

**IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN LITERACY PRACTICES IN L2:
A CASE STUDY OF THREE KOREAN GRADUATE STUDENTS IN
A TESOL PROGRAM**

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INTRODUCTION

The acquisition of academic literacy in a second language (L2) is inherently challenging and complex. The process requires that students consciously and unconsciously come to terms with new ways of making sense of literacy practices that may be at odds with their familiar and desired ways of being and speaking. Students are further challenged by having limited control over the second language, which represents both an important linguistic resource and form of power.

Poststructuralists view literacy acquisition as a process of identity reconstruction (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic, 2000; Collins & Blot, 2003; Erdreich & Rapoport, 2002; Gee, 1996, 2000; Street, 1984, 1993). In a study of identity and schooling among Palestinian Israeli female college students, Erdreich and Rapoport (2002) found that even though students may feel excluded from the dominant academic discourse and challenged by new ways of knowing, they uniquely construct academic knowledge by drawing on their lived and living knowledge and experience. They also use new literacy skills to explore and articulate their own ethnonational identity. Similarly, Morita (2002) illuminates the conflicting and transformative process of L2 academic discourse socialization in her qualitative case study of a group of graduate students in a TESOL program. The study provides a rich account of how L2 graduate students' identities and power are negotiated and reconstituted while participating in academic communities of practice.¹ These two studies suggest that the acquisition of academic L2 literacy is not a

¹ In this study, I use the terms such as L2 students and non-native educators although I am aware of the risk of essentializing and stereotyping groups of individuals by using such terms. Drawing upon Spivak's notion of strategic use of essentialism, Pennycook (2001) contends that it "allowed us to consider when we want to question identities, realities, rights, or languages and when we need to operationalize more fixed and concrete notions for strategic purposes (p. 172)." Thus, I choose to use essentializing terms with the goals

unilateral process of socialization but requires “the adoption of radically different perspectives” (Kulz, Groden, & Zamel, 1993, p. 29) that lead to the reconstruction and extension of embodied knowledge and learner perspectives (Canararajah, 2002; Spack, 1997b).

The in-depth, longitudinal study described here contributes to the emerging discussion on TESOL by reporting on the experiences of three Korean students in an American graduate program. I first present a conceptual framework and describe my research methodology for this study. I next present my findings, focusing on how participants’ identities were imposed as well as chosen through the acquisition of academic literacy in the L2. I conclude with the theoretical and methodological implications of these findings.

FRAMING THE STUDY

This study draws upon a number of epistemological and theoretical perspectives. I take into account feminist poststructuralist views of discursive constructions of identity and agency (Davies, 1990; Pavlenko, 2003; Ropers-Huilman, 1998; Weedon, 2001), which have advanced theoretical understanding of the conditions under which agency is activated and with what consequences. I also draw upon poststructuralist approaches to literacy practices (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000; Collins & Blot, 2003; Erdreich & Rapoport, 2002; Gee, 1996, 2002; Heath, 1983; Rose, 1989; Street, 1984, 1993, 1995, 2001) that allow us to appreciate the dynamics of literacy, power, and identity. I find the notion of emotional colonialism (Kim, 2001; Nandy, 1983) useful in analyzing the unconscious state of mind that shapes subject positions. Finally, I combine Canagarajah’s (2002) concept of local knowledge with Wenger’s understanding of imagination to examine how L2 students engage in academic disciplinary knowledge and reposition themselves in relation to the academic community.

Discursive Construction of Identity and Agency

Some feminist poststructuralists argue that both the individual and reality are products of discursive and agentive actions (Davies, 1989, 1990; Weedon, 2001). According to Weedon (2001), the individual, by virtue of his or her social existence, belongs to a range of discursive fields that include competing ways of understanding the world and experience while providing the individual with many possible forms of subjectivity. Davies (1990) argues that the individual gains access to what it means to be a member of different discursive fields by learning how to use available discursive practices. While sometimes accepting and sometimes rejecting assigned categories, the individual becomes a subject “implicated in and made sense of through such practices” (p. 342).

Just as the discursive practices in which an individual engages are inherently competing or contradictory, multiple, changing over time and space, and a site of struggle over meaning, access, and power (Norton Pierce, 1989), so are the subject positions that the individual takes up. The questions that arise from this complexity include how an individual takes up a position within competing discourses and what driving forces enable that individual to position him or herself in a particular way.

The notion of agency is key to understanding the constant renegotiation of position as an individual moves through a wide range of available discursive practices (Collins & Blot, 2003; Davies, 1990; Ropers-Huilman, 1998; Weedon, 2001). Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) view agency as “a relationship that is constantly co-constructed and renegotiated with those around the individual and with the society at large” (p. 148). This view supposes that agency is implicated in the power relations of discourse. Ahearn (2001) also suggests taking into consideration the unconscious of the individual, that is, “things like internal dialogues and fragmented subjectivities” (p. 8), when investigating agency. That enables us to raise questions about what kinds of actions can be considered as genuinely agentive or even whether “an action must be fully, consciously intentional to be agentive” (p. 8).

Davies (1990) contends that discursive, personal, and social resources must all be available in order for agency to be activated. Discursive resources refer to the availability of recognizable alternative discourses that provide new ways of being in the world.

Personal resources are an individual's knowledge, skills, and ability to mobilize relevant discursive resources. The individual also has to have a sense of agency; that is, he or she should assume the power to make choices, put them into action, and assume the moral responsibility for the consequences (p. 360). It is also very important to interact with others who support his or her exercising agency, which constitutes social resources. Davies contends that in order not to become "trapped inside a new set of assumptions, imperatives, and desires" (p. 345) when subscribing to a particular discourse, an individual should also be capable of understanding the political and ideological significance of positioning him or herself as suggested by diverse discourses. Only then can the subject actively make sense of meanings to adopt a beneficial position.

In relation to this, Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) note that human agency is shaped by whatever is significant to the individual (see also Morita, 2001). As Mission (1996) posits, an individual subscribes to a discourse that appears to be responsive to his or her desires and interests. For example, in Ibrahim's (1999) study, French-speaking immigrant, refugee African youths invested in becoming 'black' linguistically and culturally during ESL learning so as to identify themselves with black Americans. To take another example, a Chinese high school teenager refused the negative identities imposed on him by classroom discourse and instead engaged in computer-mediated communications in English that led to successful language study (Lam, 2000). Communicating on the Internet enabled him to discover his competence as a knowledgeable fan of Japanese pop music while exploring his new English literacy. Similarly, in a reinterpretation of a previous study, Norton (2001) argues that the non-participation of two L2 students in an English class resulted from their desire to preserve their identities as capable and experienced adults. Choosing whether and how to participate in L2 learning is "an act of investment, an expression of desire" (Ibrahim, 1999, p. 365).

Literacy Practices, Power and Identity

Poststructuralist literacy theorists view literacy as particularly situated practices of reading and writing within society, involving people's values, attitudes, and beliefs about literacy and the discourses of literacy (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000; Collins & Blot, 2003; Street, 1984, 1993). Like every other human activity, literacy practices structure

social relations. That social relations are built into literacy practices signifies that literacy is inherently political and ideological and caught up with broader social concerns involving such dimensions of identity as class, race, and gender.

Street (1984) asserts that “literacy can only be known to us in forms which already have political and ideological significance” (p. 8). Similarly, Gee (1996) points out that social power relations within discourses set people apart from one another by categorizing “who is an insider and who isn’t, often, who is normal and who isn’t, often too many other things as well” (p. 132). In a language use and child socialization study, Heath (1983) demonstrates how schooled discourses serve to screen out some groups of students from one social class while promoting others from other classes.

The working of power relations in schooled discourses is best examined using the notion of markedness. Drawing upon linguistics, Bucholtz and Hall (2003) define markedness as “the hierarchical structuring of difference” (p. 3). They argue that schooled discourses afford a special, normative status to some social categories such as whiteness, masculinity, heterosexuality, and middle-class status while marking other categories as diverging from the norm. The potentially dangerous effect of this process, they note, is that when one category assumes the unmarked normative position, its power is taken for granted and therefore hardly questioned. Those in the marked categories within the hegemonic discourse meanwhile struggle to gain legitimacy and measure up to the norm.

Unmarked native speaker norms of identity and proficiency tend to be foregrounded in most SLA theory, while ‘non-native English speakers’, such as ‘ESL’ students and ‘non-native’ in-service teachers, are marked as inadequate or having second class status. For example, although there has been relatively little research on non-native TESOL teachers’ literacy acquisition and identity formation (but see Kramsch & Lam, 1999; Morita, 2002; Pavlenko, 2003; Shamimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999), concerns over their professional status have been raised in studies on TESOL (e.g., Braine, 1999; Liu, 1999; Tang, 1997). Those positioned as subordinate are often sensitive to “what the dominant refused them whatever is their attitude: resignation, denial, contestation, imitation, or repression” (Jean-Claude Passeron, quoted in Chartier, 1995, p. 96). Thus, the relationship between ‘native’ and ‘non-native’ professionals sometimes becomes that of

teachers and students because the non-native English instructor seeks recognition or approval of linguistic and professional legitimacy from the native (see Liu, 1990; Tang, 1997). This issue has been examined by several critical scholars in the field (Canagarajah, 2002; Kubota, 1999; Pavlenko, 2003; Pennycook, 1998; Spack, 1997).

Emotional Colonialism

Postcolonialists have noted the psychological repercussions of colonialism (Kim, 2002; Nandy, 1983; Pennycook, 1998, 2001). Nandy (1983) defines colonialism as “a psychological state rooted in earlier forms of social consciousness in both the colonizers and colonized” (p. 2). Kim (2002) refers to a similar Korean concept, *sadaejuui*, in critiquing the hegemony of English and Western scholarship in Korea. *Sadaejuui* means for Kim a colonized mindset developed among people who have undergone political, economic, and cultural domination by other groups. The colonized have a tendency to submit blindly to the colonizers while looking down on the cultural and social norms of their own heritage. Kim summarizes this tendency in Korea as follows:

Cultural colonialism persists steadfastly and has a great influence on the shape of our desires. The long-lived practices of kowtowing to China in Korean history entailed nearly perfect intellectual and cultural subordination to China, and this cultural submission in us has now been redirected toward the North America and its culture as the North American and its language, English, enjoy their unprecedented power in the world (p. 18).

Kim (2002) points out that a colonized mindset predominates among Korean elites that frantically subscribe to discourses attached to English and Western scholarship. This broad social and historical context provides the basis for Korean graduate students’ aspirations and investment in pursuing degrees in the United States. I draw on this postcolonialist perspective in my analysis of how the mindsets of social subjects are discursively constructed by social and historical settings.

Local Knowledge Reconstruction and Imagination

According to Kulz, Groden, and Zamel (1993), the acquisition of academic literacy has to do with “extending and elaborating” a learner’s embodied knowledge (p. 40).

Canagarajah (2002) re-conceptualizes the notion of local knowledge to advance understanding of how learners encounter new modes of discourse:

Local knowledge is not a mere *product* constituted by the beliefs and practices of the past. Local knowledge is a *process*—a process of negotiating dominant discourses and engaging in an ongoing construction of relevant knowledge in the context of our history and social practice. What is important is our *angle* from which we conduct this practice—that is, from the locality that shapes our social and intellectual practice... We interpret other knowledge constructs and social formations only from our local positionality. This is our hermeneutic bias (*italics in original*, p. 251).

Canagarajah's basic premises are that knowledge is local and all individuals stand on their own local positions. It is only from their locally situated positions (i.e., their "hermeneutic bias," p. 251) that they make sense of other knowledge constructs and social constitutions. This epistemological practice allows them to appropriate meanings of certain forms of knowledge and re-position themselves in relation to the world. He goes on to argue that this practice enables individuals to transcend the global/local dichotomy since the global and local are constantly intersecting with each other. At the same time, global knowledge is only understood and manifested through local lenses.²

In relation to Canagarajah's local knowledge construction, imagination is an essential part of the identity. Wenger (1998) views imagination as an integral part of the sense of place in a given community of practice. He defines imagination as "a process of expanding our self by transcending our time and space and creating new images of the world and ourselves" (p. 177). He writes:

Throughout imagination, we can locate ourselves in the world and in history, and include in our identities other meanings, other possibilities, other perspectives. It is through imagination that we recognize our own experience as reflecting broader patterns, connections, and configurations. It is through imagination that we see our own practices as continuing histories that reach

² The Palestinian Israeli women in Erdreich and Rapoport's (2002) study mentioned earlier provide a case in point. These college students made sense of new academic knowledge from their subject position as a minority group and acquired new ways of thought in the university to transform the way they belonged in the world.

far into the past, and it is through imagination that we conceive of new developments, explore alternatives, and envision possible futures ... imagination can make us consider our own position with new eyes. By taking us into the past and carrying us into the future, it can recast the present and show it as holding unsuspected possibilities (p. 178).

That is, the process of local knowledge reconstruction entails re-imagining our place in the world along with appropriating new meanings.

I have briefly discussed four different theoretical perspectives that frame this case study. First, the feminist poststructuralist view of identity as discursive production and agency illuminates how identities may be both discursively imposed as well as chosen and how agency is activated. Second, the poststructuralist view of the inter-relationship between literacy practices and identity construction is useful for exploring the dynamics of literacy, power, and identity. Third, the postcolonialist concept of ‘emotional colonialism’ explains the unconscious mindset that constitutes subject positions and therefore has an impact on the way we engage in new academic discourses. Finally, Canagarajah’s (2002) concept of local knowledge is helpful in understanding what it takes to acquire and make sense of new academic discourse in a second language. The notion of local knowledge not only helps us better understand the social and historical construction of imagination but also the way imagined identities are contested, negotiated, and re-shaped when L2 learners maneuver within a range of competing academic discourses.

METHODS OF INQUIRY

Methods of inquiry employed in this case study included autoethnography and ethnography to investigate my own and two colleagues experiences with academic L2 literacy (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). I collected and transcribed approximately 97 hours of taped interview data and also numerous informal personal conversations over the course of this research in which I took extensive field notes. The sources of data also included numerous e-mail correspondence and papers from a Writing Pedagogy course that contained our reflections on the acquisition of academic writing in English. Data were collected both in English and Korean, and the Korean data were translated and analyzed by me and member-checked for the accuracy of meaning and wording by the interviewees at different stages of writing in order to lessen the inherent danger of biased interpretation (Davis, 1990; Hatch, 2002). As is typical of interpretative qualitative studies, the process of collecting and analyzing data was cyclical.

A major component of this study involved narratives. Narratives result from an individual's desire to make sense of life as a whole amid the tensions between his or her "memories of the past and anticipations of the future" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 746). Bell (2002) draws our attention to the epistemological stance or underlying assumptions enmeshed in an individual's narration that gives meaning to what would otherwise seem like random experience. That is to say, the individual attends to certain elements of experience and organizes those elements in ways that are responsive to the stories available to him or her. In this regard, narrative inquiry serves as a window on interpretations of experience (see also Schiffrin, 1996). Likewise, Bell (2002) notes that narrative is constructed along a temporal thread, such that the meaning of current experience is shaped not only by one's lived past experience and epistemic stance, but also by the future one imagines for oneself. Bell argues that this in turn is shaped by the discursive practices that are available to the individual.

Pavlenko (2002) delineates the social, cultural, and historical influences on narrative and the relationship between the storyteller and the researcher. Rhetorical effects include shared narrative norms and ways of portraying race, ethnicity, class, gender, and

sexuality. An informed narrative inquiry, she argues, should explore the multiple influences that shape narrative configurations to illuminate what stories are told in what ways and whose voices remain unheard and why. Weedon (2001) similarly emphasizes that “the way people make sense of their lives is a necessary starting point for understanding how power relations structure society” (p. 8). Pennycook (2001) also considers narrative analysis a useful research tool for investigating the working of power relations in individual experiences.

Narratives are used in this study to examine how identities and power are contested and negotiated in the course of academic literacy practices in L2. By attending to the unique ways each of us make sense of emergent academic discourses, I gained insight into the frames of interpretation with which each of us organize our experiences and the ideologies that influence our narrative construction. This method allowed me to capture multiple, changing, and sometimes conflicting positionings as we moved into a range of different academic discourses (see Bell, 1997).

I engaged in autoethnographic and ethnographic data collection between August 2002 and May 2004. The three Korean students in the study (myself and two others) were enrolled in an ESL graduate program in a North American university. The university has a population of 19,863 students from various ethnic, racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds (Registrar, 2003) One hundred and thirty-six students were enrolled in the ESL graduate program, including 22 Doctoral degree candidates, 100 Master’s degree students, and 14 certificate students.

Before beginning the Master’s degree program in this U.S. ESL program, the three subjects of the study, including myself, another female student (referred to as ‘Jin’ in this study, and a male student (‘Chong’), all had Master’s degrees in the field from Korean universities and between three to five years English teaching experience. The power relations between the researcher and participants were more or less equal because I am both Korean and a co-participant in the study. Since I shared narrative norms with the participants as a Korean as well as a fellow graduate student, there was little of the cultural and political tension in the researcher-researched encounter about which Canagarajah (1996) expresses concern. Exploring and constructing the meanings of our encounters with new academic discourses entailed disclosing my own ways of

interpreting these new experiences to a great extent. Over the course of this research, all of our subject positions changed along with the acquisition of new academic discourses. Likewise, my frames of interpretation changed as I became more familiar with the other two participants' storylines and better informed of relevant theories and research (see Bell, 1997). Henceforth, I refer to myself and the two other participants as 'we' and 'our' to signify this commonality of experience.

The main purpose of the study was to investigate how L2 learners encounter academic discourse and how this is implicated in the construction of identity. The underlying premises are that: (a) identity involves constant negotiation of how we relate to the world (Pennycook, 2001) and can be both imposed and chosen through the acquisition of new discourses (Collins & Blot, 2003); (b) individuals embody different and unique histories and perspectives, so their ways of making sense of their learning inherently differ; and (c) discourses of literacy are seen as having ideological and political significance. With these premises in mind, I raise the following research questions:

1. How do participating students make sense of academic literacy in L2?
2. How are identities and power challenged, negotiated, and constructed in the acquisition of academic literacy in L2?
3. In what ways is engagement in academic discourse tied up with the construction of identity? In other words, what are the effects of academic discourse acquisition on the shaping of identity?
4. And, in what ways is agency activated in the process of acquiring academic discourses in L2?

In the following sections, I explore the ways in which our narratives interrogated our experiences with academic literacy in L2 and revealed implications for negotiating and constructing our identities. Descriptions of emerging themes include imposed identity choice; emotional colonialism; and embracing differences, empowerment, and agency.

THE WAYS WE ENCOUNTERED ACADEMIC LITERACY IN L2

Imposed Choice: Inadequate Forever?

As we were introduced to a range of academic discourses through readings and discussions in graduate coursework, we faced the ideological and political significance of pursuing American degrees. Although all of us held a strong aspiration to become competent members in the professional community by successfully completing the graduate program, we found ourselves prohibited from moving into full membership because of prevailing discourses within it. That is, specific discourses marked us linguistically and thus professionally as less than fully qualified members of the profession of ESL teachers. Furthermore, our unique subject positions, including diverse epistemic stances, competencies, and knowledge, were not given due respect and acknowledgment in these discourses. The following excerpt from a personal conversation demonstrates our concern that taken-for-granted values about native speaker norms and identities marked us as linguistically limited and imposed on us a sense of being inadequate:

Chong: You know, I'm rather skeptical about our professional qualifications. Even though we earn degrees here, we will never be treated as fully qualified professionals in the field simply because we can never become native speakers [of English].

Younghee: Agreed. I'm rather concerned with the fact that our existence [as bilingual EFL teachers] is hardly acknowledged in the literature. I think the program is designed for native speakers of English, not for us.

Chong: Even these articles on non-native professionals are not really about us. The authors all have nearly native-like proficiency...born and raised in English speaking countries.

Younghee: Yeah, I'm just wondering how we are perceived by professors or native colleagues. Are we thought of as equally capable graduate students or those with linguistic and cultural deficits? *What are we?*

(August 3, 2003).

After being exposed to substantial disciplinary knowledge during the first two semesters, Chong realized that it was simply not possible for us to accomplish a native level of English proficiency, which he understood as a taken-for-granted requirement in the hegemonic discourse of the core courses he took. He began to question whether linguistic proficiency should be the first and foremost criteria for TESOL professionals. Despite his initial critical reflection on the ideological implications of this discourse, Chong found that he had picked up the tacit values of native speakers and partially accepted his imposed subject position as linguistically marked and as less than fully capable. This made him subject to the power relations enmeshed in the discourse.

Pavlenko (2002) contends that those who sense their subordinate positions in inequitable social relations seek recognition from those in power and are always sensitive to their marked identity categories. As was indicated in the above interview, Chong was sensitive to his linguistic limitations and also had to come to terms with the precarious professional identity imposed on him. Similarly, my own recognition of marked practices has to do with forms of disciplinary knowledge that fail to address ‘non-native’ TESOL teachers’ specific needs and concerns in relation to their social and cultural contingency (Shamimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999). These kinds of disciplinary knowledge were too foreign to appeal to me, so I retained an outsider’s stance in the academic community. The more I became familiar with these discourses, the more alienated I felt from them because they barely recognized the existence of ‘non-native’ teachers in the profession. I found it difficult to forge my professional positionality without knowing any competent members of the profession with whom I could identify, or “invent similarity” to use Bucholtz and Hall’s (2003) phrase, which is essential for identity construction (Ibrahim, 1999).

In addition to such marked practices, our goals of attaining “personal and professional growth” were disrupted because a substantial part of our identities was not recognized within the literacy practices of the academic community. Jin reflects on this:

At first I thought it was because of my limited English, I couldn’t get my meaning across to the professor. But as miscommunication occurred over and over again and I felt as if tension had been getting intense, I began to see what I was facing... There was a gap in the way we framed the research questions.

What was shocking to me was that he didn't seem to acknowledge that individual students could come from different [professional and academic] traditions, and thus, could have different ways of framing inquiries...I'm not saying that I was disappointed simply because I failed to sell my ideas to the professor. It's a matter of respect. Having respect for different stances students might bring to class does not mean that you agree...It seems to me that some professors are ready to listen to whatever rings true to them whereas they crush any other differing opinions. It is not an easy task for me to speak up in class. I take the courage to bring up the kind of issues that I have thought over. Then, I get cut off for being nonsense. That's really frustrating and hurts. (May, 24, 2003)

Jin had strong academic training, having earned an MA in a similar field in Korea, and initially showed substantial confidence in understanding the academic content of the courses she was taking. When she began her coursework, she was highly motivated to meet the challenge of the academic community. However, her confidence was crushed by instructors who ignored her ways of framing research inquiries whenever hers differed from their own approaches. After a couple of rejections, she realized that there was a gap between the predominant mode of thinking and her own, and that hers was not accepted as legitimate. Even though she was more than willing to learn new modes of being and thinking, if that was what it would take for her to become a legitimate member of the target community, Jin resented her professors refusing to acknowledge that there could be many different ways of thinking and understanding the world. Taylor (1992) argues that non-recognition has political implications as a form of oppression. It is a way of denying the essential human need to be a whole being by imposing on someone a "false, distorted, reduced mode of being" (p. 25). The failure to respect or even acknowledge the different epistemic stance Jin brought to class had a tremendous impact on her engagement in academic discourse. It inhibited her from developing as a critical and independent researcher in the field and becoming a more capable graduate student.

I also experienced different epistemic stances in the disjunction between what I wanted to learn and what my instructors had to teach:

My impression of the western scholarship is that they tend to tear things apart and focus very meticulously on parts of the whole...not looking at things as a whole. I suppose it's good to have all those instrumental knowledge about linguistic theories of English as a base, but I don't really see how this type of knowledge will inform my professional development. I raised this issue to Dr. P in class, she frustratingly responded, "You should be able to transcend the cultural and social boundary of the research results and creatively apply the results to your own contexts." At first I felt ashamed not knowing how to do so, but by now I'm thinking maybe there isn't much to transcend in that type of knowledge...By now, my question is, "*Is this all that they have to teach us?*" I believe there are a lot more important things I need to learn about as an English teaching professional...(Younghee, journal entry, October 5, 2002)

I conceptualized my graduate training as intended to turn out well-prepared English teaching professional. I had never questioned the authority of professional knowledge produced by western academics before I entered the graduate program. I believed the knowledge I would gain was universal and transcendently applicable to my own teaching contexts and students. After awhile, I realized that my struggles to make sense of new modes of discourse in the program could not simply be chalked up to inadequate previous training in the field. Rather, the new knowledge had less relevance to my English teaching context than was to be promised, due to the social, cultural, and historical boundaries of the research and theories.

Chong had a similar experience:

I find it hard to fit myself into the mainstream research agenda. I really envy X and Y whose academic interests are in right alignment with SLA research tradition. I so wish my academic interests happened to match with it just like theirs. Then, I wouldn't have to go through this much frustration and conflict. (Interview, November 20, 2003)

Like many other graduate students new to academic research, Chong found it hard to narrow down his research topics within the prevalent research tradition. He was primarily concerned with the hegemony of English and ELT and their effects on language planning and policy in Korea, but realized the majority of his colleagues and professors were not

sympathetic with those issues. This perceived difference in focus caused him great inner conflict. He became more sensitive toward the difference when he was bluntly put down by a professor in a core course after he raised questions about assumptions about how language is acquired. He was also silenced by the dominant voices in an elective course wherein he argued for acceptance of the different rhetorical styles diverse ESL students manifest in their writing in English. His attitude toward the prevailing discourses at this stage in his studies was complex, as he was afraid to be framed as different from his colleagues but knew it would not be possible for him to simply deny what mattered to him. Chong witnessed his self being fragmented because he did not know how to embrace his lived different positions in his new academic community.

In summary, the prevailing discourses of L2 academic literacy practices were neither responsive to our lived epistemic stances, competencies, knowledge, and experiences nor inclusive of our different embodied subject positions. Instead, we were provided with linguistically and professionally marked subject positions which did not allow us to actively engage in these discourses. Moreover, we experienced disruption in achieving our imagined goals of professional growth as we felt there was a gap between the institutional agenda and our expectations of the program. The program seemed designed to unilaterally assimilate students into its academic community of practice, but we had envisioned that our personal and professional development would extend and elaborate on our lived knowledge and experience and help us construct our local knowledge in Canagarajah's sense (2002). When our positions were doubly challenged as foreigners to the academic community as well as L2 speakers, we became subject to the power relations structured in the academic literacy practices. Thus we had to come to terms with imposed subject positions as less than fully legitimated professionals.

Emotional Colonialism

I now turn to an element of our subject positions, the unconscious state of mind that seemed to have a substantial impact on shaping our engagement of the academic discourse. As I briefly discussed above, some postcolonialists have suggested that Koreans tend to show intellectual and emotional colonialism toward professional knowledge produced by western scholars due to a long and humiliating history of cultural

subordination to China and now North America (Yeong Min Kim, 2001; Yeong Myeong Kim, 2002). This might explain why we initially perceived ourselves in subordinate positions vis-à-vis the new academic discourse we encountered. This unconscious perception may have restrained us from taking a more active position within the discourse. For example, I reacted to class discussions differently from my Caucasian classmates. In one ESL Pedagogy course, the class engaged in a heated discussion on how the program would prepare its students to be better language teachers. To my surprise and embarrassment, the majority of students were very vocal about their negative reactions to the readings and how the program failed to provide them with theoretical and practical tools to make informed pedagogical decisions in the future. Entries in my journal kept at the time present my reaction:

In course X, we had this heated discussion on what pedagogy means. Several Caucasian classmates of mine were pretty vocal about their complaints about the readings for the course. They also took issue with the instructor's rather broadly defined notion of pedagogy. To me, what they were arguing made much more sense to me, yet I found myself trying hard to make sense of the professor's [argument]. What was striking to me was their boldness, which was quite different from our attitudes toward the knowledge. They really seemed to know what they were talking about. In contrast, I was still struggling to catch up with the content of knowledge. (Younghee, April, 11, 2003)

Chong had a similar experience:

Although I wanted to take issues with some of the instructor's claims, I couldn't because I thought there must be something that I don't know about. (Chong, interview, December 2, 2002)

When we were exposed to new knowledge in the field, we held off arguing with expert authority, even though our working knowledge, mobilized by our previous teaching experience, told us the expert might be mistaken. Our attitude reveals the ways we related to a target academic discourse through having internalized a knowledge hierarchy.

Kang (2001) discusses “knowledge power” and the “cultural prerogative” whereby certain forms of knowledge exercise power over other forms. Knowledge power refers to the power of elites who produce and distribute theories and researched knowledge. The cultural prerogative includes the working knowledge people gain through lived experience and reflection. Reflecting the broader socioeconomic context of knowledge production and dissemination, the knowledge produced by western scholars is usually accorded higher authority than any other form (see also Kim, 2002). My claim is that by witnessing the power of North American degrees in Korea, we had internalized this knowledge hierarchy. This internalized knowledge hierarchy then prevented us from giving due credit to our lived experience, that is, using our cultural prerogative to actively make sense of new knowledge.

In the pedagogy class, I noticed a difference in attitude toward the readings and class discussions between some of my Caucasian classmates and me. They seemed to have already established professional positions from which they actively made sense of the new knowledge. I realized that I did not have the same kind of ownership of my studies as they did. Instead, I only strove to familiarize myself with the academic discourses presented to me, neither able to make connections between my teaching experience and the academic discourse nor taking a critical distance based on a position of academic literacy. I assumed my subordinate position in relation to the academic community and was thus subject to the power relations structured in the discourse.

One of the salient features of the academic community was the way its competent members talked, which I initially found very disturbing. The following excerpt from my journal demonstrates this:

I went to this Brownbag lecture. There was this visiting scholar who was severely criticizing another scholar’s claims made in a conference a while ago while pointing out every single claim of hers. His criticism was not simply about theoretical or methodological fallacy in her paper. It was rather personal accusation treating her as if she would naively do harm to the field. Although I was not quite following him as I was only a first year grad student, I was appalled by the way he tore her claims down, and was wondering how one can be so adamant about his beliefs. What was even more appalling to me was that

the audience (professors and senior colleagues) were laughing with his talk. It seems to me that people here are trying to prove themselves by finding fault with other people's ideas... I felt as if I was in a battlefield... I'm scared and very uncomfortable with this practice. (Younghee, Journal entry, September, 2001)

Professors and senior students in this new academic community sounded obsessed with claiming their own regimes of truth, defending themselves by "finding fault with other people's ideas." I privately named this the "let-me-tear-you-down" discursive practice. Similarly, in an elective course designed for EFL practitioners, Chong, Jin, and I regularly discussed the arrogant and defensive speaking style of a few senior students in class. We felt that the way these competent students expressed themselves in an academic context was almost unbearably confrontational and defensive.

My discomfort with this kind of discursive practice presented a dilemma. On the one hand, I desired full membership in the academic community which seemed to require learning how to speak like other competent members; on the other hand, I did not want to develop what I perceived as an arrogant talking style. In his discussion of how newcomers are socialized into a community, Gee (2000) contends that all members, old-timers and newcomers alike, pick up tacit knowledge, norms, values, and narratives as they constantly engage in the practices of the community. In my desire to become a full professional, I made an effort to overcome the gap between my familiar way of talking and the common way of talking in the community by carefully observing and then emulating how people interacted. In other words, I learned to perform competence by trying to speak like apparently competent professors and senior students. My endeavor was further shaped by the encouragement of my colleagues and professors commenting on my "achievement" by saying, "You are nearly getting there," or, "Younghee, I think you've made great progress in speaking." As I was so involved in the acquisition of academic discourse, I lost sight of what I was becoming.

It's quite embarrassing to find myself speaking just like them, to which I had such a strong resistance. I've turned out to show off knowledge, be confrontational, defensive and sometimes schizophrenic about claiming my own regime of truth. Admittedly, I can see there has been a great change in

the way I feel and think about things. It's like the very texture of my mind changed a lot. I find myself readily criticizing what I see as lousy or faulty in someone else's ideas. ...The more I feel at home in this discursive discourse, the more I feel competent and confident. It's...an embarrassing realization. (Younghee, October, 29, 2003)

Interestingly, both Jin and Chong noticed that I had adopted this confrontational speaking style and attempted to inform me of this indirectly on several occasions. After class one day, Chong approached me, asking "Are you aware of the way you talk in class? ...It seems to me that people think of classroom discussion as displaying knowledge, rather than as sharing and exchanging ideas." I failed to make out his intention then. On another occasion when I was upset and defensive after being severely attacked by a senior student in a class discussion, Jin did not seem sympathetic with my discomfort. These and similar incidents directed my attention inward; eventually I faced what I had become and realized what I had "achieved," to my embarrassment.

Nandy (1983) draws attention to the psychological rewards and punishments at work in the manifestation of emotional colonialism:

A colonial system perpetuates itself by inducing the colonized, through socioeconomic and psychological rewards and punishments, to accept new social norms and cognitive categories...More dangerous and permanent are the inner rewards and punishments, the secondary psychological gains and losses from suffering and submission under colonialism (p. 3).

Despite my ambivalent feelings toward confrontational, defensive, and arrogant manifestations of academic competence, I made every effort to move into fuller membership through the acquisition of the whats and hows of academic discourse. That is to say, I strove to "invent similarity" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2003) with the competent members of the community while downplaying any difference I perceived in myself. As I confessed above, I changed to the extent that "the more I feel at home in this discursive practice, the more I feel competent and confident." This echoes the idea that acquiring a new discourse entails adopting radically different values and worldviews (Kultz, Groden, & Zamel, 1993). This is also a sure sign of the emotional colonialism that concerns Nandy.

Jin reflects on the experience of emotional colonialism:

I had no idea of what it would take to study in the U.S. Now I'm finding that it means your integrity as a human being is torn apart and fragmented into pieces...I thought my study here would be in continuation of my past...English is everything. People view me based on my English ability. There is only so much I can prove myself...Now I am realizing it surely is a high stake investment to study in the U.S. Sometimes I'm wondering whether this investment is really worthwhile (Jin, interview, October 3, 2003).

Jin went through a great deal of difficulty transitioning into the new academic community despite her strong previous training in the field. She had expected her previous academic training would extend seamlessly and be acknowledged by the new academic context, yet found herself faced by unexpected challenges, one having to do with English, her second language, and the other with the gap between her primary discourse and the secondary discourse (Gee, 1996). Particularly challenged by her English speaking skills, she invested a great deal of energy and time immersing herself in natural speaking events. Despite constant effort, her instructors were often blatantly intolerant of her not yet fully polished academic English. She realized that she could prove herself only so much using a second language over which she had limited control. Like me, she desired to project an image of herself as a capable graduate student. On the other hand, she sensed that due to her rather accented English she was framed otherwise by professors and some colleagues. This disruption in her identity caused her such emotional suffering that she described her integrity as a human being as "torn apart and fragmented into pieces." In her case, emotional colonialism was experienced as psychological punishment.

In summary, I have discussed the repercussions of emotional colonialism in our transition into new academic discourses. Emotional colonialism made us subject to the power relations implicated in L2 literacy practices. It not only prevented us from taking up active positions within the discourses but also trapped us within a system of internalized rewards and punishments constructed by our perceived subordinate subject positions in relation to the academic community.

Embracing Differences, Empowerment and Agency

I have so far discussed how we were framed linguistically and professionally as less than fully competent by the hegemonic discourse and trapped within emotional colonialism by not being able to actively make sense of the discourses presented to us. Now I turn to the impact of alternative discourses on our taking up new positions. The new discourses we encountered activated our agency, helping us rediscover competence and embrace our lived and living histories. In this section, I discuss the ways such discourses appealed to us and with what consequences.

In my case, a new discourse legitimated my past identity and helped me discover competence as an EFL teacher:

I taught this English Grammar course in a community service program back in Korea... The teaching method I had figured out from years of experience was that I had them talk about many different aspects of their lives, complaints about their husbands, and children and education, their wishes, daydreams and past lives, etc. and then had them ask the question, How do you say this and that in English? Then, we worked on any grammar items emerged from the storytelling. The course was a real success even though I prepared basically nothing for it. What was interesting was that I was also teaching Reading course for college students at the same time and I had spent so much time developing the curriculum and materials for that class. Despite all my passion for it, I had many busted lessons in that reading course. I was so curious about this contradictory outcome, but I knew no theory to explain why.... This semester I was thrilled when I came across the notion of the language learner' identity because it answered my long-held question. (Journal entry, September 22, 2002)

While I had had a hard time relating to the types of professional knowledge initially presented to me, and even began to wonder how such knowledge would inform my professional development, I came across a new idea about how language learners' identities affect the process of language learning that was exciting to me for several reasons. First of all, it was meaningful knowledge that not only legitimated my past identity as a competent language teacher but also provided a theoretical framework for

the past successful teaching experience. This new concept served as a point of connection between my lived experience and academic discourse. In addition, this encounter with the new discourse helped me envisage new forms of professional development built upon my teaching history and immediate concerns and needs in relation to my teaching context in Korea. This was quite revolutionary in my ways of thinking. I initially took up a rather passive position as a learner who was primarily concerned with assimilating myself into the expected norms and values of the academic community. I now began to restore the purposes and meanings of academic literacy acquisition. That is, I began reconstructing and elaborating my embodied local knowledge (Canagarajah, 2002) rather than starting from scratch as if my previous teaching experience was unworthy of incorporation into my professional development, as the unresponsive course curricula seemed to suggest.

Another element of this kind of appealing discourse helped me better understand the moments of tension and disruption in my experience so that I could embrace my precarious and less capable self:

In this course, we are reading the philosophical, theoretical and political underpinnings of doing qualitative research. I find the concepts and theories way heavy and difficult to grapple with, and also foreign and new to me. But I'm so into the readings because the readings and discussion make me think about what it means for me to study in the U.S., and what I really want to do with my profession. We read about Gee's notion of Discourse, and it was mind-blowing to me. It really helped me understand how to make sense of my discomfort about the types of professional knowledge I've learned, and all those confusion, split-self experience I'd had since I entered the program. These are the very issues that I've always wanted to have answered...I feel at home in this class. The course allows me to embrace the way I am, my marginalized (professional) position. I can just be myself as much as I wanted to in it. (Journal entry, October 10, 2003).

The new discourse I encountered in this course was intellectually fulfilling because it provided me with a new way of perceiving my struggles. I was able to recast the confusion I had gone through in making the transition to a secondary discourse (Gee, 1996). The discourse was immediately relevant to my identity at the time. It helped me rethink the meaning of my studies in the United States and reposition myself in relation

to academic discourse, even though the readings were “way heavy and difficult to grapple with and foreign” to me.

Now I turn to some of the consequences of encountering alternative discourses on our forging identities in the academic community.

The critical perspectives we’ve been reading in the EFL course are just mind-blowing. Such voices have broadened my horizon. Most of all, it’s exciting to learn that there are scholars out there who speak for us, well at least I feel that way. The reading made me rethink the knowledge production and distribution system... I find there is a lot of empty knowledge that doesn’t make any contribution whatsoever to our [EFL] situation. Even though it’s true that the western academic tradition is well established and strong, we cannot religiously follow what they have to teach because it can be misleading...I think we should be able to form our positions from our own perspectives.

Reading about those non-mainstream voices really helped me envision the kind of professional position I’d like to develop (Chong, interview, April 11, 2003).

The critical perspectives he read about provided Chong with an alternative professional identity option with which to align himself and allowed him to relate to those he felt spoke for EFL practitioners like himself. This had several repercussions. First of all, these readings enabled him to critique the types of professional knowledge that had been presented to him in other courses he had taken, knowledge with ideological bearings that had sat uncomfortably in his mind. He began to discern which types of knowledge might be considered “empty” or “misleading” and which would be more relevant to his EFL context. He began to voice his reactions to the program, as he states above, that “we shouldn’t religiously follow what they have to teach.” He distanced himself from some forms of professional knowledge to the extent that the hegemonic academic discourse ceased to dominate as much as it had dominated previously. In relation to this, he also began to question the universal and transcendental characteristics of professional knowledge produced by western academics. This questioning opposed his initial subject position where he had taken for granted not only the unilateral dissemination of professional knowledge, but also its transcendental nature.

I was very suspicious of the already filtered knowledge through the instructors' perspectives. I always wanted to come in contact firsthand with mainstream knowledge for myself...I suppose I will be one who has received the knowledge firsthand, and also one who has a strong theoretical base, and perspectives on how to appropriate knowledge. (Interview, September 17, 2002).

Before he entered the TESOL graduate program in the United States, he participated in several in-service teacher trainings in Korea in which he encountered such "filtered knowledge." He thought the reason why the theories and teaching methodologies failed to appeal to the majority of local teachers who participated in these training sessions was probably because the instructors, who were themselves holders of American degrees, did not translate them appropriately. He wanted to appropriate western knowledge firsthand so as to inform his Korean English education. It probably did not occur to him then that such professional knowledge might not be universally transferable and applicable. Once in the TESOL program in the United States, Chong began to rethink his assumptions about western produced knowledge while struggling to make sense of new knowledge and being exposed to alternative discourses. He began to analyze the mechanisms whereby certain forms of professional knowledge are produced, distributed, and consumed, and the ideological implications of these processes for the receiver. By taking up new positions in this way, he was able to somewhat reconcile his conflicting desires. He hoped to join the community of competent members by successfully socializing himself into the community, but resented that his experience as an EFL teacher went unacknowledged. By subscribing to the specific discourse that had meanings for him, he learned to develop a professional position that responded to his lived teaching experience and knowledge.

Jin made different accommodations to the new academic discourse. After struggling to "prove" herself to professors, she realized it would get her nowhere and instead decided to follow her own preferences.

When I was so bogged down with [the professor's] comments on my papers and was wondering why I failed to sell my ideas to him, a close friend of mine strongly advised me to drop my worries and frustration. She said, "What do

you think they can do for you? Nobody cares about your topic as much as you do. Just follow your heart. Stick to what you want to explore and how you want to do it...” She is right. I simply cannot follow their footsteps trying to fit [my academic inquiry] into theirs. If I keep on doing that, I will end up with nothing. If I do, I guess down the road I can earn my degree, but then I won’t be able to explore what I am really interested in. I don’t see the point of doing it [trying to fit my own area of interest into the professors’]. I now came to think I don’t have to prove anything to anyone. It’s my study after all (Interview, November 20, 2003).

She chose to preserve the integrity of her identity by distancing herself from the community of academic practices. However, it was only after she acquired a great deal of academic discourse and figured out which discourses conformed to her academic interests that she began to attend to the integrity of her desires and gain control over her studies. In doing so, she repositioned herself in relation to the target academic community. She shifted from someone who wanted to successfully fit into the academic practices to someone who desired to grow intellectually according to her own style, informed by her lived knowledge and experience.

In summary, in this section, I have discussed ways in which some discourses spoke to us and informed our ability to exercise agency and re-position ourselves in relation to the target academic community. As Mission (1996) contends, we came to subscribe to those discourses that were responsive to the patterns of our desires, which restored the integrity of our identities (Norton, 2001). Alternative discourses provided us with meaningful knowledge that provided theoretical support of our past teaching expertise. At the same time, they enabled us to criticize the relevance and usefulness of other types of professional knowledge and its ideological implications. They afforded Chong an alternative professional subject position. Chong even came to challenge the authority of western produced knowledge while reconciling his inner conflict concerning how to develop a professional identity when constrained by the hegemonic discourse. He became a subject of the discourses made available to him such that he re-imagined his professional identity in the target academic community.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, I have tried to show how three Korean students in a North American TESOL program engaged in academic literacy in L2 and also how this affected the construction of identities. The findings suggest that our identities were marked linguistically and professionally by the hegemonic modes of discourse in the field, and also our lived experience, knowledge, competence and epistemic stance were not given due recognition in them, leading us subject to the power relations implicated in the literacy practices. It was also found out that intellectual and emotional colonialism rendered us trapped by psychological rewards and punishments while preventing us from actively taking up positions within discourses presented to us. Finally, by subscribing to the alternative discourses that responded to our past, present and future identities, each of us was found to embrace our difference and re-imagine our positions in relation to the academic community while articulating and exploring our personally embodied knowledge and experience.

I conclude by discussing the theoretical, pedagogical, and methodological implications of these findings, specifically: (a) the discursive construction of imagination; (b) positioning in literacy encounters; (c) empowerment, recognition, and agency; and (d) comments on methods of inquiry.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Discursive Construction of Imagination

Recent research on identity has allowed us to appreciate imagination as an integral mode of belonging and an identity boundary (Kanno, 2003; Kanno & Norton, 2003; Pavlenko, 2003). Jin's narration echoes this position:

I very much wish that they did not judge me on the basis of what I appear to be capable of doing now. I wish they could see me in progress, they could patiently see me as a student who is working hard to make herself in the way she wants to see. I might seem not as capable, but that is not me at all! I'm what I end up becoming after all, and I believe I will make progress. (Interview, May, 13, 2003).

The imagined image of oneself is integral to one's identity and organizes one's experience. Jin rejected the way she was framed by others because it conflicted with how she envisioned herself in the future, saying "That is not me after all!"

One's future image of oneself is constantly challenged, negotiated, and reconstructed as one moves through diverse and often competing discourses that provide different possible subject positions. Our imagined identities as participants in the graduate TESOL program took different shapes as we were introduced to many different modes of discourse. That is to say, our initial imaginings were rather blurred as we had little idea of what form our professional development would take. However, through the acquisition of academic literacy in L2, our desires and imagination were restructured and we repositioned ourselves in relation to the academic community. Therefore, imagination should not be understood as static and unitary, but as conflicting, multifaceted, and changing over time and space. Imagination is a site of struggle, as is suggested by the poststructuralist feminist notion of subjectivity (Weedon, 2001).

Positioning in Literacy Encounter

In her attempt to seek a new direction for teacher education in TESOL, Pavlenko (2003) found that alternative discourses allowed some students to re-imagine themselves as multi-competent and bilingual, but failed to appeal to other students. Her study could not explain this discrepancy. Pennycook (2001) argues that individuals are embodied differences, with different histories, epistemic stances, and knowledge. By extension, individuals inevitably react to discourse differently. The appeal of a particular discourse will differ in accord with the shape of individual desires. At the same time, these desires are constantly negotiated and reconstructed through engagement in discursive practices within social and historical contexts. As was seen in Pavlenko's findings, the 'non-native' in-service and pre-service teachers, rather than domestic students, most actively engaged in challenging the native speaker/non-native speaker (NS/NNS) dichotomy to embrace a new imagined community of multi-competent speakers. As Pavlenko understood, these were the ones whose legitimacy as professionals was most challenged by the NS/NNS dichotomy. A more detailed account of appealing discourses is found in the present study.

Although all of us were exposed to critical perspectives in the MA program, each of us reacted to these discourses differently. Chong and I actively related these discourses to our initial feelings of insecurity with our professional identities and a growing confidence in our lived experiences and knowledge. However, Jin did not seem as interested in these discourses, even though she suffered as much as we did from the imposition of the hegemonic discourse. It could be that the subject position the critical discourses seemed to offer did not match the imagined professional identity Jin wanted to create. Rather, she sought recognition within the traditional discourse of the field. Alternatively, our past experiences may have led us to assuming different embodied subject positions. Chong and I did not have as privileged an academic background as did Jin, and we were both sensitive to the social consequences of education. Jin had attended and succeeded at a top ranking university in Korea, so critical discourses might not have appealed to her as strongly as they did to us.

Empowerment, Recognition, and Agency

As Taylor (1992) maintains, it is an essential human need to be recognized as a whole being. An individual becomes empowered when this need is satisfied, and his or her past, present, and future identities are acknowledged, recognized, and supported in a given context. When our identities were simply reduced to mere linguistic and professional incompetence by the hegemonic discourse of the ‘native speaker’, and when we were subject to intellectual and emotional colonialism, we were not able to function fully as capable graduate students. However, when we were introduced to new discourses that not only acknowledged but also supported our embodied subject positions—different from those of native speakers—we began to embrace our differences and a positionality built upon our competencies. This rendered us subject to the power relations embedded in academic discourse, but we could make informed choices in taking up various positions within this discourse. Therefore, empowerment involves giving credit to the integrity of the individual identity, including the imagined one. In this way, an individual can preserve his or her identity and have a sense of security in his or her place in the target community.

Empowerment also has to do with exercising agency. The findings of the study described here lend empirical support to Davies' (1990) claim that discursive, personal, and social resources must all be taken into account in understanding agency. As was apparent in the findings, agency is not merely a matter of significance to the individual (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001), it is also a question of the power relations enmeshed in the discourse available to him or her (Davies, 1990). It was only when Chong and I had acquired some competence in academic discourse that we were able to actively take up positions when introduced to alternative discourses. Our exercising agency was fostered as we interacted with others, including sympathetic professors and scholars who supported our subscription to alternative discourses. That is to say, our personal resources (academic competence and knowledge), social resources (supportive others), and alternative discourses all helped constructed us as empowered agents and rendered us subjects of the discourses presented to us.

Comments on Methods of Inquiry

The longitudinal research described herein provides a viable account of the long-term effects of new discourses on the shaping of subject positions. It shows how frames of interpretation shift as we move among different academic discourses and how identities are both imposed and chosen within them (Collins & Blot, 2003). Over the course of our studies, our local knowledge was reconstructed to the extent that we repositioned ourselves in relation to the academic community and re-examined the meaningfulness of pursuing North American degrees.

My frame of interpretation also changed as I became more familiar with the stories of the other two participants and better informed about relevant theories and research (see also Bell, 1997). This in turn affected my understanding of their experiences, along with my own, as we shared in the acquisition of academic literacy in L2. The constant sharing of our experiences over two academic years served to raise our meta-cognition of what we were going through. Communicating the lived moments of struggle and conflict with one another enabled us to critically reflect on our experiences and the meanings of our schooling in the United States.

Chong discussed how this sharing also aided him to transcend his gender specific ways of talking:

The interviews have provided me with a chance to articulate and reflect on my thoughts and ideas...Through sharing my thoughts and feelings with other people, I could learn the others' ways of understanding that were different from mine, and also sometimes I heard them speaking my minds. I think sharing each other's thoughts was such a precious and rare experience. I wouldn't have come forward this far if it had not been for this research. You know it is rather prohibited for a Korean man to reveal his inner thoughts. It is considered as feminine thing to talk through your conflicts, feelings to detail.

(Personal communication, March 6, 2004)

In short, this research had what might be called therapeutic consequences for each of us (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Our experiences adjusting to the target academic community were full of tension, worry, confusion, and disconnection from the past as we faced a new academic life. Although revealing our inner conflicts and contradictory desires to one another throughout the course of this research project was sometimes burdensome (all of us resisted sharing sensitive issues at several points in the study), our personal narratives helped us maintain coherence and make sense of our lived experiences. We eventually were able to embrace our differences and form our professional positions in our own ways.

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