English Teaching, Vol. 77, No. 1, Spring 2022, pp. 21-39
DOI: https://doi.org/10.15858/engtea.77.1.202203.21
http://journal.kate.or.kr

Analysis of Gender Pronoun Errors in Korean Speakers' English Speech

Sooho Song*

Song, Sooho. (2022). Analysis of gender pronoun errors in Korean speakers' English speech. *English Teaching*, *77*(1), 21-39.

Since the Korean pronoun system does not specify gender indication, Korean speakers of English tend to have difficulties when they use English pronouns. This paper explores how absence of obligatory gender marking in Korean affects gender errors in the production of English. Gender pronoun errors made by Korean learners of English were analyzed using recordings of English conversations of seven Korean subjects. Findings of this study revealed that Korean English learners struggled with the use of gender pronouns due to differences in gender pronoun systems between Korean and English. Both gender-neutrality and pro-drop practices do not require Korean speakers to pay close attention to gender factors when using pronouns in their native language, resulting in native language interference. Considering that the Korean language lacks specific gender orientation in its usage of pronouns whereas English requires clear gender specification, findings of this study imply that native language gender concept can influence second language use.

Key words: pronoun errors, third person pronoun, gender pronoun, pro-drop, quasi-pronoun, gender confusion, native language interference, gender-neutrality, cultural schema

*Author: Sooho Song, Professor, Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. P.O. Box 413, Milwaukee, WI 53201-0413; Email: sooho@uwm.edu

Received 31 December 2021; Reviewed 31 January 2022; Accepted 18 March 2022

1. INTRODUCTION

In the foreign language acquisition process, learners often make errors. Among them, pronoun errors are occasionally encountered. According to Callahan (2008), proper usage of pronouns requires knowledge about 'bonding' and 'resolution. 'Bonding' refers to garnering factual information of the antecedent, such as singular vs. plural and/or male vs. female. 'Resolution' denotes applying factual information to the context of communication (Callahan, 2008). If the speaker does not understand these two factors, errors can be made in using pronouns. Common pronoun errors are incorrect use of number (*singular* vs. *plural*), gender (*male* vs. *female*), or animacy (*person* vs. *object*).

Improper usage of pronouns is also common. They include omission (a pronoun is needed but absent) and grammatically incorrect insertion (e.g., *The women she studied Korean* instead of *the woman studied*). Most of these errors do not significantly affect communication. Yet, gender pronoun errors may offend the interlocutor and cause misunderstanding or friction between communicators (Chen & Su, 2011; Conrad, 2020; James, 1998).

Previous studies reported that pronoun errors occur when speakers fail to match gender pronouns properly with their antecedents (e.g., Dewaele & Véronique, 2001; Holmes & Dejean de la Bâtie, 1999; James, 1998; Scholes, 1981). There are two schools of thoughts regarding gender pronoun errors: the straightforward perspective and the complicate perspective. The straightforward perspective (e.g., Dong, Wen, Zeng, & Ji, 2015) asserts that pronoun gender is simple and straightforward as the gender of the antecedent can be easily determined based on its biological nature. Thus, even foreign speakers can accurately guess the gender of the pronoun by using common sense.

The complicate perspective (e.g., Eberhard, Cutting, & Bock., 2005; Khalil, 1985; Slevc, Lane, & Ferreira, 2007), on the other hand, contends that common sense in biological nature is not always applicable to gender pronoun usage because gender orientation varies among different languages and cultures. Typically, gender in a language is determined by both linguistic and non-linguistic elements. To use gender pronouns properly, speakers need to understand two things: (1) how gender information is generated in the grammatical system of each language; and (2) how gender is culturally comprehended and presupposed in each linguistic community.

Grammatical patterns restrain delicate cognitive aspects that are related to each society's cultural schema (Gordon, 2004; Levinson, 2003). Social structures entail specific manners of language that the members of a society use. Thus, cognitive conceptualization of a language heavily depends on the culture with which the person grows up and lives (Slobin 1996). According to Duffy and Keir (2004), gender information is schematized for automatic activation. They argue that the error of gender mismatch implies that the cultural schema of

gender stereotypes in their native language is automatically activated in producing pronouns in a different language (Duffy & Keir, 2004). In other words, second language acquisition process is affected by social and cultural conventions of the native language.

This paper explores the impact of native language gender pronoun systems on using gender pronouns in a foreign language. In particular, by analyzing Korean speakers' gender pronoun errors in English speech acts, I examine how the lack of obligatory gender marking in Korean pronoun system affects Korean English learners' usage of gender pronouns in their English speech. To this end, I analyzed interview data of seven Korean subjects. In the interviews, an English native speaker asked the subjects various questions that require the use of gender pronouns. Then, gender pronoun errors were analyzed.

Joining the debate between the straightforward school and the complicate perspective, the contribution of this study is twofold. First, previous studies mainly focused on examining gender pronoun errors in foreign language usage among European languages, including English, French, German, and Spanish (Antón-Méndez, 2010; Chen, 2004; Chen & Su, 2011; Delisle, 1985; Dewaele & Véronique, 2001; Lemhöfer, Schriefers, & Hanique, 2010). Thus, this study fills the gap in the literature by studying second language learners of English with a very different linguistic background. Second, findings of this study aim to enhance an important contribution to enhancing our understanding of the nexus between cultural expectations and grammatical components, which is important in learning and teaching foreign languages.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Previous Studies on Gender Pronouns Errors by Foreign Language Speakers

There is a consensus in the foreign language acquisition literature that the native language significantly affects foreign language acquisition (Dulay & Burt, 1973; Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982; Felix, 1980; Kellerman, 1995). Pronoun usage is no exception. Past studies have examined gender pronoun errors in foreign language acquisition. Delisle (1985) investigated German pronoun errors by English speakers. Dewaele and Véronique (2001) studied French pronoun errors by English and German speakers. Lemhöfer et al. (2010) scrutinized Dutch pronoun errors by German speakers, and Antón-Méndez (2010) examined English pronoun errors by Spanish speakers. Few studies have investigated Asian learners of English and those that do have focused only on Chinese learners (Chen, 2004; Chen & Su, 2011).

Most of these past studies found that native language influence is one of the main sources

of gender pronoun errors in foreign language production (Truscott & Sharwood, 2004). Truscott and Sharwood (2004) argued that gender pronoun systems vary over different languages due to cultural differences, particularly different orientations on gender concept. Each language has its own unique gender semantic specification, and speakers unconsciously tend to employ the conceptual gender orientation of their native language even when they speak a foreign language, which may cause errors. As a result, the more different the gender pronoun systems of two languages are, the more gender pronoun errors speakers are likely to make.

A language typically has one of the following four types of third person gender pronoun systems: (1) male and female gender pronouns and grammatical gender distinction system between masculine and feminine objects (e.g., French, Dutch); (2) male and female gender pronouns without grammatical gender distinction between masculine and feminine objects (e.g., English, German)[1]; (3) male and female gender pronouns with granting pronoun drop (pro-drop language) (e.g., Spanish, Italian); and (4) only one third person pronoun that infers male for both gender and allows the drop of pronouns (e.g., vernacular Chinese, Korean).[2]

Because of the differences in gender pronoun systems of different languages, we can easily expect native language influence on second language production with respect to the usage of gender pronouns. Previous studies have shown that speakers whose native language has gender pronouns and obligatory requirement of use tend not to make gender pronoun errors in foreign language productions, while speakers whose native language has no gender pronouns and does not require mandatory use tend to have difficulties with using gender pronouns in foreign language production (e.g., Antón-Méndez, 2010; Foucart & Frenck-Mestre, 2012; Kroll & Tokowicz, 2005). As Tokowicz and MacWhinney (2005) note, the degree of correspondence between the first language and the second language determines how native-like the second language performance appears. Blom, Polisenska, and Weerman (2008) argue that differences in grammatical gender system caused an issue to the Moroccan adult second language learners' Dutch gender adjective use.

Vigliocco et al. (2005) claimed that grammatical gender systems play a significant role in perceiving any entities together with human referents. For instance, French and Dutch speakers tend not to have difficulties with using third person gender pronouns in learning English, whereas Spaniards and Italians do make errors (Antón-Méndez, 2010, 2011;

[1] Gathercole (1989) called languages with this semantic gender type as "a natural-gender language", contrasting "a grammatical-gender language" like Spanish.

[2] The fourth type of language such as Korean has only one gender pronoun that infers male. Chinese has gender-specific pronouns in writing, but gender tends to be neutralized at the vernacular level. That said, some languages, such as Spanish, have only one third person possessive pronoun although they have both male and female gender pronouns.

[3]. Because of the expression "그녀 *keunyeo*," which means *she*, Lee, Madigan, and Park (2015) note that one can argue Korean has gender specific third person singular pronoun.

Foucart & Frenck-Mestre, 2012). These findings imply that foreign language learners whose native language requires specific gender indication in pronoun usage have a gender pronoun schema that can be applicable to foreign language learning, but speakers whose native language does not have that kind of system in their mindset tend to struggle (Duffy & Keir, 2004).

More recent studies on gender and language echo that the use of gender vocabulary is closely connected to social norms. In a study on the Japanese dialects, Ren (2019) explored how different conceptualizations of masculinity are associated with their vocabularies, which impact the understanding and the use of those words. Analyzing corpus data in Chinese media, Yating (2019) studied how Chinese media discourse patterns depict women over 27 as 'left-over women' who contravene social norms on gender and age. Eckert (2019) also claimed that grammatical and semantic systems are broadly connected to their referential meanings as well as socioindexical meanings. In other words, the use of grammatical gender is closely related to their social evaluation. In addition, Everett (2011) claimed that the male gender pronouns such as he, him, or his tend to be used as the default gender when a referent's gender is not clear in English.

Another cause of gender pronoun errors in foreign language speech is pronoun omission permitted in the native language. Speakers whose native language allows pronoun-drops tend not to pay attention to the case and gender of the antecedent when they use third person gender pronouns. Antón-Méndez (2010) empirically corroborated this assertion in her study of Spanish learners of English. Since Spanish permits omitting nominative pronouns based on the context, Spanish learners of English tend to struggle with using third person gender pronouns in English.

Despite a plethora of studies on gender pronoun errors, there are a limited number of studies that have investigated Asian ESL learners' gender pronoun errors, and a significant majority focused on Chinese learners of English making errors in using gender pronouns (e.g., Dong et al., 2015; Dong & Jia, 2011; Xu, Jiang & Zhou, 2013). According to Dong et al. (2015), Chinese learners of English tend to have difficulties in using gender pronouns because the Chinese language does not distinguish the case of pronouns based on gender. "Ta," a third person pronoun in Chinese, is used for all third person pronouns regardless of their case or gender. Thus, Chinese speakers are not likely to pay attention to the gender of the antecedent in using pronouns. This argument has been empirically supported. For instance, Chen (2004) compared gender pronoun error ratio among Chinese, Japanese, and French speakers and found that Chinese learners of English made the highest rate of errors with 17.65 percent, while Japanese and French showed 4.2 percent and 0.92 percent respectively. Dong et al. (2015) reaffirmed the findings of Chen's (2004) study later.

Although native language influence is a major source of pronoun errors in foreign language usage, not all pronoun errors can be explained by comparing the native language

and the target language. For instance, Spanish learners of English are expected to make more pronoun omission errors than gender related errors given that Spanish allows pronoun drops while English does not. However, Antón-Méndez (2010) reported that Spanish learners of English tend to make more gender pronoun errors than pronoun omission errors. Moreover, they tend not to make errors if the head noun's gender is male, implying the default gender is male (Antón-Méndez, Nicol, & Garrett, 2002). In other words, further studies on gender pronoun errors are required to understand the various types of pronoun gender errors.

2.2. The Korean Pronoun System

Korean pronouns are unlike English, which has gender specifications as in "he" or "she" to be utilized obligatorily in discourse (Kim-Renaud, 2009). Everett (2011) noted that Korean uses epicene pronouns that specify gender factor in a third person pronoun.

Any female person stated in a previous sentence is indicated by "she/her/hers" when she is referred to again. The Korean language does not have gender characteristics in its grammar like French or Italian. Nouns have no systematic indication of grammatical gender, either. The concept of gender is only based on the semantic meaning of biological gender in the Korean language. There are no separate pronoun words for different cases. Their cases and grammatical functions are indicated by particles following the pronouns. Instead of putting the specification in semantic gender, Korean pronouns are differentiated by the perception of social relationship. A unique feature of the Korean language in pronoun usage is that it has hierarchical distinctions in third person pronouns. Table 1 describes the comparable pronoun systems in Korean and English (Sohn, 1999).

TABLE 1

Comparison of Pronouns in Korean and English

Pronouns		Korean	English
1st person	plain sg/pl	나 *na*/우리 *wuri*	I/we
	humble sg/pl	저 ch*eo*/저희 *cheohuy*	
2nd person	plain sg/pl	너 *neo*/너희 *neohi*	you/you
	polite sg	댁 *taek*/*댁*들 *taek-dul*	
	blunt sg/pl	당신 tangsin/당신들 tangsin-dul	
	intimate sg	자기 *chagi*	
3rd person	sg/pl	그 *ku*/그들 *ku-dul*	he/they
	deferential sg/pl	그 분 *ku-bun*/그 분들 *ku-bun-dul*	
	familiar sg/pl	그 사람 *ku-saram*/ 그 사람들 *ku-saram-dul*	
	blunt sg/pl	그 이 *ku-i*/그이들 *ku-i-dul*	
	fem sg/pl	*그녀(여자) *ku-nyeo*/ 그녀(여자)들 *ku-nyeo-dul*	she/they
	inani sg/pl	그것/그것들 *kukeot/ku-keot-dul*	it/the

As shown in Table 1, Korean has various levels of pronouns to show modesty or politeness. Although various expressions are used based on the case and number of the antecedent, gender is not a main factor in selecting Korean pronouns. The relative social status of the interlocutor is the main factor in determining Korean pronouns. Sohn (1999, p.107) notes that Korean pronouns show "relative social hierarchy between the speaker and the addressee."

There are three perspectives concerning third person singular pronouns in Korean. The first perspective posits that Korean has only one type of third person singular pronoun without gender specification (Kim-Renaud, 2009; Lee, Madigan, & Park, 2016; Sohn, 1999). The basic form of the third person singular pronoun is '그 *ku* (that)." This pronoun is combined with other nouns to indicate the characteristics of the antecedent. For example, '그 사람 (ku-salam)," "그 이 (ku-i)," and "그 분 (ku-pun)' indicate the social status of the person referred to (Sohn, 1999, p. 207). Kim-Renaud (2009) calls this form of pronoun system "a quasi-pronoun" in spite of agreeing that 그 (ku) is the only third person singular pronoun in Korean that is mostly used in fiction rather than daily conversations.

On the other hand, the second perspective (Song, 2005) contends that Korean has multiple third person pronouns that are made up of demonstrative words such as 그 (that), 이 (this), 저 (that) with bounded nouns including 사람 (person) or 여자 (woman). These pronouns have specific references concerning the antecedent.

In contrast to the aforementioned perspectives, the third perspective (Yeon & Brown, 2011; Lee & Ramsey, 2000) asserts that in principle Korean has no designated third-person pronoun because Koreans use '그 사람 *ku-salam*' and '그 분 *ku-pun*' for 'that person' or 'this person.' The pronoun '그 *ku*' functions as a non-gendered third person pronoun, which is the demonstrative pre-noun. The pre-noun is used combined with bounded nouns: '그 *ku'* is pre-noun and '분 *bun*' is the bounded noun.

Although there is no consensus regarding the third person singular pronoun in Korean, all Korean language scholars agree that Korean has no third person female pronouns despite the existence of the expression '그 녀' meaning "that woman." This expression is hardly used in normal conversations. The only case this expression is used is when English texts are translated into Korean. For example, "that woman" may be translated into '그 녀' *ku-nyeo*' (Yeon & Brown, 2011). Unless the gender of the antecedent needs to be specified, '그 사람 *ku-salam*' or '그 이 *ku-I*' meaning 'that person,' both of which are gender-neutral expressions denoting humanity, are commonly used in daily conversations for the third person regardless of gender.[3]

Although these terms are gender-neutral in principle, they refer to male in practice. Cho (2006) argues that many Korean words seem to be gender-neutral, but typically "the

[3]. Because of the expression "그녀 *keunyeo*," which means *she*, Lee, Madigan, and Park (2015) note that one can argue Korean has gender specific third person singular pronoun.

unmarked generic terms imply male" (p. 119). When female gender needs to be specified, a gender-marking word is added. For example, '의사 *euisa*' means medical doctor without gender specification. Yet, it implies male doctor as there is no word like '남 *nam* (male)-의사 *euisa* (doctor).' To indicate someone is a female doctor, they put '여 *yeo*' (female) before '의사 *euisa*' to make it '여의사 *yeo-euisa*' (female doctor). When the term '여 *yeo*' (female) is used before other nouns, they tend to downgrade the person referred to. For example, '여기자 *yeo-kija*' (female reporter) or '여류 작가 *yeolyu-jakga*' (female writer) tend to imply that they are inferior to their male colleagues. Because of this cultural implication, Korean people prefer not to use the term '그녀 *ku-nyeo* (that woman or she)' in their speech (Lee et al., 2015). Cho (2006, p. 119) argued that the Korean language shows the society's traditional downgrading of the female gender coming from Confucius ideology. Confucius philosophy in Korea had an element of male superiority. Thus, only males became representatives of the people in society, and women were expected to be submissive to men. The old saying "If the hen (symbolizing woman) crows, the family falls to ruin," well represents the male-dominant aspect of the culture.

Another feature of Korean pronouns that needs to be noted is that the subject or object can be dropped in Korean sentences if interlocutors understand who they are talking about. Given that Korean is a high-context language, Korean people often omit pronouns without mentioning the antecedent repeatedly. Instead, they use the name and title of the person they refer to. As a result, the gender of the antecedent is not important to Korean interlocutors. In fact, in Korean discourse, omitting the pronoun is more natural than repeatedly referring to the antecedent with pronouns.

In summary, there are three differences between the third person singular pronoun systems of Korean and English. First, the male-dominant aspect of the culture is embedded in Korean language usage whereas English has no gender discrimination. Second, since Korean is a high-context language, it allows dropping of the subject or object as well as pronouns while English does not. Third, English has gender and case specific third person pronouns while Korean does not. As Song (2005) wrote, third person pronouns are considered as open-ended bodies in Korean.

3. METHODS

3.1. Subject Information

This study utilized the data collected from interviewing seven Korean learners of English. The number of subjects included in the study is limited because it involves an interview that lasts 30-40 minutes. As a result, people often refused to participate in the study. That said,

the objective of this study is analyzing gender pronoun errors of second language learners. Thus, the number of subjects included in the study is not critical as long as gender pronoun errors are displayed in the obtained data. All Korean subjects are students working on their graduate degrees at a university in Texas, the United States. When the interviews were conducted, all of the subjects had lived in the United States for at least two years. They all began to learn English in the 7th grade in Korea as a foreign language. Since English education in Korea emphasizes grammar and translation, they had limited opportunities to speak English with native speakers before they came to the United States.

3.2. Data Collection Method and Empirical Analysis

There are three different types of data collection method used in studying gender pronoun errors in language learning: 1) self-paced reading (e.g., Dong et al., 2015); 2) naming pictures to use noun phrases (e.g., Lemhöfer et al., 2010); and 3) asking questions intended to elicit gender pronouns (e.g., Antón-Méndez, 2010). Data collection method employed in this study is similar to Antón-Méndez's (2010) as I expect optimal result from data collected from free conversation instead of reading scripts or naming pronouns. There are two steps in my data collection process. First, a list of questions was prepared requiring subjects to use third person singular pronouns to answer the questions. Second, a native English speaker interviewed the Korean subjects. The interviewer is a PhD student in linguistics. The native speaker was hired for two reasons: 1) to make sure the interviewer is a native speaker and interviewees are foreign learners; and 2) to create an interview environment that these subjects normally encounter in daily life in the US.

The interview started with the native speaker asking a question to the subject based on the questionnaire (The questionnaire can be found in the appendix). After the first question, the dialogue was carried on according to the interviewee's response. Once the dialogue stemming from the first question ended, the interviewer moved on to the next question. The interview continued until all questions had been asked. All interviews lasted 30-40 minutes. The overall time for each interview was controlled so that the contact time would not impact the number of the errors. All the interviews were recorded for analysis. In the analysis, the recorded interviews were transcribed and the number of errors each subject made were counted. Error count includes gender specific pronouns and other pronoun usage errors.[4] Finally, the rate of errors by dividing the number of errors was calculated by the total number of obligatory use of pronouns.

[4] After the interview, I asked the subject if they were aware of the mistakes they made in using gender pronouns.

4. RESULTS

Four subjects made third person gender pronoun errors while the other three had no difficulties using gender pronouns. The subjects who made errors showed a tendency to mix up "he" and "she" and incorrectly used them. To see the relationship between the period of stay in the US and gender pronoun errors, the period of stay for each subject was checked before the interview. It was found that all of the subjects who struggled with gender pronoun usage have been in the US for less than three years, while those subjects who had no difficulties using third person gender pronouns have been in the United State for at least four years. The results indicated period of stay in the US is closely associated with the command of third person gender pronouns. The analysis of all gender pronoun errors of the four Korean subjects are reported in Table 2.

TABLE 2

Third Person Gender Specific Pronoun Errors by Korean Subjects in English Speech

		Subject A	Subject B	Subject C	Subject D
3rd person singular male	Total obligatory occasions	21	19	17	20
	Correct use	12 (57%)	10 (55%)	11 (64%)	12 (60%)
	Error/confusion	0	0	0	1
3rd person singular female	Total obligatory occasions	25	21	19	24
	Correct use	9 (36%)	7 (25%)	8 (53%)	9 (38%)
	Error/confusion	4	3	4	2
3rd person plural	Total obligatory occasions	4	3	4	5
	Actual use	4 (100%)	2 (66%)	3 (75%)	4 (80%)
1st person singular	Total obligatory occasions	12	9	9	11
	Actual use	10 (83%)	8 (88%)	7 (75%)	10 (90%)

In Table 2, the numbers in the "total obligatory occasion" denotes the number of occasions that require the subject to use some form of pronouns (e.g., third person singular gender pronouns, first person pronoun, or the third person plural pronouns) during the interview. The numbers in the "actual use" indicate the number of accurate uses of pronouns by the subjects. Numbers in the parentheses for 3rd person singular pronouns are produced by dividing the number of correct uses by the number of total obligatory occasions to show the percentage of correct use of gender specific pronouns. Numbers in the parentheses for 3rd person plural pronoun and 1st person pronoun are produced by dividing the number of actual uses by the number of total obligatory occasions. The numbers in the "errors or confusion" show the number of grammatically incorrect pronoun usages (i.e., using male pronouns for female and vice versa). Some subjects seemed to intentionally avoid using third person gender pronouns. The reason is that they used nouns such as "that friend" or proper nouns

such as the names of the third person, which were not counted as errors or confusion because they are not grammatically incorrect. For this reason, the addition of correct and incorrect use of gender pronouns does not equal to number of total obligatory occasions. Since the subjects made no errors in using first person singular and third person plural pronouns, the table does not have the number for "error or confusion" for these categories. Although these subjects incorrectly used third person singular gender pronouns, they had no difficulties using first person pronouns or third person plural pronouns.

For further analysis of the data, I analyzed the characteristics of error patterns individually. From the beginning of the interview, Subject A repeatedly mixed up "he" and "she." As noted earlier, the first question was about the subject's favorite actor and/or actress. When subject A talked about his favorite actress, he repeatedly used "he" instead of "she." For example, Subject A said, "I like her style although he is not really good looking." Subject A also said, "He was in (mumbling and unclear) movies." Subject A correctly used third person male pronouns, but he repeatedly made errors in using third person female pronouns.

There was an interesting error that Subject A made. When asked who his favorite English teacher was, he replied, "It's a professor." As the dialogue carried on, it became clear that his favorite English teacher was one of the English professors he had in college who is a man. Instead of using "he," Subject A used "it." Using "it" for a person was quite surprising given that the subject was a graduate student who lived in the US for two years. Overall, it was clear that Subject A did not have a good grasp of the grammatical rules of third person gender pronoun usage, particularly singular ones.

Subject B also made frequent errors in using third person gender pronouns. For example, when asked what his sister's job was, he said, "He works in the bar." Subject B made the same type of errors repeatedly in his responses to other questions. However, he correctly used third person gender pronouns when he talked about his favorite English teacher, who was a man. These results implied that the default gender in his mindset in terms of pronoun usage was male. Notably, Subject B sometimes corrected his errors, indicating that he was trying to use third person gender pronoun correctly although he was struggling during speaking.

Overall, Subjects A and B showed a similar error pattern of incorrectly using "he" when "she" was supposed to be used. Yet, they made no errors in using "he" for male. In a casual conversation after the interview, Subject B mentioned that he knew he made errors in using third person gender pronouns, indicating his awareness of errors. On the reasons for his difficulties with using gender pronouns, he said the Korean language does not use gender pronouns in daily conversation.

The number of errors made by Subject C was greater than that of Subject A or B. Subject C has been in the US for three years while Subjects A and B have been in the US for two years. The length of the stay in the US did not guarantee less errors in using gender pronouns.

Subject C has been in the US for three years while Subjects A and B have been in the US for two years. Subject C made a similar error to Subjects A and B by using "he" instead of "she." For example, when asked about his mother, he answered, "He is a housewife." In describing his favorite Korean actress, he said, "Just for her good looking. If in terms of how to say... skill ... I don't know. I cannot… He is the good actor ... I just judge by her looking." Incorrect use of "he" and "she" just like Subject A and B occurred when he talked about his favorite English teacher, who was a woman. When the interviewer asked him to describe why she is his favorite English teacher, he said; "Because of his pronunciation and patience. I think he is better than other English teachers I had." Just like Subject B, Subject C also stated that he knew he often made errors in using gender pronouns. He added that he tried not to let that bother him too much.

Subject D also made gender pronoun errors like the other subjects by using "he" when "she" is expected. All these four subjects made similar errors. For Subject D, when he talked about his favorite English teacher who was a woman, he said, "He is the woman teacher ... I like her grammar teaching." Unlike Subjects A, B, and C, Subject D made an error by using "she" where he talked about his brother. For example, in describing his siblings, he said, "My younger sister is ... he is university student. She major art. My younger brother is a student ... I like ... she study hard." Realizing these errors, Subject D sometimes used "my sibling" instead of "he" or "she" in later conversation.

Based on the analysis of the interview data, the findings can be summarized as follows.

1. Overall, Subject A, B, C, and D seemed to try not to use gender pronouns as they did not seem comfortable using them. For example, instead of using "he" or "she," all subjects frequently used other nouns such as "my mother" or "my father" although they had to use the terms repeatedly.
2. All Subjects tried to avoid using third person singular pronouns, particularly female ones, although they had no trouble using first person and/or third person plural pronouns.
3. All Subjects made errors in using third person gender pronouns by using "he" to refer to a woman except one error by Subject D that he used "she" where he was supposed to use "he."
4. After the interview, I asked Subjects A, B, C, and D whether they were aware of the errors in a follow-up question. In responding to this question, they all said they knew they made errors in using gender pronouns right after they spoke. Their responses imply that gender confusion errors are mostly due to "insufficient automatization" (Antón-Méndez, 2011, p. 319). According to Antón-Méndez (2011), "Insufficient automatization" happens when the use of second language features involves the automatic implementation of the

new concept, which is not required in the first language. Theoretically, it may not seem to be difficult to learn, but second language learners tend to struggle with automatic implementation of the new system, resulting in "insufficient automatization." In other words, Korean speakers' gender pronoun errors in English production demonstrate the process of "insufficient automatization" of their native language gender orientation.

5. Given that Subject E, F, and G made no errors in using gender pronouns and the period of their stay in the US is longer than four years, the length of stay in the country of the target language tends to have a positive impact on the command of pronoun use of the target language. There is not much difference between the subjects who made gender pronoun errors and who did not in other factors. The only difference between the two groups is the period of stay in the United States. That is why I concluded that the length of stay made a clear difference in making gender pronoun errors.[5] Ellis (1991) argues that "Both number of years of exposure and starting age affect the level of success" (p. 106). She highlights the positive impact of the period of exposure to the native speaker on the improvement of second language. Collier (1987) also contends that the number of years of schooling in English and 4-8 years of practice in the second language immersion can make a difference in the second language capacity. In addition, Linck, Kroll and Sunderman (2009) reports that English learners of Spanish in immersion setting improved their language ability much faster than their classroom counterparts. Residing in the target language country provides immersion. Thus, it is not surprising that the subjects with longer stay in the US outperformed the subjects with shorter stay.

5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Findings of this study reveal three important theoretical implications with respect to gender pronoun errors. First, the presence (or absence) of separate gender pronouns in the native language system seems to be related to gender pronoun errors in second language learning. The reason is that the presence of gender pronouns in the native language leads to

[5] Another rationale behind my conclusion is that the gender pronoun system in English is not very complicated. Thus, practice can easily improve the usage of gender pronoun. Given that longer period of stay means more practice of using gender pronouns, it is reasonable to assume that there is a positive relationship between the period of stay in the US and command of gender pronouns in English. This finding implies that regardless of the type of errors, the frequency of gender pronoun errors declines as their language proficiency improves.

automatic schema activation. However, if the native language does not have separate gender pronouns, automatic schema activation does not occur, which becomes a source of problem. This theoretical mechanism is applicable to explaining Korean speakers' gender pronoun errors. In other words, differences in gender features between the native and target languages (i.e., presence or absence of gender specific pronouns, gender-neutrality, pronoun drop practices) cause difficulties for Korean learners of English with respect to using gender pronouns. The pro-drop system in the Korean language aggravates the difficulties for Korean learners of English.

To tackle the issue, Lemhöfer et al. (2010) contend that showing pictures of different genders to the target language learners and asking them to describe using gender pronouns in the target language is an effective method to tackle gender pronoun errors in foreign language learning. This can be a way to practice gender pronouns in class to help students avoid gender pronoun errors in using English. The rationale behind this approach is that practice of thinking gender in their pronoun usage is likely to help activate cultural schema pertaining to the gender orientation of the target language. It should be emphasized in teaching that social relations are embedded in using gender pronouns as well (Conrad, 2020).

Second, gender errors in second language usage are often caused by the speaker's conceptual inaccuracies because gender distinction in pronoun usage is related to information encoding at the cognitive level of the learner (Slevc et al., 2007). For example, Chinese speakers hardly practice biological gender information in their usage of pronoun, which results in gender errors by Chinese learners of English. The gender saliency of antecedents generates the mismatch effect for Chinese learners of English (Slevc et al., 2007).

Korean speakers also tend not to pay close attention to the gender of pronouns in their native language usage because of gender-neutrality and pro-drop practices. Due to the lack of native language gender orientation, gender features may not come into Korean speaker's mind when they speak English. In other words, the use of gender pronouns is closely linked to the cognitive awareness of the target language's gender information. As Sera and Berge (1994) reported, grammatical gender system plays a greater role in the subjects' attention to the gender factor than the semantic gender system.

Finally, Korean speakers' misuse of male pronouns for female antecedents may be understood as being stemmed from male primacy in Korean social, linguistic practices. As I mentioned earlier, female pronouns are hardly used in normal dialogues, although they exist. Moreover, female pronouns in the Korean language are implicitly regarded as lower-level expressions, and they are often used to downgrade the status of women. In a nutshell, male primacy in their native language usage may lead Korean people to pay less attention to gender features when they learn a foreign language.

6. CONCLUSION

In this study, I examined the gender pronoun errors made by Korean learners of English by analyzing the recordings of seven Korean subjects to fill the gap in the literature dominated by the study of English by European language speakers. Findings of this study reveal that Korean English learners struggle with the use of gender pronouns due to the differences in gender pronoun systems between Korean and English. Both gender-neutrality and pro-drop practices do not require Korean speakers to pay close attention to gender factors in using pronouns in their native language, resulting in native language interference.

That said, the interference by Korean as a native language on gender pronoun errors is rather complicated due to the relation to cultural schema. Gender distinction in pronouns is related to information encoding at the cognitive level of the learners (Slevc et al., 2007). According to Antón-Méndez (2011, p. 319), the primary cause of gender confusion errors is "insufficient automatization," which occurs "when the use of second language features involve the automatic implementation of the new concept, which is not required in the first language". It is found that foreign language learners often experience difficulties when the learner's linguistic and cultural background is very different from that of the target language. Accordingly, it can be argued that Korean people's cognitive orientation of gender, rather than their habitual transfer of third person pronoun use, plays a significant role in their errors of gender pronoun (see Dong et al., 2015).

Cross-validation of the findings of this study would be desirable given the limited number of subjects included in the study. Despite the limits of the study, the findings shed light on studying gender pronoun errors by Korean learners of English. Given that previous studies heavily focused on European languages with similar cultural backgrounds, I hope this study fuels many future investigations of gender pronoun errors made by foreign language learners who have very different linguistic and cultural backgrounds compared to the target and culture. In addition, examination of gender pronoun errors in the long term will be also advantageous to learn when and how those errors are overcome.

Applicable level: Tertiary

REFERENCES

Antón-Méndez, I. L., Nicol, J., & Garrett, M. F. (2002). The relation between gender and number agreement processing. *Syntax, 5*(1), 1-25.

Antón-Méndez, I. L. (2010). Whose? L2 English speakers' possessive pronoun gender errors. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, *14*(3)*,* 318-331.

Antón-Méndez, I. L. (2011). Gender bender: Gender errors in L2 pronoun production. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research, 39*(2), 119-13.

Blom, E, Polisenska, P., & Weerman, F. (2008). Articles, adjectives and age of onset: The acquisition of Dutch grammatical gender. *Second Language Research*, *24*(3), 297-331.

Callahan, S. M. (2008). Processing anaphoric constructions: Insights from electrophysiological studies, *Journal of Neurolinguistics, 21*(3), 231-266.

Chen, J. Y., & Su, J. J. (2011). Differential sensitivity to the gender of a person by English and Chinese speakers. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, *40*(3), 195-203.

Chen, X. (2004). *Personal referential strategies in Chinese EFL learners' oral narratives - A Constrictive study based on multinational learner corpus*. Unpublished master's thesis, South China Normal University, Guangzhou, China.

Cho, Y-A. (2006). Gender differences in Korean speech. In H. Sohn (Ed.). *Korean language in culture and society* (pp.189-198). Honolulu, HI: University Hawaii Press.

Collier, V. (1987). Age and rate of acquisition of second language for academic purposes. *TESOL Quarterly, 21*(4), 617-641.

Conrad, K. (2020). Pronouns and gender in language. In K. Hall & R. Barrett (Eds.). *Language and Sexuality* (pp.1-18). Oxford, England: Oxford Univeristy Press.

Delisle, H. H. (1985). The acquisition of gender by American students of German. *The Modern Language Journal*, *69*(1), 55-63.

Dewaele, J-M., & Véronique, D. (2001). Gender assignment and gender agreement in advanced French Interlanguage: A cross sectional study. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition, 4*(3), 275-297.

Dong, Y., & Jia, T. (2011). Zhongguo Yingyu Xuexizhe Qianyany Yuxin Bianma: Laizi Yingyu Daici Xingbie Cuowunde Zhengjv (Composition of preverbal message: Gender errors of English pronouns by Chinese learners of English). *Xiandai Waiyu Waiyu (Modern Foreign Languages)*, *34*(3), 279-286.

Dong, Y., Wen, Y., Zeng, X., & Ji, Y. (2015). Exploring the cause of English pronoun gender errors by Chinese learners of English: Evidence from the self-paced reading paradigm. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research, 44*(6), 33-747.

Duffy, S., & Keir, J. (2004). Violating stereotypes' eye movements and comprehension processes when text conflicts with world knowledge. *Memory and Cognition*, *32*(4), 551-559.

Dulay, H., & Burt, M. (1973). Should we teach children syntax? *Language Learning*, *23*(2), 245-258.

Dulay, H., Burt, M., & Krashen, S. (1982). *Language two*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Eberhard, K. M., Cutting, J. C., & Bock, K. (2005). Making syntax of sense: Number agreement in sentence production. *Psychological Review, 112*(3), 531-559.

Eckert, P. (2019). The limits of meaning: social indexicality, variation, and the cline of interiority. *Language, 95*(4), 751-776.

Ellis, R. (1991). *Understanding Second language acquisition*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Everett, C. (2011). Gender, pronouns and thought: The ligature between epicene pronouns and a more neutral gender perception. *Gender and Language*, *2*(1), 133-152.

Felix, S. (1980). *Recent trends in research on second language acquisition.* Tubingen, Germany: Gunter Narr.

Foucart, A., & Frenck-Mestre, C. (2012). Can late L2 learners acquire new grammatical features: Evidence from ERPs and eye-tracking. *Journal of Memory and Language*, *66*, 226-248.

Gordon, P. (2004). I'm tired. You clean and cook: Shifting gender identities and second language socialization. *TESOL Quarterly, 38*(3), 437-457.

Holmes, V. M., & Dejean de la Bâtie, B. (1999). Assignment of grammatical gender by native speakers and foreign learners of French. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, *20*(4), 479-506.

James, C. (1998). *Errors in language learning and use: Exploring error analysis*. London: England: Routledge.

Kellerman, E. (1995). Crosslinguistic influence: Transfer to nowhere? *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 15*, 125-150.

Khalil. A. (1985). Communicative E\error evaluations: Native speaker's evaluation and interpretation of written errors of Arab EFL Learners. *TESOL Quarterly*, *19*(2), 225-35.

Kim-Renaud, Y. (2009). *Korean: An essential grammar*. London, England: Routledge.

Kroll, J., & Tokowicz, N. (2005). Models of bilingual representation and processing: Looking back and to the future. In J. Kroll, J & A. M. B. De Groot (Eds.). *Handbook of bilingualism: Psycholinguistic approaches* (pp. 531-554). New York: Oxford University Press.

Lee, I., & Ramsey, R. (2000). *The Korean language*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Lee, E., Madigan, S., & Park, M. (2015). *An introduction to Korean linguistics*. London: Routledge.

Lemhöfer, K., Schriefers, H., & Hanique, I. (2010). Native language effects in learning second-language grammatical gender: Training study. *Acta Psychologica*, *135*(2), 150-158.

Levinson, S. C. (2003). Language and mind: Let's get the issues straight! In D. Gentner & S. Goldin-Meadow (Eds.), *Language in mind: advances in the study of language and thought* (pp. 25-46). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Linck, J. K., Kroll, J. F., & Sunderman, G. (2009). Losing Access to the native language while immersed in a second language: evidence for the role of inhibition in second-language learning. *Psychological Science, 20*(12), 507-1515.

Ren, Y. (2019). *Masculinity, fatherhood, and beyond: Potential social indices behind Osaka dialect.* Unpublished master's thesis, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon, U.S.A.

Scholes, R. (1981). Developmental comprehension of third person personal pronouns in English. *Language and Speech*, *24*(1), 91-98.

Sera, M. D., & Berge, C. A. H. (1994). Grammatical and conceptual forces in the attribution of gender by English and Spanish speakers. *Cognitive Development, 9*(3), 261-292.

Slevc, L. R., Lane, L. W., & Ferreira, V. S. (2007). Pronoun production: World or world knowledge. *MIT Working Papers in Linguistics*, *53*, 191-203.

Slobin, D. I. (1996). Though and language to 'thinking for speaking'. In J. Gumperz & S. Iverson (Eds.). Re*thinking Linguistic Relativity* (pp. 77-96). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Sohn. H. (1999). *The Korean language*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Song, J. J. (2005). *The Korean language: Structure, use, and context*. London: Routledge.

Tokowicz, N., & MacWhinney, B. (2005). Implicit and explicit measures of sensitivity to violations in second language grammar: An event-related potential investigation. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, *27*(2), 173-204.

Truscott, J., & Sharwood, S. M. (2004). Acquisition by processing: A modular perspective on language development. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition, 7*(1), 1-20.

Xu, X., Jiang, X., & Zhou, X. (2013). Processing biological gender and number information during Chinese pronoun resolution: ERP Evidence for functional differentiation. *Brain and Cognition*, *82*(2), 223-236.

Yeon, J., & Brown, L. (2011). *Korean: A comprehensive grammar*. London: Routledge.

Vigliocco, G., Vinson, D., Paganelli, F., & Dworzynski, K. (2005). Grammatical gender effects on cognition: Implications for language learning and language use. *Journal of Experimental Psychology, 134*(4), 501-520.

Yating, Y. (2019). Media representations of 'leftover women' in China: A corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis. *Gender and Language*, *13*(3), 369-395.

APPENDIX

Questionnaire

1) Do you like movies? If so, who is your favorite actor and/or actress?

2) When did you start learning English? Among all the English teachers you have had thus far, who is your favorite and why?

3) Tell me about your siblings; How many do you have and what do they do for a living?

4) Tell me about your parents; What does your father or mother do for a living?

5) How do you like living and studying in the United States? Have Americans been kind to you?

6) Have you made any friends in America? If you have, tell me about them. What do you do when you hang out with your friends?