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The multiple roles and functions of English in South Korea

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ABSTRACT

In the field of language and identity, the subcategory of gender has been an area of growing interest (Pavlenko, 2001; Norton & Pavlenko, 2004; Menard-Warwick, 2008; and Higgins, 2010). Adopting the view of gender as “a system of social relationships and discursive practices” (Norton & Pavlenko, 2004, p. 504), social context is fundamental in understanding how gender relates to foreign language learning. This qualitative study focused on the extent to which gender impacts English language learning and English language use in the context of teaching English as a foreign language in South Korea. More specifically, it investigates how gender shapes self and social identity, and how these identities relate to English language learning and English language use, at present and/or in the future, in both real and/or imagined communities. Four male and four female participants were selected using purposive homogenous sampling techniques based on the criteria of having lived abroad in an English speaking community for over 5 years—a criterion which assumes the formation of self and social identity in addition to their native Korean L1. Data was collected through multiple methods including open-ended questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. Interview and questionnaire data reveals gender differences in the symbolic meaning of English language, the relevance of English in self and social positioning, and the role of English in shaping future professional trajectories with males situating themselves in international contexts and females in the local.

Keywords: EFL; identity; language; gender; Korea

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Introduction

Scholarly interest in the relationship between gender and language is not new. Over the past 50 years, researchers have examined the many ways that men and women use language, often differently, to form and negotiate their social identities (c.f Coates, 1997; Hall & Bucholtz, 1995; Johnson & Meinhof, 1997; Tannen, 1994 Cluster quote from Higgins, 2010). However, much of this research has focused on communication in the L1 that may vary considerably from gendered identities that may emerge when learning additional languages. Until recently, the effect of language learning on the development of gendered identities remained overlooked, with the exception of the contributions made by a small group of scholars (Norton & Pavlenko, 2004; Pavlenko, 2001; Menard-Warwick, 2009; and Higgins, 2010) who have focused on how learning an additional language shapes learner self identity, how these identities are negotiated through broader social relationships and social structures, and how these identities are impacted by gender.

Through a critical post-structuralist lens, their research has shown that gender does in fact play a significant role in language learning, namely in encouraging or discouraging investment in the L2. Through language learning, L2 identities are developed, and the ways in which language learners experience their L2 gendered identities relates to their desire to be affiliated with the L2 community and to further engage in the L2 identity. Learners that find their L2 gendered identity appealing are more likely to invest in their L2 learning. In contrast, if an L2 identity conflicts with the L1 gendered identity, resistance and distancing from the target community would impede acquisition of the L2. Not only has this research been seminal in filling the void in SLA on language learning and gendered identities, but it has also stimulated significant debate across multidisciplinary fields calling for more comprehensive socio-culturally based examinations of language in society.

Over the course of the past two years, the authors have been interested in identity negotiation among Korean EFL learners. Adopting the sociocultural view that learning a language is not a neutral process but is “conflictual and transformative” (Norton 2010, p. 357), it is presumed that as learners gain more competence in the target language, their L1 identities may be contested. Years as an English language-medium instructor at a local Korean university specializing in foreign language acquisition made the primary author curious as to how FL (foreign language learning) including but not limited to the English language shaped her students’ L1/L2 self-social identities. Between 2010 and 2012, she began interviewing students to better understand the relationship between language and self-identity, and its process and outcomes. The impetus for this current study emerges from the interviews and observations of Korean FL/EFL language learners with the focus on one aspect, gender.

This paper seeks to add to the growing body of gendered identity research in SLA. It addresses foreign language learning contexts, an area that has yet to receive the same degree of attention as gendered identity negotiation in settings where English is an official language. Accordingly, this study investigated the role gender plays in shaping self and social identity, and how these identities relate to English language learning and English language use, at present and/or in the future, in both real and/or imagined communities.

Theoretical Framework

To a great extent, contemporary gender research has been shaped by Judith Butler’s definition: “Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural kind of being” (1990, p. 32). By viewing gender as a stylized performance, emphasis is placed on the concept of

performativity and the ability to choose to perform certain identities. Inherently, gender and identity are then viewed as socially constructed, non-static, and unfixed.

Analyzing how gender is produced in diverse ways through various social practices rejects the view that gender is an innate binary characteristic of male/female. Instead, gender is considered a performance enacted in daily life through speech and actions, and is constantly renegotiated through social interaction. Through this perspective, an individual's gendered speech and behavior may work towards reproducing existing dominant gender ideologies; in contrast, expressions of gendered identities may also be used to challenge oppressive ideals. Though speakers may possess agency to choose modes of self-representation, the extent to which individuals can resist and oppose gender ideologies remains a valid concern. As Luke (2009) argues, limitations regarding social structure and human agency based on phenotypical features such as their gender or sexuality, their language and accent (which) are not chosen, not wholly malleable through discourse and can compromise the exercise of agency whereby some social structures and ideologies can be too strong to resist. Even though individuals have a range of choice in performing their gendered selves, these choices are not isolated from societal expectations, cultural models and ideologies about gender.

Societal expectations and beliefs about ways of being 'male' and 'female' circulate through gender discourses and are largely learned unconsciously in the early stages of socialization. Similar to gender socialization, language learning itself is shaped by these discourses affecting how both men and women view the process of language acquisition. Given the inextractable link between language and gender, recent studies on language learner identities have exposed how often language learning itself becomes a site for challenging and transforming gender ideals within dominant society (Higgins, 2010). This study adopts the view that gender is "a complex system of social relations and discursive practices, differentially constructed in local contexts" (Norton & Pavlenko, 2004, p.504), and thus is open to individual acts that can support or resist hegemonic gendered ideals.

Combined with performativity, this study also departs from traditional approaches in sociolinguistics that argues that we speak in particular ways because of who we are (e.g. Labov, 1966). In contrast, this paper draws from Pennycook (2007) who asserts that we are because of the way we speak. Following this shift in orientation, English is no longer seen as a "thing" or independent variable that impacts the dependent variable (the individual). Rather it views language use and learning as multi-directional affecting both processes and outcomes (Pennycook, 2007, p. 73). From this perspective, instead of asking, "What are the gender differences in language learning identities between men and women?", the multi-directional complex nature of performativity leads to the question "What difference does gender make?" and "How did gender come to make a difference?" (McElhinny, 2003, p. 24).

The concept of performativity meshes well with Norton's (2000) construct of language learner investment. However, Pennycook's (2007) approach is seemingly more applicable to this study as it situates English language learning within a more complex ecology of local people's needs and identities. Recognizing the globalized flow of people and an increasingly mobile learner population, such a perspective addresses the transcultural flows that characterize the lives of many Korean EFL learners.

Literature Review

A comprehensive review of gender and language-learning research can be found in Higgins (2010) which divides the current body of literature into two broad strands: The first strand, employing ethnographic methods and drawing on Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of Communities of

Practice, explores how structural constraints and obstacles shape the gender identities of second/foreign learners in the TC (target culture). Much of this research has focused on immigrant populations, and how access to the target language and culture is mediated by factors including power differentials, race, socioeconomic background, and cultural differences between the L1 and L2 communities. Included in this body of literature are the works of Pierce (1995) Norton (2000) Auerbach & Burgess (1985) Menard-Warwick, (2008) and Skilton-Sylvester (2002). These studies have showed how investment using English is largely mediated by societal constructed concepts of gender and as a result, is strongly connected to the learners' L1 and L2 gendered identities.

Negotiating Discourses of Gender

More pertinent to this study, the second strand of research, identified by Higgins (2010), focuses on whether learners develop a new sense of self in their L2 (e.g. Pavlenko, 1998, 2001; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). Findings here indicate that learners do in fact develop a new sense of self through a new set of subject positions and identity options made available through discursive assimilation, (re)positioning, and self-translation (Pavlenko 1998, 2001, 2005; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000).

More specifically, findings from Pavlenko's research show that many L2 users do not completely abandon their L1 gender identities, but instead, that they often develop the ability to shift between gendered subjectivities and sometimes find themselves between worlds. Moreover, discursive assimilation-based research shows that many women and girls feel forms of liberation through English language learning (Gordon, 2004; McMahill, 2001; Pavlenko, 2001; Piller & Takahashi, 2006). For example, in Japan, the early work of McMahill (2001) exposed how, though the association between liberation and English is particularly salient, for female, Japanese English-language learners, English gave women a "new voice" for expressing themselves without constraint. McMahill explains that when using English, respondents felt able to openly discuss topics and issues that were considered off limits in Japanese culture, such as their relationships with their mothers, their experiences with gender discrimination at work, and their responses to societal pressures to be married and raise children. For the participants in McMahill's study, English was considered as a "weapon for self-empowerment" as a way to reject patriarchy in their L1 reality (2001).

While McMahill's research illustrates the use of the L2 as a means of empowerment, discursive assimilation can be an obstacle to L2 learning if learners hold negative perceptions of particular L2 gender identities (Kissau & Wierzalis, 2008; Kouritzin, 2003; Ohara, 2001). Siegal's (1996) study of Mary, a New Zealander white woman learning Japanese in Japan uncovered how resistance to L2 gender norms affects L2 investment and motivation. Skapoulli's (2004) case study of Nadia, a teenage Arabic-speaking Egyptian girl living in Cyprus and speaking Cypriot Greek as her second language demonstrates how a learner may reject L2 gender identities because they interpret them as threatening to their L1/C1 (first language/first culture) gendered self. Higgins' (2011) extensive research on gender identities of western women using Swahili as an L2 in Tanzania (Higgins, 2011) observes a fair amount of resistance to Tanzanian gender identities leading to resistance in using the L2 and adoption of the L2 gendered identity. Disaccord with the L2 gendered identity extends to the point of considering migration and life outside the social structures that reinforced the unfavorable L2 gendered identity.

Gendered Korea

As this study focused on the gendered identities negotiated in the local context, Korean socio-cultural background in relation to gender ideologies needs to be explored. Gender ideologies are socially constructed, produced and reproduced through social structures and social interactions. In Korea, ideologies are also highly genderized with distinct roles, responsibilities, obligations, and codes of conduct for men and women. The traditional division of gender roles becomes evident in Cho's (2005) research on gender roles in marriage and domestic life. Her findings show that most Korean adults believe the primary role of married women is to take care of the family. In response to the survey item, "It is best for everyone if the husband makes the living and the wife takes care of the home and family", the majority of male and female participants agreed, with only a small percentage of men and women disagreeing. Cho concludes that in contemporary South Korea, both men and women continue to hold traditional views of gender roles and tend to endorse the traditional division of labor. This gendered ideology is also reflected in the national statistics (1997) cited by Cho which show that only 22% of married women aged 15-49 were employed in companies with over 10 employees. This percentage is significantly lower for women with more than a high school diploma: 4.3% were employed. The low tendency for women to work after marriage suggests distinct gender roles and expectations between men and women, a pattern that becomes significant in understanding gendered identities.

Gender ideologies extend beyond domestic relationships and as Park (1997) argues, permeate all aspects of Korean social life. Referring to two central tenets of Korean culture, 'anjeong' (proper timing) and 'ttae' (establishment, stability, or security), Park maintains that in pursuing education, getting married, or having children, proper timing (anjeong) and the need for stability (ttae) influences the life decisions most Korean people make (1997). Park argues that although these two concepts are held up as ideals for all Koreans, in practice, they are experienced very differently by men and women (Park, 1997, p. 3). For instance, as Korean society highly values beauty and youth, getting married at the proper time is considered very important for women. Meanwhile, for men, emphasis is placed on job stability, since they are considered the main breadwinners of the family (Park, 1997).

More striking is the contrast between traditional Korean culture and Western culture, namely in relation to age and gender. Cho (2012, p. 225) captures this disaccord from the view of a foreign-born female Korean-Australian, "In Korea, you have to respect the culture. As a consequence, you have to compromise all your beliefs" (Cho, 2012, p. 225). For this young woman, life in Korea entailed a dramatic shift in self-social positioning as she recounts stories of being scolded by older Korean men for her smoking in public, an experience highly unlikely in Western settings. The incident described above depicts a social environment with significant differential rights and responsibilities for men and women, and likewise, in contrast to the expectations of gender equality prevalent in the West.

Because language is intrinsically bound to culture, how gendered identities intertwine with English as a foreign language in Korea is of particular interest. In their discourse analysis of Korean popular media, Lo and Kim (2012) argue that the coolness associated with English as depicted in the Korean media does not apply indiscriminately to men and women (2012). Looking at English use in the Korean music industry, Lo and Kim contend divergence in standards of modernity, cosmopolitanism, coolness, and heterosexual desirability. For male Korean popular-music (K-pop) stars, the hypersexualization associated with English lyrics, English names, and English stylization through fashion, hairstyles, and demeanor was viewed positively; however, the equivalent was not the case for female musicians and performers. For females in the K-pop music industry, hyper sexuality associated with English stylization was avoided as it is commonly perceived as immoral for Korean females to present or conduct themselves in that style. While the findings above relate

to the music industry, these norms apply to broader ideologies and social structures, and place the traditional L1 values in sharp contrast with L2 associations.

With the exception of McMahill (2001) and O'Hara's (2001) research on gendered identities among foreign language learners, most of studies conducted so far have been limited to language learning in the target community. To fill this gap and to better understand the relationship between gendered identities and English as a foreign language in the local Korean context, the study is guided by the following research question: What difference does gender make in the negotiation of English as a foreign language identity among Korean students?

Methodology

Role of the Researcher

This study adopts a holistic ethnographic approach with a focus on understanding the histories, lived experiences and longitudinal experience of individuals. Ethnographic research typically entails a long-term commitment to a field site in order for researchers to develop a deep understanding of their subject/participants' lived experience. Moreover, because this work often takes a critical perspective on language, power, and social structures, the subjectivity of the researcher in relation to personal values, assumptions, potential biases vis-a-vis the ethnographic site must be clarified. The researcher is a Canadian female of non-Korean ethnicity. She has resided in Korea for several years and has spent 5 years as an assistant professor at the research site. Through her affiliation with the department of English Interpretation and Translation, she had become familiar with the language learning experiences of the participants. Consequently, she is accustomed to the social and cultural atmosphere of the university and has already met and worked with the participants in an instructor-student capacity. Nevertheless, as an 'outsider' to the ethnographic context, she provides an 'etic' socio-cultural view.

Data Collection Procedures

As previously mentioned, interest in the gendered identities of Korean English language learners/speakers emerged from the author's ongoing qualitative inquiry into learner identity development and negotiation in the local context. Initially, this sample population was recruited for an investigation on L1/L2 identity negotiation among bilingual Korean/English speakers in Korea; however, through the course of data analysis, the variable of gender became prominent leading to additional data collection, analysis, and the subsequent production of this research paper.

To understand how L2 gendered identities manifest in EFL contexts, it was presumed that the experience of English language users would provide a more in-depth understanding as they may have already established L2 identities through their extensive experience in the TC. Therefore, purposeful sampling was used to select representative cases of adult English users that self-define themselves as "bilingual" English-Korean language speakers to shed light on language use and identity negotiation beyond immediate artificial classroom settings. Typically, participants in this group would have spent a significant period abroad (over 5 years) and classify themselves as "returnees" to Korea. At the time of the study, all respondents were students enrolled in English course either as an academic subject related to their major (English Interpretation and Translation) or studying English in a post graduate vocational training program to obtain an International Trade Specialist Certification.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Name	Gender	Age	Major	Time Abroad- Accompanied- education	Age abroad	Country	Languages Spoken
1) Esther	Female	26	English Interpretation Japanese Interpretation	10 years With parents (Public school)	12-22	Guam, USA	Korean, English, Japanese
2) Jenny	Female	22	English Interpretation	5 years With parents (International school)	12-17	Shanghai	Korean English Chinese
3) Julie	Female	22	English Interpretation	6 years With parents (International school)	13-19	Singapore	Korean English
4) Allan	Male	20	EIT	8 years With relatives Public School	10-18	Toronto, Canada	Korean English
5) Keith	Male	30	EIT	12 years With Relatives Public School	7-19	Atlanta, U.S.A.	Korean English
6) Tom	Male	30?	Business Economics	7 years With sister Public school- university	22-29	L.A. U.S.A.	Korean English
7) Dan	Male	28	Chinese Literature	4 plus years Alone International School-University	22-28	Shanghai	Korean Chinese English
8) Lindsey	Female	30	Mass communication	6 years 5 months Alone Private school University	22-28	Philippines	Korean English

Data was drawn from two instruments: (1) a preliminary open-ended questionnaire; (2) in-depth interviews (2-3 sessions). First, participants were provided with the questionnaire and allowed sufficient time to familiarize themselves with the topic at hand and reflect on their personal experiences, beliefs, behaviors, and roles. Once questionnaires were returned, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted. During the interview process, respondents were allowed to refer to their questionnaires as data from this source was used to guide the semi-structured interview. On average, the first set of interviews lasted 1-2 hours per participant. All interviews were recorded, later transcribed by the research, and forwarded to each participant for respondent validation.

At the second interview, respondents were asked to comment on the accuracy of their individual transcript, namely to clarify any points that they felt were misspoken and not representative of their experiences. In addition, participants were allowed to expand on comments that they believed required further explanation. Likewise, the researcher used this opportunity to ask follow up questions for clarification and elaboration on themes that may be emerging from the data.

Based on the questionnaire, and interview data collected from the 2 meetings with the researcher, a third meeting was scheduled in which the researcher provided respondents with a brief summary of their individual data set (vignette) to confirm the accuracy of the interviewer's understanding and interpretation of respondents' overall meaning.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis involved the combination of inductive and interpretive analysis (Hatch, 2002). First, inductive techniques were used to identify the connections between specific statements expressed by respondents and general themes and trends. Secondly, interpretative analysis was employed to give meaning to data and make sense of the social situations described in the data. In an effort to explain the experiences of the participants, interpretation, inferences, and conclusions were drawn based on the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon.

Findings and Discussion

The following section presents the data relating to guiding research question: what difference does gender make in the negotiation of EFL identities of Korean EFL students? Findings will be presented through comparison and contrast by first reporting the similarities and shared experiences of both male and female participants, and then discussing the differences in gendered identities.

Similarities

Rare use of L2 in L1 Context

Both the male and female participants commented that they rarely used English in the L1 context especially when speaking to local Korean speakers. All respondents believed that speaking in English when the Korean language could be used was inappropriate and awkward. Numerous reasons were presented: Jenny and Julie noted that using the L1 when speaking to L1 peers is preferred by all especially when there is a significant gap in communicative ability. Tom and Keith commented that doing so would be considered arrogant or showing off whereby you are trying to display that you are more confident or better in English than they are.

The preference for monolingual Korean language communication in Korea is explained by J.S. Park (2008) through the construct of externalization where the fact that English forms a natural part of the linguistic repertoire in the local Korean context is denied emphasizing the highly monolingual tradition of Hangeul (Korean language) and Korean society. This externalization is evidenced in the opinion of Lindsay who notes that "Nothing good can come out of speaking English to a Korean. I'm not sure why. It's a mystery, but it always leads to judgment". Park insists that English use among Korean triggers strong negative reactions and can be viewed as aligning oneself with an English identity and in turn betraying their native Korean identity. Hence, "The ideology of externalization contributes to the construction of Korean monolingualism...it discourages Koreans from actively adopting English" (Park, 2008, p. 339). Because the use of English is seen as a boastful show of pretentiousness and investment in a language and culture not their own, Koreans who are fluent in English may be reluctant to display their proficiency and in return gain social acceptance. For the participants, as Koreans who have spent a significant period of their life overseas, all the respondents are well aware of their need to fit into Korean society; hence the preference to use the shared L1 for daily communication.

Adapting L2 use to local L1 context

For all participants, L1/L2 use was dependent on content and context. Respondents explained that there are certain ways to speak and certain things they can say in English to English speakers. Conversely, there is a certain way to speak and certain things to say to Koreans in the Korean language. Both male and female respondents also commented on how their Korean language use and L1 identity differs from the L2 use/identity in that their Korean use is more polite, conservative, and reflective of Korean values and norms. The female participants, Jenny, Julie and Esther noted that they will talk about certain things with foreign friends and not Korean friends. These things are too “wild” and “crazy” to talk to Korean girls about. Thus, cultural values are expressed in the associated language. Allan comments that sometimes when speaking to his Canadian friends (in English) they ask him if he has turned Korean. When probed by the interviewer to explain what his friends mean by “turning Korean”, Allan responded that it was because of an “uncool” comment, saying something like “we should study hard for our future”, or “we have to respect our parents”. Allan explained that these are values rejected by most urban Canadian teens, and that by adhering to these values. He is acting like a “geeky Asian”. At this point, Allan becomes aware that he is expressing an L1 identity which his L2 peers are not familiar with.

Differences in Gendered Identities

Trajectories, Transnationalism and Affiliation with the L2

Interestingly, a stark disparity between male and female identities related to migration; all male respondents stated that they wanted to immigrate back to the TC (Canada, U.S. and China). From their comments, the male respondents felt freer living outside of Korea and hence, preferred their life overseas. To a great extent, this desire relates to the career and financial pressures that Korean men face in their adult life. As young adults preparing to enter the workforce, the male respondents lamented on their immediate stress in trying to find a stable job that provides the necessary status and financial rewards. For most Koreans, employment in large conglomerates is preferred with small and medium size companies shunned for not providing sufficient job stability and career opportunities. Competition to enter an established corporation is steep, and if successfully recruited, new employees anticipate the pressure and stress of long work hours, rigid hierarchal work structure, and stifling competition for advancement. Alongside professional uncertainties, the societal expectation of saving money, starting a family and being the primary provider for the family adds to the burdens of young Korean men.

Allan who has been back in Korea for 2 years upon the interview comments:

I don't like the lifestyle in Korea. It's all about grades, test scores, and salary. I want to live in Canada, and I sure don't want to get married in Korea and send my kids to Korean school. My parents agree that I should return to Canada. They agree that there is more freedom in Canada and it's a more balanced lifestyle.

Tom sympathizes saying,

Korea is too competitive and stressful. My family is pressuring me to get a job in a big company and you know how hard that is. I'm worried about that. Ideally, I would return to the U.S., but I'd need permanent residency there to find a job. My sister has residency in the U.S. She found a job, got married, and now lives in Boston. I miss my life in the States. I know it sounds opportunistic,

but ideally, I'd meet an American born Korean girl here, get married and move back to the States. But how could I meet a girl without having a job first?

Dan spent nearly 5 years in Shanghai studying in international school and continuing on to complete an undergraduate degree in English and Chinese medium. There he met his current girlfriend, also a Korean student enrolled at the same university. Dan says he would like to return to Shanghai, but his girlfriend prefers to stay in Korea. According to Dan, it depends on the situation,

She really wants to stay here. I'll stay for several years to marry her. In the meantime, I'll have to find a job that includes a lot of travel. Eventually though, I want to return to Shanghai."

When probed as to why he wants to immigrate to Shanghai and why his girlfriend prefers to remain in Korea, he responded, "I think that Korean women want a stable life, but guys want more adventure."

All male participants viewed their language skill as essential to leaving Korea and gaining employment overseas. In the worst case scenario, all male respondents commented that if they were to stay in Korea, then they would want to work for an international company which allowed for significant travel and not a typically Korean corporation. Keith voices this concern,

I want to return to the States, but my parents want me to stay in Korea. I know that I could never work in a Korean company, so it would have to be a foreign company. I can't work those long hours and deal with their ageism and hierarchy. You know how new workers get treated when they enter a company. I guess, in the meantime, until I can go back, I'll just try to find a job in a multinational.

Again, for the male respondents, English is considered as necessary for employment in international companies.

For the male respondents, English related to a more favorable lifestyle reminiscent of the lives they lead in the TC. English also related to their skill set and their competitive advantage in finding a stable job in Korea or abroad. The pressures of Korean society with expectations shaped by traditional values for stability and appropriate timing led the male respondents to envision returning to the TC as an option if unsuccessful in securing a respectable job by Korean standards.

In contrast to the male respondents who expressed the desire to immigrate, most of the female respondents described trajectories based on the local or regional contexts (North East Asia) which involved the use of the Korean language. Jenny revealed her aspiration to work as the tourism/hospitality industry as perhaps a manager for a global hotel chain. She noted that she would prefer to live in Korea, but would consider relocating to Shanghai where she would use her English, Korean, and Chinese language skills. Esther planned to continue her studies in English/Korean/Japanese Interpretation and Translation and work as a professional interpreter. Julie was uncertain of her career plans. Most of her friends were preparing for the teacher exam to be trained public school English instructors, a career path she once considered; however, she was also considering the option of tourism and hospitality similar to Jenny. For Julie, home was Korea and when asked to describe her future plans, she made no mention of immigration.

Lindsey was the one exception who discussed her interest in living in Germany to study German; "My dream is to live in Germany. I want to work there, maybe in international trade for a multinational company". When asked if she spoke the German language or has ever been to Germany, she replied that she studied German once in the past, long ago and has forgotten most

of it now but is assured that her English will help her in Germany. Unlike the other female respondents, Lindsey's comments reflected the stress of "ttae" and "anjeong" described by the male participants whereby familial pressures made her feel (in her own words) "like I'm constantly being judged". For Lindsey, the theme of "judgment" was reoccurring representing the strain she felt was placed on her.

Here, it is important to note that at the time of the interview, Lindsey was 30 years old, unmarried, and attending a vocational program to obtain a certificate as an International Trade Specialist. On numerous occasions, Lindsey made reference to her age, as she was a few years older than the other students in the program and the oldest of all the females enrolled. The repeated mention of age, judgment, and pressure to fulfill specific gendered expectations was blatantly stated: "Of course, I have to find a job and get married soon. I have to do this soon because I'm getting older and I think about this a lot. I like doing my volunteer work at the church because I feel that I'm giving back to the community, but my parents want me to get a full time job and meet a boyfriend. To be honest, I kind of like my life now, but that can't last". When asked whether these expectations were a cause of stress Lindsey replied affirmatively, "Of course it is".

Aside from Lindsey, the female respondents did not express the same degree of stress and burden as the male respondents. Instead, the female respondents were more optimistic of establishing their careers and family life in Korea and spoke of how they will use their English language skills in their desired profession. For the female participants, there was no clear expression of desire to re-assimilate into the L2 context, nor was their expression of repression and the need to escape Korea.

Interest in other languages

Another notable difference between the male and female respondents was in regards to interest in language learning aside from English. Female participants expressed interest in other languages apart from English: for, Esther Japanese, Jenny Chinese, and Lisa German. Interest in other languages was touched on repeatedly as the female respondents included L3 in their discussion about L1/L2 identity and repositioning. Esther and Jenny commented that their achievement in L3 is also an important source of self-confidence. Esther disclosed that she has "become more confident after learning English. I feel that since I can speak in English with other people, I can do the same with any other language as long as I study.

Jenny notes that she thinks she has experienced some changes in herself from speaking Korean, English, and Chinese and that "until now, I still think that I don't only enjoy learning English but other foreign languages. If I didn't speak English, my life would be a little different, but it would still be almost the same as I will be studying another language as hard as I study English." From Jenny's comments, English is not viewed a catalyst for identity formation and professional success, as her English proficiency would be replaced with achievement in another foreign language.

The fact that the women did not show the same degree of affiliation or attachment to the L2 may relate to their interest and investment in learning additional languages. In this regard, it is imperative to note that there were no significant differences in linguistic proficiency between the male and female respondents in this study despite variance in attitudes and aspirations for re-affiliation with the TC. Furthermore, it is unclear whether the majority of female learners found gendered identities in the L2 context appealing or unappealing or whether their affiliation to their L1 identities relates directly to their satisfaction in social positioning within the local context.

Explaining What Difference Gender Makes

How can lower female affiliation to the L2 identity and TC and higher male affiliation to the L2 gendered identity and the TC be explained? Much of the research on language learning and gendered identities has focused on the socio-cultural constraints facing immigrant populations in ESL contexts, and how access or non-access to these resources and opportunities shape learner investment, language learning, and L2 identities. In the case of the Korean male returnees, bilingual in English and Korean, and for the exception of Dan, multilingual in Korean, English, Chinese, the societal constraints deepened by the traditional values of “*ttae*” and “*anjeong*” in the L1 community inadvertently reinforce their investment in the L2 through maintained affiliation with the TC and the desire to return. This is interesting as it shows how in foreign language contexts, gendered L2 identities are largely mediated by conditions of the L1 community. Likewise, in the case of the female respondents who expressed the desire to remain in Korea and utilize their multilingualism to establish careers within the nation/region, conditions of the L1 context seemed to determine their investment in L2 identities and future trajectories. For females, non-mention of socio-cultural constraints in the L1 community correlated with investment in additional languages suggests a lower affiliation with the TC.

In regards to the similarities between male and female participants, from a direct literal analysis of both English and Korean language use and linguistic identities, both males and females agreed that it was most appropriate to use the L1 when communicating with Koreans locally, and that English was typically reserved for discussing topics or expressing values associated with a more liberal Western culture. However, returning to performativity and the view of gender as “the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts...” (Butler, 1990, p. 32), and Pennycook’s (2007) assertion that we are because of the way we speak, one may wonder whether the discourse surrounding L2 identities itself were subject to gendered ways of being whereby the male respondents feel more at ease to be “masculine” and express criticism and the direct rejection to Korean culture such as working for a “foreign company” or “immigrating”. Likewise, the discourse from the female respondents may be interpreted as an attempt to be more “feminine” and passive by not voicing disparagement towards the L1 culture. From Sharkey’s (2004) reflections as a scholar, acts of self-censorship and what remains untold raises numerous questions regarding personal narratives in qualitative data collection. In other words, because the female respondents did not directly express similar trepidation regarding their social pressure to secure a stable job and raise a family, can we assume that they did not share these sentiments? Or should their omission of these concerns be viewed as acts of self-censorship? Or can other factors aside from gender explain the divergence between male and female experiences such as age or social class. Through Norton and Pavlenko’s view of gender as “a complex system of social relations and discursive practices, differentially constructed in local contexts” (2004, p. 504), it is not possible, nor is it desirable, to isolate the respondents’ discourse from broader ideologies, and realities, guiding behavior and attitudes.

Conclusion

Has this research been able to address the guiding research question of what difference does gender make in the negotiation of English as a foreign language identity among Korean students? Findings show similarities and differences between the gendered L2 identities expressed by the respondents. Overall, male respondents demonstrated a greater investment in their L2 identities, namely, in the aspiration to return to the TC when faced with the societal demands placed on Korean adult males. This affiliation with the TC strengthened their investment in their L2 identity. In contrast, the female respondents seemed optimistic about their future in Korea and with the exception of Lindsey, did not mention an interest in returning to the TC. Moreover, 3 of the 4 female

respondents were also highly invested in additional languages in either real or imaginative terms, while only one male respondent expressed interest in an additional language. This becomes relevant in understanding the female respondents' English gendered identities.

Limitations

Before concluding, we need to reconsider researcher positionality and subjectivity. As previously noted, the researcher, also known to the participants in an instructor/student capacity is a Canadian female of non-Korean ethnicity, thus providing an "outsider" perspective. Following interpretative data analysis methods, the data gathered, analyzed, and presented in this paper could be subject to other interpretations based on researcher role and researcher subjectivity. To ensure requisite objectivity, peer-debriefing and external auditing with current faculty at the research site, and with academic colleagues and advisors was necessary to counter balance the weight of researcher subjectivity in the interpretation of the data and the final conclusions reached. Moreover, gender is only one variable composing self and social identity. In the case of Korean ethnographic based studies, and as demonstrated in the findings above, class is an equally principal variable that needs to be examined to provide a comprehensive understanding of Korean self-social identity. Finally, as this study draws from a small homogenous sample, and in line with the view of gender as a complex system of social relations highly dependent on local context, this study does not seek to make generalizations about gendered experiences, nor does it strive to predict how individuals may experience language learning based on other individuals' experiences.

In conclusion, while this research is embedded in the sociocultural context of South Korea, similar potential for language identity negotiation and reconstruction may be present in various forms throughout the international arena of English language learning. With the participation in international education, traditional expanding circle nations are seeing more and more of their citizens going abroad for educational purposes and returning with a new set of knowledge, experiences, and world views. Today, acquiring English as the *Lingua Franca* goes beyond the linguistic study in artificial classroom setting creating unique opportunities for bilingual and multilingual English users to form, negotiate and construct their linguistic identities within their local contexts. As the research above demonstrates, language is just one variable in identity formation; gender too plays a significant role in situating English identity. As language learners in every region of the world engage in multiple identities, multiple possibilities, multiple languages, and multiple contexts, their identities and investments are worthy of understanding.

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