A Profile of In-Service Korean EFL Teachers’
Attitudes toward World Englishes

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This study investigates in-service Korean EFL teachers’ attitudes toward World Englishes (WEs) and how they perceive non-native varieties of English in the context of English language teaching. A total of 68 in-service Korean EFL teachers participated in an online questionnaire with a 6-point Likert scale and their responses were scored from 1 to 6, so that higher WEs index scores indicate more positive attitudes toward the WEs perspective. Six subcategories were also identified through factor analysis and used for analysis of the collected data to examine the participants’ attitudes in more detail. The results reveal that in-service Korean EFL teachers view the general concept of WEs slightly positively with a WEs index score of 4.01. When it comes to teaching in the classroom and evaluating the students’ grammar and vocabulary use, however, they show a tendency to lean towards the World Standard English (WSE) perspective, indicating that they prefer native-varieties as the standard in their teaching and testing. Further analysis found that the in-service teachers’ knowledge of WEs affects their acceptance of the WEs perspective overall. The teachers’ awareness of WEs led to positive attitudes toward WEs (p< .05). Specifically, statistically significant differences were observed in evaluating students’ oral proficiency and pronunciation and in accepting the ownership of the English language (p< .05). The findings of the present study might imply a probable future in which Korean EFL classrooms show greater diversity.

Key words: World Englishes, in-service EFL teachers, English language teaching, teacher education
I. Introduction

World Englishes (WEs) was one of the hottest topics in a sociolinguistics seminar I recently participated in. The participants, in-service English teachers, had a heated discussion on how to deal with the concept of WEs in the Korean educational setting, where they teach English as a foreign language (EFL). Even though they could not reach a consensus on how to teach, they tended to agree that the concept of WEs might reflect a reality that Korean EFL teachers would confront in the near future. Considering that this topic has been relatively overlooked in the field of English language teaching (ELT) in Korea (Yoon, 2007), teachers’ interest in the topic seems to indicate recent changes in Korean society.

Korean EFL teachers have witnessed cultural and pedagogical shifts in this country, which is deeply rooted in a homogeneous ethnic tradition. Korean society has been rapidly multiculturalized over the past years. According to the national population census by the Korean Statistical Information Office, in 2015, the number of foreign residents in Korea accounted for 2.7% of the total population, an increase of 37.6% compared to the percentage of foreign residents in 2010 (Korean Statistical Information Service, 2016). It may no longer be rare in Korea to work with or live near somebody from a different culture. In a sense, using English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) does not sound entirely unrealistic at this pace of multiculturalization. In this case, as Kachru (1991) mentioned in his argument against Quirk’s concerns on the pluricentricity of English, teachers may need to deal with “culture bound localized strategies of English” (p. 10) for more effective interaction.

In the domain of ELT, under the motto of globalization, innovation in education was proclaimed and a new national curriculum emphasizing communicative competence was enacted in 1997 (Kwon & Kim, 2010). A series of innovative efforts culminated in a policy strongly encouraging