The dynamics of ethnic name maintenance and change: Cases of Korean ESL immigrants in Toronto

Tae-Young Kim, Dr., Chung-Ang University
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Tae-Young Kim
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Modern Language Centre, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

In this paper, I analysed Korean ESL immigrants’ ethnic name changing phenomena. The interpretive discourse analyses of the 15 interview data obtained from six new immigrants, documented that four of them maintained their Korean names, whereas others anglicised their names depending upon their subjective identity positionings in a new society. In particular, the sense of imagined communities (Wenger, 1998) was of utmost importance to the participants in the study. Participants, who hypothesised imagined communities or a third culture Kramsch (1993) mainly for their jobs, were willing to change their Korean names, whereas participants, who resisted habitus (Bourdieu, 1977, 1998, 2000) reorganisation by remaining in Korean-speaking communities in Toronto, demonstrated little sensitivity to the intricate relationship between name and identity or emotionally resisted the name change. The findings corroborate that ESL immigrants’ name changing practices reflect their sense of ethnic identity, and suggest how individuals’ unique sociocultural milieux impact name maintenance or change.

doi: 10.2167/jmmd419.1

Keywords: ethnic name, immigrants, ethnic identity, imagined community, habitus

One’s given name is always social. It is realised through multiple social interactions, be it noticed or unnoticed by the name bearer. For both the name bearer and the name addresser(s), the name is perceived to have idiosyncratic uniqueness, first by conscious repetitions of ventriloquation (Bakhtin, 1981) from others in a heteroglossic society, and then by inner speech of the name bearer as the result of internalisation (Vygotsky, 1978). Even though many different individuals can share the same given name, which has exactly the same pronunciation, they cannot share an emotion-laden accumulation of experiences attached to the name. Put differently, one’s given name bears individual importance, not for its phonetic aspects, but for the nature of its idiosyncratic ‘symbolic capital’ (Bourdieu, 1991).

Reflecting upon previous immigration patterns, it is noteworthy that a considerable number of English-as-a-second-language (ESL) immigrants to North America have adopted a new Anglicised name to signify new national identities after arrival (Watkins-Goffman, 2001). Given that they rarely felt the need for a name change in their home country, the dynamics of ethnic name change among many ESL immigrants to North America deserve academic attention. Specifically, the collaborating factors in name changing practices
need to be identified, in addition to the ways in which these practices influence ESL immigrants’ sense of ethnolinguistic identities, which may lead to identity repositionings.

Given the influx of Korean ESL immigrants to Canada (Statistics Canada, 2002) and their historical naming practices in Korea, which are different from those in North America, it would be worthwhile investigating Koreans’ awareness of and attitudes toward their own name. I believe that for ESL teachers and administrators, the investigation of name change or maintenance patterns of Korean ESL immigrants staying in an English-speaking society for a considerable time span would be highly relevant because regardless of the nationwide policy on multiculturalism in Canada, in ESL classrooms for adult non-native English-speaking immigrants, there has been no consensus on Anglicisation of immigrants’ ethnic names. It is often observed that some ESL teachers advise new immigrants’ name change for the sake of pronunciation or for their easy assimilation to ‘mainstream’ Canadian society, whereas other ESL teachers vehemently reject the idea of name Anglicisation. However, to my knowledge, except for anecdotal personal accounts, no research had been conducted focusing on the dynamics surrounding Korean ESL immigrants’ (in)voluntary name changes in their host countries.

In this descriptive case study of six Korean ESL immigrants, I document their different awareness and attitudes toward the change of their Korean names into Anglicised names. Based upon their narratives obtained from 15 in-depth interviews, first, I will explicate the cases of four Korean immigrants who maintained their ethnic name. Second, opposing cases of two Korean immigrants, which show ethnic name changes, will be illustrated. Particularly, the role of Christian names to Korean immigrants will be discussed, and an eclectic use of English names for social detachment purposes will be illustrated. The name changes in the two cases will be conceptualised as an emotional buffer zone preventing foreseeable anomie (Durkheim, 1984). Also, the symbolic power of Korean names and English names inherent in different *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977, 2000) will be discussed.

**Naming Practices in Korea: Historical Overview**

Since Korean society has been strongly influenced by Confucianism, the society has had a high respect to literati class in the last Joseon Dynasty (i.e. from 1392 to 1910 AD). The literati class had enjoyed a monopoly for gaining access to government officer positions, as well as financial benefits, and gradually this spread into societal naming practices. For example, ‘yeong-gam’ had been exclusively used in order to signify only high-ranking government officers in the Dynasty, but soon this term was favoured for the euphemistic and polite use of an old male Korean. The replacement of one’s given name with his or her job position is still widely exercised in Korea with the form of one’s family name followed by the name of a job title. It should also be noted that traditional Korean society was defined as a homogeneous agricultural society. Since human power was directly
linked to an increased gross harvest in each year, collaboration within a farm village was of the utmost importance. As a corollary, a kinship term instead of one’s given name was widely used throughout the Joseon Dynasty (Wang, 2000).

The political and economic influences of the US and other Western nations from the late 19th century have also affected the demography of religion in South Korea. Traditionally, the majority of Koreans believed in Buddhism, but Roman Catholicism was gradually introduced in the 18th century via China, and Protestantism began to take root through a group of North American evangelists in the 19th century. Moreover, after the Korean War (1950–1953), the political and economic ties between Korea and the US have facilitated the spread of Protestantism in South Korea. The Korean Ministry of Culture and Tourism (2004) estimates that 52% of the Korean populace practice Christianity (i.e. Protestantism and Roman Catholicism), followed by 46% who practice Buddhism. For Christians, especially for Roman Catholics in South Korea, it is religious custom to have a Christian name as well as their ethnic name. It should be emphasised that even though for social life Korean ethnic names have legal implications, the Christian name exerts legitimate power at least within religious communities. In South Korea, it is common for a Christian name, for instance, Maria, to be used in such a form as ‘Maria jamae (sister) nim (honorific suffix)’ in church or religious gatherings, instead of her ethnic given name, which is registered in the family registrar, and, thus, has legal implications.

The Study

Purpose and research questions

The data presented in this paper come from interview data from six Korean ESL immigrants in Toronto, Canada, over a four-month period. In responding to various interview questions, all participants expressed their opinion about changing their own Korean name. Particularly, responding to ethnolinguistic identity questions (see the Appendix), they strongly supported for or were against the Anglicisation of their original name.

The aim of this study is to investigate the name changes of adult Korean ESL learners, and the influences of sociocultural milieux on the ESL learners. Specifically, this paper aims to (1) identify the awareness and attitudes toward name changes among Korean ESL immigrants, and (2) investigate the conceptual relationship between their ethnic name maintenance/change and their perceptions of self.

Participant profile

All six participants were attending the same government-funded ESL program, Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Since I did not specifically focus on a limited age group, the participants’ ages ranged from 31 to 65 years (see Table 1 for participant profiles). Their English proficiency varied from beginner to advanced level based on the result of Canadian Language Benchmarks.
assessments. A total of 15 interviews were conducted. Each interview was conducted in Korean at a convenient time and place for the participants, and lasted approximately one and a half hours.

Data analysis

I used the grounded theory approach of Strauss and Corbin (1994, 1998). According to Strauss and Corbin (1998: 12), adopting grounded theory means that ‘a researcher does not begin a project with a preconceived theory in mind (unless his or her purpose is to elaborate and extend existing theory)’. Therefore, theorising the practices is entirely based upon the comments expressed by the six participants through the interview processes.

The nature of interview data requires both a micro perspective of discourse analysis and a macro interpretive discourse analysis, in order to juxtapose the interview data with its proper sociocultural contexts. I adopted the concept of meaning unit following the suggestion of Ratner (2002) for the unit of analysis of cultural psychological investigation. In the sense that this study focuses mainly on the meaning of name change realised in a target language society, it can be understood as the sub-field of second language socialisation (Watson-Gegeo & Nielsen, 2003; Zuengler & Cole, 2005).

Findings

In this section, I will compare the cases of ethnic name maintenance with the cases of name changes among Korean ESL immigrants. First, I will analyse the participants’ name maintenance practices. Second, I will focus on name changing phenomena with close reference to (1) the role of religion for the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>LINC level (out of 5*)</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Time in Canada (year/month)</th>
<th>Occupation before immigration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Young-Mi</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>2, 3 (low)</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>0/3</td>
<td>Reading tutor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Se-Jin</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>5, graduated</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0/2</td>
<td>TV producer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sung-Yeon</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>3 (high), 4</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2/7</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyun-Jae</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0/2</td>
<td>Finance analyst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-Do</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>Small business (retired)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yong-Sung</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>3 (low)</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>3/9</td>
<td>Small business (retired)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Participant profiles*

*Participants’ real names have been replaced with pseudonyms.
†There are five levels in the LINC site, but due to the increasing number of the middle proficiency ESL population, Level 3 was further divided into High and Low classes. Those who have two different levels were promoted to a higher level in the LINC program.
smooth name transition reported by one participant, and (2) peer social capital (Valenzuela, 1999) for the eclectic use of English names.

**Ethnic name maintenance among Korean ESL immigrants**

Among the six Korean participants, four Koreans maintained their ethnic names regardless of the perceived difficulty of native English speakers’ pronouncing their Korean names. Of the four, two were over 60-years-old. Both older participants anticipated attending their LINC class as long as possible, because it was regarded as a window to outer mainstream Canadian society. That is, their motivation for class attendance was not to increase their English proficiency *per se*, but to secure their sense of self-actualisation (Maslow, 1954). They perceived their ethnic identity² as Korean, and the socialisation was conducted only with other Korean immigrants. Extract 1 shows this aspect.

**Extract 1**: Chi-Do (second interview)

1.305 Interviewer: Don’t you feel stressful because of your English proficiency?

1.306 Chi-Do: Stress … Well, we are … There is a huge number of Koreans around North York area, in Toronto. Like grocery shop owners … Nowadays due to the large number of Korean population around here, I don’t feel much difficulty living here. So it is not stressful. (laugh) I don’t feel such stress. Also, right now I’m living in a condo unit, and perhaps one third of the whole unit occupants are Koreans. So anyhow I don’t feel much difficulty living here. (laugh)

1.309 I: Is your identity the same?

1.310 C: Yes. I think so.

1.311 I: I see. By the way, do you use English name or Korean name in your ESL classes?

1.312 C: I use Korean name.

1.313 I: OK, is there any reason? I heard that many young Koreans use English-style name in their LINC classes.

1.314 C: Uh. In my case, when I arrived here [i.e. LINC class], I just used my Korean name as it is. So I’m still using it. Moreover, I didn’t feel much need of name change. So I am still using it.

Chi-Do, a 60-year-old LINC learner, expresses his gratitude for the current influx of Korean immigrants to the North York region, north of GTA. To Chi-Do, the shops and facilities owned by many Korean immigrants are evidently perceived as some of the many merits of living in that area, and those amenities lessen the stress of English use for him (Turn 1.306). Since he seems safely nested in ‘small Korea’ in Toronto, he is not stressed to learn English and adjust socially. In sum, Korean-Canadian ‘Chi-Do Park’ is known as Korean ‘Park Chi-Do⁴’ only to a limited Korean society.
Similarly, Yong-Sung, a 65-year-old LINC learner, expresses his reservations about name change in Extract 2. He expresses his doubts about his remaining life expectancy, which seems directly related to his emotional adherence to his Korean name. In other words, he does not want to change his name, which does not have much perceived merit for him.

**Extract 2: Yong-Sung (first interview)**

2.284 I: So far you’ve been using your Korean name. But as you know, quite a few people [Koreans] use an English name here. How do you feel about that?

2.285 Y: Ah, well. That’s because this is my given name since I was born, so I just want to stick to it. Well, now … I’m not sure how many years I have ahead. Also even though I change my name in English style, there’s not much merit. I would like to have my Korean name as always.

Both the old Korean male immigrants do not want to change their names, since they regard themselves as retired from the work force. It seems that they have limited Korean communities in Toronto, and do not associate with other cultures or languages except for in their daily attendance of their LINC classes.

Warning against dichotomous distinctions widespread in the field of SLA, Kramsch (1993) posits an idiosyncratic third culture with which each language learning adult may be faced. Third culture means a culture shared by a group of people who have the same experience of departing from their native land, first language, home culture, and so forth. In the case of the two older Korean immigrants’ ethnic name maintenance phenomena, there exist two possible interpretations. They are not exposed to Kramsch’s third culture yet, or they first experienced the third culture but exerted their agency to retreat into their indigenous Korean culture. In either case, more importantly, despite their physical presence in a LINC class, which is considered as an ESL context in general, they stay in a group of Korean community, a pseudo-ESL, if not English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) context.

It should be emphasised that the tendency for Korean name maintenance is not necessarily related to an age-specific phenomenon. Rather, it depends on a person’s subjective self-positioning in the target culture. Before Sung-Yeon, a 31-year-old female LINC learner, moved to Canada, she worked as a secretary at a company in Korea. She has been married to a 1.5 generation Korean-Canadian for more than two years, and has a toddler. According to her, from the initial stages of her marriage, her husband did most of the housework including grocery shopping, dishwashing, and laundry for her because he hoped to help her to adjust to her new environment and her host country. She could focus solely on child bearing. Ironically, however, her husband’s thoughtful consideration resulted in her over-reliance on her husband for communicating with external society. Her husband became the liaison officer to the external Canadian society for Sung-Yeon, while she was nested in the
safety of their small Korean home, which is similar to the two older Korean LINC learners analysed above.

**Extract 3: Sung-Yeon (first interview)**

3.236 **I:** Does your husband use a Korean name or...?
3.237 **S:** He uses a Korean name.
3.238 **I:** Oh, does he?
3.239 **S:** Yes. He does.
3.240 **I:** How about yourself?
3.241 **S:** I use my Korean name as well.
3.242 **I:** Do you want to anglicise your name?
3.243 **S:** No, I’ve never considered that.
3.246 **I:** Why do you think you don’t like the idea?
3.247 **S:** I don’t know exactly. (laugh) That may be because... It’s an individual preference... I just don’t want to change my name. Also, I feel some guilt toward my mom and dad. I don’t want to ‘touch’ my own name one bit.
3.248 **I:** Hmm... Well, when I was interviewing other people, they sometimes use an English name. Of course there’re lots of reasons, say the difficulty of pronouncing the name, or an English name is easy for Canadians to remember... Some of my participants mentioned that But in your case, you just want your Korean name...
3.249 **S:** It’s their problem [not being able to pronounce Korean name correctly]. I don’t want to change my name.

For Sung-Yeon, her Korean name is clearly attached to her Korean identity and family kinship. She uses a highly emotional word, touch, in Turn 3.247, which denotes her defensive positioning. Even the slightest Anglicisation of her ethnic name might hamper her pure Koreanness. In this sense, Sung-Yeon is highly sensitive to her ethnic name and identity, and expresses emotional resistance to Anglicisation. The potential difficulty of pronouncing her ethnic name is also seen as ‘their’ problem, neither her fault nor her Korean parents’ fault.

As shown above, for those who maintain their ethnic name, the reasons for maintenance seem attributable to the limited opportunity to take part in a new community. Participation, often represented by getting a job in a new society, did not happen for them. The lack of socialisation with English-speaking members in the new society have resulted in either their why-bother attitudes toward name change (Chi-Do and Yong-Sung) or strong emotional resistance to the change (Sung-Yeon).

Compared to the cases of Chi-Do, Yong-Sung and Sung-Yeon, the developmental aspects of Se-Jin’s ethnic name maintenance requires a different analysis. Se-Jin, a 31-year-old female LINC learner, had worked in a broadcasting company before immigrating. Throughout the three months of the interview period, she expressed her strong desire to obtain a job, and in such instances, she mentioned that she was ready to quit the LINC programme at
any time. Her versatile self-positioning is reflected in her experiences of name change in Extract 4.

**Extract 4: Se-Jin (first interview)**

4.219 I: Some Koreans change to English names after they arrive in Canada. How do you feel about that?

4.220 S: The problem is, my name is difficult to pronounce, but at the same time, I don’t want to change my name. For example, if I decide to call myself Sandy, when other people call me Sandy, I may not notice that’s my name. Sometimes I’ve witnessed such cases. Some people forgot their English name. (laugh) She introduced herself Sandy, but when I called her Sandy, she did not look back at me. In my case, my name is Se-Jin, but they called me ‘Say-Jean’. You know they can’t pronounce ‘Se’ correctly. So they are sometimes calling me ‘Say-Jean’ or ‘Shey-Jean’ or whatever. So one day, I decided to use ‘Sandra’ because it is also staring with ‘S’ like my Korean name. I didn’t want to change my Korean name entirely into a new one. So I thought either ‘Sandra’ or ‘Sandy’ was good. But as you know, I’ve stayed here in LINC classes for more than one month and known as ‘Se-Jin’. When I talked to my close friends in the LINC and asked their opinion about changing my name into Sandra, they said ‘Se-Jin fits you, you are Se-Jin.’ So I simply decided to stick to my own name. Before I asked my LINC friends’ opinion, I thought they might agree with my name change because it was difficult to pronounce. But when they said my name sounds alright as it is, I thought twice like ‘I’m Se-Jin and why should I change my name Se-Jin? Why should I change my name simply for their own convenience?’

She already knew that her name might pose some, if not serious, pronunciation problems for native English speakers, which made her consider the name change. However, as she mentions, she did not want to alter her Korean name, either, which poses the initial dilemma. This dilemma was resolved by adopting a new Anglicised name, Sandra or Sandy, which starts with S, the same initial as her Korean name Se-Jin. Contrary to her expectation, nonetheless, her ESL LINC classmates did not accept her Anglicised name, since they had known her by the name of ‘Se-Jin’, not ‘Sandra’. The refusal from her classmates rendered another opportunity for Se-Jin to critically think about her ethnic identity, and made her reach a new awareness in preserving her Korean self.

As stated by Watkins-Goffman (2001: 13) ‘one of the most important issues in the psychological development of the multicultural individual is the emergence of the public and private selves.’ I regard the two selves relevant for explaining Se-Jin’s case. According to Goffman (1959), an individual functioning in a society gives an impression to the society wittingly or unwittingly, and this is similar to what an actor performs in a play in front of a group of audience. Depending upon the social relationship that a person has with other members of society, the number of a person’s public self may be
multiple. In Se-Jin’s case, her initial willingness to the Anglicisation of her name may set a cornerstone for her new public self, which is different from her previous public self established in Korea. She tried to build a new public self, and her effort is epitomised by the act of name change. However, the name adopted was rejected by her LINC classmates, and for them, the already known public Se-Jin could not be equated with the Sandra whom they did not know.5

Vis-à-vis Se-Jin’s cautious trial for a new public self, neither the two older LINC learners nor Sung-Yeon shows any indication of establishing a new public self. Even though we are not sure whether or not they have already gone through the boundary-crossing experience from their Korean culture to the third culture, the interview data illustrate that they resort to their private self, since they do not form dynamic social interactions with target language speakers. Conversely, given the social nature of identity negotiation (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004), in Se-Jin’s case, the environment for identity repositioning is gradually provided through her efforts for meaningful social interaction with other Canadians including her LINC classmates.

It is noteworthy that Se-Jin’s case is essentially different from the other three participants cases. For Se-Jin, the entire processes of name selection have consolidated and re-assured her sense of Korean identity, whereas the three other participants virtually did not have much chance to ponder their identity, since they resulted in remaining in their own Korean culture and secure ethnic environments. Even though the three participants have already acquired a legitimate in-group membership (Giles & Johnson, 1981) within their own Korean society in Toronto, their possibility of obtaining a multi-ethnic membership in Canadian society seems to be relatively low compared to Se-Jin. At the same time, the three participants’ sense of identity is relatively secure, in that they decide to identify themselves as Koreans regardless of their physical presence in either Korea or Canada, whereas Se-Jin may experience the subtle disturbance of a growing sense of a new self-identification even though she retains her Korean name. From the perspective of Goffman (1959), in Se-Jin’s case, there exists a potential for growing public self, whereas in the other participants’ case, private selves are reinforced.

**Ethnic name changes among Korean ESL immigrants**

*A smooth transition from Hyun-Jae to Paul: the role of a Christian name*

Hyun-Jae, an MBA holder and former financial analyst, had been in Toronto for three months when the first interview was conducted. He was anticipating continuing his graduate studies at a doctoral level at a major Canadian university, which was one of the main reasons for his immigration. It should be noted that in his case, both his immediate family and his in-laws had called him by his Christian name even from a very young age, and immediately after his marriage. Accordingly, before immigration, Hyun-Jae had two different names co-existing in Korea: Hyun-Jae for his public (occupational) life, and Paul for his family life. After immigration, his Christian name was only used in his family life as it was before, and the Christian name rapidly replaced the
use of his ethnic name in his public, social life. His perception of a Christian English name is well reflected in Turn 5.290 in Extract 5.

**Extract 5: Hyun-Jae (first interview)**

5.289 I: Do you mean in the future you’re going to use Paul for your name?
5.290 H: Yes. I will. Actually, I didn’t like the name [Paul] because it is such a common name. But it would be weird to make another English name, you know. I already had and have used an English [Christian] name.
5.294 H: Well . . . The name Hyun-Jae is formally used for say, opening a bank account or something like that. To me, that’s not an issue to me. Anyhow, my Korean name is dead . . . Because my life here is totally different . . . When I was in Korea, every morning, ‘Kim daeri’ was required to check the economy section in newspapers and to make a briefing in my work place . . .

As shown in Extract 5, in the Canadian context, where he does not have any meaningful social relationships taking place, such as in the job market or at graduate school, he may not have the opportunity to use his Korean name in social situations yet. However, even if such instances arise, since he already perceives the pronunciation difficulty of his name, and has been using his Christian name, his Korean name, Hyun-Jae, may not be used in the future.

**A hard landing from Young-Mi to Jennifer: attitudes associated with the two names**

To Hyun-Jae, the long-term co-existence of two names has resulted in an equal distribution of positive and negative value to both names, which is not the case for Young-Mi, a 39-year-old female LINC learner. Among the six participants in the study, she was the most active and outgoing, and had made a group of Canadian friends in her neighborhood. According to her, the main reason for immigrating was her discontent with the current Korean political unrest. The negative attribution to Korean society, in general, is one of the important factors, which explain her name change and her identity positioning. Extract 6, describing her life in Korea, corroborates this. She mentions that she did not have the chance to claim her own identity. She understands her previous (dissatisfactory) life pattern juxtaposed with her new Canadian life, which is represented by the ‘opportunity to contact other people’ (Turn 6.370).

**Extract 6: Young-Mi (first interview)**

6.365 I: Hmm. How do you perceive yourself in Korea and now in Canada? What do you think about your identity?
6.366 Y: Um. I think it’s a bit different. Yes. It’s different.
6.367 I: Do you make an intentional effort to change it?
6.368 Y: Oh yes. Some of them are intentional effort.
6.369 I: What are ‘some of them’?
6.370 Y: Or well . . . Sometimes I carefully think about it. Did I behave like that [in Korea]? Or am I trying to intentionally change my style? I guess both are related. When I was in Korea, I didn’t have much opportunity . . . In fact, I didn’t have any chance to reveal my identity.
I simply existed for my family for 15 years. I didn’t have the chance to escape from the fence called family. But once I came here, I saw lots of opportunities. I mean the opportunity to contact other people, and that affects my personality in a rather active way. Plus, if I don’t live like that, I’m afraid my life here will be really hard and lonely. That makes me more active …

6.371 I: Are you saying that you are trying to be active and positive?

6.372 Y: You bet. Yep. Also, sometimes, on the one hand, I’m crazy busy and uh well, what’s the word? When I’m really exhausted, almost tired to death, feel like a wet sponge, but on the other, I feel intense happiness. Ah, now I’m living this hard, this diligence. So, I feel so good. Although I’m tired, besides feeling of exhaustion, I’m happy …

Young-Mi seems to take advantage of her new opportunities to a full extent. She is ‘tired to death’, but still holds a positive emotional state. The combination of the discontent with the current Korean political situation and her personal sense of lost opportunities in Korea seems to be transferred to her sense of ethnic name. For Young-Mi, an English name connotes ‘Western’ values, such as independence, respect for others’ privacy, and courtesy, whereas a Korean name is devalued arguably for intruding into another’s affairs. Her dichotomous distinction is salient in her comments on her judicious use of the English name, Jennifer.

**Extract 7: Young-Mi (second interview)**

7.277 I: Are you changing your name at your convenience? …

7.278 Y: Yes. I think I can use the two names at my convenience … Yes …

7.279 I: I see … I guess when you are using the name Jennifer, you are probably speaking in English.

7.280 Y: Uh, no. Not necessarily. Hmm … As I’ve told you before, the people who don’t like Korean way of familiarity, I mean, not considering others’ privacy, use English name. Lots of my friends [Korean friends that Young-Mi met in Toronto] don’t use a Korean name. Well, I think they don’t like the Korean way. So, they don’t like to be involved in. When these friends first met me, they just let me know their English name, no Korean name. Never. They never wanted me to know their Korean name. I’ve known them more than a couple of months, but still I have no idea what their Korean names are.

7.281 I: Aha, I see. Then do you think that, among other expectations, they are assuming a kind of Western life style when they wanted you to call them using their English names?

7.282 Y: That’s right. I think so. I think there’s a common, hidden convention [among Korean immigrants about the differential use of names] …

What is clear in her comments is that the English names are used for specific social purposes. Contrary to the interviewer’s expectation (Turn 7.279), she used her English name, Jennifer, even among Korean friends with whom she is newly acquainted. Neither Young-Mi nor her Korean immigrant friends want
to be overly involved in each other’s private lives. This is represented by their use of English names. Put differently, for both Young-Mi and her Korean friends, their newly-adopted English names are assumed to have desired ‘cultural capital’ (Bourdieu, 1991) or ‘peer social capital’ (Valenzuela, 1999) guarding against unnecessary involvement in potential disputes. Calling each other by an English name empowers the members of a given speech community to constantly evoke and reproduce the unique value attached to an English name.

In sum, compared to Hyun-Jae’s relatively stable sense of identity, Young-Mi experiences identity repositioning from a negative Korean to an imagined positive Korean-Canadian. For Hyun-Jae, using the English name, Paul, does not result in a negative value endowment to his previous Korean sociocultural background. For Young-Mi, her Korean name is negatively perceived, whereas her self-selected English name, Jennifer, is an active representation of positive self-affirmation.

Discussion

The findings of six Korean immigrants’ name maintenance and change show their diverse awareness and attitudes referenced to their sense of ethnic identity. Throughout the interviews, two older Korean LINC learners (Chi-Do and Yong-Sung) and a married female LINC learner (Sung-Yeon) mentioned that they did not have constant social interactions with other members of a larger English Canadian community. As a consequence, they identify themselves as Koreans not as hyphenated Korean-Canadians, which is implicated in their ethnic name maintenance. In other words, the three participants complete the process of identity negotiation by reaffirming their Korean identity.

Bourdieu (1977: 86) explains that habitus is ‘a subjective but not individual system of internalised structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class’ and bound by culture and history (Bourdieu, 1998, 2000). Habitus also ‘changes constantly in response to new experiences’, but the change is ‘never radical, because it [habitus] works on the basis of the premises established in the previous state’ (Bourdieu, 2000: 161). Given this, changes in sociocultural surroundings resulting from immigration have the potential for gradual habitus reorganisation. However, for the three participants above, due to their lack of opportunity or sometimes emotional resistance to participating in a variety of markets or fields abound in host culture, their habitus does not seem to be drastically reconstructed in a near future. Their ethnic name maintenance can be understood as the representation of habitus reinforcement, in this regard.

The other three participants can be classified under the category of imagined community (Norton, 2001) group. Se-Jin, Hyun-Jae, and Young-Mi express their strong desire to participate in Canadian work places even though their English proficiency may need further refinement. They have their own imagined communities outside of their LINC classrooms. As newcomers, they aspire to obtain legitimate old-timer membership by participating in their
imagined English-speaking communities. This mental posture is signified by
Hyun-Jae and Young-Mi’s name changes, which represented huge symbolic
though at a surface level she did not change her ethnic name, the act of
adopting a new name and the actual trial of the name with other LINC
members distinguishes the attitude toward her ethnic name from that of the
three Korean immigrants above.

Drawing upon Wenger (1998), Norton distinguishes three models of
belonging-engagement, imagination, and alignment:

By ‘engagement’ he [Wenger, 1998] refers to active involvement in
mutual processes of negotiation and meaning; ‘imagination’ addresses
the extent to which we create images of the world and see connections
through time and space by extrapolating from our experience; ‘align-
ment’ addresses the extent to which we coordinate our energies and
activities in order to fit within broader structures and contribute to
broader enterprises. (Norton, 2001: 163)

Given this, the name change can be understood as belonging through
imagination of communities. One way of preparation for the realisation of the
community will be the Anglicisation of their name, which can function as a
buffer zone between their previous Korean identity and newly burgeoning
Korean-Canadian identity potential. That is, a familiarity with an English
name and its hypothesised western values in advance, especially for Young-
Mi, can lessen the gravity of foreseeable anomie (Durkheim, 1984) which might
be imposed on them after becoming employed in the new surroundings. It is
noteworthy that in Hyun-Jae’s case, his Christian name, which he had already
used for his family, facilitated the entire process of adoption and familiarisa-
tion with his new contexts.

However, it should be explicated what made the Korean participants
hypothesise imagined communities and what are the hidden oppressive
forces inducing them to do that. The participants who vied for a position
within the Canadian labour market expressed their willingness to anglicise
their name even before they actually experienced the real problem related
to the pronunciation of their Korean name. At the core of the name
maintenance and changing practices lies the pre-conceived power imbalance
between new Korean ESL immigrants and old-timers in Canadian society.
Considering the fact that the two participants who changed their names
stayed in the new culture less than three months, the possibility for them to
have experienced major difficulties caused by their Korean name
seems relatively low. In this sense, the power imbalance is pre-conceived or
imagined and is related to the participants’ past life experiences in Korea,
not present ones in Canada. The perceived power imbalance, therefore, is
different from Foucault’s (e.g. 1977) institutionalised violence of substantial
power structure.

As mentioned above, we can identify two different modes of habitus in two
groups: habitus reinforcement for the name maintenance group, and habitus
reorganisation for the name change group. The former is regulated by and
behaves within the habitus rooted in previous Korean identity, and, thus, lead
to habitus reinforcement, whereas the latter is acting upon the imagined Canadian communities, which lead to each participant’s habitus reorganisation. However, we need to extend Bourdieu’s notion of habitus, since it does not provide full explanation of the tensions residing in each participant’s name change or maintenance phenomenon. Simply attributing the act of ethnic name change/maintenance to the different habitus may only end up with a static social topology (Anheier et al., 1995). The above data illustrate each participant’s various developmental paths to the ethnic name change or maintenance.

For this, the peer social capital of Valenzuela (1999), defined as social ties which connect peers to each other, will be a useful concept extending Bourdieu’s ideas (cf. Goldstein, 2003). Influenced by an exchange theory perspective in sociology (e.g. Coleman, 1988), Valenzuela (1999) conducted an in-depth ethnographic study on Mexican immigrant youths’ subtractive assimilation in school contexts. For them, Spanish functions as peer social capital, in the sense that it expresses their Chicano identity, their family history, and ‘what it means to be a Mexican in this world’ (Valenzuela, 1999: 158). This concept is particularly useful for Young-Mi and her new Korean immigrant friends’ intentional use of English name for social detachment purposes from other Korean immigrant groups. They have gradually accepted the idiosyncratic use of English names to denote non-engagement with others’ privacy as the implicit norm of those names. As a consequence, they established a unique peer network by exchanging their English names, one type of peer social capital, which is not found with Hyun-Jae, another English (Christian) name user.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

The present study investigated macro sociological factors surrounding the phenomenon of ethnic name maintenance and change among new immigrants to Canada by means of eclectic interpretive discourse analyses. All six participants, regardless of their current state of name change or maintenance, were functioning within their proximal habitus relevant to their daily lives. Overall, for those who aspire to assimilate into mainstream society, name Anglicisation was noticeable even before they experienced severe inconveniences incurred by their ethnic names. This seems to reflect the imagined power imbalance between new immigrants who lack linguistic and cultural capital and in-group members who acquire such capital in the society.

For the future direction of the study of name change/maintenance, the impact of national language policy at a macro level (Burnaby, 1996) on immigrants’ name changing practices should be addressed. Compared to the ‘official English movement’ (Crystal, 2003: 127–40) which endeavors to make the US an English-only country, the governmental level support for bilingualism and multiculturalism in Canada may affect immigrants awareness of their ethnolinguistic identity, and, subsequently, affect their decision to change or maintain their name.
Another area will be the phenomenon of women’s surname change (McConnell-Ginet, 2003; Murray, 1997). Recently, an unprecedented number of women have decided not to change their maiden surname, or have hyphenated it with their husband’s surname after their marriage, which was not usually observed in traditional Western societies. It will deserve academic attention to investigate how East Asian female immigrants to North America, who do not change their maiden surname in their home country, interpret the Western tradition, and the recent changing trends, and how their perception affects their naming practices.

In addition, longitudinal studies on name changing practices of new immigrants need to be conducted. Since the scope of the present study is limited to the issues of ethnic names and identity for only four months, none of the participants had experienced the job markets or graduate level study in Canada yet. Those new life experiences may influence their ethnic name change or maintenance. Moreover, the adolescent ESL population, whose identity is in the process of active negotiation as their ESL proficiency increases, should be investigated for future study on name changing practices.

Acknowledgements

This research was made possible by the Language Learning Dissertation Grant. I thank Louis Chen, Alister Cumming, Mila Glavinic, Tara Goldstein, Huamei Han, Katherine Rehner, Hyunjung Shin, Linda Steinman, and Merrill Swain for constructive feedback on earlier versions of this paper. This paper is an expanded version of the paper presented at the 5th OISE/UT Graduate Student Research Conference on April 1st, 2005. Any shortcomings are entirely my responsibility.

Correspondence

Any correspondence should be directed to Tae-Young Kim, PhD Candidate, Modern Language Centre, 10th Floor, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, 252 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 1V6 Canada (taekim@oise.utoronto.ca).

Notes

1. In many cases, a child’s name precedes the kinship term. For example, even though a person’s name is Tae-Ho, he will not be addressed directly as Tae-Ho. Instead, he will usually be called ‘Young-June’s uncle’, where Young-June is his nephew’s name.
2. Rotheran and Phinney (1987: 13) define ethnic identity as ‘one sense of belonging to an ethnic group, and the part of one’s thinking, perceptions, feelings and behavior that is due to ethnic group membership’.
3. Extracts are translated from Korean into colloquial North American English. I followed the transcription conventions by Cumming (2006), with latch, false starts, and pauses deleted. I solicited the help of another Korean graduate student majoring in second language education to double-check my translation, and thus increase the validity of the final data.
4. In East Asian countries, the family name precedes the given name. In Chi-Do’s case, ‘Park’ is his family name.
5. Since the LINC classmates are all immigrants from non-English-speaking countries, there exists another interpretation that they may have experienced a similar name changing process, and they may have recommended Se-Jin not to change her name based upon their own (negative) experiences.

6. Kim is his family name, and ‘daeri’ can be broadly translated into ‘lower assistant manager’.

References


Appendix: Sample Interview Questions

- How do you feel about yourself when you are identifying yourself as an ESL learner in front of other people who share the same ethnic background and language?
- How do you feel about yourself when you are identifying yourself as an ESL learner in front of other ESL students from other non-English-speaking countries?
- How do you feel about yourself when you are identifying yourself as an ESL learner in front of other English-speaking local people?
- Is this feeling in three above-mentioned cases different? If so, what do you think is the source of difference?
- Do you have a specific identity or ‘voice’ when you learn or use English? Does it reflect who you are? (your personal or ethnic identity)
- Is it different from your identity when you use your mother tongue?
- Are you trying to change this? Do you want to differentiate your life in Toronto from past life you lived in Korea?