

## **An Analysis of Student Evaluations of Native and Non Native Korean Foreign Language Teachers**

*Julie Damron, Ph.D.  
Brigham Young University*

### **Abstract**

In an effort to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of native and non-native teaching assistants and part-time teachers (both referred to as TAs in this article), students completed 632 evaluations of Korean Language TAs from 2005 to 2008, and these evaluations were compiled for an analysis of variants (ANOVA). The evaluations were categorized into three groups of TAs: native Korean-speaking female, native Korean-speaking male, and non-native male; non-native females would have been included in the study, but there were not enough non-native female teachers to have a reliable sample. In an effort to encourage more self-examined teaching practices, this study addresses the greatest strengths and weaknesses of each group. Results revealed several significant differences between the ratings of the groups: native female TAs rated lowest overall, and non-native male TAs rated highest overall. The most prominent differences between groups occurred in ratings of amount students learned, TAs' preparedness, TAs' active involvement in students' learning, TAs' enthusiasm, and TAs' tardiness. This study reviews students' written comments on the evaluations and proposes possible causes of these findings, concluding that differences in ratings are based on both teaching patterns associated with each group of TAs and student response bias that favors non-native male speakers. Teaching patterns include a tendency for native (Korean) female TAs to teach using a lecture format and non-native male TAs to teach using a discussion format; for native TAs to have difficulty adapting to the language level of the students; and for a more visible enthusiasm for Korean culture held by non-native TAs. Causes for bias may include "othering" females and natives, TA selection procedures, and trends in evaluating TAs based on language level.

There has long been a debate about whether native or non-native speakers of a particular language should teach that language in the second language classroom. Researchers have attempted, with various methods, to examine the teaching skills of native and non-native speakers in an effort to find a pattern of effectiveness or lack of effectiveness in these two groups. Although research that compares native and non-native English-speaking ESL teachers within the context of the ESL/EFL classrooms is abundant (e.g., Braine, 1999; Davis, 1995; Kramsch, 1995; Edge, 1988; Medgyes, 1994; Paikeday, 1985; Rampton, 1990; Reves & Medgyes, 1994; Samimy, 1997; Seidlhofer, 1996), little work has been done on non-native teachers teaching languages other than English, such as Chinese, Korean or Japanese. This study compares native and non-native speaking Korean foreign language teachers with two purposes in mind. The first is to identify strengths and weaknesses of various foreign language teaching groups. Knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses common to one's demographic will encourage more self-examined, and therefore improved teaching practices. The second objective is to identify possible reasons for any trends that appear in the results.

Despite the fact that relatively little research has been undertaken in the field of non-English foreign language teaching by native and non-native teachers, the research conducted in EFL/ESL may help us identify universal trends. One professor of English, Peter Medgyes, whose native language is Hungarian, identified some of these trends as he spoke from personal experience about the benefits and challenges of being a non-Native English-Speaking Teacher (non-NEST). Medgyes wrote that, as a non-NEST, he was able to be a good role model for learners, was culturally informed, and empathetic to students' needs. On the other hand, he noted that "linguistic deficit" (lack of grammatical knowledge) was the greatest hindrance to non-NESTS. Considering these characteristics, Medgyes concluded that NESTs and non-NESTS "are potentially equally effective teachers, because...their respective strengths and weaknesses balance each other out. Different does not imply better or worse!" (Medgyes,1998).

Other researchers have noted differences in how students and teachers perceive effective teaching. For example, one researcher

showed that when non-native teachers evaluated their own instruction, they perceived “insufficiencies” in their language skills more than their students did, in student evaluations. The comparison of student evaluations with teacher self-evaluations showed that “for instructors who speak English as their native language, speaking ability and enthusiasm are closely linked to self-ratings of teaching effectiveness. Students also value these traits but care more about instructors’ preparation for class” (Bosshardt, 2001).

Whether trends in native/non-native teacher effectiveness carry over into other disciplines remains uncertain. For example, when Jacobs and Friedman used student complaints and evaluations to examine the effectiveness of Foreign Teaching Associates (FTAs) in non-foreign language classes such as mathematics, computer science, physics, chemistry, and engineering, they found that, despite existing cultural differences, students taught by FTAs performed just as well as those taught by native FTAs (Jacobs, 1988).

Using student evaluations to determine teacher effectiveness at the university level has been a common method in much of the research on native and non-native teacher effectiveness. However, this method of teacher evaluation has not been without controversy. Various papers report that student evaluations are unreliable because of systematic student bias. Wennerstrom and Heiser claim that “systematic bias occurs in ESL student evaluations due to ethnic background, level of English, course content, and attitude toward the course” (Wennerstrom, 1992). Their data showed that Chinese (predominantly from the People’s Republic of China), Latin American, Indonesian, and Arabic speaking students, in that order, on average gave higher ratings than Japanese students. Ratings in reading and writing courses were lower on average than those in grammar courses. Students in more advanced levels gave lower ratings on average than those in lower levels. Similarly, the longer the student had been in the program, the lower s/he rated. (p. 281)

Often aware of these trends, researchers are continually working to determine the validity of student evaluations and to improve on existing evaluation methods. One method of determining validity is to measure student evaluations against objective language exams, and then see whether they positively correlate—which they generally do (Feldman, 1989). However, since “objective tests do not

fully measure learning, or how much learning is due to the instructor's influence, [student evaluations] have also been compared to other types of teaching evaluations, including instructors' self evaluations and administrators' evaluations" (Bosshardt, 2001). Feldman analyzed over 40 earlier studies, comparing evaluations completed by instructors, their current and former students, their colleagues, outside observers, and administrators. The instructors' self-evaluations had the highest correlation with evaluations by current students, which may imply that student evaluations of their teachers, which most closely reflect the teachers' own perception of themselves, are more valid and reliable than evaluations done by colleagues, observers, and administrators.

To be able to appropriately apply findings of earlier research to teachers of Korean, this research project attempts to answer these questions:

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of native (Korean) foreign language TAs teaching their native language, Korean?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of non-native (non-Korean) foreign language TAs teaching their second language, Korean?
3. What could account for any trends, and what significance does it have for language teachers?

The project analyzed student evaluations of native and non-native Korean language teaching assistants to identify trends in language teaching and learning in non-English languages. Korean language teaching is an admittedly narrow field in the United States, but conclusions made through research in this area will bring additional insight to the unique skill sets of native and non-native teaching assistants across languages.

### **The Present Study**

This study compared the student ratings of native (Korean) male TAs, native (Korean) female TAs, and non-native (non-Korean) male TAs and non-native (non-Korean) female TAs who assisted in teaching courses in the Asian and Near Eastern Languages Depart-

ment at Brigham Young University. Unfortunately, because of the scarcity of non-native female TAs, the analysis dropped all evaluations of non-native females. TAs for this study team-taught Korean courses with a professor; the professor taught the class on Tuesday and Thursday and the TA had full responsibility for the class on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. All non-native TAs were native English speakers of traditional college age and had all spent at least two years in Korea and were taking upper level Korean language classes at the time of their TAship. All native speaking TAs were students at the university in various degree seeking programs. Their ages ranged from eighteen to thirty-five. All of the native Korean TAs had graduated from high school in Korea. All of the TAs, both native and non-native, had been through a two day training program and attended occasional in-service training meetings throughout the semester with the same professor, but none of them had been through rigorous, formal TA training. The purpose of the study was to determine the strengths and weaknesses of each category of TAs from the perspective of their students. Several of the systematic biases of student evaluations described by Wennerstrom and Heiser (1992) are of little relevance in this research because (1) the students attending Korean language classes spoke English as their first language, and (2) all language classes followed a similar curriculum. However, the systematic bias of students according to language level potentially influenced the student evaluations.

### **Data collection and research design**

The Korean section of the Asian and Near Eastern Languages Department at Brigham Young University distributed “Korean Teaching Assistant Evaluations” at the end of each semester, and all evaluations from 2005 to 2008 were gathered for analysis. The course number, section, semester/year, and TAs’ names were written at the top of each form.

The evaluation first asked students to give an overall rating of the TA, based on a seven-point scale from 1 (poor) to 7 (exceptional). Second, students rated a series of 14 statements according to the extent to which the student agreed with the statement. Students as-

signed each statement a number on a seven-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (very strongly agree). The 14 statements are  
Student learned a great deal.

TA had effective learning activities.

TA had genuine interest in students.

TA kept the student actively involved.

TA was enthusiastic.

TA was well prepared for class.

TA made good use of class time.

TA made helpful evaluations of performance.

TA responded respectfully.

TA motivated by example.

TA started and dismissed class on time.

TA seldom missed class.

TA inspired students to develop good character.

TA was spiritually inspiring insofar as the subject matter permitted.

It should be noted that statement fourteen is specific to Brigham Young University, a private, religious university. The third section of the evaluation asked the students to write comments related to the strengths and weaknesses of their TA.

There were 632 total evaluations from the 4-year period. Students who took the evaluations ranged from freshman to seniors. Many of the upper level students were either Korean majors or minors or were required to take a non-Indo-European language for a different major, such as linguistics. Many lower level students were studying Korean as an elective course, often as a result of an interest in Korean pop culture, their own Korean heritage or because a significant person in their lives was Korean. The total number of students and classes over the 4 years is unknown due to several factors: students filled out the evaluations anonymously; TAs occasionally taught Korean language classes for more than one semester, which makes the total number of participating classrooms unclear; and students in the Korean program often filled out several evaluations over the course of their undergraduate education, making the total number of student participants unclear. The gender of each TA was determined by specification in comments (he/she) as well as the name of the teacher written at the top of the evaluation. Approximately 65% of

the teachers were female and 35% were male; 82% of the teachers were native speakers of Korean, and the other 18% were native English speakers.

### Data analysis

In order to produce reliable data from the evaluation, we used an analysis of variants (ANOVA) to examine the four groups of TAs and how students perceived them: native (Korean) male, native (Korean) female, and non-native (non-Korean) male. After the initial analysis, we then did post hoc pair wise comparisons with Turkey adjustments.

Variable	1- Native Female	2- Native Male	3- Non-Native Male
Overall	4.89 (.044) <sup>b</sup>	5.00 (.134)	5.30 (.094) <sup>b</sup>
Learned a Lot	5.59 (.048) <sup>b</sup>	5.71 (.149) <sup>c</sup>	6.20 (.102) <sup>b c</sup>
Effective	5.31 (.055) <sup>b</sup>	5.67 (.169)	5.82 (.115) <sup>b</sup>
Interest	6.19 (.043)	6.29 (.132)	6.31 (.090)
Actively Involved	5.89 (.051) <sup>a b</sup>	6.29 (.159) <sup>a</sup>	6.21 (.109) <sup>b</sup>
Enthusiastic	6.31 (.037) <sup>b</sup>	6.16 (.114) <sup>c</sup>	6.61 (.078) <sup>b c</sup>
Well Prepared	6.01 (.049) <sup>a</sup>	5.53 (.150) <sup>a c</sup>	6.20 (.102) <sup>c</sup>
Use of Time	5.49 (.057) <sup>b</sup>	5.59 (.175)	5.96 (.120) <sup>b</sup>
Evaluations	5.24 (.056) <sup>b</sup>	5.59 (.175)	5.80 (.119) <sup>b</sup>
Respectful	6.26 (.041)	6.53 (.126)	6.20 (.086)
Motivating	5.62 (.053) <sup>b</sup>	5.88 (.162)	6.05 (.111) <sup>b</sup>
Start/Dismiss on time	5.77 (.059) <sup>b</sup>	5.90 (.184)	6.21 (.126) <sup>b</sup>
Missed Class	6.50 (.048) <sup>a</sup>	5.73 (.149) <sup>a c</sup>	6.51 (.102) <sup>c</sup>
Inspired	5.97 (.046)	5.92 (.142)	6.12 (.097)
Spiritual	5.53 (.056) <sup>b</sup>	5.29 (.172) <sup>c</sup>	5.99 (.118) <sup>b c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>1, 2 different (P < .05) <sup>b</sup>1, 3 different (P < .05) <sup>c</sup>2, 3 different (P < .05)

## Results and Discussion

The analysis revealed a significant overall difference in the evaluations of the groups ( $F_{2,590} = 7.82, P = 0.0004$ ), with the scores for native male and native female TAs being significantly different from the scores for non-native male TAs ( $t_{590} = -3.02, P = 0.0026$ ). Overall, non-native male TAs had the highest mean, native male TAs had the second, and native female TAs had the third. There were many factors that influenced these overall ratings. A close look at statement ratings in which one group differed significantly from the other two groups, as well as a review of accompanying student comments, gave promising explanations of what was occurring in the classroom with each group of TAs.

The first significant difference among classes taught by the different TA groups shows up in responses to the prompt, "I learned a great deal from this teaching assistant" ( $F_{2,621} = 14.65, P = < .0001$ ). Students rated native male and female TAs significantly lower than they rated non-native male TAs ( $t_{621} = -4.26, P = < .0001$ ). The first plausible explanation for this was the language barrier that native TAs faced. It was apparent that native TAs received more criticism about miscommunication than did non-native TAs. Occasionally, explanations given in Korean by native TAs exceeded the comprehension ability of their students. One student commented, "We all sat in class bored because we were not involved at all and it was way over our heads." Another wrote, "Honestly can't understand when she explains Korean grammar in Korean." Many student comments exposed scenarios in which TAs were oblivious to the lack of comprehension of their students. One student noted, "Sometimes she spoke way over our heads and I don't think she knew," and another student revealed, "Sometimes the students and TA were on a different page. I think it was difficult for her to relate to our Korean learning experience and know what was effective." One student suggested to a native female TA, "Find a way to find out what we learned." Obviously, this issue does not appear to be a lack of Korean language ability, but a lack of the ability to explain Korean concepts in English, a lack of willingness to understand student weaknesses and address those weaknesses sufficiently, or both.



Similarly, some student comments revealed that students were less interested in the lecture topics and conversation with native TAs. This attitude may have arisen from difficulties native TAs have in catering to the language level of the students. A particular lesson would be too easy for some students, and another lesson would be too difficult for others. The comments referenced above state that the subject matter is too difficult for the students; though fewer in number, there were also statements that criticized the simplicity of the classes, such as “You should make the class more challenging,” “Was good, some classes I didn’t learn a lot but very fun,” and “Teaches things that seem irrelevant.” Although teaching and conversing at an appropriate level is a challenge for all TAs, the difficulties appeared to be more acute for native TAs.

Non-native male teachers appeared to more easily discern the language level of their students and teach accordingly. One student of a non-native male TA said, “Great ability to communicate using a language we barely know and helping us to understand and learn it along the way.” Another student wrote of a non-native male TA, “Knows Korean very well and teaches in such a way that it is easy to learn.”

Knowledge of “American teaching style” was a tool for learning in some cases and a barrier for learning in other cases. Although it appears that both native and non-native TAs attempted to use an American teaching style as an instrument in teaching, the more intimate knowledge of Western teaching methods possessed by non-native TAs seemed to elicit better ratings. This is shown in comments for non-native male TAs such as, “You connect well with students and I learned a ton,” and “Created a great learning and fun-loving atmosphere.”

Native TAs were rated highly when they took advantage of their knowledge of Korean culture. There are certain advantages of native TAs that cannot be ignored. The following positive comments for native female TAs list several of these advantages: “Her various experiences with the Korean culture and way of life brought new and interesting stories to her lectures”; “Explained why things, Korean, historical events, words, and sayings are the way they are”; and “Having the atmosphere where it was 100% Korean was also very helpful.” This finding supports Medgyes’s (2000) finding that native

speaking teachers are generally much more proficient at understanding and teaching certain aspects of culture, such as idioms, innuendos, and appropriate pragmatic uses of the language. Talented native TAs also gave students a detailed knowledge of aspects of Korean culture such as historical events, holidays, customs, and so on.

Significant differences were also found between native and non-native TAs ( $t_{618} = -3.31$ ,  $P = 0.0010$ ) in the category of preparedness (i.e., is the teacher well-prepared for class?) ( $F_{2,618} = 6.84$ ,  $P = 0.0011$ ), with natives rating lower than non-natives. There were a fair number of positive comments about the preparedness of native TAs, such as “Really prepared, helped a ton.” and “She prepared very well to help us learn well.” However, a number of native TAs received lower preparedness ratings, possibly because students equated quality of activities with preparation. There is evidence of this in the following comments: “He could improve his activities. Sometimes they are not well-planned or evaluated,” and “Some of the activities were good, but a lot seemed like ways to kill the time.” Perhaps just as influential as the activities was the preparation of materials for the activities. The following is a portion of a detailed comment about an exceptionally rated native female TA. A student said that she was “Very well prepared; she always put lots of time and effort into each class (PowerPoint’s, cut-outs, media, etc.)” In contrast, another student said of another native female TA, “Occasionally it felt like her lessons could have used a little more preparation but usually it was very good.” Logically then it seems that TAs’ preparation for and execution of activities yielded better ratings for non-native male TAs in this category; this was not an expected advantage of non-natives over natives. This brings up the question of why non-native TAs generally seemed to prepare more thoroughly for activities than native TAs did. A possible explanation may be that the native speakers feel more confident in and rely more on their language ability, rather than on outside materials, to give an effective lesson. The non-native teachers may be attempting to “make-up” for their “non-nativeness” by compensating in other areas of teaching. Another explanation may be that the American style of teaching mentioned above is more interactive and uses more activities than a Korean style of teaching does. This may in turn make students feel that less or more preparation has taken place.

The next result with significant differences between groups was the question of whether or not the teacher kept the students actively involved ( $F_{2,621} = 5.64$ ,  $P = 0.0037$ ), in which native males were rated highest and native females were rated lowest. Native male TAs were not significantly different from non-native male TAs ( $t_{621} = -0.89$ ,  $P = 0.3732$ ); however, native female TAs differed significantly from the other two groups because of their low ratings. A detailed look into the comments of students suggests that teaching style influenced active involvement ratings. Again, students showed a trend of commenting on lecture-based teaching practices of Korean culture more negatively than discussion-based teaching practices typical of American teaching style.

The most common type of complaint from students was unquestionably related to excessive lecturing on the part of the native TA (about 70% of negative comments related to excessive lecturing, not enough time to talk.) Students often felt shorthanded when not given opportunities to discuss topics in class. (Although this contradicts the statements above related to difficult discussion topics, we should assume that students who requested more discussion in class are expecting discussion at an appropriate language level.) One student said of a native male TA, "I think if there were more opportunities to speak instead of hearing him speak for most of the class, it would have been more beneficial." Another complained about a native female TA, "She was very enthusiastic about teaching, but activities that actually involved speaking were sparse." More than anything else, students mentioned discussion in the classroom, and the majority of these complaints and requests were aimed towards native female TAs: "I did not like how little we got to speak as a class. My understanding increased but I feel my speaking skills went down"; "More class participation would have been good"; "I wish we would have had more opportunities to have class debates and class discussions"; "mostly a lecture [with] little interaction"; "I think the only thing that could be improved is if she would have us speak more in class." Finally, one student wrote an extensive comment for a female TA that depicted her as an outstanding TA, but then ended with the suggestion that "more emphasis on free class discussion might help."

It is important to remember that active involvement ratings between native and non-native TAs were statistically significant, but

the difference was not overwhelmingly great; furthermore, the native male TAs had the highest mean of the three groups. Nevertheless, frequent student requests for more class discussion reaffirm the fact that native female TAs were rated the lowest in active involvement ratings mostly because of excessive lecturing.

The enthusiasm that the teacher brought to the classroom was also an area of significant difference between the various groups of teachers ( $F_{2,620} = 7.49, P = 0.0006$ ). Native TAs' mean scores were significantly lower than those of non-native TAs, with native male TAs being the lowest ( $t_{620} = -3.80, P = 0.0002$ ). A logical approach to understanding these results may be that non-native TAs most likely did not grow up in Korea and are, consequently, more enthusiastic about the foreign culture and language to which they have devoted their studies and may have found certain details of Korean culture more captivating. Evidence of this type of foreigner enthusiasm is found in positive comments about non-native male TAs: "His charismatic personality and enthusiasm and love for Korean really motivated and had a positive effect on us as students"; "Good enthusiasm for the subject and provided interesting details. Made me want to delve into things deeper"; "Enthusiastic and positive towards students." The small, somewhat insignificant cultural details that may seem mundane to native speakers of Korean seem to create a sense of enthusiasm in non-native male TAs that the TAs then pass on to their non-native students.

There was a significant difference between TAs related to starting and dismissing class on time ( $F_{2,620} = 12.16, P = < .0001$ ), with native TAs rated significantly lower than non-native TAs ( $t_{590} = -3.10, P = 0.0020$ ). Unfortunately, there were no revealing comments from students about tardiness and timely dismissal, except for the frequent and expected: "He was often late." It wasn't much of a surprise that bustling undergraduates considered the tardiness of their TAs a "don't ask, don't tell" relationship, with students likely happy to have a few less minutes of class. Native female TAs were marked lowest in this category, but without accompanying comments, there is no empirical explanation for why native female TAs were more often tardy than the other TA groups.

There were items on the evaluation that provided significant differences for only two of the three groups, and this article will men-

tion them here but won't discuss them detail. In response to the statement, "Learning activities were effective in helping students learn," there was a significant difference between non-native male TAs who ranked highest and native female TAs who ranked lowest. Native male TAs ranked between the other two groups, with an insignificant difference separating them from the other two groups. Non-native male TAs were also ranked highest in response to "The TA made good use of class time," with native female TAs receiving the lowest rankings. The same scenario played out in relation to the statements, "The TA made helpful evaluations of my performance" and "The TA motivated me by his/her example to want to learn." Responses to the statement, "The TA seldom missed class," revealed a large gap between native male TAs, who ranked significantly lower than native female TAs, and non-native male TAs who ranked almost identically to native female TAs.

Items on the questionnaire that provided no significant differences were "The TA made good use of class time," "The TA responded respectfully to students," "The TA showed genuine interest in students learning," and "The TA inspired students to develop good character."

### **Conclusion and Future Research**

In this particular study non-native male TAs ranked higher in most categories than their native male and female counterparts. While the purpose of this study is not to determine which group teaches "better" or "more effectively," such a critical analysis provides further insight into the results shown here. Nevertheless, the author stands by Medgyes, who wrote that native and non-native teachers "are potentially equally effective" (Medgyes, 1998).

The author has discovered a few conclusions that help to account for the trends that result from comparing the three groups, in addition to possible sources of social bias. With the addition of detailed examination of student comments, in conjunction with the 14 questions to which students responded, it appeared that the differences in ratings were in part related to certain practices and tendencies common within each TA group. Three trends in teacher effectiveness that manifest themselves in the results of the surveys are that

native TAs have more difficulty adapting to the language level of students, native female TAs lecture more than others, and non-native TAs have a more contagious enthusiasm for the culture.

First, native TAs have more difficulty adapting to the language level of students. Students gave native TAs lower ratings for amount learned, and their comments indicated that miscommunications were more common with native TAs. Such miscommunications arose from both difficulty in understanding explanations and overly simplistic teachings. Although the question of difficulty was unique to each student's language level, it appeared that non-native male TAs more accurately executed adaptation of teaching.

Secondly, native female TAs lecture more than native male TAs and non-native male TAs. Teaching by lecture is a common feature of Confucian-based societies, but data showed that native female TAs, in particular, lectured at length, whereas comments about TAs lecturing too much were sparse for native male TAs and non-existent for non-native male TAs. It would be beneficial to further examine any discrepancies between native male and native female TAs to discover whether other teaching practices are unique to gender in Confucian culture.

Finally, non-native TAs have a more contagious enthusiasm for Korean culture. Several native female TAs were praised for their detailed explanations of Korean culture and history, but non-native male TAs had a higher mean for enthusiasm and a high number of positive comments about the enthusiasm they infused into their students. This could be attributed to the fact that details that fascinate non-native TAs may likewise fascinate their students. Identifying unique and captivating cultural details may require more overt exploration on the part of native TAs.

There are other factors that may help explain why one particular group of TAs (non-native male) ranks significantly higher in almost every category in the overall ratings, and one (native female) ranks significantly lower. First, this result is considerable because it runs against expectations—research points to the idea that second-language learners prefer native speakers to non-native speakers as

teachers (Amin 1999<sup>1</sup>). We have already identified patterns associated with each group of TAs that influence their performance in certain areas; these trends, as well as bias, may have influenced the ratings. This bias is caused by many factors, including Hegel's psychological/philosophical concept of "otherness," bias in TA selection, and trends in evaluating TAs based on the language level they taught.

Classes taught by native speakers are almost entirely composed of non-native males because native speakers teach third- and fourth-year language classes which are, at this university, mostly taken by returned LDS missionaries who have completed two years of service in South Korea or Korean-speaking communities in the United States and Canada; most of these returned missionaries are male. On the other hand, classes taught by non-native males have a mix of non-native female and male students because non-native males are typically assigned to lower-level classes with none of the aforementioned Korean-speaking returned missionaries. Therefore, one explanation for the discrepancy in ratings is that native females are more "othered," or subconsciously singled out as different from oneself, by the students they teach, compared to the non-native males.

According to German philosopher George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, when a person "others" somebody else, they are more likely to view them critically.<sup>2</sup> To apply this idea, non-native students may

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<sup>1</sup> This is particularly interesting because Amin, in the article referenced here, suggests that non-White female teachers of *English* are in a position of disprivilege, in part because English is their second language and students mistrust her for that. Authors of other chapters of this book, non-native English teachers, agree with her. However, here we see that the same group (non-White and female; White will refer to a native speaker of English) are least favored among all groups of *Korean* teachers.

<sup>2</sup> Though originally a philosophical, Hegelian concept, women's, gender, and race studies scholars use otherness to help explain sexism, racism, and discrimination of aberrant groups. For a particularly concise explanation of this concept, see the Simone de Beauvoir's introduction to her book *The Second Sex*.

“other” native TAs, and male students may “other” female TAs. Native female TAs, therefore, may be “double-othered” by their students who are both non-native and male. This “othering”, therefore, may influence how a teacher is rated by his/her students, and even how he/she teaches.

Indeed, women are not biologically inferior teachers of a foreign language any more than Koreans are to Americans; something more significant is happening in the classroom. If native and female teachers are indeed “othered” by their students, how might that affect the ratings? Could it lead to the lower ratings native females received? One study found that “male students rated female professors more negatively than did female students in the same class.” (Basow, 2010). Other studies have not found a statistically significant difference in the average course evaluations for male and [female] instructors, but there are same-gender preferences, such that female students tend to give higher ratings to female instructors and non-native English speakers have significantly lower course evaluations. Other studies show that faculty of color receive lower course evaluations than their white peers and students rate Asian-American instructors as less credible and intelligible than white instructors. This strongly supports the concept of otherness as a major factor in student ratings (Huston, 2009).

Describing Hegelian “otherness” theory, de Beauvoir writes, “...we find in consciousness itself a fundamental hostility toward every other consciousness” (de Beauvoir, 1993). Part of the reason why native Koreans and females were rated lower may be subconsciously hostile reaction non-natives and males have towards these groups on account of their otherness. Practical causes for this hostility may include a sense of entitlement to certain privileges (jobs, etc.) in American society and fear that those privileges are being exploited by the “othered” groups.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, being othered may negatively affect the quality of female and native TAs’ teaching, which, in turn, may affect the rat-

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<sup>3</sup> In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir describes reading the following quote in a newspaper: “Every woman student who goes into medicine or law robs us of a job” (de Beauvoir, 44).



ings. Perhaps the privileges associated with nativeness (the non-native TA shares a common cultural background with his students) and gender, as two non-"othered" groups, contribute to the ratings indirectly, in that the subconscious acceptance that one is like his students leads to more confident teaching, and a more positive, less critical reception among the students. Likewise, feeling "othered" may cause teachers to be less effective in the classroom.<sup>4</sup>

Potential hiring bias is another factor that may contribute to the aforementioned trend in TA ratings. The author of this research (a female non-native Korean teacher) hires all of the part-time teachers and TAs in the department. By the author's own admission, because they lack the language skills of a native, American TAs may have been more rigorously scrutinized during the hiring process than were native Korean TAs. Since American TAs are not native speakers of Korean, it is more important to be sure they are competent teachers in all areas of teaching. When hiring native Korean TAs, the fact that they are native speakers is given much more weight than overall teaching skills. Overcompensation on the part of non-native TAs may have contributed to their higher ratings, especially because, as a confessed weakness, the student surveys lacked a question on the TAs proficiency in the Korean language.

Finally, while the Korean section at Brigham Young University employs native and non-native teachers at all levels of Korean instruction, there were very few native Korean TAs assigned to the beginning levels of the program. Some researchers believe that students at lower levels tend to evaluate teachers more generously, and that students at higher levels tend to evaluate teachers more rigorously (Wennerstrom, 1992). If this is true, it may contribute to the more critical evaluations of native speaking teachers. Perhaps the differences in rating can be linked both to teaching patterns associated with each group of TAs and the bias mentioned here.

Other limitations to the study and suggestions for further research

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<sup>4</sup> This idea, which remains scientifically unstudied as far as the author is aware, raises yet another question of whether existing social constructs influence how women or natives teach.

There were a few other limitations to this study that, if addressed, could add to the research and conclusions reached here and in related studies in the field. These included having too small a sample size of non-native female teachers to consider their data in the analysis, and lacking survey questions that address the language proficiency of the teaching assistants.

First, because there was not a sufficient number of female non-native TAs, the author had to eliminate them from the findings. Conducting another study that includes non-native female TAs may help to clarify whether or not there is some bias against female teachers. Even though bias for or against male or female teachers may come from both male and female students, many of the student evaluations in this study came from upper-level classes comprised almost entirely of male students. Secondly, adding a question to the survey asking students to rank the TAs language proficiency would likely add another dimension to the overall ratings.

What can language teaching institutions learn from these data and conclusions? Viewing the numeric results of this specific study and comparing the three groups, one might preemptively call into question Medgyes aforementioned statement that that native and non-native language teachers are potentially equally effective, and that their strengths and weaknesses balance each other out. In this study, non-native males received significantly better scores than their native counterparts in many of the categories. However, the intent of this study is not to say that non-native teachers are more effective in the classroom. Instead, it is to encourage self-examined teaching practices, which will enhance student learning. Effectiveness in teaching depends on a teacher understanding the strengths and weaknesses of his or her own teaching—some of which may be related to their native- or non-native-ness, their gender, or to student perceptions of these characteristics.

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