – is a time-consuming task that requires the learners to devote a substantial amount of time. With spare time scarce for expatriate professors on tenure track in East Asia – due to skewed work-life balance (Bader, Froese & Kraeh 2016) and intense publishing pressure (Lee & Lee 2013) – it stands to reason that time for language study could be subtracted from working time. Thus, increased language study might take away from overall work productivity; or, vice versa, fewer working hours (and less productivity) could provide the opportunity for increased language study.

The following hypotheses were tested by the present study:

- *Hypothesis 1:* High host country language proficiency can be predicted by good language learning aptitude, increased study effort, and individually perceived need to learn a language on the part of the expatriate academics.
- *Hypothesis 2:* Study effort invested in learning the host country language displayed by expatriate academics is significantly related to good language learning aptitude, an expatriate's willingness to integrate into the host society, the time she or he has spent in the host country, and decreased work productivity.

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1 Participants and sampling

Expatriate faculty members originating from the United States of America and Canada, in tenure track positions at six Korean and eight Japanese universities and research institutions, were contacted and invited to participate in an anonymous online survey asking them about their attitudes toward and experiences with learning the Korean/Japanese language. One participant had recently been naturalized as a citizen of Japan but was still included in the data. The requirement was that Korean or Japanese was learned as a second language. No participant was excluded based on their language skills, resulting in beginners of Korean/Japanese as well as professors of Korean or Japanese studies, highly proficient in the respective language, participating in the survey. Ethnic Korean and Japanese professors with foreign nationalities were not included. The survey was open between December 2017 and April 2018. Eligible participants were searched for through the offices of international affairs at 14 universities and subsequently invited to take part in the survey. The overall response rate was 33% ( $N=45$ ). Due to the limited target population of the study (nationals of North American English-speaking countries), a small sample size was expected.

A total of 28 professors (5 female and 23 male, USA 22 and Canada 6, age range 30-64, mean age  $46.3 \pm 10.1$ ) of various ranks and disciplines were recruited from six Korean universities. See Table 1 for an overview of gender and job rank of the participants from Korea.

**Table 1:** Gender, rank, nationality of participants at Korean universities (USA/Canada).

	Assistant professor	Associate professor	Full professor	Total
Female	1/0	2/1	1/0	5
Male	9/3	8/2	1/0	23

The sample of expatriate faculty members from Japan included a total of 17 professors (6 female and 11 male, USA 14 and Canada 3, age range 35-64, mean age  $47.2 \pm 11.4$ ) of various ranks and disciplines (see Table 2) from eight universities/research institutions in Japan.

**Table 2:** Gender, rank, nationality of participants at Japanese universities and research institutions (USA/Canada).

	Assistant professor	Associate professor	Full professor	Total
Female	1/0	2/0	3/0	6
Male	3/1	2/1	3/1	11

The male majority in both samples reflects the pattern that exists within expatriate faculty at East Asian universities, where male international researchers are more likely to be hired for tenure-track positions compared to female international researchers, and academic mobility is more commonly recognized as a predominantly male activity (Froese 2012, Huang 2017).

#### 3.2 Variables

The survey questions were aimed at measuring variables that can inform about (a) participants' time and efforts invested in studying Korean or Japanese, and (b) the proficiency level they had achieved in the language (see Table 3 for an overview of the variables). When feasible, variables were combined into meaningful composite variables by standardizing them to a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1 and calculating their mean.

The following single-measure variables were included in the statistical models: self-reported Korean or Japanese language skill (measured on an ordinal scale from 1 to 5, with 1 representing no language skills and 5 very high proficiency), self-reported good language learning ability (no=0, yes=1), number of foreign languages in which an intermediate level had been reached by participants, and average weekly study hours devoted to studying Korean/Japanese. Furthermore, the number of semesters a participant had been employed in their host country, their willingness to participate in the local culture (from 1 to 5, with 1 being the least interested), and their perceived need to learn the local language to navigate their social and professional lives in their host countries (measured from 1, no need, to 3, urgent need to learn the local language) were included.

Study effort was a composite variable composed of (1) average weekly study hours and (2) percentage of time in a host country that participants had taken language classes (measured in %). Language learning aptitude was another composite variable composed of (1) good language learning skills and the (2) number of foreign languages in which an intermediate level had been reached by participants. A third composite variable was work productivity, composed of (1) average weekly work hours (measured on an ordinal scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being 35 hours and less and 5 being 55 hours and more) and (2) number of first-author publications (i.e., conference papers, articles and books) that have come out within the last two years. Cases of highly proficient speakers ( $N=6$ ) were excluded from the sample for the regression model as it was not expected that they show any study effort.

**Table 3:** Variable statistics.

	<b>Min.</b>	<b>Max.</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Language skill	2	4	2.59	0.72
Good language learning ability	0	1	0.49	0.51
Number of foreign languages learned	0	4	1.56	1.17
Weekly study hours	0	10	1.51	2.05
Semesters in country	2	48	14.82	11.21
Willingness to participate in local culture	0	1	0.56	0.5
Perceived need to learn local language	1	3	2.5	0.6
<b>Composite:</b> study effort	-0.78	1.89	0.05	0.85
<b>Composite:</b> language-learning aptitude	-1.19	1.58	-0.01	0.92
<b>Composite:</b> work productivity	-1.32	1.43	-0.03	0.67

Two linear-regression models were run to determine which factors can best predict (a) the study effort that expatriate professors invest in learning the local language of their host country, and (b) the proficiency they have attained in the language. Collinearity (Field 2005) did not appear to be an issue (maximum generalized variance inflation factor=1.8; Fox & Monette 1992) and visual inspection of residual plots did not show any obvious deviations from homoscedasticity or normality.

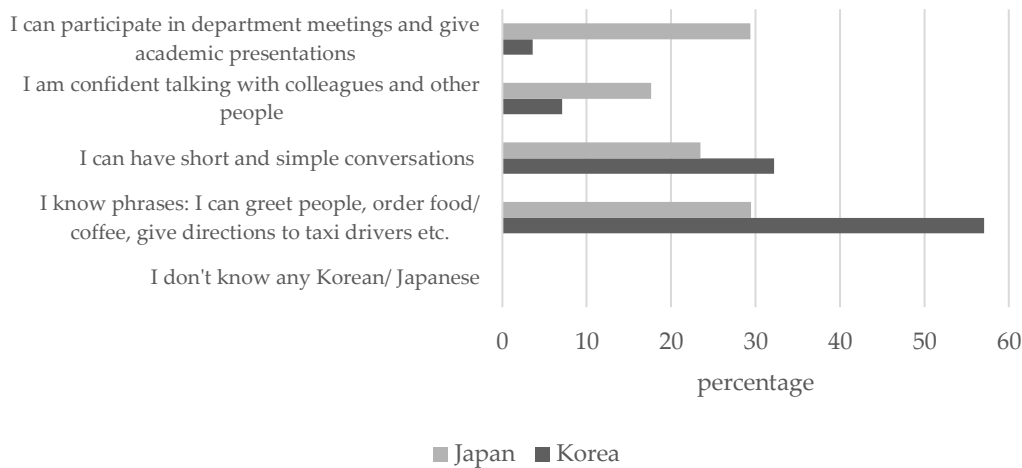
In the qualitative part of the study, participants were asked what they considered the greatest problem preventing them from engaging in more intensive language study and achieving a higher proficiency in the language of their host country.

The sample size for descriptive analysis was 45 participants: 28 from Korean and 17 from Japanese research institutions. The sample size for regression analysis was 39 participants: 27 from Korean and 12 from Japanese research institutions.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Descriptive results

Participants recruited in Korea had been working in Korea for an average of 15.2 semesters ( $\pm 10.7$ ), while participants recruited in Japan had been employed there for 25.9 ( $\pm 24.6$ ) semesters. Figure 1 presents an overview of the Korean and Japanese language proficiencies as reported by the participants.



**Figure 1:** Overview of Korean/Japanese proficiency levels (N=45; note that the group of highly proficient speakers was excluded from the regression models).

Obvious differences in language proficiency emerge between the Korean and Japanese samples. Language skill is clearly higher for the professors working at Japanese institutions, with approximately 30% being highly proficient. The rate of low-proficiency language learners is around 30% in the Japanese sample, but close to 60% in the Korean sample. Expatriate professors in Japan are better suited to function in the Japanese academic world (for instance by participating in department meetings and conducting academic work in Japanese), while this is rather rare for expatriate professors in Korea. The Korean sample (due to their lesser proficiency) focused their Korean language-learning effort more on being able to navigate through daily life outside of academia.

In terms of study effort, it was found that the majority of respondents reported investing relatively low effort into studying the local language. The Korean sample showed more study effort than the Japanese sample, which had better language proficiency in general. In Korea, expatriate professors had attended Korean classes more rigorously than their Japanese counterparts during their time in the host country. Table 4 presents an overview of the main variables and their differences between the samples in Korea and Japan.

**Table 4:** Overview of variables by country.

	Language learning skills	Foreign languages learned	Japanese/Korean skills	Willingness for cultural integration	Perceived need to learn language	Weekly study hours	% of time in country enrolled in class
Japan	0.71	1.47	3.47	0.71	2.59	1.25	32.1
Korea	0.43	1.5	2.57	0.57	2.33	1.6	17.8

## 4.2 Linear regressions

Results of the first regression model revealed significant predictors *for study effort*:  $F(2, 75)=29, p<.001$ , power analysis (Cohen's  $f^2$ )=0.94; see Table 5.

**Table 5:** Results of the linear regression predicting study effort.

	<b>B</b>	<b>Standard error</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>Significance</b>
(Constant)	8.83	4.09	2.16	0.03
Semesters in country	-0.36	0.28	-1.28	0.2
Work productivity	0.43	0.12	3.59	< 0.001 ***
Language aptitude	0.44	0.1	4.34	< 0.001 ***
Willingness to participate in culture	3.39	6.61	0.51	0.61

N=39,  $R^2 = .44$

Important factors for study effort were language learning aptitude and work productivity. Generally, better language learning aptitude led to higher study effort on the part of the participants. Concerning work productivity, the relationship to study effort was a negative one: higher levels of work productivity led to a decrease in study effort. Willingness to integrate into the host society and the semesters a professor had spent working and living in the host country had no influence on their study effort.

To test whether participants who showed higher language learning aptitude and less work productivity possessed better Korean/Japanese skills to begin with, group comparisons with Mann Whitney *U* tests were conducted between (a) participants with high and low levels of language learning aptitude and (b) professors who display high and low levels of work productivity. No differences in Korean/Japanese proficiency were found among participants reporting different levels of language learning aptitude ( $p=0.06$ ) or those reporting different levels of work productivity ( $p=0.88$ ).

The second regression model investigating *language proficiency* also yielded a number of significant predictor variables:  $F(3, 35)=7.1, p<.001$ , power analysis (Cohen's  $f^2$ )=0.5; see Table 6.

**Table 6:** Results of the linear regression predicting Korean/Japanese language skill level.

	<b>B</b>	<b>Standard error</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>Significance</b>
(Constant)	2.42	0.42	5.75	0
Good language learner	0.92	0.25	3.69	< 0.001 ***
Number of foreign languages learned	-0.36	0.11	-3.32	0.002 **
Weekly study hours	0.11	0.05	2.22	0.03 **
Perceived need of local language	0.29	0.25	1.15	0.26

N=39,  $R^2 = .38$

Here, better language learning skills, a high number of foreign languages spoken at an intermediate level, and more weekly study hours were predictors for good Korean/Japanese proficiency. The perceived need to know the local language to navigate through daily life in the host country did not contribute to language proficiency. It is noteworthy that this model is characterized by less power (power analysis=0.5,  $R^2 = .38$ ) than the study effort model (power analysis=0.9,  $R^2 = .44$ ).



### 4.3 Qualitative results

The answers to the question of what constitutes the greatest obstacle to investing more time and achieving a higher proficiency in the host country language can be classified into eight distinct categories (ordered according to most frequently named reasons, see total number of mentions in brackets):

- (a) Lack of time (due to personal and professional commitments) (36)
- (b) Language is considered too difficult to acquire the level that is necessary for work and social life (11)
- (c) Lack of opportunity to practice with native speakers (11)
- (d) Personal reasons: I don't want to learn the language; I am not motivated or disciplined enough to learn the language; I am a bad language learner (11)
- (e) Lack of institutional support or encouragement (10)
- (f) Language skill is not considered necessary or important; there is no benefit to learning the language (7)
- (g) Suboptimal language pedagogy in classes (5)
- (h) High cost of language classes (3)

In the following section, the statistical results from the regression analyses will be discussed and the findings stemming from them will be put into context with the help of the qualitative answers from the participants. First, the results concerning *study effort* will be discussed; next the results concerning host country *language proficiency* will be the focus.

## 5. Discussion

The aim of the present study was to investigate the state of local language proficiency of expatriate faculty working in Korean and Japanese higher education and determine which factors can predict better linguistic integration of foreign-born professors into their host countries. Although research on expatriate faculty at East Asian universities has been growing over the last decade, the topic of sociocultural and linguistic integration has remained underrepresented (Zhang et al. 2018).

The present study identified a number of predictors that can help anticipate how well expatriate faculty learn the Korean or Japanese language and how much study effort they put into doing so. The findings are discussed in detail below and embedded into the larger context of cultural adjustment and career prospects for expatriate professors in Korean and Japanese higher education. Results are based on a small sample size and should thus be considered preliminary.

Results of the Korean sample clearly demonstrate Korean language skills below average, but participants showed a tendency to improve with time spent in Korea. The average time people had been in Korea was more than seven years, yet 50% of the respondents reported their Korean proficiency as consisting of basic knowledge of useful phrases, not good enough to have actual conversations with people. Whether someone had good Korean skills was predictable using the known contributors to language learning: being a good language learner and having learned more than two foreign languages to an (at least) intermediate level as well as investing more weekly study hours. Unsurprisingly, personal predisposition for language learning plays a major role for learning success. Lack of language learning experience and skill makes it all the harder to learn a language like Korean that is typologically different from English, the native language of the sample, resulting in relatively low proficiency even after many hours of instruction.

According to the Language Difficulty Ranking of the Foreign Service Institute of the United States (a government agency for training diplomats and employees in foreign affairs),

Korean is in the category of “exceptionally difficult for native English speakers“ and takes around 2200 hours (or 88 weeks) to reach medium proficiency in the language (U.S. Department of State 2018). Proficiency improved slightly with years a participant had been working in Korea: to get from *basic knowledge of useful phrases* (average time in Korea approximately six years) to being able to *have short and simple conversations with Koreans* (average time in Korea ten years), about four years can be estimated; it then takes another two years on average to get to being *confident talking with colleagues and others in Korean* (average time in Korea twelve years).

Overcoming learning difficulties that result from linguistic differences between the native language and the target language can be a challenging and time-consuming task (Luef & Sun 2019). While increased exposure to a linguistic environment (living in the host country) is undoubtedly an important facilitator in the second language learning context and, in particular, for adult learners of a new language (Freed et al. 2004), learning progress can be slow and ultimately demotivating for learners. As one participant said:

*I have taken night classes [for six hours] a week, a simple class for faculty (two hours a week), and done intensive language exchanges for two summers. Even so, I have not quite reached the point at which I can truly gain fluency like I have in four other languages.*

Weekly study hours also contributed to overall language proficiency. Adult language learners often benefit from self-study and, in the age of electronic/mobile language learning, self-directed learning has become increasingly useful, especially among people lacking the time for formal instruction (Luef et al. 2018, Luef et al. 2019).

The perceived need to learn the local language had no impact on actual language skill of the expatriate academics surveyed. The majority of participants stated that host country language skills are essential for working and living in the host country; however, this perceived urge to learn did not translate into better language skills. Participants recognized the importance of learning Korean/Japanese but frequently justified their insufficient language proficiency with learning difficulties due to linguistic distance between English and the local East-Asian language. One participant lamented:

*...never reaching the level... where meaningful conversations can be made.*

...While another stated:

*There is no career benefit to Korean proficiency below native level.*

Language proficiency was higher in the Japanese sample, which differed from the Korean sample in two important ways: professors working at Japanese institutions reported better overall language abilities but fewer weekly study hours. These findings can be reconciled with the assumption that more expatriate academics arrive in Japan with previously acquired Japanese language skills, which is supported by the fact that a high number of them have graduated from Japanese universities (Huang 2017). In addition, local language proficiency may be considered more important for Japanese hiring practices, since Japanese scholars have often been trained at Japanese institutions. Contrarily, a large majority of Korean professors have been educated abroad (frequently the United States or Europe) and thus may create a more multilingual work experience in their departments. Generally, for learners who have reached an intermediate proficiency level in the local language there may be fewer incentives to continue their language studies. As one participant pointed out:

*I've reached a level where I can do most of what I want to do in Japanese, and so I am not motivated enough to do more.*

While Japanese ranks with Korean among the most difficult languages to learn for native English speakers (U.S. Department of State 2018), it seems that American professors hired in Japanese higher education come with some level of Japanese language experience. A higher percentage of the Japanese sample reported having an ethnic Japanese family member (=60%) than the percentage of the Korean sample having an ethnic Korean family member (=40%). Family ties to a host country obviously foster cultural integration, including language learning. Huang (2017) explains good Japanese language skills among the expatriate faculty in Japan as related to their more positive career outlooks and the fact that expatriate professors can plan for a successful academic future in Japan.

Concerning study effort, good language learning aptitude and lower work productivity were the main predictors for high study effort, whereas time spent in the host country and willingness to integrate into the host society did not factor into increased study effort. It stands to reason that more able language learners can maintain study motivation for longer and will invest increased effort into learning the local language. It seems reasonable to assume that time spent in Korea/Japan and willingness to integrate into the host society would lead professors to set more time aside for studying the local language; however, the reality of working at an East-Asian university may prove too demanding in terms of research productivity so that language learning does not rise to a high priority. As a matter of fact, work productivity was negatively correlated with study effort, and the less time a respondent spent working, the more time she or he spent studying language. Language learning thus seems to come at the cost of work productivity and ultimately career goals, leaving many expatriate professors with the decision between advancing their academic career or furthering their cultural integration into the host country. As one participant noted, there is also a noticeable “lack of importance placed on (expectation of) Korean language ability”, leading expatriate faculty to consider language study as less important than their academic work.

The overall study effort as shown by both the Korean and Japanese sample was modest. While the majority of respondents had attended Korean classes for an average of 31% of their time in Korea (however, 25% of low-proficiency learners had never taken a class), people spent an average of 1.6 hours per week studying. Among professors in Japan, 19% of respondents had attended Japanese classes during their employment period, and the average time spent studying Japanese was 1.3 hours per week. Possessing better overall language proficiency, the Japanese sample would be expected to invest less effort.

The findings from the qualitative part of the study can help put the statistical results into the appropriate context. Respondents from both countries explained their low study efforts primarily by time constraints and difficult work-life balance that leaves little time for activities beside work and family life, with participants stating that the most severe problems associated with studying Korean/Japanese are

*...finding necessary time and energy. Our jobs (and in my case, my marriage) demand a lot of both.*

*Between work, family, physical fitness and church, it's hard to have the time to learn Korean language and culture as I would like.*

Pressure to publish in high-profile journals (Lee & Lee 2013) and engage in service work other than teaching and research is omnipresent for expatriate faculty at Korean and Japanese universities and a requirement for promotion at many universities, forcing professors to prioritize their careers.

*Finding the time to study Korean is the biggest challenge given the pressures placed on international faculty to publish, publish, publish.*

*Time needed to [study Japanese] would otherwise detract from the fulfilment of professional responsibilities/expectations.*

Difficulty in learning Korean/Japanese as a native English speaker and the long time it takes to reach an intermediate level, together with a lack of opportunities to practice the new language (many Koreans/Japanese prefer to speak English to their foreign-born colleagues) were named as major reasons for not possessing better host country language skills. In addition, personal reasons, including having no interest in or lacking motivation/discipline to study the Korean or Japanese language, were mentioned frequently to explain low study effort. Many expatriate professors complained about the lack of institutional support or encouragement from their university. Partial teaching relief and financial support were cited as crucial factors that could help expatriate academics with language learning.

In explaining their low study effort, participants also mentioned the lack of suitable Korean/Japanese classes and teaching pedagogy.

*Most Korean classes are designed for 20-somethings or housewives from [South-East] Asia or Russia.*

*The teaching method is arcane. They focus too much on grammar rather than communicative Korean. Need to develop a better system for adults who are 30 plus.*

*Textbooks seem to be mostly held over from the '80s and focus too much on business Japanese.*

In addition, the English language was described as ubiquitous in Seoul, providing another discouragement to foreigners who want to learn the Korean language.

*Korean people are generally unwilling to speak... Korean slowly. ...They always speak English, no matter how many times I ask them to speak Korean so I can practice.*

Here, a difference arises for participants in Japan, where English proficiency is less widespread, forcing foreigners to learn the Japanese language (Yamao & Sekiguchi 2015). Nonetheless, some participants reported a tendency to be addressed in English: “many Japanese want to speak English to us instead of Japanese”.

One comment appeared multiple times in the questionnaires: Korean/Japanese skills represent *non-transportable assets*. Several respondents echoed the sentiment that learning Korean would mean “giving up time from either family or career to learn something which is time intensive and... doesn’t help me much if I leave Korea”. Similarly, one respondent mentioned “Korean, being a language isolate; [it] doesn’t offer the opportunity to use it in a number of places”. Korean and Japanese do not belong to the so-called *global languages* defined as having a large number of speakers and a linguistic community not defined strictly along ethnic lines (Chan 2017) or as having an influential Internet status (Ronen et al. 2014). The relative limited use of the two languages globally may contribute to their status as less commonly taught second languages in North America (though both have become more popular in recent years), making it less likely that North American academics would be familiar with them from second-language instruction prior to arrival in Korea or Japan.

This study focused on expatriate faculty from the United States and Canada; however, the findings may not be restricted to North American English speakers *per se*. While there is

agreement that expatriate experiences are biased by country of origin (Selmer 2001), there are many common issues that apply to all expatriate faculty equally (see Froese 2012). Language learning, of course, is profoundly impacted by one's native language. Expatriate professors with native languages that show more resemblances to Korean (such as Japanese) find it easier to become proficient in Korean.

In terms of time that can be allotted to studying the local language and the factors that drive study effort, large similarities between different nationalities can be assumed. Academic life in the Korean and Japanese tenure-track systems is stressful, especially during early career stages, as promotion is highly dependent upon publications in internationally indexed journals, which are tedious and hard to produce. Any available time will thus be used to work on career-oriented activities, leaving little time for pursuing activities that do not directly contribute to career success. The fast life in academia, characterized by high job insecurity (evidenced by short work contracts and high job fluctuation) means that people have to decide whether it is worth investing time and effort gaining access to a culture when it is all but clear if they will be able to hold onto their jobs (i.e., get contract renewals or promotions).

## 6. Conclusion

The present study investigated the host country language skills of expatriate academics from English-speaking North American countries in Korea and Japan. Specifically, predictors for language proficiency and study effort were sought. It was found that language proficiency was mainly determined by the language learning aptitude of participants and the weekly study hours devoted to learning Korean/Japanese. Increased study effort could also be predicted by good language learning aptitude in combination with decreased work productivity.

The results of the present study suggest that local language skills of North American expatriate faculty at Korean and Japanese universities vary by country. Even though the present study was based on a small sample size and the findings should therefore be considered preliminary, the results are well within what would be expected based on previous literature: personal aptitude and attitude toward language learning is highly predictive for both study effort and language proficiency. In addition, less work productivity and thus fewer working hours mean more time for language study.

Learning the local language of the host country is essential to avoid the creation of "social ghettos" of expatriate faculty with compatriots. The results of the present study indicate that North American expatriate professors in Korea and Japan are largely confined to an English-speaking enclave. To exit this enclave, increased efforts to learn the local language are necessary; but the obstacles remain high, as personal disposition largely dictates language learning success, and increased study effort comes at the cost of work productivity (and thus career objectives).

It might not be a realistic goal to expect North American expatriates (in academia as well as the corporate world) to be able to invest a lot of time and reach high proficiency in a previously unfamiliar East Asian language. Future research should focus on the question of how expatriate professors can further their social integration and maximize their opportunities in the educational systems of their host countries even without high proficiency in the host country language (see e.g. Zhang et al. 2018). Such an approach can certainly contribute to the successful academic internationalization of East Asian higher education.

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