A Critical Study of Language Minority Students' Participation in Language Communities in the Korean Context

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A critical study of language minority students’ participation in language communities in the Korean context

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In South Korea, Damunwha students (students from multicultural family backgrounds) have difficulties at school because of others’ derogatory perception of them and the different linguistic and cultural settings. In light of this issue, this paper addresses the Damunwha students’ identities and participation within the language communities from a community of practice perspective and a critical pedagogy perspective. Four students (two from international marriage families and two from immigrant workers’ families), their teachers, and their supervisors participated in the study from March to April 2013. The findings suggest that Damunwha students’ participation in Korean society depends on their resources, others’ perception of the participants’ identities, and cultural capital. The findings show that students are losing their connection with their first language communities and that their linguistic resources and cultural diversity are undervalued. The study implies that cultural sensitivity should be promoted and that explicit support for Damunwha students is needed.

Introduction

In recent years, the foreign population has rapidly increased in South Korea (henceforth referred to as Korea) due to the growing number of international marriages and the influx of immigrant workers. International marriage in Korea began in the early 1990s as a government-supported project to marry bachelors living in rural areas to foreign spouses, mostly from developing countries in Asia. The majority of such couples are arranged by

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commercial matchmaking agencies through their ‘marriage package travel’ (Seo, 2011). Meanwhile, immigrant workers, another emerging foreigner group, come mostly from China and other developing Asian countries (Han, 2011). They began to immigrate to Korea for higher wages in the 1990s, and their number has been steadily increasing over the past five years. As of 2012, of 529,690 working-age foreign residents in Korea, 479,426 were working in blue collar, low-wage jobs, whereas only 50,264 had professional jobs (Korea Immigration Service, 2013).

Together with the increase in the foreign population is the increase in the number of children from foreign families who attend Korean schools. The students are referred to as Damunwha students, which means ‘multicultural students’ in Korean. In a literal sense, da means ‘multi’ and munwha means ‘culture.’ According to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (2012a), the population of Damunwha students in 2012 increased by 21% from the previous year, with the trend increasing in the last six years.

Damunwha students have two linguistic backgrounds: Korean and their home language. Students from international marriage families speak Korean as their first language (L1) and their home language as their second language (L2), since only one of their parents uses the home language. Children from immigrant worker families speak Korean as either their L1 or L2, influenced by their birthplace and length of residence in Korea. Given that Korea recognizes Korean as the official language, and foreigners constitute only 1.87% of the overall population (Statistics Korea, 20 June 2013), Damunwha students’ language backgrounds are considered a minority and a deviation in Korean society.

Accordingly, the term Damunwha is seen in a derogatory sense because of Korean society’s inexperience in living with an ethnically diverse population. Throughout history, Korea has prided itself in being an ethnically homogenous nation, using the term ‘Korean ethnicity’ in a nationalistic, perhaps ethnocentric, sense (Choi, 2010). The Korean Government also officially acknowledges various forms of discrimination against foreigners because of the arguable ethnic homogeneity (Republic of Korea, 18 August 2006).

According to Ha (2012), this racial discrimination dates back to the late nineteenth century, when the Joseon Dynasty1 was under Japanese invasion. At the time, Western civilization and technology, which flooded into Joseon for the first time, were seen as pathways to Joseon’s enlightenment and independence from Japan. White Caucasians who introduced this civilization were admired by the people in the Joseon Dynasty. This later evolved into white supremacy.

The characteristics of international marriage and immigrant workers’ families are therefore viewed negatively in Korean society for various reasons. First, most foreign spouses and immigrants are from Asian developing countries and have dark skin. Second, marriage after only a few dates, which is the most prevalent form of international marriage in Korea, is often perceived as ‘purchase marriage’ (Choi & Choi, 2008). Finally, Koreans’ attitudes toward immigrant workers are not favorable due to the cultural difference between them and the latter’s predisposition to blue-collar jobs (Jo, 2011). Thus, the term Damunwha connotes a different group of the population from the majority group, composed of ‘illegitimate’ people.

Overall, Damunwha students are minorities and perceived as newcomers in Korean society, where ethnic Koreans constitute the majority of the population. In this context, the research questions of this paper are twofold: (1) How do Damunwha students participate in their language communities? (2) How can Damunwha students’ participation and identities be interpreted from a critical pedagogy perspective?
Literature review

Communities of practice, participation, and language

The two leading theoretical frameworks of this study are the community of practice (CoP) perspective and the critical pedagogy perspective. CoP envisions Damunwha students’ positions and identities in relation to their ambient communities. Lave and Wenger (1991) situated learning in a community and regarded learning as a social practice, providing an alternative viewpoint to cognitive-oriented theories on learners’ individual competence (Pavlenko, 2002). From this view, learning takes place while learners increase their participation in a certain CoP, where a group of people endeavor to achieve a shared goal (Wenger, 1998). The process by which newcomers become old-timers of the community through growing participation is called legitimate peripheral participation.

Through participation in their CoP, the learners’ identities are (re)constructed through various forms of interaction. According to Norton and McKinney (2011), ‘every time learners speak, they are negotiating and renegotiating a sense of self in relation to the larger social world, and reorganizing that relationship in multiple dimensions of their lives’ (p. 73). The learners’ identities are undergoing a continuous transition from newcomers to old-timers through interactions with the community. As Wenger (1998) stated, ‘practice entails the negotiation of ways of being a person in that context’ (p. 149).

Applying this perspective, this study aims to investigate Damunwha students’ participation in Korean and home language communities in which they are active members. In the process, the study will also address the students’ negotiation of identities in these communities. In the Korean language community, they may take part in school classrooms, after-school groups, and welfare centers. In their home language community, they may participate in their homes, religious groups, and other communities, as well as interact with their relatives. Participation in these communities may be facilitated or discouraged for a variety of reasons, even seemingly trivial matters such as seating arrangements and borrowing (Toohey, 1998). Therefore, this study will focus on Damunwha students’ growing participation and perceived identities in each language community and will investigate what can potentially encourage or hamper the students’ legitimate peripheral participation.

Critical pedagogy and critical multiculturalism

Critical pedagogy challenges what is considered normal and legitimate by the mainstream. It reconstructs human activities in terms of power relations and strives to identify inequalities surrounding educational practices. The voices of the silenced are brought to the center. Empowerment, the right to speak, and democracy are promoted. Giroux and Simon (1988) explained that critical pedagogy ‘takes into consideration how the symbolic and material transactions of the everyday provide the basis for rethinking how people give meaning and ethical substance to their experiences and voices’ (p. 10). In this view, schools and classrooms are power-laden contexts where the previous hierarchy and power structure are reproduced.

Critical multiculturalism focuses on the inequalities derived from belonging to a different race, class, or gender (McLaren, 1995). As opposed to liberal multiculturalism, which focuses on ensuring equal opportunities for everyone, critical multiculturalism aims for ‘social transformation by seeking social justice and equality among all people rather than merely celebrating differences or assuming a priori that all people are equal’ (Kubota, 2004, p. 37). More specifically, critical multiculturalism explicitly examines
injustice and inequality among people and endeavors to raise critical awareness regarding such irrationalities among all educators and students.

_Damunwha_ students’ language communities, including their classrooms and homes, are also fraught with power relations. _Damunwha_ students with parent(s) from Asian developing countries report that they are sometimes discriminated against by their friends; the students’ relatively low socioeconomic status compared to that of Koreans exacerbates this social stratification (Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, 2012).

This social problem calls for a critical pedagogy perspective, which examines the minority students’ participation with regard to power relations. In this regard, this paper aims to address _Damunwha_ students’ participation in language communities from the viewpoint of race, inequality, and discrimination. According to Pennycook (1999), critical pedagogy in language learning research has investigated issues of ‘class, race, or gender, in which relations of power and inequality are often at their most obvious in terms of both social or structural inequity’ (p. 331). Therefore, in addition to investigating _Damunwha_ students’ social status and discrimination, this study will also discuss cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and critical multiculturalism (Kubota, 2004; McLaren, 1995) for a more in-depth analysis of the students’ participation.

The study

Research contexts and participants

This research was conducted in two welfare centers providing after-school academic support and care for _Damunwha_ students in junior high school. We chose these centers instead of the students’ schools because the centers have been providing personalized welfare services for each family for more than three years. Thus, they have a more intimate relationship with the households than the students’ schools do. The after-school program matches _Damunwha_ students in need of academic support with adult volunteers who teach school subjects. The program runs for three hours in the evening, two to three times a week. It derives its funding from government subsidies and donations.

From March to April 2013, two students from international marriage families and two students from immigrant workers’ families were the core participants of this study. Their basic profiles and family backgrounds are summarized in Tables 1 and 2. The supervisors provided information on their estimated household income, in reference to the average monthly household income of a Korean family (about 4.193 million won or approximately 3884 USD; Statistics Korea, 24 May 2013). Volunteer teachers and supervisors were also recruited; their profiles are summarized in Table 3. All participants

Table 1. Core participants’ profile.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Center</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Family type</th>
<th>Language proficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Chenik</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>Immigrant worker</td>
<td>L1 (Russian) L2 (Korean) High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hwang</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>Immigrant worker</td>
<td>L1 (Chinese) L2 (Korean) High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Gahee</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>International marriage</td>
<td>L1 (Korean) L2 (English) Beginning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yong</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>International marriage</td>
<td>L1 (Korean) L2 (Chinese) Beginning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
voluntarily agreed to take part in the study and were informed that their data would be kept confidential. All the names used in this paper are pseudonyms.

Data collection and analysis

Semi-structured interviews, background profiles, and open-ended questionnaires were the main data sources of this study. All the tools underwent strict revisions by center supervisors to prevent the possibility of unintentionally offending participants. The tools were pilot tested on a Damunwha student, a teacher, and a social worker.

The first author was in charge of data collection and played the role of participant-observer, instead of standing aloof. Her previous engagement with the centers, including volunteering at Center A for a year and assisting in Center B activities for approximately three months, helped her participate in the center activities as an insider and conduct this study. All participants were already familiar with the first author and aware that she shared the same family background with them. During the data collection period, she visited the centers, participated in center activities, and conducted semi-structured interviews in a casual way. Only Korean was used throughout the interviews, since the two participants whose L1 is not Korean also felt comfortable using Korean.

In the first meeting, the core participants were asked to complete background profile sheets and open-ended questionnaires on their life histories. Then, the first author set up two semi-structured interviews with each participant. The interview questions covered their family information, identities, and their Korean and home language communities. The questions were used as a guide so that the participants could talk about themselves freely.

The interviews were conducted twice for the core participants, with each interview session ranging from 20 to 50 minutes. After the first interview sessions were finished,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Center</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>(One of) parent’s home country</th>
<th>Father’s occupation</th>
<th>Mother’s occupation</th>
<th>Household income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Chenik</td>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td>Part-time worker</td>
<td>Caregiver</td>
<td>Slightly less than the average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hwang</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Construction worker</td>
<td>Part-time worker</td>
<td>Less than the average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Gahee</td>
<td>The Philippines</td>
<td>Sanitation worker</td>
<td>Translator</td>
<td>More than the average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yong</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Day laborer</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Much lower than the average</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Other participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Center</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Chenik’s teacher</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hwang’s teacher</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Center A Supervisor</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Center B Teacher</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Center B Supervisor</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
each participant’s volunteer teacher and supervisor were asked to participate in interviews based on the information from the core participants’ first interviews. The data obtained from the interviews with teachers and supervisors triangulated the findings from the core participants’ interviews. All interview data were transcribed in Korean after each interview and translated into English by the first author.

**Damunwha students’ participation in their language communities**

**Chenik: an outgoing girl in both language communities**

Chenik was born in Uzbekistan and emigrated to Korea with her family when she was in Grade 7. However, she had to start from Grade 5 in Korea because of her lack of competence in speaking Korean at that time. At the time of data collection, she was two years older than her classmates. All of her family members were enrolled in Center A to take Korean classes in pursuit of Korean citizenship.

As for Chenik’s Korean language community, her class was the community in which she was most active. In class, Chenik was an outgoing and sociable girl who was greatly loved by her classmates. Her classmates elected her as class president and gave her a friendly nickname, ‘Oekukin,’ a comical way of saying ‘foreigner’ in Korea. Chenik also loved hanging out with her classmates, going out for lunch, and going to karaoke bars after exams. Her teachers, especially her school principal, loved Chenik as well, granting her a special scholarship. Her supervisor commented, ‘She’s a shining star. She is loved everywhere, including her school and this center.’ Chenik greatly enjoyed participating in her school community, where she was the only foreigner among Korean classmates.

What is notable in Chenik’s Korean community participation is that her active participation was partly attributable to her appearance and nationality. Chenik had a Western-like appearance that distinguished her from Koreans and other Damunwha participants of this study. Although Chenik herself did not notice it, her supervisor commented as follows:

Excerpt 1 (Interview with Center A Supervisor, April 19, 2013)

**Interviewer (I):** I heard that her school principal really likes her.

**Center A Supervisor:** Chenik also behaves so well. And what’s more is … What if she were a girl from Southeast Asia? Though her skin is not white and her hair is not blonde, for Korean people, Chenik’s appearance is more favorable than that of children from Southeast Asia. From this perspective, it’s pitiful.

The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family (2012) reported that Damunwha families from South and Southeast Asia are often discriminated against in Korean society. In contrast, Chenik’s Central Asian nationality and Western-like appearance implicitly appealed to Koreans. In this sense, Chenik’s identity as a Damunwha student in Korean society was more favored than that of Damunwha students from South or Southeast Asian countries.

Chenik’s home language communities, mainly consisting of her relatives and Russians attending Center A, embraced her in the community networks and provided her with shelter. Her father had eight siblings, four of whom were living in Korea. Her family maintained a close relationship with their relatives in Korea and with the Russian population in Center A, often inviting them to their home and throwing parties together. During these events, she socialized with other adults in the communities and made new Russian friends of her age. The Center A supervisor, who has spent four years consulting
with Chenik’s family and the Russian community in the center, said that the members of the Russian community cherished Chenik and kept her within a socially desirable boundary. Her Russian community functioned as a shelter for her:

Excerpt 2 (Interview with Center A Supervisor, April 19, 2013)

**Center A Supervisor:** Chenik’s family, mother, her mother’s friends … Wherever she goes, there are always others who look after her. So I’m relieved [because she cannot misbehave in the presence of other adults] … Her [L1] community loves her and at the same time keeps her from deviating. If she crosses over a [socially acceptable] line, there are many others who would keep her on track. Chenik is growing up within the safe boundary of her [L1] community.

However, despite her L1 community relationships, Chenik felt that she was slowly losing her L1 and Russian culture. She felt more comfortable with the Korean language and culture and planned to stay in Korea. Her L1 stagnated. She explained, ‘Sometimes I can’t understand what my friends are saying. My Russian stopped improving the moment I left there. Instead, the Korean language is becoming easier to speak now.’ In addition to the L1 attrition, she felt that the Korean culture was more familiar: ‘I only watch Korean dramas. Now I can’t understand Uzbekistan dramas.’

In spite of her L1 attrition, Chenik firmly maintained her identity as an Uzbekistan girl, as evidenced by her use of deictic words. When she said ‘my country,’ she always meant Uzbekistan. Moreover, she wished to have a more Western-like appearance, as shown in Excerpt 3:

Excerpt 3 (Interview with Chenik, April 12, 2013)

**Chenik (C):** I don’t like my appearance … [particularly] my face and ears.  
**I:** Why? The teacher [in the center] said you’re pretty. I think so too.  
**C:** I wish I had more of a Western-like appearance, such as blonde hair and blue eyes. Like her [Chenik’s best friend from Uzbekistan].

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**Hwang: immigration, separation, and seclusion**

Hwang was born in a suburban area of China. Before emigrating, he lived with his relatives while his parents were working in Korea. When he was 10, he moved to Korea. His parents were unable to spend much time with him because of their busy work schedules. His father had to work in remote regions because he was a construction worker.

Unlike Chenik, Hwang preferred to remain invisible to everyone around him. He did not make an explicit effort to socialize with others; rather, he chose to remain in his own world. He reported that he did not make efforts to participate in peer activities with classmates, as shown in the excerpt below:

Excerpt 4 (Interview with Hwang, March 25, 2013)

**I:** Do you like hanging out with your friends?  
**Hwang (H):** I prefer being alone. I don’t really like hanging out.  
**I:** Do you prefer playing smartphone games and watching cartoons?  
**H:** Yes.  
**I:** In your opinion, what do your friends think about you?
H: Just ... a strange boy. Haha. I just sit absent-minded, without any reaction. Nowadays I chew a pencil [in class].

I: You act strangely ... In your opinion, who understands you the best?

H: You mean friends?

I: Not necessarily. Parents, adults, teachers ... anyone.

H: No one understands me.

This excerpt shows that Hwang refused to build strong relationships with Korean friends; instead, he preferred to stay inside and play phone games or watch cartoons. His teacher explained, ‘He already experienced separation from his friends because of his immigration, and he suffered from the pain.’ According to his teacher, Hwang realized that personal relationships were ephemeral, while games and cartoons were always there to welcome him. Therefore, he intentionally made only superficial relationships rather than trying to adapt to Korean society.

Hwang also showed a lukewarm attitude toward participating in the activities of the center. This was a form of passive resistance against the derogatory perceptions of his identity. During the data collection period, he did not show up for any activities such as field day or the yearly gathering. His supervisor commented:

in the case of Chenik, she likes events in the center and she can enjoy with her family, so it doesn’t matter. But inviting Hwang to our Damunwha events can be hurtful to him, and maybe he does not want to acknowledge that he is different from others.

In this context, Hwang felt that getting involved in this CoP was tantamount to admitting that he was a Damunwha student, which all too often carries a derogatory meaning. Therefore, he chose not to take part in the community.

As for Hwang’s L1 community, he lost contact with the Chinese-speaking communities after his immigration. While Chenik had a close relationship with her mother, who built a bridge between Chenik and her L1 community, Hwang did not have such a relationship or opportunities to meet new friends who speak Chinese. The excerpt below illustrates his family relationship:

Excerpt 5 (Interview with Hwang, March 25, 2013)

I: Can you describe your family to me?

H: Hmm ... My father. He works outside. He rarely comes home. He stays only a few days at home.

I: What kind of work does he do?

H: I don’t know. I’m not interested. Um ... When he returns, he sleeps. And when he gets up, he watches TV while eating. After he finishes eating, he sleeps again.

I: What about your mother?

H: My mom ... goes to work. I eat dinner alone.

I: Then, what kind of work does she do?

H: I don’t know.

Whereas Chenik could maintain her bond with her L1 community, thanks to the network of the center and her family members, Hwang was not close to his parents, who were busy at work, thereby losing his primary connection with his L1 community. While Chenik had time to meet L1-speaking friends at the center, Hwang did not have such an
opportunity because there were no boys or girls of the same age who spoke Chinese as an L1 in the center. Moreover, he ceased speaking Chinese at home because he felt more comfortable speaking in Korean. Excerpt 6 shows that he has lost contact with the Chinese-speaking community:

Excerpt 6 (Interview with Hwang, April 8, 2013)

I: Who do you talk with in Chinese?
H: No one.
I: Who are the people you speak with in Korean?
H: Friends.
I: And more?
H: Parents.
I: Oh, you speak in Korean with your parents? Not Chinese?
H: I speak Korean to them.

The above conversation shows that Hwang’s immigration cut him off from the Chinese-speaking community including his parents. He did not seek speakers of the same L1 in Korea, due to his lack of interest in socializing with others and his lack of motivation to maintain his Chinese-speaking skills. His identity in the Chinese communities was slowly waning, as he lost most of his connections with his L1 communities and did not seek other opportunities to participate in the L1 community in Korea.

**Gahee: ambivalent identity as a Damunwha student**

Gahee and Yong, students at Center B, were from international marriage families. Both of them had a foreign mother and a Korean father. Gahee’s mother was from the Philippines and was working as a translator; she spoke Tagalog, English, and Korean. Influenced by her mother, Gahee spoke Korean as an L1 and English as an L2. However, her English proficiency remained at an average level. Because of her mother’s professional job, her family’s economic status was relatively better than that of the other participants.

Gahee’s identity as a girl from an international marriage family affected her participation in Korean communities both positively and negatively. Her attitude toward her identity and participation in her school and her center were ambivalent, due to the different contexts of each CoP. At her school, she could not get along with others because mischievous kids always bullied her, saying, ‘Your skin color is black. You go back to your country.’ Even though Gahee’s appearance was not particularly distinguishable from other non-Damunwha students, the kids somehow knew that she was a Damunwha student and bullied her. The bullying lessened after Gahee started junior high, but it still affected her. Gahee and her teacher described the bullying as follows:

Excerpt 7 (Gahee’s open-ended questionnaire response)

**Question:** What is the difference between your elementary school and junior high school?

**Gahee (G):** In elementary school, I was bullied because my mom was a foreigner. But now it is getting better and I study a lot.

Excerpt 8 (Interview with Center B Teacher, April 18, 2013)

**Center B Teacher (BT):** Gahee suffered from serious bullying in her elementary school because of her skin color. Her skin color is not distinguishable from others. Her appearance is
just that of a typical Korean. But kids just ridiculously point out her skin color and her Damunwha family and bully her.

I: What about her friends?
BT: Her friends know she receives more pocket money than they do, so they use it maliciously … She doesn’t say a word [about buying something], but her friends make her pay for what they have eaten. I’m worried that she’s making friends with her money … There are more cases like this …

Gahee was struggling to participate in the Korean CoP because of her family status, but that same factor positively affected her participation in the center. More than 80% of the students at Center B were Damunwha students. Gahee has been going to the center since it opened. Being a Damunwha student was not considered a deviation there. Although her family status did not give her an advantage in making friends at school, she felt much more comfortable at the center and acted as a legitimate old-timer of the CoP. In this context, she could socialize with her Damunwha friends and care for younger kids. Her familiarity with the center and its members is shown in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 9 (Interview with Gahee, April 9, 2013)
I: [While discussing a new person in the center] I heard she’s a sister of … someone. Am I right?
G: No. Never. Absolutely not. I know all the kids and teachers here. We’ve been really intimate for more than four years.
I: Really? You’ve been here since Grade 4?
G: Yes.

As for her L2 community, Gahee had an international family network that she showed a willingness to participate in. Gahee visited the Philippines once or twice every two years, and sometimes visited Japan to meet her uncle. She enjoyed taking trips overseas and meeting her relatives using her L2, although she was not very fluent in English. However, none of her maternal relatives were living in Korea, giving her only a few opportunities to interact and participate in the community. Despite her interest in participation, she could not help but remain in a peripheral position in her English language community.

Yong: an indifferent observer in his language communities

Yong was a reticent boy with a Korean father and a Chinese mother. The household income of Yong’s family was around half that of the average Korean family. Thus, Yong’s family sometimes had to rely on charity funds.

In his school, Yong was indifferent to all matters surrounding him and voluntarily chose to be separated from others. He kept his level of participation minimal, making no effort to get involved and no attempt to get out of his school community. The excerpt below shows his attitude toward participation:

Excerpt 10 (Interview with Yong, April 9, 2013)
I: Do you like going out with your friends?
Yong (Y): No. I prefer staying alone.
I: Why?
Y: They’re just too noisy.
I: What do you usually do at your school?
Y: At school? Sleep, read books …
I: How do your friends think about you?
Y: An indifferent boy.

In contrast to Gahee’s situation, where she could not participate even if she wished to, Yong was apathetic to his school, voluntarily choosing not to increase his participation in the CoP. The supervisor and the teacher attributed this apathy to his home, which put pressure on him and could not give him enough emotional support. In his open-ended questionnaire response in Excerpt 11, he did not mention his personal relationships with family members; he simply stated the facts about his family:

Excerpt 11 (Yong’s open-ended questionnaire response)

**Question:** Please describe your family briefly.

Y: Father: spends much time in his company. Mother: spends much time in church and at home. Brother: spends most of his time playing computer games after he comes home from school.

The Center B supervisor and teacher, who have been consulting with Yong’s parents, commented that Yong’s relationships at home were suffering, especially since his mother could not provide appropriate support. The Center B supervisor described Yong’s mother in Excerpt 12:

Excerpt 12 (Interview with Center B Supervisor, April 19, 2013)

I: Do Gahee and Yong receive enough support from their homes, both financially and emotionally?

**Center B Supervisor:** Certainly, Gahee is receiving. … Yong’s mother is also eager to educate her kids well. But there’s nothing she can do, so she pushes her kids and puts much pressure on them. Her enthusiasm is second to none, but both her kids are slow [at learning] and tired of studying because they cannot meet her enthusiasm. Yong’s mother is supposed to back her kids up, but she just pushes them and demands too much. Her kids are suffering. Korean mothers are educated and they know how to treat their kids. But that’s not the case for Yong’s family. Yong’s mother is forcing on the kids the way she has lived so far. So her kids have struggles in studying, and at the same time, Yong’s mother cannot understand why her kids are left behind.

However, Yong’s participation in the center was slightly different than his participation in the school and home. Similar to Gahee, Yong was the oldest boy at the center, which he had been going to for four years. He was fully aware of the norms and rules of the center and helped younger boys abide by them. For example, the first author observed him preventing fights and misbehavior among young boys during breaks.

Yong’s Chinese language community, albeit vague and abstract, consisted of a group of relatives on his mother’s side. Except for his mother, all other relatives were living in China, and he rarely talked to them over the phone. He visited China once but could not remember it since it was 10 years ago. Although his Chinese language community was distant from him, he was learning Chinese at school as a foreign language in addition to English, and he showed willingness to communicate in Chinese with his uncles in China. Yet he was not committed to learn Chinese for communication purposes; he simply followed the Chinese course provided by his school. His Chinese identity remained
vague, as he showed only ambiguous curiosity toward the Chinese community and did not have an immediate need or interest to participate in it.

Discussion

At first, *Damunwha* students’ participation in Korean CoPs indicated a Korean preference of whiteness (Kubota, 2004; Kubota & Lin, 2006; McLaren, 1995). In Kubota and Lin’s (2006) words, ‘Whiteness exerts its power as an invisible and unmarked norm against which all Others are racially and culturally defined, marked, and made inferior’ (p. 483). Lim and Kim’s (2011) general survey of 1000 adult Koreans showed that White Caucasians were far more preferred over other races, while foreign workers and Asians were neglected because of Korean nationalism (Jang & Hwang, 2007) and white supremacy, which began taking shape in the modernization period of the Joseon Dynasty (Ha, 2012). Goh (2005) and Lee (2007), who studied racial discrimination among children and adolescents, also reported that this racial preference is demonstrated by the young Korean generation. Specifically, whiteness and things related to it, such as white skin color and Western language, are favored, whereas those with colored skin are considered unpleasant and inferior.

The participants’ legitimate peripheral participation in their schools was largely affected by their race and resources rather than their individual efforts. On the one hand, the legitimacy of the participants in Korean society was unquestionable, as all of them had appropriate legal status. On the other hand, their participation was qualitatively different depending on their race. Chenik, who was endowed with a Western-like appearance and sociability, was able to obtain a respected old-timer position in her class and was warmly received by her classmates. Her nickname ‘Oekukin (外國人),’ meaning a foreigner, was a positive nomenclature for her identity as white rather than Korean or Asian. Although she liked participating in Korean communities, she chose to maintain her foreign identity, as her whiteness-related identity was welcomed and considered favorable in Korean society. In contrast, Gahee’s identity as the daughter of a Southeast Asian mother was not welcomed by her classmates; even though Gahee’s skin color was not distinctive from that of her peers, she had to endure bullying from her classmates because of this identity.

Although the two students shared an identity as *Damunwha* students in Korean society, Chenik was welcomed, while Gahee was ‘othered’ in the process of participation. The difference represents the privilege that Korean peers confer on whiteness-related values. This is consistent with the findings of Goh (2005) and Lee (2007) on racial preference among young students. Socially privileged resources such as Western appearance and language were welcomed, whereas Asian languages and cultures were disparaged or even discriminated against in school. These findings are also consistent with those of other large-scale studies that examined *Damunwha* students’ experience with discrimination against their skin color (Cho, 2006; Oh, 2009).

*Damunwha* students’ cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) does not fit comfortably into the existing structure (Kanno, 2004) that was originally developed for Koreans. Cultural capital refers to intangible assets such as education and experience, which promote social mobility acquired from home. In some cases, *Damunwha* students could not pick up the Korean language appropriately at an early age and had problems adapting to Korean culture (Cho, 2006). In the present study, the participants’ Korean proficiency did not cause problems because all of them were either highly fluent in Korean or spoke Korean as an L1. However, Yong’s family was not accustomed to the style of education in Korea; they
demanded too much of him and did not give sufficient emotional support. Yong’s family could not provide him with appropriate cultural capital for Korean schooling, resulting in his indifference toward participating in Korean school. Yong’s case implies that Damunwha students’ participation could be deterred by the difference in cultural capital.

However, in a community where the students’ diversity was celebrated and Korean cultural capital was not the norm, a completely different phenomenon appeared. In Center B, more than 80% of the children were Damunwha students from various linguistic backgrounds. In that context, Gahee and Yong acted as legitimate old-timers of the community, caring for younger kids and preventing fights on behalf of their teachers. Their marginalized and depreciated identities as Damunwha students were reinterpreted as normal and legitimate in the center. The two students were able to participate without any symbolic violence or discrimination. Thus, the center served as a ‘safe house’ (Canagarajah, 2004) where the students’ subversive identities were renegotiated.

In their L1 or their home language communities, the students gradually decreased their participation or were not interested in increasing their participation. As Chenik’s case demonstrated, the students’ home language community can serve as a safety net and a unique linguistic resource associated with their parents’ communities. However, none of the participants received bilingual education or cultural understanding classes that value their home language communities. Rather, the Korean language was considered superior, and it was left to the individual students to recognize the value of their home language communities and build strong relationships with them.

The participants were gradually being cut off from their L1 communities or did not have a close relationship with their mother’s community; thus, they were losing their L1. Rather than embracing the diversity of language and culture within a society, Damunwha students’ unique backgrounds and experiences are considered a deviation, which requires them to be ‘Koreanized.’ The Damunwha policy in Korea is geared toward an assimilation approach that forces foreigners to abandon their cultural heritage (Lim, 2011).

Damunwha students bear two inseparable language communities from birth. An (2007) and Shin (2007) found that teaching Damunwha students their mothers’ language and culture facilitates a robust relationship with their parents, identity building, and adaptation to school. However, the diverse linguistic resources and experience obtained by living with parents from another culture were undervalued, discouraging healthy identity building among the students.

Critical multiculturalism (Kubota, 2004; McLaren, 1995), which aims to demystify the domination of mainstream values and celebrate diversity, has yet to be properly implemented in the Korean context. The students need bilingual and bicultural education to maintain healthy relationships with both their home language communities and Korean language communities. If their cultural capital does not match the Korean way of schooling, special measures must be taken to assist in their safe adaptation in school. Both Damunwha students and non-Damunwha students should be educated about diversity and globalization to prevent discrimination and bullying of Damunwha students. Merely treating all students as equal, as promoted by liberal multiculturalism, is not sufficient; the students need differentiated and customized measures.

Educational implications

All Damunwha students are legitimate participants in Korean society; thus, they should be provided with a discrimination-free educational environment. At the societal level, a bill against racial discrimination within the Damunwha society was submitted to the
Korean National Assembly by Jeon (2009) but it is still pending. The bill mandates anti-racism education and legal punishment for those who discriminate against others based on their race, nationality, and ethnicity at workplaces in the fields of education, medical services, and legal procedure. Given that Korean society has no legal ground for eliminating racial discrimination, the bill can serve as a cornerstone in institutionalizing anti-racism in Korea.

At the classroom level, education for international understanding (Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding, 2009) could be implemented. This would be not only for Damunwha students but also for all students in elementary and secondary schools. It has already been adopted in the form of creative experiential activities in elementary and secondary schools since the revised national curriculum was introduced in 2009 (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2010). Education for international understanding aims to raise critical awareness about peace, human rights, discrimination, and Damunwha issues in Korean society by reinterpreting local and friendly themes such as culinary culture, sports, and housing (Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding, 2007). Ultimately, it prepares students to be global citizens who respect cultural and linguistic diversity. Koo (2008) also reported that education for international understanding has significantly improved elementary school students’ global awareness and understanding of other cultures.

In addition, Damunwha students should be provided with opportunities to develop their resources and understand their parents’ cultures, including bilingual education and after-school classes on their parents’ countries. Recent efforts made by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (2012b) are an example. The ministry aims to run Korean as a second language program regularly in school and facilitate mentoring services on school subjects to reduce the percentage of under-achieving Damunwha students. According to the plan, bilingual instructors will teach language and culture to all students through after-school and weekend programs. Such efforts toward critical multiculturalism would lay the foundation for an egalitarian Korean society in the twenty-first century.

Disclosure statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Note
1. The Joseon Dynasty (1392–1897) was the last dynasty of Korean history.

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Miso Kim is a Ph.D. student at the Pennsylvania State University. Her research interests on multicultural, minority, or underprivileged students grew out of her teaching experience with the students. Currently, she is teaching undergraduate ESL students and pursuing her research interests further.

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