


2016

Beyond Embracing A Multicompetent Self: An Autoethnography of A NNEST

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Beyond Embracing A Multicompetent Self:
An Autoethnography of A NNEST

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Master of Arts in TESOL degree
at SIT Graduate Institute,
Brattleboro, Vermont.

July 14, 2016

IPP Advisor: Steve Iams

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ABSTRACT

This article represents the identity transformation process of a non-native English-speaking teacher (hereafter NNEST¹) in the format of an autoethnography. Through the vignettes of the author, the evidence that English language plays a vital role as *cultural capital*² (Bourdieu, 1991) in *expanding circle* countries³ (hereafter ECCs) (Kachru, 1985, 1986) such as South Korea (hereafter Korea) becomes apparent. Also, her narrative adds more credence to how the newly imagined identity options such as multicompetent self and English language teaching (hereafter ELT) professional have a tremendous constructive impact on the personal and professional development of NNESTs. Lastly, this study proposes the reconceptualization of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (hereafter TESOL) programs to address NNESTs' needs for further language improvement. The NNESTs' efforts for language development should no longer be seen to be rooted from a sense of inferiority, but as a desire to broaden their linguistic reservoirs in order to become more effective teachers. By moving forward from simply discussing multilingualism to making further efforts to accommodate NNESTs' desired level of English proficiency, TESOL programs will see an exponential growth in professional practice among participants.

¹ I advocate that the ultimate purpose of using the terms *NNEST* and *NEST* is to “to put our finger on the problem” (Selvi, 2014:596). Therefore, although I acknowledge that the binary terms *NNEST* and *NEST* do embody a negative connotation of non-native English teachers, I decided to use these terms in this article in an attempt to foster active discussions surrounding issues of the NNEST/NEST dichotomy.

² *Cultural capital* refers to highly valued cultural signals that are used for sociocultural division and exclusion such as “attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviors, goods, and credentials” (Lamont & Lareau, 1988:156). Bourdieu (1997) divides cultural capital into more specified forms and explains other types of capital as well as other related concepts, but here I will not touch on those in detail.

³ Kachru (1986) introduces a model of three concentric circles in order to explain different types of the spread of English: the *inner circle* countries (hereafter ICCs: countries where English is used as the primary language such as the United States or the United Kingdom), the *outer circle* countries (hereafter OCCs: countries where English has been evolved as a second language such as India), and the *expanding circle* countries (hereafter ECCs: countries where English is used as a foreign language such as Korea).

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) DESCRIPTORS

Autobiographies

Multilingualism

Native Speakers

Professional Identity

Second Language Learning

Self Concept

Teacher Education

TESOL

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INTRODUCTION

Since coming to the States, I often felt an urge to burst into tears. How much more effort should I put into this language? How many more times do I have to come across the moments when I feel like I'm such a helpless idiot, until I finally become a competent English teacher? Will that day ever come? If I hadn't chosen to be an English teacher, I wouldn't have felt this awful feeling for myself. (...) Last Friday, with all these lingering questions, I sat on the bench on the hill where the sun had already gone away, and cried.⁴

I remember the beginning of my first semester in the TESOL program in the United States. At that time, I was struggling with a huge language barrier as a *non-native English speaker* (hereafter NNES) – as I viewed myself as deficient compared to *native English speakers* (hereafter NESs). For example, when it came to group tasks, I often felt that there was not enough time for me to process, plan, and complete the tasks in order to make a significant contribution to my group. Consequently, I often felt that I was falling behind my classmates. This sense of inferiority led me to consider myself as an insufficient English speaker/teacher, which generated low self-efficacy. Over time I grew silent and became a passive watcher in groups. I was reluctant to express my opinions when working on group tasks, focusing solely on my individual tasks. This differed from how Seullee (my identity as a Korean speaker) had taken on group tasks – she used to be a competent, proactive team member. However, Talia (my identity as an English speaker) was passive and timid in group work as well as in many of her own learning tasks.

This incongruence between the first (hereafter L1) and second language (hereafter L2) speaker components of a language learner's identity commonly leads to struggles around the resulting power inequities between the two components. When trade-offs between two-selves in one individual collide, one often experiences internal conflict and mental distress – such as insecurity, anxiety, sadness, confusion, and a sense of inability (Pavlenko, 2006). Doubled

⁴ Lee, Seullee Talia (November 16, 2015). Personal journal entry.

with another ‘problem-causing’ factor of being a NNEST in *native-speakerism*⁵ (Holliday, 2005), my own internal conflict as a NNEST(T) took me a long time to overcome.

Experiencing this identity crisis, I came to be interested in the correlation between language learning and language learners’ identities. In searching for theoretical explanations that could illustrate and thus help me to overcome my identity struggle, I found my answer within the theoretical frameworks of identity research. These frameworks helped me to explain my personal stories of developing my identity as an English speaker as well as an ELT professional. In writing this article, I present my trajectory to self-awareness and my identity development as a multicompetent English speaker and an ELT professional in line with the work of identity research in the field of Second Language Acquisition (hereafter SLA).

Also, this paper seeks to find further implications for pre-service or in-service teachers in TESOL programs based on personal experiences. Identity in relation to language learning has been the focus of several studies over the past two decades. After Norton’s groundbreaking work in identity research (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton 2000, 2013), a growing number of identity studies have been conducted, intriguing scholars in the field of SLA and language education (Norton & Toohey, 2011). In particular, a great deal of literature has well illustrated how the new identity option as a multilingual and a multicompetent teacher generates positive ramifications in ELT professionals (e.g. Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999; Pavlenko, 2003a). However, I found that researchers almost never suggested pedagogical implications ‘after’ the identity transformation to multicompetent English teachers. This article hopes to make a contribution to the existing identity research, with respect to what practical support for NNESTs should follow up after the identity transformation phase has taken place.

⁵ *Native-speakerism* refers to ‘an established believe that “native-speaker” teachers represent a “Western culture” from which spring the ideals both of the English language and of English language teaching methodology’ (Holliday, 2005:6).

The Format of an Autoethnography

In this paper, I will present my own narrative as a speaker/teacher of English in particular cultural settings that I have experienced or witnessed. In reviewing and representing my own trajectory, this article adopts the form of an autoethnography.

Traditionally, the use of the first person 'I' has been considered as subjective, an undesirable quality in academic literature. I believe that the reason that personal testament is so often excluded from academia is because objectivity is so pivotal to academic writing. Nevertheless, I insist that it is impossible for academic writing to be completely free from subjectivity. In the autobiography of Pavlenko (2003b), she contends that every scholar inevitably draws his/her own self into academic writing – we write about certain topics because we are drawn by personal history that makes the topics more important than others (2003b:177). Based on this premise that academic literature inextricably reflects the authors' lived experience, I argue against the traditional convention in schools which views the use of the first person as unreliable or unprofessional as academic literature.

Also, one of the purposes of this article is to demonstrate the sociocultural context of ECCs – Korean society to be specific – through my own narrative. I found that my narrative could be articulated in the most effective manner through the form of an autoethnography. Canagarajah (2012) defines the term *autoethnography* by breaking it into three pieces: *auto*, *ethno*, and *graphy*. *Auto* represents that the genre of autoethnography is “conducted and represented from the point of view of the self” (p.258). *Ethno* indicates that the close interconnectedness of culture and one's experience plays a crucial role in this type of research. Finally, *graphy* implies the importance of writing, as a tool to record and interrogate data. I believe that the definitions of these three pieces can explain this literature well. Therefore, this research will be framed in an autoethnography.

To conclude, the major emphasis in this paper is fourfold:

- a) To articulate my own experiences as a NNES(T) through the lens of existing studies in identity research in order to make a meaningful connection between theories and myself both as an individual and as an ELT professional.
- b) To suggest that TESOL programs continue to foster NNETs' ongoing personal and professional identity development by providing practical support beyond simply helping them to embrace their identities as multicompetent individuals and ELT professionals.
- c) To provide vivid pictures of English language learning in ECCs – specifically Korea, where English plays a vital role as cultural capital.
- d) To advocate that the use of the first person 'I' in academic writing is legitimate by implementing the format of an autoethnography as a frame for my personal narrative.

This article will first sketch out the theoretical frameworks underpinning the analysis of my own narratives with respect to identity. Next, I articulate my vignettes as a NNES(T) and interpret those vignettes using the aforementioned theoretical frameworks. These personal narratives are organized into six chapters based upon identity development stages that I underwent. Finally, possible implications from this autoethnographic account will be addressed.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Globalization and Multilingualism

Globalization is inextricable in explaining the worldwide spread of the English language. Although the origin of globalization varies from one scholar to the next, the spread of English traces back to the British colonial period, where English functioned as an imperial language in former British colonies (Phillipson, 1992). More recently, economic globalization – commonly equated to *Americanization* by opponents of neo-liberalism (Guerlain, 2002:66) – and the consequential spread of American English (hereafter AmE) (Kachru, 1985) started with the end of the Cold War (Berghahn, 2010). After the Cold War, the United States has maintained the strongest economic power in the international community (Schneider, 2011). The power of the United States economy fostered the worldwide spread of its culture, including AmE. The spread of AmE generated a number of sociocultural power inequity issues in the global society, disseminating native speaker norms of English.

Traditionally, the process of globalization is considered to have deepened disparity in economic and cultural power between dominant *Centre* (the powerful Western countries) and dominated *Peripheries* (the under-developed countries) (cited in Phillipson, 1992; Galtung, 1971). Under the influence of neoliberalism, which is a core feature of globalism, the English language was promoted in the form of standardized native speaker varieties of ICCs in OCCs and ECCs. As English has historically been a language of dominant countries such as the United Kingdom or the United States, it has been powerful linguistic capital that symbolizes the power of dominant groups.

Meanwhile, the trend of globalization also generated a greater need for more diverse varieties of English. According to Canagarajah (2014), the English language has recently come to be used not only in local contexts such as ICCs or OCCs, but also in other

multilingual communities in the context of globalization. Consequently, interactions of interlocutors have become highly unpredictable. This phenomenon has brought a new paradigm of multilingualism into the field of SLA and TESOL praxis. Localized varieties of English are appreciated, as opposed to the previously prevailing *monolingual bias*.⁶

Thanks to the scholars that have challenged the monolingual bias and standard English ideology, and suggested *multicompetence*⁷ as an alternative (cited in Pavlenko, 2003a; Cook, 1992, 1999; Kachru, 1994; Sridhar, 1994), we have seen stark changes in the representation of the English language itself and recent English language learning (Canagarajah, 2014). Most recently, English has come to be viewed as an international language. It is considered as a diverse, dynamic language that is negotiated in different manners based on specific settings, rather than a homogeneous language with a set of standard norms (Canagarajah, 2014). Now there is heightened awareness and active movement of this multilingual era in the field of SLA and pedagogical orientation. As May (2013) describes, “the need for more nuanced ethnographic understandings of the complex multilingual repertoires of speakers” (p.1) in this globalized community has been fostering the movement that attempts to place multilingualism at the center of SLA study and TESOL discourse.

Identity, Investment, and Imagined Identity/Community

After Norton (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton 2000, 2013) conceptualized the notion of *investment* as contrary to that of *motivation* in the mid-1990s, there has been growing interest in identity research over the last two decades (Norton & Toohey, 2011). Norton, who is well

⁶ *Monolingual bias* accounts for “the practice of assessing and measuring second language competence or performance according to monolingual norms” (De Angelis, 2007:12)

⁷ The term *multicompetence* is introduced by Cook (1991), referring to “the compound state of mind with two grammars” (p.12). Cook argues that multicompetence encompasses all the linguistic knowledge of both L1 and L2 of a person. In this state of one’s mind, his/her L1 and L2 influence one another interchangeably and therefore a bilingual speaker’s knowledge of his/her L1 inevitably differs from that of a monolingual.

known for her work in identity studies, defines *identity* as “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (Norton 2013:45). Drawing on poststructural theories, she contends that one’s identity is (re)constructed and negotiated by interlocutors through language.

Granted that the nature of identity is context-dependent and ever shifting, Norton conceptualizes investment as a way through which language learners position themselves to the point where they can acquire their desired *social* and *cultural capital* (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1997).⁸ According to Norton, “if learners invest in a language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital and social power” (2000:10). This notion of investment poses a new question associated with a learner’s commitment to learning the target language. In addition to asking, for example, ‘Are students motivated to learn a language?’ we may need to add an additional question: ‘Are students invested in the language and literacy practices of a given classroom or community?’ (Norton, 2013)

This alternative question stems from Norton’s research findings that were not consistent with existing theories of motivation in the field of SLA (Norton & Toohey, 2001). Most theories at the time assumed that the reason learners failed to learn the target language was because of their lack of motivation. Based on this assumption with respect to the concept of motivation, a learner that did not show enough progress in a language learning context was often seen as a poor or unmotivated language learner. However, in her research with immigrant women in Canada (Norton, 2000), she observed that high levels of motivation did not necessarily lead to success in language learning. The case of Mai in her study

⁸ According to Bourdieu (1997), *capital* is “accumulated labor” (p. 46), which has a potential to (re)produce profits. He insists that capital appears in various forms such as *social* or *cultural capital*. *Social capital* refers to social relations that provide the members therein with its collectively owned capital; and *cultural capital* is already explained above (see Footnote #2). Norton (2000) sees one’s language learning in line with the learner’s investment in order to obtain his/her desired social and cultural capital that the newly acquired language entails.

(2000) presents this well. Mai ended up withdrawing from the entire English language course, showing her lack of investment in the language classroom. Although she had a strong motivation to learn English, her investment was thwarted due to the frustration with her *imagined community*.

Imagined community refers to “groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of the imagination” (Kanno & Norton, 2003:241). According to Kanno and Norton (2003), we are involved in a number of communities that we can directly interact with in our daily lives: our workplaces, educational institutions, religious groups, etc. However, these are not the only communities to which we belong. According to Wenger (1998; cited in Kanno & Norton, 2003), imagination – as well as direct involvement – is another crucial source of participation in community practices. He draws on Anderson (1991), who first coined the term ‘imagined communities’. Anderson argues that what we think of as nations are actually imagined communities, “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (p.6). Thus, we can feel a sense of belonging and bonding to communities by imagining ourselves connected to that group of people. Norton (2013), emphasizing the significant role of imagination as a source of community practice, insists that these imagined communities might have a greater impact on trajectories of language learners than do the actual communities in which they are physically involved.

Ethnocultural Context of Korea

English Language Imperialism in Korea

Phillipson (1992), who first coined the term *linguistic imperialism*, draws heavily on Galtung’s theory on imperialism. Galtung (1971) insists that elites in both dominant Centre

and dominated Peripheries are closely interconnected with one another by shared interests (cited in Phillipson, 1992:52). According to Phillipson, the English language is one of the shared interests of the elites that ensures strong bonding among them and enables them to accumulate social capital as well as to pass those down to future generations. Consequently, English is often used as a means of solidifying the status of elites, aggravating the gap between *English-haves* and *English-have-nots* (Phillipson, 2008).

Korea is a prime example where this linguistic imperialism can be well explained. With the onset of globalization in the twenty-first century, English became significant linguistic capital in Korea (Lee & Jeon, 2006). Having political interests with Western countries and building firm alliances with those countries, elites in Korean society established their social capital in line with the English language. English, the linguistic capital of the dominant groups, became a symbol of the privileged in Korean society. In particular, standard AmE became the most powerful symbolic capital of Korean elite groups because of the primary dependence of Korea on the social, political, economic, and cultural aspects of American society (Lee, 2016).

This phenomenon is particularly evident in *Gangnam*, one of the most affluent areas in Korea. Concentrated with Korean elites that have the highest socioeconomic status (hereafter SES) in the country, Gangnam does not require any further explanation on its fame in wealth among Korean people. As one example showing this, the average house price in Gangnam district is almost two times higher than that of Seoul and 3.5 times higher than that of the nation (Jeong, 2011). In the study of Lee (2016) on neoliberal English ideology in Gangnam, the ideology that American-like English proficiency represents the high SES of the speaker's family reoccurs in the discourse of the participants that are parents who live in the Gangnam area. Also, native-like English is a prerequisite to enter the inner circle of the Gangnam community. This obsession with English is not only seen in the Gangnam

community, but also in the rest of Korean society. Although the majority of Koreans cannot afford the same luxury as Gangnam members – such as early education abroad in the United States – they make an enormous effort to obtain high proficiency in English.

English-Haves vs. English-Have-Nots in Korea

According to Bourdieu (1997), unequal distribution of cultural capital from one's birth (re)produces educational and social inequalities. For instance, students from higher SES family, through the exposure to their parents' accumulated economic and cultural capital, are more likely to achieve success in school than those from the lower SES family. This educational achievement of students with higher SES backgrounds eventually leads them to possess high SES as adults, which can also be passed down to future generation. Likewise, cultural capital itself reproduces cultural capital, aggravating existing social inequalities in a society.

In Korea, English knowledge is one of the representative cultural capital that has tremendous symbolic (e.g., honor) as well as economic (e.g., wealth) values (Seo, 2010). As described earlier that native-like English – AmE in particular – is essential capital of Korean elites in symbolizing and maintaining their high SES, having a good command of English privileges one to access economic, cultural, and social capital in Korean society. This disposition of English as invaluable cultural capital entails its symbolized image as 'language of elites' among Koreans.

Furthermore, English plays a gatekeeping role that directly decides one's SES in Korean society. From the early years in school, English is one of the most important subjects (Byun, 2007) that are often allotted the highest percentage in calculating the total GPA of a student when entering college. The English score on the national university entrance exam is also a key factor that decides which college one can enter. Considering the strong hierarchy in university ranks in Korean society and consequential social and economic (dis)advantages

based on one's affiliated college (e.g., job opportunities), it is not an exaggeration to say that English determines if one is eligible to be given an access to social and cultural capital even at the early stages in his/her life.

Moreover, in the Korean labor market, nearly all companies request candidates to submit scores in Test of English for International Communication (hereafter TOEIC), Test of English as a Foreign Language (hereafter TOEFL) or other standardized English tests as an indication of one's competitiveness (Byun, 2007). Even after obtaining employment, he/she is offered uneven opportunities in his/her work place when promoted to higher positions or provided salary increase according to his/her English scores. In a survey on English proficiency as a determining factor in one's success in his/her company, 370 human resources managers responded that English proficiency affected an employee's career advancement and salary increase (Choi, 2010). Reflecting this unparalleled status of English in business, 88% out of 350 companies in another survey (Son, 2007) answered that they provided massive support for English proficiency development of its employees, such as through in-company/overseas English training or financial assistance for English courses in private institutes. In this Korean context where English proficiency governs almost all aspects of one's life, people are frantic to be one of the English-haves in order not to be social outcasts. Once one taps into English-haves community, he/she will be given a green card to social and cultural capital and be able to reproduce it. However, if one fails to acquire English, he/she may face disadvantages of class stratification and being provided with only a limited access to social and cultural capital. This divide between English-haves and English-have-nots in Korea has long been a serious issue that has caused social inequalities and yet remains unsolved to this day.

Education Fever in Korea

Korean society is well known for its ‘education fever’ (Seth, 2002). There are numerous *hagwons* (private institutes) all over the country in which students study as late as midnight every day. Parents invest heavily in their children’s education, regardless of their aptitude on tests. Private tutoring is a necessity among students, regardless of any potential financial difficulties. In this atmosphere, English is the top pursuit for all parents and students in Korea. According to the Korea Development Institute (KDI), the total budget of private tutoring solely on English subjects accounted for about 6.5 trillion won (about \$ 5.6 billion) at the national level in 2012 (Song, 2013). This spending outweighed that of other major subjects in primary and secondary levels such as Mathematics and the Korean language. It is indicative of a national obsession with English due to its cultural capital as described in the previous section.

This Korean zeal for education is derived from the fundamental societal structure of Korea that provides increased professional potential with higher academic achievement. Korean students, at the high school level especially, are exposed to extreme competition to enter the most prestigious Seoul-based universities that will guarantee them social prestige, admiration from others, and better job opportunities. Students who have strong English language skills in addition to a degree from one of Korea’s elite universities will gain political, economic and social advantages.

Sociocultural Appropriateness in Korea

Behaving within sociocultural norms is highly important in Korean society. One of the most influential attributes in understanding this culture is Confucianism. Confucianism is a philosophy that studies human nature, putting foremost emphasis on human relationships as the basis of society (Yum, 1988). This philosophy has been underpinning sociocultural and political principles in Korean society for over 500 years (Park, 2012). As social relationships

are highly valued under Confucianism, virtues such as saving face, acting modestly and 立身揚名 (translates to ‘rise in the world and gain fame’, which considers achieving fame on behalf of one’s family as the primary goal in his/her life) are basic principles that strongly govern Koreans’ thoughts and behavior. If one does not conform to these norms, the individual is often seen as disrespectful, problematic, uneducated, selfish or poorly behaved.

Consequently, Koreans’ interpersonal behavior is generally regulated by sociocultural values of Korean society. Even in an English learning context, one is not exempt from conforming to sociocultural norms. Park (2012) shows this complexity in explaining interactions among Korean interlocutors. Despite the firm belief of Koreans on the superiority of native English, “a desirable self-image based on one’s own sociocultural norms” (p.230) is also a significant variable that decides Koreans’ interactive behavior. She describes factors that affect Korean English learners’ interpersonal behavior, such as interdependent culture, hierarchy based on age or position in social or institutional context, and indirectness. These are more decisive variables in representing Korean learners’ identities than their desire to choose a native variety of English in an attempt to associate themselves with NESs. In other words, Korean-specific norms are what predominantly govern Korean interlocutors’ behavior when using English (e.g., acting modestly when speaking with elders), preference in English variety (i.e., AmE, rather than other varieties of English because of historical ties), and their imagined identities. Although Koreans aspire to identify their English with native variety of English, their imagined identities are members of English-haves communities in Korean society, rather than NESs. This general tendency of having imagined identities of English-haves demonstrates the primacy of Koreans’ adherence to shared sociocultural norms in their society.

AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Chapter One: The first encounter with an exotic language

I do not remember my first encounter with the English language, but I do remember that the first word that I learned was ‘breakfast’. I learned this word when watching a videotaped English program for kids which my parents bought for me. In the video, a number of children were playing around, singing songs, and living together in harmony in a fictitious village. Every morning, they had breakfast all together, shouting the word ‘breakfast’ in excitement. In hindsight, this may have affected my firm belief that breakfast is the most important meal of the day. More importantly, they communicated with one another both in Korean and English. I remember that I thought it was such a ‘cool’ idea to use two languages when making friends. English became the first foreign language that I came across in a meaningful context. I was so inspired by seeing children in my age group conversing in an exotic language, as well as my own language, that I even wrote a journal titled, “I love English!” I was around 6 years old.

When I was in elementary school, there was a strong hierarchy among peers. As Suk-Dae Uhm takes over the whole class and other peers succumb to his supreme power and authority in Lee’s novel *Our twisted hero*, we – especially girls – had a highly stratified class system that overpowered us. Once you were identified with a certain group, it was hard to move up the ‘elementary caste system’. Therefore, you had to be strategic and diplomatic in choosing your friends. All the small kids knew how our class system worked, and conformed to the established rules in our own society, though we were never explicitly taught how politics worked. Due to, I assume, my strong personality at that time, I was in the ‘coolest’ peer group in the school. I was not afraid of any other kids except for one: Ran (pseudonym). She held an absolute power in our school district. One day, when I was a teenager and penpals were popular, Ran ‘designated’ me as her penpal and she wrote a letter to me

expressing that she wanted me to be her ‘exclusive bestie’, meaning that she did not want me to have any other close friends besides her. Since she had been saying this to a couple of other peers, I felt a sort of pressure that I had to impress her in order to maintain a close friendship with her. As one strategy to impress her – I still do not have a clue where I got this idea – I wrote “to” and “from” on the surface of my letter envelope in English. If my memory is correct, it was a grand success. She favored me over other girls because of my use of the exotic language. At that time, not many kids could use English, as we had not been taught it yet.⁹ I had linguistic capital that other peers did not have. It was my first experience using language as a means of gaining social and cultural capital without knowing or being taught ‘how’.

Chapter Two: Imagined identity in secondary school

My academic year group officially started learning English in junior-high school, in the 7th grade. With the start of English instruction, it became more than a mere ‘cool tool’ for me to make friends. Instead, it became a must-have item to be equipped with to enter a prestigious college and be a successful individual in the era of globalization. The cultural capital that I could obtain through a command of the English language was no longer limited to gaining the favor of a friend in a powerful position. It was a matter of *what kind of life I would have for the rest of my life* in Korea: the life of either *English-haves* or *English-have-nots*. “The key subjects in the college entrance exam are Mathematics and English,” university admission experts among college preparation institutes used to say. “There are a

⁹ Under the 7th national curriculum, English was officially introduced to the national elementary curriculum of Korea in 2001 (Lee & Jeong, 2015). With considerable changes being made to the 6th national curriculum, English started to be taught using textbooks from 3rd grade in elementary school. Up until 6th curriculum, which I went through in my elementary school years, there was no English subject in school before the 7th grade.

number of good¹⁰ universities that do not require Math scores. Yet, there is no university that does not require English scores.” During the senior year of high school, a lot of students give up on their Math scores when preparing for the college entrance exam. However, I have hardly heard of anyone giving up on their English scores.

I grew up in this atmosphere, where no one questioned why we had to place stronger emphasis on the English language over our own language. Even when English was not used in our daily lives, I was pushed to become a fluent English language user, as were the majority of the Korean population. My imagined identity was to become a member of the English-haves community, where I could indulge in all of the accumulated cultural capital and high SES in our society. This imagined identity is commonly seen in Korean students. Korean students tend to have a homogeneous superordinate goal, the value of which has been firmly set with unanimous agreement in our society: to be a successful individual, conforming to Korean-specific sociocultural norms. To achieve this goal, we had to enter one of the top-tier universities in Seoul (Sorensen, 1994).

However, in spite of my strong motivation to excel in English, I was never motivated to invest in classroom practice. In each English course, meaningful learning became harder and harder to come across as I advanced through high school because the main focus was merely on the college entrance exam. Teacher-student interaction scarcely happened because of the large class size, and the same teaching patterns made students bored. In class, I found nothing new except a new vocabulary list to memorize every day. In this context, I failed to find any need to invest in classroom tasks. Far from finding new identity options besides entering a good university, I could not find any link even between each classroom activity and my imagined identity (i.e., a good student who gets a higher score in English test). There

¹⁰ The adjective ‘good’ is frequently used to indicate nouns, but in Korea, it inherently means that the modified noun serves Korean sociocultural values and norms well. For instances, when Koreans label something as ‘good’ (e.g., universities, professionals, husband, wife, son/daughter-in-law, etc.), there is a shared meaning attached to each noun among Korean interlocutors that does not even need to be explicitly explained.

was little to no presentation on the meaning-making process in class of how each class was helping me to achieve my imagined identity. However, my lack of classroom participation was not a problem as long as I got a high enough score to get into a ‘good’ college. My peers also complained that they could not find meaningful connections between the English course in school and their imagined communities (i.e., good universities), saying, “English teachers in our school are not good at teaching”. To fill this gap, many of us went to additional private institutes or received private tutoring after school. We studied in school from 6:30 am to 10:30 pm, received extra tutorial instructions, and had homework afterward. This is still the case today.

Looking back on those days, I wonder how I would have spent my time in each English course at school if I had found a meaningful connection between my desired identity and classroom activity. Going further, how excited would I have been if I had been taught that my investment in class would incredibly enrich my life as an English speaker besides enabling myself to get into a ‘good’ university? If I had known, I would have never missed a single moment in class. This experience in secondary school taught me an unforgettable lesson as an ELT professional; that it is a crucial role for language teachers to provide learners with ample opportunity through which learners can discover a link between their imagined identities and each classroom activity.

Throughout my school years, I had never been considered a good student who listened to teachers and conformed to the school rules. I was a rather aggressive, rebellious and problematic student that challenged teachers’ authorities. Yet, I had maintained an outstanding GPA until my 11th grade. In the 11th grade, I ended up being depressed and pessimistic, getting sick of behaving within Korean sociocultural appropriateness, which had been colliding with my own personality. I tried to drop out of school but was discouraged due to the strong opposition of my father, who had always been supportive and respectful for

every decision that I had made. In my senior year of high school, I ran away from home and school, and went to Seoul alone in an attempt to be freed from all restraints that I did not want to bear anymore, especially from the excessive competition in the college entrance exam system. I was planning to get a part-time job in Seoul as a first step to be an independent individual, but my determination did not last that long. I soon called home to let my parents know that I was safe and would not go back for a while. Over the pay phone, my mother was crying. I was lost for words. Ms. Kim (one of the teachers in my high school, pseudonym) was maybe right when she said I was ‘just a peculiar, problematic child who could do nothing but let down my parents all the time,’ I thought, standing at the pay phone booth. I came back home with a broken heart as a ‘bad’ daughter, as well as a ‘bad’ student. When I came back, my parents were summoned to school because of the unacceptable behavior of their daughter as a student. They were asked to fill out a certain form, promising that they would supervise their daughter well afterwards. Nevertheless, they remained supportive. “Do not do it again. It was dangerous,” my father said; and it was the only comment from my parents on my short runaway.

Chapter Three: English language learning in college

Aside from some deep conversations in the middle of the night over fried chicken and beer – which is forbidden to teens by law – I did not have that many memories of my senior year. I spent the rest of the school days with no desire to invest in college entrance exam preparation anymore. Most of the time at school, I put my head down on the desk and slept in class. All I wanted was to get away from school; I counted days until the graduation. After graduating high school at last, however, I became motivated to study on my own and decided to apply for college in the following year.

After preparing another year for the university entrance exam, I entered one of the prestigious universities in Seoul. Some parents who heard the news asked me to tutor their

children during vacation. I accepted one mother's request and started teaching English and Math to her only son. Soon after, the private tutoring turned out to be one of the hardest tasks that I had ever done. Her son was a 10th grader and had no interest in going to college at all. He did not have any foundational knowledge both in English and Math. I started teaching from the very basic level in each subject. Nevertheless, it was hard to tell if he understood what I was teaching. In each session, he did not say any words but just stared at his book. When I asked questions, he did not respond at all. It was obvious that he was just sitting down with me since his mother forced him to. When I tried talking about him to his mother, who had so much passion in her son's education that she even designated textbooks that she wanted me to use, she repeatedly said that her son would eventually be interested in studying if I he met the 'right' – a synonym for the adjective 'good' in this context – tutor, who could guide him into a college. Obviously, I was not the 'right' tutor. I had zero desire to persuade him to study, if he had no interest. I thought that forcing students to study would be equivalent to propagating the deeply rooted thought in Korean society that you would be a 'loser' if your GPA was not high enough to enter a good university. Eventually, after tutoring the student for a month, I quit. Before discontinuing the tutoring, I introduced a friend of mine who also entered a Seoul-based university and could possibly be the right tutor. After another month, I heard that she was content with the new tutor. Yet, I could not erase a lingering disturbing feeling inside of me, whenever I thought of the empty look of her son during our tutoring session.

This experience made me never want to do private tutoring again. Even if tutees were willing to learn, I still did not feel right to be a private tutor since the price of the tutoring seemed unfairly measured. In 2007, private tutors were normally paid over 30,000 won (about \$27) an hour, whereas the minimum hourly wage in Korea that college students were generally paid in such places as cafés or bookstores was 3,480 won (about \$3) (Minimum

Wage Commission, 2016). Moreover, if you were a skilled tutor or taught students in Gangnam, the price of private tuition rises sharply. For better or worse, making money by giving private tutoring was common for the majority of college students in renowned universities. Among college student tutors, English was commonly considered as a relatively easy subject to teach – the only thing they needed to teach was how to use tricks to pick the right answers quickly on the test, instead of teaching an actual language. Given the effort that college student tutors generally put in before giving their lessons, I felt that the price of an hour-private-lesson was overpriced for college students.¹¹ In some cases of NES students that I knew, their private tutoring price felt ridiculous to me, as they were paid just to chitchat (or ‘converse’) for hours. When I shared this thought that the market price of one-on-one lesson was unfairly set, one of my friends told me, “That is why you have to enter a prestigious university: to make more money more easily”.

If you ask college students in Korea what their plans are for summer or winter vacation, chances are that you will be told one of the following most common options: a) enrolling in an English course in a private institute to prepare for TOEIC, TOEFL, or other standardized English tests or – if the students already have high enough scores in these English tests – b) applying for an intern position in a big company (Kang, 2006). If you wish to apply for a competitive job in Korea, impressive English scores on standardized tests are prerequisite no matter what types of profession you are applying for.

In 2009 winter, I enrolled for a month-long English course to prepare for TOEFL. I was going into my junior year in college and had not thought about becoming an ELT professional yet. At that time, I was pursuing my first major, B.A. in Film & Theatre, and therefore was interested in directing, acting, and writing screenplays. Having no desire to get a job in a company, I ostensibly did not need English scores for any future career plan that I

¹¹ I acknowledge that there are excellent tutors who have a high sense of professional responsibility among college students. Sadly, however, it was rather rare to find those tutors based on what I had experienced or heard.

had. However, almost every college student that I knew in other majors talked about their TOEIC or TOEFL preparation and was concerned about their scores. I was told that I ‘should’ have an English test score just in case. Carried along by the atmosphere of preparing for an English test, I went to Gangnam to register for a course.¹²

When the course started, however, I could not stand staying in the class – the stifling atmosphere where every one’s mind was occupied with ‘English test scores’, instructors who taught how to use tricks to get higher scores, and over 100-decontextualized words to memorize every day. The overwhelming atmosphere of the Gangnam area was also oppressive. Every day, there was a ceaseless surging crowd from Gangnam station. It seemed to me as if each train reaching Gangnam station vomited out the massive crowd and sucked up another crowd of people every other minute. The majority of the people in the crowd seemed to be in my age group. They were mostly burying themselves in textbooks written in English. Feeling disgusted by the overall impressions from the class and the area, I threw up right after the first day of the English course. I felt something was not right; I felt an “unspeakable wrongness” (Orwell, 2000:46). I ended up withdrawing from the course and getting a partial refund. I never came back to the area for years afterwards.

Chapter Four: Identity shifting as a NNET

In 2013, I chose English Education, which is ‘TESOL’ in a Korean setting, as my second major in college. After this choice, I witnessed significant changes in my surrounding environment where I negotiated my identity. I had been fairly confident in my English before I started my career as an ELT professional. With the start of my journey as a world traveler, I had experienced the benefits of using English as a *lingua franca*. Most importantly, I had been able to interact with amazingly diversified people and culture all over the world through

¹² Gangnam is home to many private English institutes in Korea (cited in Lee, 2016; Lee, 2013). It has the highest density of English private institutes in Korea. Especially Daechi-dong, one of the districts in Gangnam area, has the largest number of hagwons teaching all subjects including English. I often heard about Gangnam’s fame for English hagwons, and so I enrolled for a course in the biggest language institute in the area.

English, which in turn had brought tremendous richness into my life. I came to realize that one's identity, worldview, values, or lifestyle were closely intertwined with specific cultural settings in which one had grown up and that these elements could vary considerably. This fact that the way of living one's life could exist in various manners helped me to view myself as a unique individual that had her own culture, instead of a problematic individual according to the perspective of Korean specific norms. This liberating experience was all thanks to English bridging me to the bigger world beyond Korean society. I was deeply appreciative of my ability to use English that enabled me to explore all the newness of the world.

However, my identity as an English speaker shifted as my expected roles changed from an English user to a pre-service English teacher. My imagined identity for investing in the English language was no longer confined to a member of English-haves community in Korean society or backpackers communities worldwide. It became 'being a proficient English teacher', as English became the language of my profession. With the increased pressure on my English proficiency due to this change, I became much more sensitive to the existing gap between my desired and current English proficiency. Furthermore, as I was studying in the English education department and the majority of the course work was in English, I came to be more frequently exposed to fluent English speakers. I also met more NESs. Conversing with NESs, I often felt that my English proficiency would never be enough as an English teacher. Because of this sense of a lack of the essential qualifications of an ELT professional, I became self-conscious when using English. Sometime I could read, or thought I could read, the NESs' embarrassment when communication breakdowns happened. I felt ashamed of myself as if the miscommunications were solely attributed to my lack of English language competence. I suffered from the overwhelming sensation that I would never be able to overcome disadvantages as a NNEST. I perceived an imaginary wall standing right in front of me. The other side of the wall was only for NESTs, who were privileged to

naturally ‘acquire’ the linguistic capital. On the contrary, I as a NNEST who ‘learned’ English would never be invited to the other side.

This inferior identity as Talia (my English name) was inconsistent with the positive identity as Seullee (my Korean name). Seullee was a competent individual in general. She was able to communicate with others using sophisticated language. On the other hand, Talia often did not have appropriate language to put her thoughts or opinion into. I was confused by the incongruence between two different self-images: Seullee and Talia. Whenever I became Talia, I could not help but confront a deficient self. This phenomenon is consistent with one of the definitions of identity in a sociocultural theory that Norton (2006) notes. In Norton’s study on sociocultural theory of identity in second language research, one of the distinctive features of identity with regard to language learning is *transition*. In the nature of context-dependent identity, language learners’ identities experience transition over time and space. In a similar vein, Harklau’s research (2000) shows how the same students who are regarded as ‘good’ students in high school can be categorized as ‘underachieving’ students in college ESL classes. This identity transition caused by changing places from a place in which learners are initially engaged to a place in which they are expected to newly adjust themselves, often results in an identity crisis in language learners. In my case, identity transition from an English user to a prospective English teacher imbued a negative self-image as an incompetent, inadequate professional. This deficient self was contradicting to the competent self that I used to perceive myself as. In turn, this conflict among in-between identities caused me a great deal of pain.

I felt more ashamed of myself speaking in English whenever I talked to *Kyo-pos*, whose L1 was English. *Kyo-po* refers to people who have Korean ethnic backgrounds but have lived outside of Korea for long periods of time. I noticed that I became extremely silent and passive with them. Furthermore, when asked what I studied in college, I often answered

“Education” instead of “English Education”, to avoid higher expectations of my English proficiency. I often wished I had grown up abroad like Kyo-pos; they were the very ones who I wanted to be. Their physical appearances were similar to mine, and yet it seemed to me like they had a perfect command of English. According to Norton (2001), L2 learners feel most uncomfortable speaking in English with people who they consider as members of – or gatekeepers to – their imagined communities. Thus, the community of Kyo-pos was my imagined community and that was why I got nervous when talking to these current members of my imagined community in whom I had the “particular symbolic or material investment” (Norton, 2001:166).

After graduating college, I taught English in a private high school in Korea. After briefly experiencing the life of a novice English teacher, I came to the United States to pursue my master’s degree in TESOL. At that time, I was aware of the issue of the NESTs and NNESTs dichotomy, and yet I myself did not overcome the inferiority complex as a NNEST. When I attended professional conferences such as the KOTESOL International Conference, I saw there was a raised awareness of the NNEST/NEST issues among participants. However, whenever I looked up a teaching position abroad, especially in Asian countries, it was almost impossible to find any school or institute that did not ask for ‘native-speakerness’ or ‘near-native-speakerness’ as a minimum requirement for eligible applicants. As a novice ELT professional, I was confused of where to position myself as a NNEST between the NNEST Movement (Selvi, 2014) in academia and the reality that I faced. Furthermore, having grown up in Korea where the status of NESTs is greatly privileged (Lee & Jeon, 2006), I was already conditioned to acknowledge NESTs’ superiority. I did agree that both NESTs and NNESTs had their own benefits. However, I thought there were limitations for me as a NNEST even if I would make the best effort to become a proficient ELT professional. I kept comparing my English to NESTs’ automatized language. I remember thinking, NESTs did

not need to pay their focal attention to English itself when giving input to their students. On the other hand, I could not help but produce a number of errors in spite of taking extra care when teaching in class. For this reason, I was afraid of myself being in a teaching position, as I could fossilize my students' 'errors'. Therefore, the unequal treatment in the reality of ELT profession as being a NNEST, to some extent, did make sense to me and worsened a sense of inferiority in myself.

Since coming to a graduate school in the United States, my ontological struggle as a NNEST intensified. In the very beginning of my master's program, my imagined identity was to become a native-speaker-like teacher. Consequently, I had to keep facing my deficient English because of my inability to achieve native-speakerness. However, it was my TESOL program that enabled me to see new imagined identity options. Not only did my graduate school place strong emphasis on social justice issues, but my TESOL program also always challenged the monolingual bias in TESOL. For instance, my academic advisor noticed that I often paid a great deal of attention to my non-native-speakerness in my discourse. He pointed it out and provided several articles that would empower me. In SLA class, I was introduced to the notions of multicompetence (Cook, 1992) which has had a monumental effect on my perspective. I realized that I, whose mother tongue was not English, could be a powerful resource that could enrich my students' learning experience. My SLA professor was the perfect example for this, as she brought in-depth knowledge and rich experiences to the class by being a NNEST. Talking to her, my confidence in myself as an ELT professional grew, in the hope that I would become a teacher who could provide, as she did, learners with a new identity option: multicompetent individuals. Contrary to suffering from an inferior identity as a second-class citizen in English-speaking communities, embracing my multicompetent self was a revolutionary change in my personal and professional development.

On top of the enormous guidance from faculty members in my master's program, I came to be further empowered by reading other NNETs' narratives. I did not know that an academic paper could be therapeutic until I came across Pavlenko's article (2003a). In her work, Pavlenko illustrates how the shift in pre-service or in-service English teachers' imagined identities plays a key role both in shaping their self-images and increasing participation in their community. The participants go through identity transformation as they start to view themselves as multicompetent individuals, instead of deficient NNETs. Through readings and course work, they come to realize that it is not necessarily desirable to keep their previously imagined community (i.e., a community of NESs) and come to knowledge about a new imagined community option (i.e., a community of multilinguals where their multicompetence as ELT professionals will be welcomed) (Pavlenko, 2003a). Walking through their narratives and watching their identity transformation process, I was filled with an indescribable joy. As they did, I realized my effort in trying hard to get into NESs community was undesirable. It was not only 'impossible', but 'unnecessary'. I as a multicompetent teacher already had eligibility and ability to be a proficient English teacher, as did NESTs. In a hope for this new imagined identity, I became more actively engaged in each class with a greater confidence in myself. I decided to stop mentioning anything belittling my English because of my NNETness, but rather, to be appreciative of my multicompetence. Likewise, a significant increase of my investment in ELT professional communities was seen with the shift of my imagined identity from a NNET to a multicompetent teacher.

Chapter Five: Beyond embracing the new identity option as a multicompetent teacher

The majority of the faculty members and colleagues in my TESOL program seemed to be alert on the issues of the NNET/NEST dichotomy. Acknowledging that English

language learning always embodied socioeconomic and political ideologies by its very nature (Pennycook, 1994), they were mindful of power inequity issues surrounding the English language and were cautious about their attitudes and behaviors toward the matters. One of my close colleagues with whom I did my teaching practicum as part of our master's program is an example. When he and I were together in Nicaragua, people tended to ask questions related to English to him, instead of me, as he was a 'native speaker' from 'the United States'. Every time it happened, he deflected the questions to other interlocutors whose first languages were not English by asking, for instance, "what do you think, Talia?" and added his thought if necessary, saying, "I am inclined to say (...), but this is just my opinion". By doing this, he intended to destabilize the existing dichotomy between NESTs and NNESTs. He was showing that he was not the only authority who owned English due to his nationality. Likewise, thanks to the help of these proactive faculty and colleagues in reconceptualizing the ownership of English, I was able to continue to hold on to the new imagined identity as a multicompetent ELT professional.

Nevertheless, the fact that I was a multicompetent self and professional did not necessarily mean that I was a prepared English teacher. Although I embraced the new identity option, I felt something was still missing to be a proficient English teacher. Especially, it was obvious to me that my NES colleagues were more advanced English language users than I was. Yet, when I shared my concerns that my perceived English proficiency was not high enough to be an effective teacher, people seldom seemed to think it was true or a 'big deal'. For most people who had an awareness of native-speakerism issues, talking about a NNEST's English proficiency could be sensitive. Those people had tentatively made an effort not to view each English teacher in the frame of the NNEST/NEST binary. As Selvi (2014) puts it, we agreed that each teacher should be understood as "situated, historical, glocal, and transformative facets of their identities" (2014:587), regardless of their native-speakerness. In

this context, I was considered as a multicompetent English user and teacher that had expertise in unique skills – for example, I was equipped with a high level of grammatical competence that most NESTs were struggling to acquire. Therefore, I was often told that my English was ‘good enough’ and I did not need to be worried about my English.

This general – unconditionally supportive – atmosphere toward NNETs made me wonder if the feeling that I lacked something as an efficient teacher was indicative that I was still experiencing the NNETs complex. However, I found that other NNETs with multicompetent identities experienced the similar dissatisfaction in terms of their English proficiency. In Brutler’s study (2004:245) in Korea, Japan, and Taiwan, he found that there was consistent incongruence between teachers’ self-evaluated current language proficiency and their desired level of language proficiency to be effective teachers. Other researchers demonstrate that this discrepancy often leads NNETs to lack of self-esteem and confidence as ELT professionals (cited in Mahboob, 2010; Brinton, 2004; Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999; Kamhi-stein & Mahboob, 2005; Medgyes, 1994; Reves & Medgyes, 1994). This phenomenon that the lack of English proficiency causes negative self-images in NNETs even after their identity transformation as multicompetent selves/teachers is inevitable because having an excellent command of English is a fundamental qualification for all ELT professionals. Many scholars have contended a high level of English language proficiency is one of the most important characteristics of good teachers for quality ELT (e.g. Allen & Valette, 1994). The successful language learning of English language learners relies not on the native-speakerness of English teachers, but rather on teachers’ linguistic skills alongside pedagogical and methodological skills (Astor, 2000). In a similar spirit, learners have shown their preference of teachers with “strong pedagogical skills and high level of declarative and procedural knowledge of English language” (qtd in Selvi, 2014:590; Mullock, 2010) whereas they have demonstrated no clear preference on native-speakerness of teachers. Of course, as

illustrated in the statements above, teachers' language proficiency is not the only requirement for successful ELT. Pasternak and Bailey (2004) contend that a good command of English of ELT professionals is "only one element of professionalism" (p. 161). They put strong emphasis on professional preparation as well as language proficiency. In order to be professionally well prepared and proficient in English, teachers need to be equipped with both declarative (knowledge 'about' something) and procedural knowledge (the ability to do things), regardless of their native-speakerness (p.157).

The problem is that among all the qualifications that are required for quality ELT, the most urgent need of many NNEST students in TESOL programs is language proficiency, procedural knowledge in particular. Many – not 'all' – NNESTs have limited knowledge of usage of English (procedural knowledge) although they have a high level of grammatical competency in English (declarative knowledge). This phenomenon is an inevitable repercussion of many NNESTs' linguistic environments where English had not been commonly used when they were growing up. According to Liu (1999), many NNESTs use English "in a way that may be grammatically correct but difficult to understand because of the interference from their native language structure and usage" (p.205).¹³ For example, as I was born and grew up in Korea, I was seldom exposed to English in daily life until I started traveling abroad as an adult. English was rather a language to 'study', not to 'use'. Hence, when producing new utterances that I had never heard of or used, I had to utilize grammatical knowledge that I had built in school and locate pieces of the language in accordance with it. At first, my hypothetical utterances could barely deliver the intended meaning despite its grammatical correctness. Through trials and errors over time, however, I came to have a better grasp of the English usage and be better at producing comprehensible utterances to other interlocutors.

¹³ Liu (1999) makes it clear that what he means by "an excellent command of English" is not equivalent to "native-like pronunciation or intonation". It is rather "fluent and idiomatic use of the English language" (p.204), which is functional and thus allows interlocutors to understand each other properly.

It is not only in the use of English on a day-to-day basis, but also in an academic setting such as MA TESOL courses that NNESTs have a difficulty because of their lack of language proficiency. Despite NNESTs scoring high enough in standardized English tests such as TOEFL or IELTS to be accepted in TESOL programs, the actual academic language proficiency of NNESTs varies from very high to very low. Consequently, many NNESTs struggle to understand the concepts and theories that are taught in their courses because of their limited academic language proficiency (Mahboob, 2010). To address this issue, many TESOL programs in ICCs provide English for Academic Purpose (hereafter EAP) courses to NNEST students. Nonetheless, many EAP courses are not as effective as they are intended to be. In my MA TESOL program, an English language course was offered to serve linguistic needs of international students. This course was mandatory for all international students whose L1 was not English. However, I often heard complaints about this course from students who had previously registered for the course. The major cause of complaints was the greatly varied language proficiency between the students in the course. Some students had lived in English-speaking countries and were fluent in listening and speaking. Their primary needs were attaining cultural reference of the United States or developing sophisticated academic writing skills. Other students, on the other hand, had limited proficiency of speaking or listening, as they had never been exposed to English for the purpose of communication in the past. They wanted to improve their general proficiency of English including speaking, listening, writing and reading skills. Apparently, the latter group's needs were not compatible with those of the former group and most students in the former group consequently dropped out of the course. For similar reasons, three out of four international students in my MA TESOL program, including myself, withdrew from the course after attending several sessions. Personally, it was not only because the level of the course was too low, but also the goal of the course was too generic: to improve English language skills of

international students. I wish there had been a specialized language course for ELT professionals that focused on enhancing procedural knowledge of English.

Along with ineffective language courses, a lack of awareness to the needs for linguistic development of NNESTs is also problematic. In current TESOL programs in ICCs, I found that there has been a binary division of attitudes towards NNESTs: viewing them either as second-class citizen teachers of English or multicompetent teachers whose legitimacy should not be questioned any longer. Recently, the latter perspective has been gaining popularity in SLA and TESOL. We have seen the active movement in reconceptualizing English teachers' legitimacy regardless of their places of birth and in deconstructing native-speakerism in TESOL (Canagarajah, 2014; Selvi, 2014). Nevertheless, there has not been enough recognition of the necessity to problematize a lack of practical support for NNESTs in line with multilingualism. Much has been written about both language training for language teachers and NNESTs' identities as multicompetent professionals in segregation. Yet, no mainstream research that I came across in both fields has taken the step of linking them together.

This limited amount of awareness in TESOL praxis is seen from the core curriculum of many TESOL programs. Most TESOL programs only focus on professional preparation, not on language development of NNESTs (Mahboob, 2010). In Liu's article (1999), it is well shown that only a few TESOL programs have addressed linguistic needs of NNESTs and focused more on enhancing students' explicit knowledge of English grammar. Designing TESOL courses that foster grammatical knowledge of TESOL students may benefit NNESTs who have not been taught on how their mother language actually operates; however, in many cases, such courses do not meet the needs of NNESTs. NNESTs, especially from ECCs, often have well-established foundation of English grammar, already. What is imperative for

NNESTs is to work more on procedural knowledge of English. Nonetheless, most TESOL programs overlook this unique situation of NNESTs.

As Pasternak and Bailey (2004) insist, I do believe that TESOL programs can significantly improve how they help NNESTs to improve language proficiency as well as their professionalism. To do this, a greater emphasis should be placed in linguistic development in the core curriculum of the programs. Pasternak and Bailey (2004) suggest a number of ways to support NNESTs in TESOL programs, such as providing EAP courses, including a learner-training element in program orientations, and designating an academic advisor to each and every student. Shin (2008) also provides some examples for TESOL programs such as designing English courses that aim to address the specific needs of NNEST students. She also insists that NNEST students should be offered language support outside the classroom as well as inside the classroom throughout the programs. As an example, on-campus employment or volunteer opportunities are good ways to provide NNEST students with authentic input in diverse contexts. Several sources with regard to improving NNEST students' language proficiency are also introduced in the book of Mahboob (2010). In this edited volume, Mahboob et al. contend that English courses for NNEST students in MA TESOL programs should not be separate but integrated into other existing courses that are being taught in the programs.

Along with all these support for NNEST students, I personally think that recognizing NNEST students' linguistic needs, developing procedural knowledge in particular, and making an effort to meet those as one of the prime responsibilities of TESOL programs is highly important. Currently, most MA TESOL programs do not consider language support for NNEST students as a priority (Mahboob, 2010). This perspective in pedagogical orientation of MA TESOL programs needs to change. Rather than viewing issues regarding NNEST students' linguistic development as 'not their job' or trying not to admit NNEST

students with relatively low English proficiency (Frazier & Phillabaum, 2012), TESOL programs should be willing to be more responsible for their students' language development. There is a growing call for greater numbers of English teachers so as to meet the demands of the many and varied English language learners around the world. TESOL programs need to play a pivotal role as ELT training schools that deal with this situation well and prepare teachers both in procedural and declarative knowledge of English.

Above all, all this practical support should take place with NNESTs' transforming experience as multicompetent individuals. Otherwise, the effort in language development may only serve the undesirable, impossible imagined identities as NESs of NNESTs. TESOL programs thus need to carefully design well-balanced curriculum between enhancing language proficiency of and providing new identity options with NNEST students; none of those should be undermined. Only then, positive changes of NNESTs will be maximized throughout TESOL courses, as NNESTs embrace their multicompetent identities as well as are better prepared as skilled professionals.

Chapter Six: Coming back, eyes opened

After the on-campus phases of my master's program ended, I left the United States and came back to Korea. On the plane, I had an interesting conversation with a passenger sitting next to me. At first, I was impressed by his fluent English. He was older than my grandparents and it was rare to find people in my grandparent's generation who could speak fluent English. When I asked how he had learned English, he said that he had worked in the United States for over 50 years and retired a while ago. After retiring, he moved to Korea a few years ago and was heading back to Korea after a trip to San Francisco by himself.

I used the Korean language when speaking to him, as I could tell his first language was Korean. However, he spoke back to me in English. After sharing stories of his trips to over 20 countries so far, he said there was no other country better to live in than the United

States; it had the best education, culture, nature, and so forth. He also asked me if I made an American boyfriend while staying in the United States. When I said “no”, he insisted that I be married to an American man – he meant a ‘US citizen’ here – so that I could get an American passport. By having an American passport, my life would be much richer and more comfortable. I asked how my life would be ‘richer and more comfortable’. He said, “You know, better life.” I just smiled.

After relaxing at home for a couple of days, for a regular checkup, I visited the hospital where my mother had been working for more than 20 years. Since most people in the hospital had been working together for many years, they knew every single story about each other. Many people had also watched me growing up since I was very little. As soon as they saw me, they commented on the color of my skin. For them, I was in the prime age for marriage and therefore needed to take good care of my skin to be ‘porcelain-like’.¹⁴ However, I had gotten tanned while staying Nicaragua for my teaching practicum and my skin was too dark for their liking. When I expressed my preference for tanned skin over porcelain-like skin, they laughed and said, “you don’t want to marry, do you?” The chitchat topic naturally moved on to my marriage. They said that I needed to bring over a ‘Kyo-po’ with an ‘American’ passport as a future husband. “A native English speaker from America with black hair – a US citizen with Korean ethnic background – is the most popular type of son-in-law nowadays,” they said. “Foreigners – ‘Western men’ in this context – are not bad, though,” they all agreed to each other. Several questions through which I could single out an imperial ideology in their comments popped up on my mind, but again, I just smiled.

Before I came back, I expected myself to face the same issues in Korean society that had been so prevalent and had had a great impact on me: the national obsession with the English language, the native/non-native speaker fallacies, the obsequious attitude toward

¹⁴ In Korea, we commonly use the expression ‘porcelain-like’ for someone’s skin to describe beautiful, fair, flawless skin.

Western cultures, and so forth. All these had put me into identity conflicts and a sense of inferiority as a NNES(T). Although I was transformed to have a different perspective, coming across these issues again is still not easy. Nevertheless, because I had grown up as a Korean in this sociocultural context, I had to struggle hard and therefore was able to accept my new identity option as a multicompetent individual. Now I appreciate my Koreanness more than ever before – as much as I had not appreciated it – as well as my multicultural identity. I imagine how many people in my country will enjoy much richer lives as multicompetent individuals when freed from deficient NES imagined identities. My own transformation has not been easy, I thought, when I was listening to the passenger on the plane and the people in the hospital. Yet the struggle has been worthwhile. I smiled again, satisfied for now with the person I had become.

CONCLUSION

So far, I have demonstrated how theoretical constructs in identity research and power inequity issues regarding the NNEST/NEST dichotomy in SLA can be well explained in my narrative. Through a number of personal vignettes, I have first illustrated that the English language manifests as significant cultural capital in Korean society. Despite its rarity in use on a daily basis, English has historically been associated with the power of dominant groups and deepened the gap between English-haves and English-have-nots in Korea. Also, I have explored my identity development as a NNEST(T) through the lens of identity theories. Apparently, a multicompetent self as a new imagined identity option does offer a transformative experience for NNESTs. Yet, in order to be truly empowered as competent professionals, NNESTs need to work further on their language proficiency to the point of their aspired level along with the identity transformation. However, this necessity for language development of NNESTs has not been accommodated in most TESOL programs. In addressing this, TESOL praxis should overcome the current atmosphere where discussing NNESTs' language proficiency is unnecessarily shunned, which is an aftereffect of reconceptualizing NNESTs' professional legitimacy in the light of multilingualism. Beyond talking about multilingualism, the TESOL field needs to realize and problematize its lack of practical support for NNESTs in current TESOL programs; systematic help and curriculum improvement are imperative to meet NNESTs' linguistic needs. By doing so, NNESTs will be able to enhance their identity transformation experiences as multicompetent selves and become more effective, competent ELT professionals.

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