



## **Emerging Language Identities in a South Korean Vocational University**

**Michael Rabbidge**

*Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, South Korea*

Although commonly thought of as a monolingual nation, South Korea, under the influence of globalization, is in the midst of a change that could see this dominant monolingual discourse challenged. To reveal and understand this potential challenge, the current study uses the constructs of investment, capital, ideologies and identity to see how the ideology of neoliberalism has influenced the language learning identities of university students studying English in a single South Korean vocational university. This is done by taking into account the perspectives of both university instructors and university students. By employing narrative frame data collection methods, coupled with asynchronous interviewing techniques, the qualitative study reveals that the symbolic capital that English embodies for students is potentially changing how the language identities of these students should be understood. Such a change has a number of implications for English education within South Korea in terms of generalized designations such as EFL and non-native identity markers.

**Keywords:** identity, investment, ideologies, narrative frames

### **Introduction**

#### **Monolingualism in South Korea**

The idea of a Korean-English bilingualism in South Korea (Baik, 1992; Shim, 1994) has often been criticized as either impractical, or as focusing on superficial uses of English within pop-culture circles rather than the everyday language use of South Korean citizens (J. J. Song, 1998, 2011). Such criticisms, however, patronize not only a cultural export that is growing in global stature, but also ignores a growing reality for a number of South Koreans in the educational sector (Rabbidge, 2019), as well as younger members of society who have invested in the English language from as early as kindergarten (Seth, 2016). Although customarily self-describing as a monolingual nation (J. J. Song, 2011), more inclusive notions of bi or multilingualism, defined as the use of two or more languages in everyday life (Grosjean, 2013), present an opportunity to reconceive South Korea as an emerging bilingual, if not multilingual country.

This challenge has arisen due to the role of English in the globalization of markets and government policies throughout the world. Globalization is understood to embody the ideology of neoliberalism, which, originally an economic theory, has been used as justification for the privatization of government institutions, ranging from healthcare to education (Block, Gray, & Holborow, 2012). Neoliberalism is understood as both a system and a discourse, and consequently has been used within applied linguistics as a term that is interchangeable with both globalization and capitalism (Block et al., 2012; Blommaert, 2010; Fairclough, 1995). Neoliberalism is also attributed with modern education's philosophical departure

from traditional pedagogical values to those of international markets, which redefine education as a form of commodity acquisition rather than a form of enlightenment.

The role of English within globalization challenges traditional notions of monolingualism, which equate geographical barriers with barriers of language use (Phillipson, 2009). This has caused a shift in perception of these language-nation ties to the extent that multilingualism is now recognized as the norm in a growing number of countries due to its growth beyond border-communities into communities-in-general (Aronin & Singleton, 2008).

Globalization is routinely credited for South Korea's growing influence in international technology sectors, pop-culture, and major international political bodies such as the UN and Interpol, as well as being credited for South Korea's current economic prowess (Seth, 2002; Yim, 2007), in addition to the increasing acceptance of the English language within South Korea itself.

## English Education in Korea

Education in South Korea is 'constructed as part of the economic and political structures of society', and political philosophies that have led to amendments to national educational curriculums since 1945 have been credited with the improved economic conditions of the country (Yim, 2007, p. 38). The espousal of neoliberal predispositions are likewise said to have corporatized both the country as well as commodified the individual (Byean, 2015). Inevitably, the concentrated marketization of education has led to intensified competition throughout the education system, placing the burden of self-development at the individual level, where neoliberal subjects are seen as endlessly 'unfolding failures or successes in the relations between peoples and their socially constructed realities as they are (re)imagined, (re)interpreted, and (re)assembled' (Springer, 2012, p. 137). The consequences of this burden are emphasized in high school, where students and teachers alike are forced into competition against each other in the name of national standardized testing (*ilje gosa*) (Byean, 2015).

Understanding neoliberalism is critical to appreciating the prominence of the English language in South Korea. Neoliberalism deems language as a commodity: as language-as-skill, as well as language-as-identity (Heller, 2010). This is due to neoliberal job markets positioning workers as bundles of skills who must continuously improve said skill sets to remain relevant in the job market (Shin, 2016). English language competency is a significant soft skill within the Korean job market, and individuals are expected to undergo constant self-development in order to retain relevance within the market (J. S.-Y. Park, 2011). This underscores how market forces act upon individuals to shape identity. Individuals within such systems are compelled to become desirable identities as defined by market forces.

English education policy within South Korea reacted to the need of its citizens to acquire English competence by introducing English into the curriculum at the third grade of elementary school in 1997 (Kang, 2008; Rabbidge, 2017). The prominence of English in South Korea over other languages is due to its perception as a lingua franca both in an economic capacity but also for more social and educational pursuits (Murata, 2019). English only policies have been implemented within the public school systems, and native English speaking teachers from abroad have been employed as part of the larger effort to improve South Korean English competencies (Kang, 2008; Liu, Ahn, Baek, & Han, 2004; J.-K. Park, 2009; Rabbidge, 2017). In addition, Korean parents have sent their children abroad to study in English speaking countries in attempts to have their children gain competitive advantage over their peers in South Korea (J.-K. Park, 2009; Seth, 2016). Ultimately, research into English language teaching has predominantly considered the context as a foreign language context (Rabbidge, 2019a, 2019b). That being said, the effects on the language identities of South Koreans due to the prominence of English, driven by a neoliberal ideology, over the last 20 to 30 years, is largely underrepresented in current literature, and is the focus of this current study.

## Literature Review

### Language and Identity

Norton's post-structuralist understanding of identity views identity as dynamically constructed within multiple combinations of experience and relationships (2000). It emphasizes roles and social groups people identify with, and how language acts in the construction of possible identities. The variety of identities available at any given time to language learners and teachers are not necessarily apparent in a given situation, but they are there nonetheless. Furthermore, identities are both assumed and imposed accordingly, with language a prominent construct in the formation of an individual's assumptions and impositions (Vasilopoulos, 2015).

Post-structuralist understandings of identity acknowledge the role that agency has in identity construction, where agency is defined as the sociocultural ability to act as one so desires (Adhern, 2001; Norton, 2000). Therefore, agency can be said to permit learners and teachers to negotiate their identities in given situations. Various contextual issues influence an individual's ability to act, and in EFL contexts, the first language and target language are often important influences for both student and teacher agency. Another construct often employed in accordance with post-structural identity research into language learners and teachers is that of imagined communities.

### Imagined Communities

The term imagined communities, as first introduced by Anderson (1991), and then later by Wenger (1998), describes the belief that people use imagination to identify with more than just their immediate environment. The use of imagination to identify with larger groups of people in immediate contexts, future contexts, as well as geographically remote contexts, is a given in modern society, as evident in identity constructs such as nationality. The construct of imagined communities has been used to understand how language learners comprehend the target language connecting them to communities that they hope to join (Kanno, 2003; Norton, 2001; Norton & Kamal, 2003; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007; J. Song, 2012).

The notion of imagined communities has also been shown to extend beyond those of the student. Parents, for example, have visions of their children's futures (Dagenais, 2003) which are influential in the creation of students imagined communities, as do schools, whose 'collective visions of imagined communities' bring impact via pedagogical practices and policies (Kanno, 2003, p. 287). Schools in particular can accommodate student and parental images of future communities, just as they can also form their own visions of where students will end up, creating a form of social reproduction that may result in students being unable to benefit from educational practices, and instead be socialized into less privileged communities. This was shown in Kanno's (2003) study of four different bilingual schools in Japan, where different pedagogical approaches resulted in schools with different visions of their students' futures. Teacher comments and observations revealed how such schools, as social agents, have images of future communities that tacitly shape the lives of their students. The use of imagined communities is said to provide researchers with an alternative to the traditional past-present understanding of language education by discussing education in terms of future-present (Kanno, 2003).

Studies of identity and imagined communities are rare in the Korean context, although there has been research into the construction of imagined communities of Korean elementary students studying English (S. Y. Yim, 2016). This study revealed the extent to which influences from outside the classroom, such as parents, private institutions, and test systems at the secondary school level, impacted on the imagined communities of the learners. In this case, the notion of English as a subject and system of grammar led learners to have imagined communities which valued English for its ability to be tested. This was said to differ radically from the imagined community of the national curriculum providers, who had imagined a

citizenry with highly developed oral communicative skills that would prove beneficial in a modern global society. The effects of the difference between the two imagined communities was said to result in low levels of student engagement with learning English at public schools as the teachers in the public schools were encouraged to focus on improving students' communicative competencies. Students, conversely, were said to value the practices of private language learning institutes which focused exclusively on test preparation. It was concluded that these students required exposure to the notion of a future community where English is used for communicative needs rather than testing in order to better visualize themselves as competent speakers of English in this EFL context (S. Y. Yim, 2016).

Another identity based study focused on a Korean English teacher's renegotiation of identity within the discourse of non-native and native speaker teachers (Kim, 2017). The study highlights the issues that Korean teachers of English experience due to the growing presence of English, and its accompanying ideology of native speakerism in South Korea. The study shows how the illumination of ideological influence can be a source of positive change in the negotiation of language identities.

Investigations into bilingual identities, although limited, have focused on adult English-Korean bilinguals who had lived abroad lived and/or studied abroad (Vasilopoulos, 2015). Vasilopoulos (2015) documented the challenges that these returnees have due to perceptions of their L2 identities in South Korea, revealing the tensions that can arise between bilingual identities in a strongly espoused monolingual society.

## Capital and Investment

When a language is required to enter a new community, the language theoretically embodies a form of capital to the learner. Bourdieu (1986) described capital as a form of power which extends into, and influences, the material and economic realities of those in possession of capital. According to Bourdieu (1986), *economic capital* signifies wealth, both property and monetary, *cultural capital* represents knowledge in the form of educational credentials as well as appreciation of culturally relevant artefacts, and *social capital* references associations with networks of power. These different forms of capital become symbolic upon recognition of their legitimacy within a given society (Bourdieu, 1986), with the forms of capital being fluid in nature, as an individual's accrued capital can be converted into different forms in accordance with needs and context (Bourdieu, 1986).

Language can become an instrument of power in contexts where there is a disparity in social relations (Bourdieu, 1977). In such contexts, language proficiency equates to a form of symbolic capital, representing social status, with the potential to be converted into economic or social capital. The symbolic capital associated with acquiring new languages sees students invest time and effort into learning the language in order to move towards the imagined community and its future promises of capital (Norton, 2000).

The capacity of a language to conceivably act as a form of capital that conveys social, political and/ or economic benefit (Bourdieu, 1977) to the learner therefore theoretically plays a significant role in not only language learning but in identity construction. In South Korea, social status embodies symbolic capital (J. J. Song, 2011), and one's English competency determines one's ability to achieve an international status, and its accompanying symbolic capital (Byean, 2015; Seth, 2016; J. J. Song, 2011). Recent criticism of English's place within South Korea has focused on the fallacy that English is a neutral skill obtainable by all in South Korea. The proposed reality is that access to, and possibly recognition of, English capital, is limited to certain social classes. This research suggests that English roles via neoliberal discourses influences a form of social reproduction that maintains and solidifies social class reproduction (Choi, 2020).

Darvin and Norton's (2015) model of investment combines the afore mention constructs of *identity* and *capital* with that of *ideologies* to investigate the role of investment in language learning contexts. *Ideologies* as a construct is understood in broader terms of normative ideas that have been constructed via symbolic powers, where legitimized powers such as governments construe ideas to represent natural

orders (Darvin & Norton, 2015). This is how *ideologies* can marginalize or legitimize identities within a population, stabilizing societies in accordance with dominant belief systems by implying that beliefs (often originating in powerful sectors of society) are to be taken as universal and unquestionable truths (Block, Gray, & Holborow, 2012). *Ideologies* such as neoliberalism influence identity construction via educational institutions to promote investment in relevant forms of symbolic capital that are believed to benefit individuals in society. Shifts in ideologies lead to shifts in potential identities and vice versa, highlighting the dynamic and fluid nature of both constructs.

Despite the growing importance of English within South Korea, there has been no research on the role that ideologies, capital and investment have on the developing identities of vocational university students. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by employing the previously described nexus of ideologies, capital, and identity to better understand how English may influence the developing language identities of vocational university students in South Korea. In order to do this, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. Why do EFL instructors in this study think their students learn English?
2. Why do the Korean EFL students in this study want to learn English?
3. How are ideologies, capital and investment affecting these students' developing language learner identities?

## Methodology

### Narrative Frames

This qualitative study employed narrative frames, a template of sentence starters that prompts participants to reveal and reflect upon their experiences about topics of interest as identified by researchers (Barkhuizen, 2014), to gather perspectives from both vocational university English instructors and students. Narratives are described as 'stories of experience' (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008, p. 373), and are regarded as an effective method of exploring participant teaching and learning experiences (Barkhuizen, 2008) as they not only provide a rich source of data for research, but also provide participants with opportunities to reflect upon their own experiences, in their own voice. The nature of experiences also means that narratives relate past experiences to present contexts, linking cultural and social aspects of experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

The narrative frame is an effective data gathering device as it allows researchers to both elicit subject matter related to specific research questions, as well as responses from any number of participants, which can then be combined to create a comprehensible impression of a given situation (Barkhuizen, 2014). The narrative frame is especially effective when dealing with language learners, as the inherent scaffolding supports students in finding the language to share their opinions. Additionally, narrative frames afford adequate occasion for participant's to add other topics of interest if desired (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008). Importantly, the narrative frame's inherently inquisitive nature provides admission into areas of new research, effectively accommodating follow-up interviews to expand upon initial responses (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008).

### Participants and Context

Purposive sampling (Dörnyei, 2011) was employed in the initial recruitment of university English instructors from a single vocational university within South Korea. Five instructors were recruited based on informal discussions had with the researcher, a co-worker of the participants, in regards to the teaching and status of English within South Korea. The instructors were all foreign born, native speakers of the English language. See Table 1 for more information regarding the instructors. The university in question

employed up to 120 foreign nationals to teach on its English language programs, and employed instructors from across the globe, both native and non-native speaker alike. This was in accordance with the university's mandate to create a global campus that exposed its students to both the English language as well as a variety of cultures. The university offered a range of vocational subjects rather than academic subjects. The instructors were all relatively new to the South Korean EFL context, which again was not deliberate. That instructor ethnicity was not raised by the students in the responses suggests that it was largely a non-issue for both instructors and students alike. The following table provides data on the instructor participants. All names are pseudonyms.

TABLE 1  
*Instructor's Information.*

<i>Instructors</i>	<i>Country of origin</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Experience in Korea</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>
T: Trevor	America	Asian American	2 years	Male	31
D: Daniel	South Africa	South African	14 months	Male	56
M: Michelle	America	Asian American	2 years	Female	43
P: Peter	America	Asian American	1 year	Male	46
S: Sally	America	Asian American	6 months	Female	54

Before proceeding, ethical issues were discussed with all instructors to ensure they knew their options moving forward in the study. See Appendix A for the narrative frame used.

Student participants were selected via convenience sampling, as the student participants attended the instructors' classes. In total, there were 59 student respondents representing a cross section of the majors offered at the university, including hotel management, culinary arts, railroad management, and physical therapy. Students were between the ages of 19 and 22 years of age and ranged from first year students to third year students.

## Data Collection

The instructors were first given an initial frame which had five sentence starters and asked to complete the starters. After reading the returned frames, it was discovered that there were additional queries in regards to the responses (Barkhuizen, 2014; Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008). To avoid overburdening the instructors, emails were sent with questions regarding the instructors' answers, and the instructors were told they could reply when they were ready. The use of emails as a research tool is sparse within language teaching research, despite how temporal dimensions related to email use provide opportunities for knowledge construction in a more convenient manner, as well as provide both researchers and participants opportunities for a more critical, and less time pressured, reflection of both questions and responses (James, 2016, 2017).

The first round of ripostes to the instructors' initial responses sought to clarify their answers and expand upon ideas they had introduced. Upon receiving their responses to this first set of follow up questions, if there were more queries then a second set of questions were attached to their responses, seeking further clarification. This round of email, or online asynchronous interviewing (Ison, 2009), was completed within four weeks.

## Students

The final step in this process was to administer a corresponding student frame that covered similar topics to those covered in the instructors' frames. To accommodate all students, the student frames were in English and Korean. Korean responses were translated into English. See Appendix B for students' frame.

## Data Analysis

Returned instructors frames and online asynchronous interviews were analysed iteratively and inductively (Dörnyei, 2011), following the *analysis of narratives* approach (Polkinghorne, 1995), which applies a paradigmatic procedure when coding themes. This involves identifying, then categorizing, themes according to emerging patterns of association (Barkhuizen, 2013). After multiple readings at various stages of the email interviews, each sentence starter was used as a starting point to find initial commonalities across the five instructors. For example, the first sentence prompt *I imagine my students learn English because ...* was analyzed to reveal three macro themes common to all instructors: *Education, Employment, International interactions*. Then, within these macro themes, smaller minor themes which justified the larger macro themes were identified. Again, as an example, for the first prompt, *school, parents, friendship, travel, and personal challenge* were identified. From here, these themes were analysed in order to identify instances of the construct's *capital, investment, imagined communities, and ideologies*. This approach was applied to all frames and interviews. Pertinent responses are discussed in the findings section. Returned student frames were analysed in the same manner.

## Findings and Discussion

### From the Instructors

This section addresses research question one: *Why do EFL instructors in this study think their students learn English?*

The instructors envisioned English as embodying forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986) that most, but not all, students may require in their futures. In terms of cultural capital, which represents knowledge in the form of educational credentials as well as appreciation of culturally relevant artefacts, Trevor stated the following,

*Trevor: After speaking with many of my former students' parents, many of them believe that having a high English proficiency level will give them advantages later in life, whether it's for college entrance requirements, passing a test like TOEIC, getting prestigious jobs, etc.*

Although not all instructors believed English would come to have cultural capital for South Korea.

*Peter: I don't see the role of English becoming greater in South Korea in the near future, unless there is a crisis that requires extensive foreign intervention (like the Korean War). There are millions of South Koreans who don't need English for any reason whatsoever, and I don't see that changing anytime soon, especially with an aging population.*

Peter's statement suggests that English will not become more prominent as it does not symbolize cultural capital for the majority of Koreans.

The views of the instructors are grounded in their own experiences with Koreans and living in Korea, as Sally highlights,

*Sally: My opinion is that a lot of Koreans are not good at accepting different nationalities, religions, and cultures. I know they were not educated in those fields, yet. However, students can learn to accept others so that they can learn to value the differences.*

Here she suggests that English will allow Koreans, and by extension her students, access to more exposure to different nationalities, which in turn will benefit Koreans by improving their knowledge of the how other nationalities behave. This suggests how English can act as a form of cultural capital for her students. It is also suggestive of some of her own experiences living in Korea in regards to being accepted by Korean society.

The cultural capital accrued by investing in English is seen by the instructors as being convertible into economic capital via employment opportunities, not only at the individual level, but for the country as a whole.

*Trevor: ... many of my students plan to work in fields (such as hotel and tourism management) where being proficient in English will give them an advantage ... I imagine that English will help South Korea become even more competitive—in regards to the economy—than they are now. Maybe English acquisition will help Korea become the 6th or 7th largest economy in the world instead of 10th or 11th.*

*Sally: Many businesses mingle with foreigners, so it is a life skill to communicate with foreigners. For example, when I went to Namdamoon in Seoul, a foreigner was asking where he could find an item. An employee couldn't understand that simple sentence. If he knew English, he could have sold an item or two to that foreigner. Another example is that many [non-Korean] professors go to doctors who can speak English and eat at restaurants where employees can speak English.*

Instructors also understood the potential social capital that English would afford their students, especially in regards to international interactions in informal settings, such as traveling, enjoying foreign entertainment, or friendships with foreign people.

*Trevor: Moreover, I hope that English will help South Korea become a more open country that not only tolerates foreigners and immigrants, but one that welcomes them into the society. Maybe South Korea will become similar to Singapore, an Asian country where a majority of the population speaks English, and one that is diverse and welcomes many people from around the world.*

However, instructors cited cultural differences in education as affecting their agency to provide learning contexts where they felt their students would be able to acquire this social capital. Classroom practices were often an issue, as instructors and students seemingly held differing views on best practices within the classroom.

*Trevor: When I was studying for my teaching credentials, I was taught that having a student centered and communicative approach, where the students do a majority of the work in class, was the most effective way to teach. In fact, that's what's expected of us now at our current university. In many ways, this style is very "western," as this is also the style that many of my teachers employed when I was moving through the U.S. education system. However, this is not the style that many Korean students grow up with. I've gotten resistance from a large amount of my current students when trying to implement this approach. Many of my students would love for me to just lecture for a majority of the time while they passively receive information and take notes. So, trying to convince my students about the efficacy of this style has been difficult.*

*Peter: I guess the reason I feel like the students aren't really learning from me is that I simply can't see it .... part of the problem is that I don't know my students' English abilities coming into my class. It is likely all over the place. A lot of what I'm teaching they've probably already learned before multiple times. I guess I'm giving them more practice, since for many of them our classes are the only time they do anything in English. But giving someone practice isn't the same as teaching them.*



Low levels of student engagement, thought to result from educational-cultural differences, were difficult for the instructors to overcome, which led Peter to believe that the students were not acquiring the competency needed to benefit from English's capital in the future. In fact, the students' competency, or perceived competency as a result of inactivity in the class, resulted in Trevor having to inhibit traits which may have made him desirable as an instructor in the first place, namely his native competency in English.

*Trevor: In class (even my advanced class) I grade my speaking to make sure or help students understand me better. In real world conversations with native speakers, I don't do this.*

*Researcher: How does this make you feel to grade your language?*

*Trevor: Awkward. I'm not used to having to grade my language and sometimes I question the efficacy of this approach. For instance, when I wanted students to turn to a specific page, especially in my past lower level classes, I would just say the page number and "open." This approach is effective; students turned to the correct page. However, a native speaker would likely say, "please turn to page 42." In some ways, I feel like I'm not demonstrating natural language when I down grade my speaking.*

This practice from the instructor may serve to further inhibit students' ability to develop English competency and benefit from any cultural capital that English may hold for the students. Additionally, it suggests instructors may struggle with the lingering influence of their students' prior learning experiences, especially those of the Korean high school context, which emphasizes test preparation and grammatical knowledge as having more symbolic capital for students than communicative competency (S. Y. Yim, 2016).

## **From the Students**

This section addresses research question two: *Why do the Korean EFL students in this study want to learn English?*

There was a lot of congruency between how the students and instructors envisioned English as a form of capital. In terms of cultural capital, students readily acknowledged the capital of English in both South Korea and the world at large.

*English is used all over the world. All countries use English, it is convenient to know how to speak English when travelling abroad*

*It's an international language and essential in a global world. You can communicate with people anywhere.*

There were also similarities in responses between students and instructors in terms of the convertibility of cultural capital to economic capital, as students firmly believed English was an important skill to have for future employment.

*People can get a good job because big companies need someone who has good English.*

*Korea thinks English is important, so many companies want people who can speak English.*

*For my future. I want to be a hotelier. I need a second language to communicate with my clients from all over the world.*

The non-specific terms *Business* and *Company* were mentioned in regards to employment without any specific mention of what type of business or particular company. This suggests that while students may be aware of the economic capital English potentially accrues, there is uncertainty over how this eventuates in reality. Nonetheless, the economic capital that English affords in terms of employment is known by students to exist both in South Korea and abroad.

The social capital that English embodies for these students is the ability to participate in the larger global community. This participation is understood in various ways, including travel, socializing, and employment

*When you travel, most people speak English.*

*I meet people who speak English in Korea.*

What's interesting to note about the theme of travel is the lack of specificity in regards to associating particular countries with the English language. In fact, only America was specifically mentioned on two occasions, whereas other comments provided more general descriptions, such as *countries*, *foreigners*, *global world*, and the like. This suggests that the students are aware of English's social capital as a global language, and that to be involved in the global community they must invest in English.

The capital that these students see English embodying correlates with an expectation that their instructors will provide opportunities to improve communicative competency in class, and the majority of students expected the following of their instructors

*Teach conversational English in a fun and interesting way.*

*Teach us practical speaking skill rather than grammar.*

*Teach high quality and practical English.*

This highlights students' knowledge about the importance of communicative competency, something not always catered for in South Korean high school settings due to washback effects from the Korean SATs. These responses reveal a contrast between the instructors and the students however. As discussed earlier, instructors felt students resisted attempts to make the English learning experience communicative, while here students seemingly demand that this be the service that the instructors provide.

## **Ideologies, Capital, Investment and Identity.**

In response to the third research question *How are ideologies, capital and investment affecting these students' developing language learner identities?* The following discussion is presented.

Implicit references to the ideologies of neoliberalism dominated most of the statements by both instructors and students rather than overtly explicit references. One such example of an ideological influence was Trevor's mention of how South Korea may benefit in terms of its global competitiveness by having its citizens speak English. This is a reoccurring theme in neoliberal discourses (Block, Gray, & Holborow, 2012). A common theme in the student responses was the global nature of English, and the pressing need of students to learn English in order to be prepared to be part of the global society in order to work, travel and address global issues. This suggests that the students had been exposed to certain ideologies that embrace such world views.

Therefore, for these instructors and students, the ideology of neoliberalism influences their understanding of English as more than just a language, it has come to represent forms of capital which offer possible future economic (i.e. employment), cultural (i.e. understanding diverse cultures via travel) and social (status within society) capital. That these ideologies were not necessarily explicitly mentioned

suggests that they may have been normalized by the communities that these instructors and students associate with (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Therefore, by extension, this normalization legitimizes English bilingual identities that can take advantage of these forms of capital, and shapes a renegotiation of identities for the students from monolingual Korean speakers to emerging bi or multilingual identities (Block et al., 2012). The lack of explicit acknowledgement of neoliberalism as an influence on these student's decisions to acquire English seems to have extended to notions of the students emerging identities as well.

These findings, when viewed via Darvin and Norton's (2015) model of investment, reveal a contrast to the traditional discourse that decries the possibility of a Korean English bilingualism in South Korea (J. J. Song, 1998, 2011). As mentioned in the introduction, neoliberalism has been central in the systematic overhaul of the South Korean educational system, and the responses here suggest that this transformation has had an impact on student investment in learning English. The developing identities of the students, when understood via the constructs of investment and capital, sees students identifying as potentially global, bi or multilingual citizens capable of employment both within South Korea and abroad. Furthermore, this bi or multilingual identity has value for these students within South Korea due to the requirement of English in both the work place as well as in social situations. Neoliberalism therefore is providing space for the development of emerging bi or multilingual identities that are challenging the discourse that constructs South Korea as a monolingual state, even if instructors and students themselves are not aware of it.

## Conclusions

Instructors at this vocational university clearly see English as embodying symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986) that will influence the imagined communities their students may join. This should come of little surprise considering that the instructors themselves, all designated foreign, have directly benefited from neoliberal discourses which interpret English as a form of capital. Without their ability to speak English in its native form, they would not be working where they are. This fact is most likely not lost on the students either, and must be considered an influence when interpreting the students' responses.

Instructors acknowledge the accrument of English's cultural capital potentially affords students opportunities to convert it into either social capital (international interactions and networking opportunities), or economic capital (employment opportunities) (Bourdieu, 1986). That being said, this feeling is not ubiquitous amongst the instructors, with some acknowledging that not all students will have such clear-cut benefits from acquiring competency in English.

Students in this study mostly corroborate what the instructors articulate in that there is almost a universal acknowledgement that learning English leads to potential accrument of cultural, social and economic capital both in South Korea as well as the larger world. English competency is viewed by the students as being part of a successful education and therefore a form of cultural capital, while creating international networks of friends and partnerships are also mentioned as examples of social capital that the students evidently recognise as desirable. While the instructors recognise that not all students will benefit from attaining English competency, this fact was not acknowledged by the student participants in this study.

Students' recognition of the importance of English competency in this study differs to the findings of Yim (2016), where students saw value in English as a skill needed to gain entrance into the Korean university system. The students in Yim's (2016) study were in elementary school, while the students here attend a vocational university and are thinking about the next stage of their lives, which inevitably entails employment and the larger world. Both sets of students have been exposed to the notion of English as a form a potential capital, and this exposure is most likely related to the socio-economic status of their families, which implies the possibility that there is also a form of social class reproduction occurring, something referred to within South Korea as the Theory of Spoon Class (*sujeogyegeublon*) (Choi, 2020).

This suggests the very distinct possibility that not all students would be aware of, or even interested in, the capital that English represents.

Despite the relative congruency between the instructors and students on the potential capital that English embodies, there seems to be potential conflict between instructor and student expectations in regards to actual classroom practices, as although students stated they want their instructors to focus on improving communicative proficiencies, the instructors themselves feel that the students are not willing to take part in classroom practices that the instructors feel would accomplish this goal. Unfortunately for this study, an investigation into the actual classroom practices of the instructors and the students was not undertaken. Future studies that look at such issues will need to focus on looking at these practices and relating them to ideals of classroom practices that both instructors and students have.

The influence that neoliberalism, via globalization, ostensibly has in the shaping of the language learning identities of these students, while not explicitly stated for the most part, are evident via the analytical constructs of capital and investment (Bourdieu, 1986; Darvin & Norton, 2015; Norton, 2000, 2013). As Block, Gray and Holborow (2012) point out, the implicit nature of these ideologies is to be expected due the manner in which most dominant ideologies within a given society are unquestioned or assumed as the natural order of existence. The findings here suggest that neoliberalism as an ideology is challenging the monolingual status of South Korea by creating conditions for the emergence of new language identities through the promotion of English as a form of capital.

## Implications

One implication from this study is the congruence that both instructors and students have in regards to the capital embodied by English. Unfortunately, it appears there is little communication on this matter between the instructors and students, which has led to the instructors misinterpreting their students' actions in the classroom, as alluded to by both Peter and Trevor. Incorporating topics that address the role of English in the world provides an opportunity to address such lapses in communication.

Additionally, it appears the instructors and students alike would benefit from more inclusive understandings of what it means to be bi or multilingual (Grosjean, 2013), as such understandings align with the desired trajectories of the students in terms of their English learning ambitions. This could allow instructors to move away from monolingual ideologies that designate EFL learners as non-native (Pavlenko, 2003; Rabbidge, 2019b).

Challenging the discourse that South Korea, and by extension Koreans, is inherently monolingual has the potential to open up pedagogical discussions that aim to value learners and the knowledge they bring with them into the classroom. Calls for traditional foreign language contexts to be re-designated as emerging bi or multilingual contexts are relatively unheard of (Rabbidge, 2019b), and one reason for this may be the claims that English operates as a tool for social class reproduction, meaning that not all have access to opportunities of learning English and accruing its potential capital (Choi, 2020). Although such claims cannot be dismissed, employing more inclusive pedagogies may be a step in addressing such concerns of unequitable opportunities in regards to English with South Korea.

## The Author

*Michael Rabbidge* is a professor in the Dept. of English Education of Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul. His current research interests cover language learner identity formation research and translanguaging research in EFL contexts. His recent publications include *The effects of translanguaging on participation in EFL classrooms* and *Satisfiers and dissatisfiers for international vocational education students*.

Department of English Education  
Hankuk University of Foreign Studies  
Seoul, 02450, Korea  
Email address: drmichaelrabbidge@gmail.com

## References

- Adhern, L. (2001). Language and agency. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 20, 109-137.
- Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origins and spread of nationalism*. London, UK: Verso.
- Barkhuizen, G. (2008). A narrative approach to exploring context in language teaching. *ELT Journal*, 62(3), 231-239. doi:10.1093/elt/ccm043
- Barkhuizen, G. (2013). Introduction: Narrative research in applied linguistics. In G. Barkhuizen (Ed.), *Narrative research in applied linguistics* (pp. 62-82). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Barkhuizen, G. (2014). Revisiting narrative frames: An instrument for investigating language teaching and learning. *System*, 47, 12-27. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2014.09.014
- Barkhuizen, G., & Wette, R. (2008). Narrative frames for investigating the experiences of language teachers. *System*, 36(3), 372-387. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2008.02.002
- Block, D., Gray, J., & Holborow, M. (2012). *Neoliberalism and applied linguistics*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). The economics of linguistic exchanges. *Social Science Information*, 16(6), 645-668. doi:10.1177/053901847701600601
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 96-111). New York, NY: Greenwood Press.
- Byean, H. (2015). English, tracking, and neoliberalization of education in South Korea. *TESOL Quarterly*, 49(4), 867-882. doi:10.1002/tesq.257
- Choi, L. J. (2020). 'English is always proportional to one's wealth': English, English language education, and social reproduction in South Korea. *Multilingua, A Head of Publication*. doi:https://doi.org/10.1515/multi-2019-0031
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Dagenais, D. (2003). Accessing imagined communities through multilingualism and immersion education. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 2(4), 269-283. doi:10.1207/S15327701JLIE0204\_3
- Darvin, R., & Norton, B. (2015). Identity and a model of investment in applied linguistics. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 35, 36-56. doi:10.1017/S0267190514000191
- Dornyei, Z. (2011). *Research methods in applied linguistics*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Grosjean, F. (2013). Bilingualism: A short introduction. In F. Grosjean & P. Li (Eds.), *The psycholinguistics of bilingualism* (pp. 5-25). Chicester, UK: Blackwell Publishing
- Heller, M. (2010). The commodification of language. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 39, 101-114.
- Ison, N. L. (2009). Having their say: Email interviews for research data collection with people who have verbal communication impairment. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 12(2), 161-172. doi:10.1080/13645570902752365
- James, N. (2016). Using email interviews in qualitative educational research: Creating space to think and time to talk. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 29(2), 150-163. doi:10.1080/09518398.2015.1017848
- James, N. (2017). You've got mail ... ! Using email interviews to gather academics' narratives of their working lives. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 40(1), 6-18. doi:10.1080/1743727X.2015.1056136

- Kang, D.-M. (2008). The classroom language use of a Korean elementary school EFL teacher: Another look at TETE. *System*, 36(2), 214-226. doi:10.1016/j.system.2007.10.005
- Kanno, Y. (2003). Imagined communities, school visions, and the education of bilingual students in Japan. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 2(4), 285-300.
- Kim, H.-K. (2017). Demystifying native speaker ideology: The critical role of critical practice in language teacher education. *The Journal of Asia TEFL*, 14(1), 81-97. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.18823/asiatefl.2017.14.1.6.81
- Liu, D., Ahn, G.-S., Baek, K.-S., & Han, N.-O. (2004). South Korean high school english teachers' code switching: Questions and challenges in the drive for maximal use of English in teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, 38(4), 605-638. doi:10.2307/3588282
- Murata, K. (2019). Exploring EMI in higher education from an ELF perspective In K. Murata (Ed.), *English medium instruction from an English as a lingua franca perspective: Exploring the higher education context* (pp. 1-11). New York: Routledge.
- Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and language learning : Gender, ethnicity and educational change*: Harlow, England ; New York : Longman, 2000.
- Norton, B. (2001). Non-participation, imagined communities and the language classroom. In M. Breen (Ed.), *Learner contributions to language learning: New directions in research* (pp. 159-171). London, UK: Longman/ Pearson education.
- Norton, B., & Kamal, F. (2003). The imagined communities of English language learners in a Pakistani school. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 2(4), 301-317. doi:10.1207/S15327701JLIE0204\_5
- Park, J.-K. (2009). 'English fever' in South Korea: Its history and symptoms. *English Today*, 25(1), 50-57. doi:10.1017/S026607840900008X
- Park, J. S.-Y. (2011). The promise of English: Linguistic capital and the neoliberal worker in the South Korean job market. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 14(4), 443-455. doi:10.1080/13670050.2011.573067
- Pavlenko, A. (2003). "I never knew I was a bilingual": Reimagining teacher identities in TESOL. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 2(4), 251-268. doi:10.1207/S15327701JLIE0204\_2
- Pavlenko, A., & Norton, B. (2007). Imagined communities, identity, and English language learning. In J. Cummins & C. Davison (Eds.), *International handbook of English language teaching* (pp. 669-680). Boston, MA: Springer US.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1995). Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 8(1), 5-23. doi:10.1080/0951839950080103
- Rabbidge, M. (2017). Assumptions, attitudes and beliefs: Tracing the development of teacher beliefs about classroom L1/TL. *The Journal of Asia TEFL*, 14(2), 346-354. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.18823/asiatefl.2017.14.2.11.346
- Rabbidge, M. (2019a). The effects of translanguaging on participation in EFL classrooms. *The Journal of Asia TEFL*, 16(4), 1305-1322.
- Rabbidge, M. (2019b). *Translanguaging in EFL contexts: A call for change*. London; New York, NY: Routledge.
- Seth, M. J. (2016). *Routledge handbook of modern Korean history*: Routledge.
- Shin, H. (2016). Language 'skills' and the neoliberal English education industry. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 37(5), 509-522. doi:10.1080/01434632.2015.1071828
- Song, J. (2012). Imagined communities and language socialization practices in transnational space: A case study of two Korean "Study Abroad" families in the United States. *The Modern Language Journal*, 96(4), 507-524.
- Song, J. J. (2011). English as an official language in South Korea: Global English or social malady? *Language Problems & Language Planning*, 35(1), 35-55. doi:10.1075/lplp.35.1.03son
- Springer, S. (2012). Neoliberalism as discourse: Between Foucauldian political economy and Marxian poststructuralism. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 9(2), 133-147. doi:10.1080/17405904.2012.656375

- Vasilopoulos, G. (2015). Language learner investment and identity negotiation in the Korean EFL context. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 14(2), 61-79. doi:10.1080/15348458.2015.1019783
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning and identity*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- Yim, S. (2007). Globalization and language policy in South Korea. In A. B. M. Tsui & J. W. Tollefson (Eds.), *Language policy, culture, and identity in Asian context* (pp. 37-53). Mahwah, N.J: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

*(Received May 25, 2020; Revised August 31, 2020; Accepted September 08, 2020)*

## Appendix A

### Instructors Frames

Name (optional):	Major:	1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> , 4 <sup>th</sup> Year student
Age:	Gender:	Instructor:

Please continue the sentence starters according to your experiences

1. I imagine my students learn English because ...
2. I believe my role as an English instructor in South Korea is ...
3. The biggest change I have experienced as an instructor since arriving in South Korea is ...
4. One example of how my classroom persona differs to my non-classroom persona is ...
5. Things I enjoy and don't enjoy about teaching English in Korea include ...

## Appendix B

### Student Frames

Name: _____	Age: _____	Time spent in Korea: _____
Marital Status: _____	Nationality: _____	Ethnicity: _____

1. Please complete the following sentences as best as you can, in either English or Korean ... (다음 빈칸을 아는 대로 영어 또는 한국어로 완성하세요.)
2. I study English because ... (나는 영어를 공부한다 왜냐하면)
3. In the future I imagine I will need English for ... (나중에 영어가 필요할 것이라고 생각한다 왜냐하면)
4. In South Korea, being able to speak English means that people ... (한국에서 영어를 구사할 수 있는 것은 사람들이 ... 를 할 수 있다는 의미이다)
5. I expect English instructors to... (나는 영어선생님들에게...를 바란다.)
6. I think my instructors know (*a lot, a little, nothing*) about who I am outside of class, and this makes me feel ... (나는 학교밖에서의 내가 누구인지에 대해서 선생님들이 (많이, 조금, 전혀)안다고 생각한다. 그리고 그것은 내가 ...하게 느끼게 한다.)