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Factors Affecting Immigrants' Host Country Language Proficiency: Focusing on the Differences Between Migrant Workers and Marriage-Migrant Women in South Korea

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Abstract

This study aims to reveal significant factors affecting the Korean language proficiency of immigrants in Korea by comparing the two immigrant groups that constitute the largest sector of the foreign-born population in Korea, migrant workers and marriage-migrant women. A comprehensive survey was conducted on a total of 136 migrant workers and 136 marriage-migrant women. Statistical analysis was followed adopting stepwise multiple regression on six independent variables (length of residence, intensity of target language use, learning time at institutions, age at arrival, linguistic distance, and education level) and one dependent variable (self-reported language proficiency). Results show that length of residence in Korea and intensity of target language use significantly contributed to the Korean language proficiency of marriage-migrant women, whereas age at arrival, intensity of target language use, and education level played a significant role in the development of language proficiency of migrant workers in Korea. Educational implications are discussed, and suggestions are made for expanding language educational support for migrant workers.

Keywords: Korea; immigrants; language proficiency; migrant workers; marriage-migrant women

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Data Availability Statement: *All relevant data are within this paper.*

Introduction

While immigration has a long history at the global level, South Korea (hereafter Korea) began witnessing this phenomenon internally around the beginning of the 21st century. The term "foreigners in Korea" (hereafter immigrants) refers to those who legally remain in Korea for residential purposes pursuant to Korean law (Article 2, Clause 1, Framework Act on Treatment of Foreigners Residing in the Republic of Korea). In Korea, the number of immigrants is increasing every year, and Korean society is gradually turning into a multicultural society. As of 2017, the population of foreign residents was 1,861,084. This figure has consistently grown and currently it constitutes 3.6% of the total population of Korea. The composition of the immigrant population in Korea is as follows: among those who are not naturalized (1,479,247; 79.5%), residents staying for work purposes (hereinafter, migrant workers) occupy the greatest ratio at 495,792 (men: 387,579, women: 108,213); marriage-migrants total 160,653 (men: 30,745, women: 129,908); ethnic Koreans such as Korean Chinese total 276,750; international students total 117,127; and others 428,925. The number of the foreign-born population who are naturalized (mostly for the purpose of marriage) is 169,535 (9.1%); among them are 34,762 men and 134,773 women. Children born from multi-cultural families total 212,302 (11.4%) (Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs, 2018).

It is essential for immigrants to gain an adequate level of local language proficiency since it contributes to successful integration into the host country. Research shows that immigrants' local language skills affect their economic success through job searches (Chiswick & Miller, 1988), the ability to access information (Lee, Lee, Cho, & Jang, 2009), rapport or relationship-building with local families and acquaintances (Park & Park, 2011), and the ability to establish self-identity in a new culture (Park, 2017). Especially in countries such as Korea where the official language, Korean, is the only medium of communication throughout society, it is a priority for immigrants to acquire good language skills. For this reason, it is fundamental to determine the factors that contribute to immigrants' language development to provide them with adequate opportunities to learn Korean. So far, existing studies have largely focused on handling the most urgent issues in the educational context that are necessary to teach Korean to the immigrants that have been flooding into classrooms in the recent three decades. More specifically, the main research interests in Korean language education for foreigners have been teaching methodology (e.g., Moon, 2011), curriculum and syllabus design (e.g., Goo, 2015), cultural education (e.g., Ahn, 2008), the current state of language classrooms (e.g., Park, 2012), teaching linguistic items and relevant error analysis (e.g., Jeon, 2011), and textbooks and material analysis (e.g., Oh, 2015).

In the present study, we compared migrant workers and marriage-migrant women in terms of the determiners of their Korean language proficiency. In the Korean context, the two largest immigrant populations have different immigration motivations and receive distinctive immigrant policy support (Kim, 2015; Kong et al., 2010), which will be described in the following section. The comparison of determinants of language proficiency between the two groups will specifically show how the different circumstances affect the development of their Korean language proficiency and what kind of support each migrant population needs to gain good language ability. Very few such surveys have been carried out concerning the determinants of immigrants' Korean language proficiency. The only research published on a related topic in the Korean context is Hwang (2016), which examined sources of the local language abilities of marriage-migrant women.

In Korea, however, migrant workers form the largest group within the foreign-born population. They are sometimes misperceived as causing problems in Korean society (Choi, 2007; Han, 2003), thereby hindering social integration. These social circumstances emphasize the necessity to integrate them into

our multicultural Korea, where appropriate language-related educational support might be a priority to be considered. Furthermore, more of the educational support targets marriage-migrant women specifically, excluding migrant workers (Jung, 2017). We believe our research is well-timed given the recent increases of immigrants in Korea. This study aims to identify the factors that affect Korean language proficiency among immigrants in order to design effective and supportive immigrant and language education policies.

Theoretical Background

The characteristics of immigration to Korea and immigrant policies

Before the late 1980s, Korea was more accurately described as a country of emigration (Kim, 2015). The rapid influx of immigrants into Korea during the last couple of decades has mainly been led by three groups of foreign-born populations: migrant workers, marriage-migrant women, and the return of foreign-born/raised ethnic Koreans (Kong, Yoon, & Yu, 2010). Among these three groups, we focus on the first two, migrant workers and marriage-migrant women, because our main concern is the development of Korean language proficiency, which naturally excludes most ethnic Koreans from the analysis whose native language is Korean. The remarkable increase in foreigners in Korea, once considered an ethnically homogeneous society, is attributed to social circumstances that the country has faced during the last three decades.

First, as Korea's economy grew, people avoided working in the so-called 3D (danger, difficult, dirty) industry and the government began to bring in foreign workers to resolve this problem. More specifically, under these circumstances, many small and medium-sized enterprises experienced a lack of local manpower, and in response to this the government introduced the Industrial Trainee System in November 1993. Formally, this system aimed to encourage economic cooperation in the name of technology transfer from Korea to developing countries, but the true intention of this system was to introduce foreign manpower. Currently, foreign workers arrive in Korea under the Employment Permit System that was introduced in 2004 (Kong et al, 2010; Seol, 2017). According to Seol & Ko (2017; cited from Seol, 2017), as of 2017, migrant workers in Korea are from 16 Asian countries including Nepal, East Timor, Laos, Mongolia, Myanmar, Vietnam, Uzbekistan, Indonesia, China, Cambodia, Kyrgyzstan, Thailand, Pakistan, and the Philippines.

Second, marriage-migration is often caused by the movement of a population between countries due to globalization, but in Korea, international marriage takes place mainly among rural unmarried men, who are considered to be past the optimal age for marriage, with women from developing countries who need economic support (Kong et al, 2010; Lee, 2013). This is due to the fact that Korean women are reluctant to marry rural bachelors as their educational backgrounds improve (Seol et al., 2005). Therefore, in the Korean context, marriage-migrants almost always refer to female migrants who have arrived for marriage. For that reason, multicultural families in Korea usually consist of a Korean male and a foreign female spouse (Kong et al., 2010; Lee, 2010). The reason why they move to Korea is to live an economically better life and, more frequently, to economically better support their family at home. Also, many foreign women marry through international marriage brokers (Seol et al., 2005).

The two immigrant groups that are the main concern of our study constitute an increasing percentage of the population and have received considerable social attention. More importantly, policies targeting the two groups have different forms and intentions. According to Kim (2015), the major principles of immigrant policies toward the two groups are assimilation and exclusion.

For marriage-migrant women, immigrant policies pursue assimilation. The purpose of their migration is to become part of Korean families, and the Korean government and related ministries are very receptive to them and provide much support to help them settle down in local society. In addition, they tend to be considered permanent residents of Korea and to be in a central position for the country to become a multicultural society. In other words, multiculturalism in Korea refers to female marriage immigrants, but less to migrant workers (who largely lack governmental support) and male marriage immigrants (Kim, 2015).

On the other hand, migrant workers are a completely different story. The Korean government does not consider migrant workers to be members of Korean society, but it tries to treat them solely from an economic point of view. These individuals work in sectors that Koreans avoid. Specifically, they are usually responsible for unskilled labor required in the manufacturing industry where the working environment is below standard. Also, the principle of equal pay for the same work is not followed, and less wages are paid to migrants than to Koreans who do the same job. What is more inhumane is that laws have been enacted to prevent migrant workers from being accompanied by their families. Based on this view, Korea's immigration policy treats migrant workers as temporary residents, groups returning home upon the expiration of their contract. This perspective naturally does not accept them as members of society and does not view them as objects of integration or assimilation (Kim, 2015). More importantly, although they make up the largest portion of the nation's foreign population and make contributions to the economy, Korea's immigration policy does not provide them with enough opportunities for Korean language and cultural education (Kwak, 2008). Kim (2015) critically describes Korea's immigration policy toward migrant workers as,

> "The basic framework of the Korean government's policy on migrant workers is institutional control and management to improve the efficiency of the migrant labor supply system in response to economic demand, to minimize the costs of the influx of migrant workers to Korean society, and to expand the economic benefits of the country and businesses[i]" (p. 141).

The immigrant policy of Korea aims to prevent immigrant workers from dwelling in Korea after the expiration of their contract period (Kim, 2015). However, contrary to policy expectations, illegal immigrants continue to increase (Kwak, 2008), and the number has risen so much that they cannot be ignored. This means it is time to change the framework for immigrants. A true multicultural society should be able to embrace not only multicultural families but also the cultures of foreigners who have entered Korea through other channels. One way to lay the foundations for such a society can be to strengthen Korean language education for the marginalized population.

Currently, policies for migrants are implemented by various government departments. In the case of migrant workers, the Ministry of Employment and Labor and the Ministry of Justice are in charge. For married-migrant women, ten ministries such as the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family and the Ministry of Justice are in charge (Kim, 2015). As for Korean language education, marriage-migrant women are supported by the Multicultural Family Support Center. They are educated about Korean language and culture as well as being supported in matters of daily life. The Korean language education programs are organized systematically, with various levels of classes and textbooks written in different languages. Also, education may be provided online or through instructors on site. On the basis of the social integration program operated by the Ministry of Justice, marriage-migrant women are exempt from the Korean language test required for naturalization after completing a total of 465 hours at five levels of Korean language courses (Jung, 2017).

Migrant workers are supported by the Ministry of Employment and Labor, which implements the Employment Permit System-Test of Proficiency in Korean (EPS-TOPIK) to test for the level of Korean language ability required to select foreign workers. Migrant workers receive 80 hours of Korean language education in their home country before leaving for Korea (Kwak, 2008). Ahn (2018) points out that the Korean language education program is not properly organized. She further mentions that Korean language education provided before entering Korea focuses on the preparation for the listening and reading test of EPS-TOPIK, and thus it does not help migrant workers gain the communicative skills in Korean. After entering Korea, the Ministry of Employment and Labor provides 20 hours of education for migrant workers, some of which contain Korean language and culture as well as other content related to working in Korea. These secondary classes are less effective in terms of Korean language education (Jung, 2017). Further, even though migrant workers learn Korean in advance to pass the EPS-TOPIK before they come to Korea, the level required by EPS-TOPIK is very low, and it is not considered sufficient for their personal and professional lives in Korea, at least not without problems (Kwak, 2008; Lee, 2016). Cho (2015) also indicates that EPS-TOPIK is evaluating the workers relative to the number of workers required, not necessarily the Korean language ability of workers. Although Korea Support Center for Foreign Worker provides Korean language education, it cannot provide intensive education. Language training for migrant workers falls short in terms of quantity compared to the education provided to marriage-migrant women. In fact, Korean language education for migrant workers is led by the private sector, such as religious and social welfare organizations (Jung, 2017).

Migrant workers and marriage-migrant women are thus in very different social environments with regard to learning Korean, which means that they may need different types of support. Therefore, by disentangling the factors significantly influencing the development of Korean proficiency from those less salient for each immigrant group, it is possible to establish more effective Korean language education policies suited to the characteristics of each group. The next sections of this paper introduce sources of immigrants' local language proficiency and specific research questions, including the variables that need to be considered in the Korean context.

Determinants of immigrants' local language proficiency

There has been extensive research on determinants of immigrants' language proficiency in other countries such as the United States of America or Australia (Chiswick & Miller, 1998; 2007; Chiswick, Lee, & Miller, 2004; 2006; Evans, 1986; Tubergen & Kalmijin, 2009). A review of the existing literature reveals that immigrants' host language proficiency is determined by the interaction of three conceptual constituents. Following Chiswick and Miller's (1998) model of dominant language fluency, the present research will discuss the three constituents and their measurable counterparts especially meaningful in the Korean context.

Economic incentives

Economic incentives such as employment, pay increases, and consumption have been considered significant factors that can influence an immigrant's language proficiency (Chiswick & Miller, 1998; 2001). For example, higher wages are an important factor in the development of language proficiency, as there is more capacity to spend money and time on language learning, and employment generally increases the chances to use the dominant language. However, according to Chiswick, Lee, and Miller (2006), this factor is not easy to measure empirically, and they point out that the visa category is a possible substitute for this variable.

In the Korean context, this economic incentive variable is not readily applicable to the analysis of the sources of immigrants' language skills since the basic assumption of the variable does not correspond to the residence situation of migrants in Korea. Specifically, migrant workers, who represent the largest foreign population, are mainly engaged in simple labor in manufacturing, construction sites, farms, fish farms, and fishing boats (Seol, 2017) and many of their colleagues are likely to be also migrant workers. Also, more than half of the migrant workers live in temporary housing or a building attached to their workplace provided by their employer (A Survey on Human Rights of Migrant Workers cited from Yeo, 2015). In addition, in the case of the manufacturing industries in which migrant workers are engaged, factories are concentrated in a specific area such as Ansan in Korea. Therefore, even if they are employed in a foreign country, they do not necessarily have many opportunities to use the dominant language (i.e., Korean). Marriage-migrant women are also sometimes employed in Korea. Kang, Lee, and Lee (2015) noted that about 60% of marriage-migrant women find employment in Korea. However, more than half of them are not in a full-time position; they are mostly temporary workers (32.6%), day laborers (18.4%), and unpaid family workers (7.5%). Therefore, their immigration is more accurately characterized by incorporation within a Korean family. Even if they do not have a chance to communicate in Korean at work, there are plenty of opportunities for them to receive a significant amount of Korean input and communication in Korean at home. Based on this fact, this study aims to analyze these two contrasting groups of immigrants without including economic incentives as an independent variable.

Exposure to host languages

Just as all other learners acquire language, the dominant method of language acquisition for immigrants is also influenced by the length of time they are exposed to the language (Chiswick & Miller, 1998). Exposure to the local language is measured by data on how long immigrants stay in the area (Chiswick & Miller, 1998). In general, it is expected that the longer the residence time, the longer the exposure time for the language. However, the residence period itself does not always indicate the time of exposure to the local language. Therefore, it may be more accurate to measure the time spent actually using the local language after migration, as also noted in Chiswick and Miller (1998). The time immigrants spend using the dominant language may include not only personal communication time, but also time spent learning the local language at an educational institution. Therefore, the two time units were separately measured in the questionnaire. These three variables, length of residence, intensity of language use in daily lives, and language learning time at an institution are expected to reveal an interesting variation in the language learning of immigrants in Korea in that the two groups who are the main concern of this study are in very different situations, as mentioned before.

Efficiency in host language learning

The last factor considered in language learning is efficiency, which is the factor that determines the degree of language learning or acquisition that is yielded by a given quantity of language exposure (Chiswick & Miller, 1998). For example, it has been found that the earlier an individual starts language learning, the smaller the difference between the target and native languages; and the higher the level of education learners receive, the more they can learn even with the same amount of language input (Chiswick & Miller, 1998). These three variables (age at arrival, linguistic distance, education level) are expected to interact with the degree of exposure of Korean immigrants to the Korean language and the amount of Korean language education.

Recently, Hwang (2016) investigated the factors influencing the dominant language ability of immigrants in Korea. He focused on marriage-migrant women. In his regression analysis, it was found that less frequent use of their native language, more children, more frequent participation in local

gatherings, higher education level, and being employed were significant to the development of language skills. Also, age at the time of data collection (not age at arrival in Korea) and length of residence affected the language ability to some degree, but participation in Korean language education was not effective, ironically.

Our research will enable a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that determine the language abilities of immigrants, including migrant women as well as migrant workers. Also, we tried to increase the suitability of the analysis, including only those variables that are considered to be more crucial in light of the Korean situation among the various variables analyzed in the existing literature.

Research Questions

This paper aims to identify significant factors contributing to the development of immigrants' language proficiency in Korea, by comparing the two largest immigrant groups: migrant workers and marriage-migrant women. Variables considered are (1) length of residence (LOR), (2) intensity of Korean language use (Language Use), (3) time spent learning Korean at an institute (Learning Time), (4) age at arrival (AAA), (5) linguistic distance between immigrants' native language and Korean (Linguistic Distance) and (6) final education that immigrants received (Education Level). The specific research questions of the present study are as follows:

1. Which of the conceptual constituents, between exposure to host languages and efficiency in host language learning, are the main determinants of immigrants' language proficiency in Korea?
2. How could the result of the first research question be integrated into Korean language education for immigrants in Korea?

We hypothesized that the two immigrant groups would reveal different patterns in determinants of Korean language proficiency. The two groups are essentially in different social environments for second language acquisition. While marriage-migrant women are necessarily immersed in the second language environment with abundant input as members of local Korean families, migrant workers receive comparatively less Korean language input since they are more likely to form ethnic enclaves. The specific hypotheses are described below.

Hypothesis on the variables of exposure to host languages

Length of Residence would be a critical factor for marriage-migrant women, whereas it would not be as significant for migrant workers. Language Use or Learning Time would better predict the local language proficiency of the migrant workers. For marriage-migrant women, the time they have spent in Korea may necessarily entail Language Use since they have more opportunities to interact with local Koreans than migrant workers do. For migrant workers, Length of Residence does not necessarily indicate the opportunity or time they have to communicate with local Koreans, which means they are exposed much less to the Korean language. In this context, the actual time they learned and used Korean inside or outside the workplace and accessed Korean mass media would have contributed more to the development of their Korean language ability.

Hypothesis on the variables of efficiency in host language learning

Age at Arrival, Linguistic Distance, and Education Level would not significantly determine the host-language proficiency of either group. The participants in this study, as reflecting the characteristics of immigration into Korean, are fairly homogeneous in terms of the age they entered the country, the

final level of education they received, and their native language. More specifically, they are mostly adult learners of Korean, and their native languages are typically one of the languages spoken in Southeast or East Asia. As for the Education Level, more than 80% of both groups held a bachelor's degree or high school diploma.

Methodology

Participants

Participants were recruited via public organizations that are in charge of supporting immigrants in Korea. As of 2016, there were 39 Korea Support Centers for Foreign Workers in operation across Korea aiming to provide immigrants with support for the EPS-TOPIK, as well as offering employment-related support. These centers are directed and supervised by the Human Resources Development Service of Korea, under the governmental body, the Ministry of Employment and Labor. Also, 219 Multicultural Family Support Centers have been established across Korea to provide support to members of multicultural families for learning Korean, along with interpretation and translation services needed for daily life. The Korean Institute for Healthy Families, under the governmental Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, directs these centers.

Each office was contacted and the purpose of the study was explained. The recruitment document was posted that provided information on how to participate in the survey. Participants were recruited on a voluntary basis. Among the immigrants who voluntarily participated in the survey, 272 people (136 migrant workers and 136 marriage-migrant women) who fully answered the survey questionnaire were selected as final study participants. Among migrant workers, men accounted for 60.3% and women for 39.7%. The age of migrant workers was distributed between 21 and 69, and the average age was 31.08 years (SD=7.398). The age of marriage-migrant women was distributed between 17 and 49, and the average age was 31.5 years (SD=6.842).

Questionnaire measures

This study analyzes a total of seven variables: self-reported language proficiency, length of residence (LOR), intensity of Korean language use, time spent learning Korean at an institution, age at arrival (AAA), linguistic distance between their native language and Korean, and Education Level. All seven variables were measured with the questionnaire. The questionnaire was originally written in Korean, and translated into seven languages (English, Chinese, Russian, Japanese, Vietnamese, Uzbek, and Indonesian). The translated versions were used for the participants who had just arrived in Korea and had difficulty in reading and answering in Korean. Foreign students who were pursuing a MA or Ph.D., majoring in Korean language education, and spoke one of the abovementioned languages translated the questionnaire and reviewed it thoroughly to ensure the accuracy of the translation. Study participants selected the questionnaire in the language that they felt most confident. In case the participant was uncomfortable with all the available languages, a research assistant helped them complete the questionnaire by explaining each question.

Variables tested

A total of six independent variables along with one dependent variable were measured and calculated for the analysis. Details of the measurements are described below.

Dependent variable: **Self-reported Korean language proficiency**

In order to measure the Korean language proficiency of the immigrants, participants were asked what they thought of their Korean ability in four subskills: (a) listening, (b) speaking, (c) reading, and (d) writing. Respondents were asked to choose one answer out of "very insufficient," "insufficient," "okay," "proficient," and "very proficient" The responses were coded by assigning 1 to 5 points, respectively. Cronbach's alpha of the measurement results was 0.925. The average value of the four questions was used as the final variable value.

Independent variables

This study included six independent variables: three variables in the dimension of exposure to host languages such as length of residence (LOR) in Korea, intensity of Korean language use, time spent learning Korean at an institution (henceforth exposure variables), and the other three in the dimension of efficiency in host language learning such as age at arrival (AAA) in Korea, linguistic difference between Korean and other languages, and education level in home countries (henceforth efficiency variables). The variables are described in more detail below.

1. To measure LOR, study participants were asked to clarify the total period of their stay in Korea in years and months. The responses were converted to months and used as variable values.
2. The participants were asked to report the time they spend in their daily lives in terms of three phases: 1) time spent communicating, reading, and writing in their workplaces (for migrant workers) or home (for marriage-migrant women); 2) time spent communicating, reading, and writing outside of their workplaces or home; and 3) time spent using mass media such as TV, radio, internet website, and newspapers or magazines. The times reported for each category, such as communicating at home, communicating outside home, reading/writing at home, reading/writing outside home, etc., were converted into minutes and averaged for each immigrant.
3. To measure learning time, study participants were asked to clarify the period of learning Korean at educational institutions in years and months. For the two groups, formal learning of Korean at an educational institution mainly began after entering Korea. The responses were all converted to months and used as variable values.
4. Participants were asked to report their birth year, and their ages were converted in reference to the year of this analysis, 2017. The AAAs were then calculated by subtracting the surveyed LORs from the converted ages following Stevens (2006).
5. Linguistic distance between Korean and other languages was derived in an indirect way from the distance between English and other languages reported in Chiswick and Miller (2005). Chiswick and Miller (2005) referred to the language scores reported in Hart-Gonzalez and Lidemann (1993) that native English-speaking Americans attained in 43 languages after 24 weeks of instruction. The score ranges from 1 to 3, where 1 refers to the lowest score and 3 the highest score. It was assumed that the lower the score an English-speaking American attained, the more difficult it was for the English speaker to learn the language. For example, native English speakers gained a score of 1 for Japanese and Korean after 24 weeks of instruction while they gained a score of 3 for Afrikaans and Swedish. This implies that the Japanese or Korean languages are more distant from English than Afrikaans or Swedish. Since there is no comparable research that reports on the linguistic distance between languages, we converted and applied the linguistic distance from English to linguistic distance between Korean and other languages. Since Korean and English have been assigned to opposite ends of the scale from 1 to 3, the distance was convertible in a simple way: the

greater the distance from English, the closer to Korean. For example, Russian scored 2.25, which shows that it is quite close to English, which in turn means that it is quite distant from Korean and converted to 1.75.

Table 1 *Linguistic distance of languages and immigrant population with each language*

Language	Linguistic Distance	Migrant Workers (%)	Marriage-Migrant Women (%)
English	1	5 (3.6)	7 (4.9)
Indonesian	2	6 (4.3)	0 (0)
Cambodian	2	38 (27.3)	3 (2.1)
Mongolian	2	2 (1.4)	2 (1.4)
Russian	1.75	12 (8.6)	2 (1.4)
Tagalog	2	18 (12.9)	19 (13.5)
Thai	2	1 (0.7)	2 (1.4)
Uzbek	2	3 (2.2)	3 (2.1)
Kazakh	2	0 (0)	1 (0.7)
Vietnamese	2.5	29 (20.9)	55 (39.0)
Mandarin	2.5	24 (17.3)	39 (27.7)
Japanese	3	1 (0.7)	7 (5.0)
No response		0 (0)	1 (0.7)
N of Total (%)		139 (100)	141 (100)

Note. The total number of native languages of the participants in this study exceeds the number of participants because some of the participants reported they were bilingual. The linguistic distance of these bilingual speakers was calculated as the average value of the two languages.

6. The participants were asked to choose their final schooling from the four choices on the questionnaire sheet: primary school graduation or below (scored 1), middle school graduation (scored 2), high school graduation (scored 3), and college graduation or above (scored 4). For this variable, we used dummy coding in the statistical analyses: primary school graduation or below – Education Level (1)=0, Education Level (2)=0, and Education Level (3)=0; middle school graduation – Education Level (1)=1, Education Level (2)=0, and Education Level (3)=0; high school graduation – Education Level (1)=0, Education Level (2)=1, and Education Level (3)=0; college graduation or above – Education Level (1)=0, Education Level (2)=0, and Education Level (3)=1.

Statistical analysis

Full multiple regression analyses were conducted to determine the significant predictors of the local language proficiency of immigrants in Korea, for migrant workers and marriage-migrant women, respectively, using SPSS 23, each with six independent variables and one dependent variable. This process was followed by stepwise multiple regression analyses to find and compare the best combination of predictors of their Korean language proficiency. The F-test criteria for entering a variable into the model were the probability less than 0.5, and the F-test criteria for deleting a variable from the model were the probability less than 0.6, in our variable selection.

Results

Descriptive statistics

The average, standard deviation, and minimum and maximum values of the two immigrant groups' Language Proficiency, LOR, Language Use, Learning Time, AAA, Linguistic Distance, and Education Level are shown in Table 2 for both groups. The measurements of each subcategory of language proficiency (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) are presented in Table 3. The bivariate correlation analyses are shown in Table 4.

Table 2 *Average, standard deviation (SD), and minimum and maximum values of the variables*

		Migrant workers					Marriage-migrant women				
		M	*SD*	*Min.*	*Max.*	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*Min.*	*Max.*	*N*
	Lang. Proficiency	2.59	0.93	1	5	136	2.74	0.97	1	5	136
Exposure	LOR (mth.)	49.51	41.80	1	244	136	60.43	54.50	1	271	136
Exposure	Language Use (min.)	54.35	70.14	0	324	136	90.05	88.23	0	540	136
Exposure	Learning Time (mth.)	16.26	21.02	0	120	136	21.74	21.62	0	109	136
Efficiency	AAA	26.96	7.05	17.17	68.42	136	26.46	5.85	16.92	46.42	136
Efficiency	Linguistic Distance	2.15	0.35	1	3	136	2.36	0.36	1	3	136
Efficiency	Education Level	3.39	0.74	1	4	136	3.24	0.76	1	4	136

The four subskills of language proficiency were compared between the two groups. As shown in Table 3 below, the two groups have comparable ability in reading and writing but marriage-migrant women reported higher ability in the use of spoken Korean. The difference between the two groups reached statistical significance only for listening ability (t = -2.71, df = 268.99, p = .007).

Table 3 *Measurements of listening, speaking, reading, and writing of the two groups*

	Migrant workers		Marriage-migrant women		t-test results		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*df*	*p*
Listening	2.54	1.22	2.93	1.15	-2.71	268.99	0.007
Speaking	2.41	1.08	2.62	1.09	-1.65	269	0.100
Reading	2.90	1.04	2.91	1.08	-0.12	269	0.904
Writing	2.51	1.03	2.51	1.05	0.06	270	0.954
Korean Language Proficiency	2.59	0.93	2.74	0.97	-1.36	270	0.175

As shown in Table 4 below, in the case of migrant workers, all six variables from the two conceptual dimensions had a significant correlation with Korean language proficiency. On the other hand, in the case of marriage-migrant women, only the exposure variables, LOR, Learning Time, and Language Use, were found to have a significant correlation with Korean language proficiency.

Table 4 *Correlation coefficients of the independent variables with Language Proficiency*

Migrant Workers		Language Proficiency	Marriage-migrant Women		Language Proficiency
Exposure	LOR	0.307**	Exposure	LOR	0.371**
Exposure	Language Use	0.330**	Exposure	Language Use	0.228**
Exposure	Learning Time	0.344**	Exposure	Learning Time	0.285**
Efficiency	AAA	-0.296**	Efficiency	AAA	-0.097
Efficiency	Linguistic Distance	0.251**	Efficiency	Linguistic Distance	0.159
Efficiency	Education Level	0.198*	Efficiency	Education Level	-0.001

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

First, we conducted full regression analyses for the two groups with all six independent variables entered at the same time. The results showed that AAA from the efficiency dimension and Language

Use from the exposure dimension had significant coefficients for migrant workers (p<.05; see Table 5). On the other hand, all of the three variables of the exposure dimension (LOR, Language Use, Learning Time) and one from the efficiency dimension (Linguistic Distance) proved to be significant for marriage migrant women (p<.05; see Table 6).

Table 5 *Full regression model of determinants of language proficiency: Migrant workers*

	Variables	B	*β*	t-value	sig.*p*	VIF
Exposure	LOR	.002	.086	.945	.346	1.450
	Language Use	.003	.254	2.959	.004	1.310
	Learning Time	.004	.098	1.058	.292	1.535
Efficiency	AAA	-.037	-.282	-3.395	.001	1.222
	Linguistic Distance	.140	.052	.622	.535	1.237
	Education Level (1)	.927	.338	1.104	.272	16.648
	Education Level (2)	1.192	.601	1.444	.151	30.680
	Education Level (3)	1.393	.748	1.698	.092	34.426
Full model R^2=.284, F(8, 127)=6.286, p<.001, Adjusted R^2=.239, Durbin Watson=1.766						

Table 6 *Full regression model of determinants of language proficiency: Marriage-migrant women*

	Variables	B	*β*	t-value	sig.*p*	VIF
Exposure	LOR	.005	.266	3.125	.002	1.195
	Language Use	.002	.177	2.184	.031	1.078
	Learning Time	.008	.183	2.112	.037	1.239
Efficiency	AAA	.000	-.001	-.008	.994	1.133
	Linguistic Distance	.474	.175	2.060	.041	1.189
	Education Level (1)	-.646	-.226	-1.175	.242	6.114
	Education Level (2)	-.428	-.220	-.823	.412	11.726
	Education Level (3)	-.426	-.217	-.811	.419	11.800
Full model R^2=.229, F(8, 127)=4.727, p<.001, Adjusted R^2=.181, Durbin Watson=2.035						

We further proceeded by performing stepwise regression analyses for the two groups, respectively. As a result of the stepwise regression analysis on the migrant workers, the best model was obtained at the fifth stage. Learning Time, AAA, Language Use, and Education Level (3) were entered in order from the 1st to 4th stage. However, in the 5th stage, Learning Time was deleted, and the final model included only three variables: AAA, Language Use, and Education Level (3). The variance inflation factor (VIF) was 1.012 for AAA, 1.005 for Language Use, and 1.015 for Education Level (3). There was no problem in multicollinearity, and Durbin Watson was close to 2 (i.e. no serial correlation) at 1.698. R^2 of this final model was 0.243 (adjusted R^2 = 0.226). According to the final model, language proficiency of migrant workers is estimated to be higher when AAA is lower, when Language Use is higher, and when the migrant worker had experienced undergraduate-level education. The size of influence is estimated to be in the order of AAA (β = -0.328), Language Use (β = 0.328), and Education Level (3) (β = 0.202). The information from the final model is given in Table 7. This shows that along with Language Use as predicted to be a significant contributing factor in the hypothesis, two other variables from the efficiency constituents also contribute to their language proficiency. This result implies that their Korean language proficiency is determined in part by their own capacity. This may have resulted from the limited opportunity for them to learn and use the Korean language.

Table 7 *Final stepwise regression model of determinants of language proficiency: Migrant workers*

Variables	B	*β*	*t*-value	sig. *p*	Step Entered	R^2 Change	VIF
AAA	-0.043	-0.328	-4.302	0.000	2	0.070	1.012
Language Use	0.004	0.328	4.317	0.000	3	0.068	1.005
Education Level (3)	0.376	0.202	2.644	0.009	4	0.026	1.015
Final model R^2 = 0.243, F (3,132) = 14.119, p < 0.001, Adjusted R^2 = 0.226, Durbin Watson = 1.698							

Stepwise regression analysis of marriage-migrant women revealed that the best model was attained at

Stage 2. LOR was entered in Step 1, Language Use was entered in Step 2, and there was no further input or deletion of variables. In the final model, the VIF of LOR and Language Use was 1.014, and there was no problem in multicollinearity. Durbin Watson was close to 2 (i.e. no serial correlation) at 2.078. The R^2 of this final model was 0.172 (adjusted R^2 = 0.159). According to the final model, it is estimated that the higher the LOR and Education Level, the higher the language proficiency of marriage-migrant women. The estimated influence size of LOR (β = 0.349) is bigger than of Language Use (β = 0.186). The information for the final model is given in Table 8. The result reveals that on the contrary to migrant workers, marriage migrant women learn the host language mainly through exposure to it.

Table 8 *Final stepwise regression model of determinants of language proficiency: Marriage-migrant women*

Variables	B	β	*t*-value	sig. *p*	Step Entered	R^2 Change	VIF
LOR	0.006	0.349	4.386	0.000	1	0.138	1.014
Language Use	0.002	0.186	2.344	0.021	2	0.034	1.014
Final model R^2 = 0.172, F (2,133) = 13.788, p < 0.001, Adjusted R^2 = 0.159, Durbin Watson = 2.078							

Discussion and Conclusion

This study revealed the sources of immigrants' language proficiency in the Korean context by focusing on the different determinants of two immigrant groups: migrant workers and marriage-migrant women. Investigating these two groups has significance in that the former composes the largest foreign-born population in Korean and the latter is the main concern of immigrant policy in Korea. To determine the factors affecting the development of immigrants' language proficiency, this study tested six potential variables that have been attested in previous research and that were deemed to be most relevant in the Korean context.

The results of stepwise multiple regression analysis show that only three variables explained migrant workers' Korean language proficiency. It was higher when AAA was lower and when Language Use and Education Level were higher. On the other hand, only two variables explained marriage-migrant women's Korean language proficiency, which was higher when LOR and Language Use were higher.

First and foremost, on the basis of these findings, it is necessary to support migrant workers by expanding language learning opportunities. From the analysis, we found that only two variables, the length of residence in Korea and the actual time spent using Korean in their daily life, significantly affected marriage-migrant women's Korean abilities. On the other hand, for migrant workers, the length of residence did not significantly affect their Korean language abilities, but age at arrival, actual hours using the Korean language, and their level of education played a crucial role in the development of their Korean language abilities.

What is noteworthy in this result is that, unlike marriage-migrant women, migrant workers' individual capacity (i.e., "efficiency" according to the term in previous research, Chiswick & Miller, 1998) critically affected their perceived Korean language proficiency. After immigrating to Korea, marriage-migrant women become a member of a Korean family. Although it may vary from person to person, this means that the period in which they live in Korea can be equated with the amount of Korean input they receive. In other words, as shown by the regression result, the main source of Korean language ability for married immigrant women is the length of residence in Korea, and the other factor that can explain the individual differences in their ability is the second significant variable, language use.

However, it turned out that the Korean language ability of migrant workers develops through the interaction of several factors: age at arrival, education level, and actual language use time. This means that it is not easy to acquire a significant amount of Korean input in migrant workers' professional and residential environments, which implies that their Korean language learning is largely based on their learning ability determined by their biological age at arrival and the level of education in their home country. Earlier, we predicted that age at arrival and education level as well as linguistic distance would not contribute to the development of their language proficiency, since the two groups are more or less homogeneous in terms of these three characteristics; they are mostly native speakers of Southeast languages, moderately educated, and are adult learners of Korean who arrived in Korea after puberty. However, unlike our hypothesis, two of these variables, age at arrival and education level, were found to be significant predictors. It is interpreted that the amount language input was so limited that these two variables inevitably affected the results, which emphasizes that migrant workers should be given more input from educational support. According to Lee (2012), migrant workers also hope that the government provides them with more Korean language classes.

Korean language education for marriage-migrant women has a recognized and important function in Korean society since their skills can directly affect those of their children in multicultural families. In addition, language skills have implications for the social adaptation of these children. As of now, there does not seem to be a similar perception for migrant workers' language skills. Considering the current situation, in which the treatment and policies of migrant workers are criticized (Byun, 2017; Yeo, 2015) and the concerns about demographic decline, it may not be long until the country accepts migrant workers as members of the Korean society. It is necessary to secure sufficient time for Korean language and cultural education for migrant workers to ensure their social adaptation and successful integration into society. Although immigrant policies prevent the settlement of immigrant workers, this has not been effective and the number of illegal immigrants has become noteworthy (Kim, 2015 p. 150). Before any improvement of the social system, the integration of society can be facilitated in advance through Korean language education.

Second, the results indicate that a Korean language program that can provide migrant workers with opportunities to participate in communication with more abundant input would be beneficial. As shown in the measurements of subcategories of language proficiency, migrant workers perceived themselves as less proficient in listening and speaking than did marriage-migrant women. Furthermore, the difference in listening ability reached statistical significance as shown in Table 3 in Results. At times, marriage-migrant women arrive in Korea without any background knowledge or ability in the Korean language. Conversely, migrant workers arrive in Korea with at least minimal ability since they prepare for the EPS-TOPIK before leaving for Korea. The differences in the ability of migrant workers and married immigrants in spoken Korean are derived from the difference in their living environment. Given the labor intensity and environment of migrant workers' jobs and current governmental support, the amount of Korean language input that migrant workers receive is assumed to be insufficient. To overcome this lack of spoken input, migrant workers need a more effective educational program, especially a program that can provide abundant input of spoken Korean. For this purpose, it is also possible to arrange for programs where local people gather with migrant workers to participate and learn Korean culture (or migrant workers and local people can learn about each other's cultures) while speaking in and listening to Korean. As indicated in Lee (2012), migrant workers mentioned that they have most difficulty in communicating with their supervisors and Korean co-workers, and with doctors at the hospital, and communication in leisure time. Therefore, it is necessary to consider their workplaces and local communities to reflect the immigrants' learning needs for more systematic Korean language education program. Furthermore, through this, it will be possible to improve communication skills of migrant workers and ultimately improve their quality of life in Korea.

Lastly, it is necessary to develop a government-led language education program for migrant workers. They are learners of Korean for a specific purpose. In other words, even if migrant workers return to their home countries upon contract expiration, they need to be educated in the Korean language that they need at work while they live in Korea. It is especially important to educate them in job-specific Korean because they work in dangerous environments where the workplace is often a site of industrial accidents. Korean education is needed as an effort to prevent industrial accidents among migrant workers and also for their human rights (Lee, 2012). According to previous data, in the workplaces of migrant workers who do not speak Korean well, safety education does not translate properly in their native languages (Kim, 2015). It will not be easy for the private sector, which is currently leading the Korean language education for migrant workers, to devise a systematic Korean language course for migrant workers of about 500,000. It is also necessary to develop a systematic Korean language curriculum along with the expansion of official Korean language education time for migrant workers, which will need to be carried out by the government and led by experts as also pointed out by Lee (2012) and Ahn (2018).

Korean language education for immigrants in Korea has taken a passive and uni-directional approach to learning and teaching based on pre-determined situations and needs of migrants merely considering the broad context of their immigration. However, as shown in the results of different variables significant for each group, it is necessary to first diagnose the migrants' needs and then design course curricula and syllabi based on their specific learning needs, thus making the language education interactive and effective.

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[i] This quotation has been translated from Korean into English.