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Issues of Language, Insider/Outsider Positionality, and Advocacy Dilemmas in Researching Plurilingual Asian Im/migrants*

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요약

Drawing on the notion of reflexivity, I examine researcher positionality concerning the issues of language and tensions in navigating perceived insider/outsider positioning, and advocacy dilemmas that I experienced in ethnographic qualitative research with plurilingual Asian im/migrant students in South Korea and in the U.S. Through reflexive analysis of my ethnographic fieldwork, I studied about my researcher's positionality and voice during and after research and highlighted the partial, situated, and subjective nature of knowledge production through qualitative research. My view is that qualitative researchers should critically reflect on their social location and power relations interlinked with their analysis and positionality, and articulate how that may affect their research.

Key words: *researcher positionality, reflexivity, plurilingual im/migrants, auto-ethnography, transnational contexts*

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I. Introduction

Qualitative researchers with a post-structural stance see knowledge as situated, fragmented, local and temporal in socio-cultural and political contexts (Choi, 2006; Subedi, 2006). In alignment with the post-structural paradigm that challenges the Western Enlightenment perspective on the objectivity and universal validity of knowledge and authority, post-structuralists claim that knowledge depends on the researchers' positionality, including who one is; how one positions one's self in the interview process; how one engages the interviewees; and why one does research. Further, the post-structural view of qualitative research problematizes the dichotomy of insider versus outsider research status (Lim, 2012). Rather, the researchers' positioning and identities are fluid and situated with their own multiple social identities (e.g., educational backgrounds, gender, sexual orientation, race, class, and language) in relation to the research settings and participants (Nero, 2015).

As such, a significant body of literature has addressed issues of the blurred boundary of researcher positionality with respect to the commonalities and differences with interviewees (e.g., Perez-Milans, 2016; Song & Parker, 1995). For example, Choi (2006), an academic trained in the U.S. academe, returned to her home country, South Korea, to research former dropout teenage youths as a teacher and researcher in an alternative school. Drawing on a post-structural approach, Choi (2006) demonstrated how her Korean ethnicity and cultural understandings, and her teacher position at school gave her access to gather stories from her former dropout students. At the same time, Choi (2006) examined whether her U.S. institution associated researcher positionality, and her social identity (e.g., middle class, highly educated individual) may have shaped her interpretations and writing on her participants from the deficit-saturated views (i.e., less-educated, self-destructive lifestyle, 'broken' home).

In a similar vein, in Rhee's (2006) study, employing auto-ethnographic lens, Rhee examined how Korean women in U.S. higher education contexts navigate, comply to and resist their gendered, classed, and racialized accounts through categorical analysis

(e.g., Korean women, women of color, im/migrant women). Likewise, Kim (2012), as a Korean academic in the U.S., examines how South Korean migrant women in U.S. higher educational contexts position the researcher in relation to the commonality and differences based on their social identity categories, and negotiates the extent they share their information. Further, examining the complexity of translation during the interviews and academic writing, Kim (2012) explicates how the academic audience in English-speaking Western academe shapes her accounts for and representation of her participants.

Researchers are bound to negotiate power relations with their interviewees within the context of particular research cultures and reflect on their assumptions and subjectivities (Subrenduth & Rhee, 2010). Another issue is how the researcher represents the researched, and how that is embedded in the power dynamics of knowledge production (Rhee, 2008). This is closely related to the research ethics of representing others' lives (Kim, 2012). Hence, the notion of reflexivity, the notion of researcher's capacity to recognize their own social location and subjectivities and reflect upon their positionality in research, is useful to unpack the researcher's analytic and ethical rigor for presenting a transparent research process and to understand the relationship between the researcher and the researched in particular social, cultural, and political contexts. For a researcher, reflexivity is about critically reflecting upon one's own presence and influence on the research contexts and participants, and about examining the ethics of representing through academic writing. Reflexivity does not increase the validity of research, but rather illuminates the discursive positioning of the researcher and knowledge production embedded in qualitative research processes and contexts (Lim, 2012). In particular, researchers have paid explicit attention to the multifaceted knowledge construction and issues of the "authentic" voice between the researcher and the researched in researching culturally, ethnically, and linguistically affiliated communities of their own (Subedi, 2006; Subedi & Rhee, 2008).

In this paper, drawing on my qualitative research in South Korea (Eur & Kang, 2011) and the U.S. (Kang, 2017; Maddamsetti, Flenbaugh, & Rosaen, in press; Maddamsetti, in

press a, b), I speak about practicing reflexivity as a transnational¹⁾ qualitative researcher. I describe my multiple positioning in research contexts. I aim to deepen understanding of complexities of research positionality that disrupts the binary notion of insider/outsider researcher positioning in researching “my people” (Chaundhry, 1997). In following sections, I juxtapose my fieldworks in South Korea and the U.S. Then, I demonstrate how my positioning intersects with issues of language particularly regarding interview language choice and translation, and tensions in negotiating the perceived and claimed insider/outsider positioning in the field.

II. Methodology

1. Auto-ethnographic Approach

I use auto-ethnographic approach in reflecting my fieldworks and experiences of interviewing Asian im/migrants in South Korea and the U.S. Auto-ethnographic approach is useful to describe and systematically analyze personal experiences in particular socio-cultural and political contexts (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Aligned with post-structural epistemology, auto-ethnographic approach, or termed interchangeably as self-study, emphasizes the researcher’s observations, experiences, and thoughts as valid source of knowledge to understand the socio-cultural and political setting that s/he is situated (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Further, in the field of teacher education, the auto-ethnographic approach has been identified as an empowering methodology for unpacking teacher educators’ positionality, identity, and learning in their ethnographic

1) Transnational qualitative researcher refers to those who have crossed cultural, linguistic, and geographic boundaries due to their im/migration and overseas education and yet research and write about the communities with whom they culturally, linguistically, and ethnically/racially affiliated with (Subedi, 2006).

fieldwork (e.g., Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). Therefore, auto-ethnographic approach is also beneficial to analyze the researcher's positionality and subjectivity in ethnographic fieldworks. Further, auto-ethnographic approaches are not just useful to interrupt the comfortable reflexivity of the researcher, but to "seek to know while at the same time situates this knowing as tenuous" (Pillow, 2003, p. 188). As such, the auto-ethnographic approach enabled me to examine my reflexivity practice of discomfort, and compare the similarities and variations between my fieldworks in South Korea and the U.S.

2. Juxtaposing Two Ethnographic Studies

This article involves some common experiences and concerns during my fieldworks with Asian im/migrants in South Korea and the U.S. I juxtapose two studies and analyze my positionality in those fieldworks for three reasons. First, both studies reflect my research interests in plurilingual im/migrant students and teachers, and examine Asian im/migrants' educational experiences in the context of their adopted country. Second, both studies are deeply rooted in my political commitment to educational equity, diversity, and social justice as a researcher and teacher. Finally, in both studies, despite my seemingly cultural and ethnic insider position with my participants, I found myself constantly negotiating my assigned and claimed insider/outsider position.

1) Multiple Case Studies of Immigrant Students in a Rural South Korean Elementary School

My first fieldwork began with the convenience of access to the field and potential participants (Eur & Kang, 2012). I was a teacher in a small rural elementary school in South Korea, where I had witnessed increasing numbers of plurilingual²⁾ and multiethnic im/migrant students and families. I was also able to observe those im/

2) Plurilingual in this paper refers to extensive range of capacities of language repertoires crossing cultural, linguistic, and geographic borders and boundaries (Taylor & Snoddon, 2013).

migrant students' racialized experiences and their challenges in developing their Korean language literacy. I intended to explore how im/migrant students demonstrate their literacy development through reading multicultural and plurilingual picture books. I spent two years from 2009 to 2010 as a teacher leading a "multicultural picture book club" while having opportunities to listen to their stories. My participants were 4th grade bilingual immigrant students whose language backgrounds were Japanese, Vietnamese, Philippines, and Chinese. I also conducted semi-structured interviews with both those students and their parents regarding their perceptions of plurilingual literacy practice and development both at home and school environments.

2) Ethnographic Case Studies with Migrant Pre-service Teachers in the U.S.

I conducted ethnographic case studies with a Korean, Korean Chinese and Chinese teacher candidate in Mid-western city during 2014~2015. I aimed to challenge the categorical notions of migrant teacher candidates (e.g., sojourner, international students, Asian), and study their academic learning and professional growth during their year-long teaching practicum (Maddamsetti, in press a, b; Maddamsetti et al., in press). The participants were all females aged from 21 to 22. All the participants had attended a teacher preparation program in the U.S. Although their specialization differs from one another (e.g., math, language arts), they shared similar career interests in becoming a teacher. I examined what kinds of academic and professional challenges they encountered in practicum school contexts, and how it influenced their perceptions of becoming a teacher, either in their home country, or in the U.S. During their teaching practicum, I visited their practicum school sites to observe and document their teaching and interactions at school. They also shared their teaching artifacts and written reflections. Further, I individually conducted interviews about their understanding of their challenges and their learning through their practicum experience. The interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions, consisting of 60-90 min. The interviews covered topics, including their academic and professional challenges, if any, related to their social identities, and their professional growth during their practicum.

III. Findings

1. Issues of Language: Interview Language Choice and Translation

I found that interviewees usually choose to speak their first language (L1) during interviews because they feel more comfortable to describe their perceptions and experiences (Lu & Gatua, 2014). Yet, researchers and participants do not always share their L1. Even if researchers and participants share their L1 other than English, transnational researchers in Western academic contexts would have to address the issues of translation of non-English into English concerning the cultural sensitivity and interpretations (Subedi & Rhee, 2008). Thus, ethnographic researchers in plurilingual research contexts face questions with respect to who chooses interview language(s) and how the interview language choices and translations might affect the interviewee's accounts and possible data interpretation (Lu & Gatua, 2014; Nguyen, 2015; Subedi, 2006).

In the study with plurilingual Korean im/migrant students, the interviews were conducted in Korean because I speak no L1 of my participants such as Vietnamese or Tagalog. My participants spoke both Korean and other language(s) at home. When asked about their language backgrounds, my participants also displayed a sense of anxiety about potentially being perceived as “non-native” and consequently gaining disapproval from teachers who were mostly from “mainstream” Korean society (e.g., middle-class, “native”-born Korean). My students' anxiety about being “non-native” Korean speakers also appear to motivate them to “master” Korean language fluency and mainstream cultural norms to fit in. I sensed the mixture of anxiety, motivation, and desire for learning a dominant language in Korean society (e.g., Korean, English) and fitting in when I brought multicultural and multilingual picture books in class. The books I found describe the lived experiences of Vietnamese, Philippines and Chinese American characters. Some of the books were English version whereas others were translated into Korean. While I naively believed that my students would find such characters relatable,

one student grumbled in a disappointed tone, 'I thought we are going to learn English, and their exciting life in America. They don't look like Americans and their stories are not exciting.' When I explained to them that the characters are like them, im/migrants in America and their stories often involve adjusting themselves to the cultural and linguistic norms, students agreed that "mastering" the dominant language in society is important. Bringing in pictures about Asian American im/migrant children's lives at home and school was based on both my naiveté and a lack of books that illustrate Korean im/migrant children's lives back then in Korea. Why they equated the non-white characters as non-Americans, and thus "non-native" American English speakers needs further discussion at the intersection of race and language ideologies (Kubota & Lin, 2006; 2009) and it is beyond the scope of this paper. Yet, they clearly demonstrated their understandings that Korean language fluency, as a marker of mainstream cultural identity, would provide them hope and access to becoming a "mainstream" Korean member.

Certainly, hierarchy exists in Korean society with respect to certain dialects and accents (Kang, 2010). Although the number of plurilingual im/migrants from various Asian countries has been rapidly increasing in South Korea, almost all of Korean public schools use Korean as the official language of instruction (Kang, 2010). Plurilingual Asian im/migrant students' home or regional languages, therefore, are used in the most casual settings, including conversations with their family and friends. At the time of the study, I assumed that conducting interviews in Korean was a legitimate choice in taking into account how plurilingual students learn and practice Korean (L2) and English (L3). In retrospect, I was oblivious as a novice researcher with "mainstream" Korean backgrounds (e.g., middle-class, higher education, and bilingual) about how researchers' language background(s) with respect to those of interviewees may affect the interview language choice, and thus power relations.

Conducting ethnographic case studies in the U.S., I became keenly aware of the ways in which the interview language choice shapes interview process. I conducted interviews in Korean with my Korean participant and in English with Chinese participants. In

my observation, the Chinese participants appeared to be more self-conscious and less comfortable in articulating their feelings and experiences through the interviews in English in comparison to the Korean participants who appeared to be content in expressing herself in her first language throughout the interviews with a Korean-speaking researcher. Yet when it comes to educational jargon or her terms specific to her subject-area (e.g., mathematical terms), the Korean participant chose to code-switch English terms and phrases. I believed that my Chinese participants and I did not have a choice but to speak English due to my limited language proficiency in Chinese. Only the Korean participant had two choices for interview languages (i.e., Korean and English), or so I believed. One of the Chinese participants, Mei, was actually a Korean heritage speaker as an ethnic Korean immigrant in China towards the end of the study. Reflecting on her linguistic identity negotiation that involves the social perceptions on ethnic Koreans in China as a model minority who is expected to academically and financially succeed in society (Gao & Park, 2012), she revealed that:

My earlier experiences at a Mandarin-only school were mostly about my fear of being bullied because of my struggling reading and writing in Mandarin, or my Korean heritage... Only close friends from middle and high school know that I am an ethnic Korean – I felt much relieved from any bias or pressure.

Mei further illustrated that learning the dominant Chinese language through education is still widely promoted as ways for upward social mobility in Korean-Chinese communities as many cases of im/migrant students in South Korea. She shared that she was, in fact, fluent and more comfortable with speaking Korean than speaking Chinese or English. She revealed that she found it challenging to speak Korean with a North Korean dialect with a South Korean researcher. Mei explained that she chose to speak English as a “professional” and “neutral” language during the interviews given that she often encountered social prejudice as a Korean-Chinese speaker from both Chinese and Korean communities. She further shared that she was afraid of my judgment of her

heavy North Korean accents. I was also reminded of Derrida's point that "I have but one language – yet that language is not mine" (1998, p. 1). Mei's striving and pretending to "master the master's language" (Derrida, 1998) throughout her Mandarin-only schooling paralleled the stories from my im/migrant students in Korean-only South Korean school contexts. Their struggles with speaking certain language and accent, and performing the mastery of language also resonate with Derrida's autobiographic accounts for his complex identity and position as a Jew in relation to French language and citizenship (Derrida, 1998). More importantly, Derrida (1998) poignantly raises methodological concerns about how I, as a "native" Korean researcher accurately represent their lived experiences, and how my interpretation of "their" language can be ways to otherize their lives. I was reminded of Garcia and Otheguy's (2014) point that my presence in the field and account for plurilingual students' lives can be ways to attribute them a "monologic ideology that privilege the monolingual speaker and the monolingual setting as the natural and unmarked conditions of languaging" (p. 649).

Additionally, while interviewees' perceptions and assumptions on interviewer influences their choice of interview language, interviewee's notion of audience and research agenda might also potentially influence their accounts and attitudes during the interviews (Kim, 2012; Song & Parker, 1995). Subedi and Rhee (2008) noted that marginalized participants in social research often wish to be heard through research and to make their story shared (Subedi & Rhee, 2008). For example, the participants from ethnographic case studies in the U.S. often expressed their clear opinions of what they made sense of subtle discrimination they encountered during their teacher preparation programs as well as during their teaching practicum. In my article (in press, Year a), while my participant, Ling, clearly articulated how becoming a "good teacher" is dependent on cultural and linguistic assumptions in society, she was ambivalent about voicing her critical opinions during her practicum in the U.S. This is reflected in her words during the exit-interview, "At the end of the day, the [U.S.] university opened the door for me to become a teacher. It would be ungrateful and unfair to criticize what they have done so well for other local teacher candidates. I can see they can do better,

but I don't want to create some troubling voice on behalf of other international students on campus. That can be too troublesome." After articulating her critical opinions about her racialized experiences as well as the need to mask them, Ling asked me to share my transcripts and analysis. Other participants appeared to be cautious about sharing their views, asking when, where, and with whom I would share their stories. For instance, Mei did not want to conduct interviews at her practicum school, but at a café and restaurant where her colleagues and peer intern teachers were not around. She expressed that "me, sharing my struggles make me feel weak and vulnerable. I don't particularly want my work-related people to know about these things about me" during the interviews. Both my participants and I contemplated a wider audience in their mind before, during, and after the interview process. On the one hand, my participants' imagined, or real audience appeared to be their practicum stakeholders (e.g., mentor teachers, field instructor, university faculty). On the other hand, I constantly contemplated how the academic audience would receive my interpretations and my positionality during my ethnographic field works.

Furthermore, after conducting interviews, translation of Korean interview data into academic English also raised questions of power relations and ethics of qualitative research. Challenges in translation extend beyond identifying words and phrases in another language, but involves cultural insights and understanding (Subedi, 2006; Kim, 2012). More importantly, translating participants' verbatim into academic text and analyzing lived experiences from theoretical views requires researchers' careful consideration of how their research interests might have potentially impact their representation of their participants (Kim, 2012). For instance, in my work (Kang, 2017), a Korean female teacher candidate, Sumi, differentiates herself and her friends in Korean communities from her domestic "American" peers because Koreans share a sense of "Jeong" by describing, "I do enjoy partying and stuff, but then I don't know much about their cultural reference and individualism here is very difficult for me to deal with. Americans do not have Jeong. It was frustrating to be connected with people." Jeong refers to a shared Korean mentality that Koreans have a strong empathy for supporting

one another regardless they are biologically related or not (Hunt, 2017). It was easy to translate such notion into English; however, it was challenging for me to contextualize Sumi's experience where she appeared to be completely isolated in social interactions with her American peers in ways not to represent Sumi as self-segregating herself by socializing only with Koreans, and thus attribute her to an identity of "forever foreigner" (Cui & Kelly, 2013). Simultaneously, in response to the homogeneous perspectives on "Asian international students" in U.S. college campuses, she wanted to distinguish herself particularly from Chinese "international students," by stating:

I heard that many Koreans who have a high score couldn't get in a few years. You know, I heard through grapevine that the college is going through financial difficulties and they live off from ESL programs. But many Koreans don't have to start from ESL programs unlike lots of Chinese students. We (Koreans) speak quite a good command of English. And so.. there are tons of Chinese students in ESL programs and undergrad programs, too... Well, I think they (Chinese international students) come here to spend money. They put lots of efforts to decorate themselves, but still so ... not fashionable at all. Ah... awful fashion sense. You know, they wear all those design brands from the head to the toe. But it's like... so tacky. I don't like to see them spending serious money instead of studying. And you know Koreans, we think we are better than Chinese. Even though they make more money, they are still "jjangge." (Kang, 2017)

The term, "jjangge," is a pejorative term to describe Chinese in Korea. This term is based on historical relationships between Korea and China that Koreans had been subjugated to China as a smaller country. As a result, Koreans had developed a sense of hostility towards China, including expressing their anger towards Chinese through such a derogatory term. While I was not sure how to respond to Sumi's remarks during the interview, Sumi wanted to be affirmed that "we" as Koreans have this stereotype about Chinese. Her casualness on revealing her prejudice appeared to stem from the fact that she knew that I am Korean, a cultural insider who would agree with this view. I quickly

changed interview topics instead of disagreeing with her prejudice, and discussing why it is problematic in the context of her marginalized experience in the U.S. Simultaneously, translating the term, “jjangge” into English encompassed how Sumi’s internalized racism shaped her self-perceived marginalization as well as racializing the Other.

Likewise, the process of translation reflects a researcher’s reflexivity and their positions both in society and academia (Kim, 2012). When I conducted a study affiliated with a Korean teacher education program and institution, I referred to plurilingual im/migrant students as an ethnic and linguistic “minority” group compared to the Korean majority. The implications of the study and future research directions aimed at a “mainstream” Korean audience. In contrast, when I began to conduct a research affiliated with a U.S. teacher preparation program and university for “western” audience, I interchangeably referred my Korean and Chinese participants as “international,” “sojourning,” and/or “non-native (English-speaking)” students from dominant perspectives (e.g., English-speaking, white, citizenship status). Recognizing the problematic otherizing views on my participants’ categorical identities, I was careful to reframe my participants and their experiences from agency-centered perspectives. In this light, the description of interviewees and implications of research involves not only researchers’ politically charged decision, but also the socio-cultural location of the researchers and their target audience (Lather, 1986, 1993).

However, I found myself constantly wrestling with interview language choice during interviews, and issues of translation and representation in my writing for academic audience. In both studies on im/migrant students’ experiences, the interview language choice appeared to be a straightforward choice in the beginning because all the participants seemed to have clear language preferences based on their self-identified language proficiency. However, in both studies, the interviews were conducted in a common language that both my interviewee and I speak (i.e., Korean and/or English) rather than the interviewees’ language proficiency. The choice of interview language raises important questions in ways that I can only conjecture about: if I had spoken my plurilingual students’ mother tongue (e.g., Mandarin Chinese, Tagalog), would my

participants have articulated their experiences more in detail? If I had spoken Korean with North Korean accent, as opposed to South Korean accent, how might that have influenced my South Korean or Korean-Chinese interviewee's perception of me as a researcher? I acknowledge that interview language choice reflects the power relations and language ideology in society. For example, as many scholars in language studies have pointed out (Kubota & Lin, 2006, 2009; Lippi-Green, 1997), the racial privilege prevalent in the lives of white native English speakers in western contexts is crucial to understand how a dominant group's (e.g., white native English-speakers) racial privilege legitimize "Standard" English as [white] "American" English. Thus, such language ideology may generate deficit-based views on "non-native" speakers, and further negate, or otherize their linguistic and cultural repertoires (Derrida, 1998; Lippi-Green, 1997). In this sense, I acknowledge that interview language may have influenced the ways I interpreted and reported the research findings.

My experience speak to Lather's (2007) post-modern feminist methodological accounts that problematize the researcher as an expert and authority, and claims the impossibility of fully experiencing and representing the lived experiences of her participants, women with HIV. Lather (2007) argued for her methodology of getting lost that describes researcher positionality should be scrutinized through a deconstruction of representation in a particular "naked" relationship between a researcher and participant(s), rather than declaring the researcher's authority. Lather (2007) urges the researcher to make efforts to strip oneself of one's authority by "think(ing) about what it means to be an academic researcher who pokes around in other people's lives, in particular ways, for particular reasons, almost always clothed in the rhetoric of doing good" (p. 55). Her claim to confront and deconstruct the authority of the researcher reminds us of the practice of reflexivity, what Pillow (2003) calls "reflexivity of discomfort" that describes how the researcher can operate the power dynamics of society, and produce the discursive representations of the participants. Specifically, Pillow (2003) argues that the researcher should engage in "reflexivity of discomfort" that "pushes towards an unfamiliar, towards, the comfortable, cannot be a simply story of

subjects, subjectivity, and transcend or self-indulgent tellings” (p. 192). In this section, I took up this idea of “reflexivity of discomfort” and provided examples against categorical analysis of my participants (e.g., women/non-native speaker as a category of analysis). Furthermore, I demonstrated how translation can be another way of producing the Other (e.g., linguistic and ethnic “minority” of Korean im/migrant students) dependent on the academic audience of my writing. Overall, in this section, despite my contentious effort to deconstruct “objective truth and knowledge” through reflexivity aligned with feminist and post-structural approach, I illuminated how the issues of interview language choice and translation complicated and continued to situate my own need and desire for gathering truth, and thus the practice of reflexivity.

2. The Researcher as a Perceived and Claimed Insider/Outsider

The “native” researcher addresses how their perceived insider positionality gave him/her access to the field, and helped her build rapport with their participants (e.g., Subedi, 2006). At the same time, “native” ethnographic researchers also address how their insider/outsider is flimsy dependent on their participants and fieldwork contexts (e.g., Choi, 2006). Thus, the researcher positionality cannot be statically insider, or outsider to their participants and within the field. As the qualitative research inevitably involves power dynamics between the researcher and participants, the researcher is bound to negotiate his/her perceived and asserted positions in the field. In this section, I address how my perceived “insider” position gave me advantages in my fieldwork, and yet how I had to negotiate my insider/outsider position throughout the fieldwork.

In both research, my affiliation to the institution at the time of the study (e.g., teaching position at a South Korean elementary school, doctoral student at a U.S. graduate school) gave me access to the field. Furthermore, because I shared commonalities with my participants (e.g., ethnicity, Pan-Asian cultural backgrounds, gender) in both studies, such commonalities helped me build trust with the participants. Or, perhaps, so I believed.

During my research with Korean im/migrant students, I identified myself as an insider because I speak and write Korean fluently and I felt being culturally connected to Korean customs and traditions. At the same time, I realized my outsider position to my participants because I was not an im/migrant in Korean society. During the interviews, my participants as well as their parents showed a sense of reservation in describing their frustrations and anxieties as im/migrants in Korean society. For example, when I asked my participants about challenges of communicating with their parent(s) who does not speak Korean, my participants kept silent, or simply responded, “there are more (non-verbal and verbal) ways in which my parents and I communicate with each other besides speaking Korean.” The silence and simple response reminded me of my “mainstream,” and thus “outsider” position. Their detached responses contrasted with those from their teachers who openly discussed their concerns about those students’ academic challenges as colleagues at school. For instance, the teachers shared with me about which participants had been struggling with reading and writing in her grade level, and perhaps the school should invite his parents to talk about the possibility of learning disability. They also shared their observations about whose parent(s) speak Korean, or not, and discussed how that might impact my participants’ academic aptitudes and learning.

In researching the learning and teaching experiences of teacher candidates in the U.S., I shared many commonalities with my participants, such as gender, migrant status, academic purpose of migration, and pan-Asian cultural identity. Sharing commonalities provided us a sense of empathy toward each other in studying abroad and facilitated our conversations about what it means to be marginalized as a migrant in the U.S. Furthermore, as I shared the specific research purpose, my preliminary interpretations about their experiences, and possible implications, my participants wanted to be involved more deeply with their suggestions for research process and analysis. For instance, while in the beginning of the research, my participants answered my interview questions somewhat on a superficial level. As I spent more time in the field, persistently expressed my strong interest in their stories, they began to ask several questions about the research agenda, and then shared very specific stories relevant to my research

purposes and questions. Also, one students postponed the interviews by stating, “This week, I don’t think I have particular stories to share related to your research topic.” They also suggested specific dates for my observations of their teaching and school events for close observations and analysis of certain interactions between them and their practicum stakeholders (e.g., mentor teacher, students). Their suggested observation of their teaching, for example includes their specialized subject (e.g., math, language arts), or challenging subject that they had to teach (e.g., social studies). In so doing, they wanted me to analyze what they had accomplished, and faced challenges, and why. Towards the end of their internship, reflecting on their practicum experiences and interviews with me, they also suggested what I could have done, or what I could do next interviews in a similar line of research. For instance, they suggested that I should have worked with them earlier stage of their teacher preparation program, rather than their yearlong practicum alone, to see their professional growth and challenge. Therefore, when participants positioned me as an insider of their in-group of “non-native English speaking,” “international students,” they played not only a role of informants of the study, but also a role of cooperative participants in my study. My participants’ perceptions of me as an “insider,” and their roles of informative collaborator for the research echo with Kim’s (2012) research, for example, that Korean students in U.K. higher educational contexts willingly collaborated with a Korean graduate student researcher.

Interestingly, my institutional affiliation and my position as a graduate student persistently reminded me of my outsider position. During the interviews, my participants kept checking with me that their responses and particular opinions would not be formally evaluated as partial forms of their practicum. In this sense, my institutional affiliation appeared to afford me an unintended power position (Lim, 2012). When I reassured them that their experiences and comments towards their program and practicum stakeholders would not be assessed and documented in their formal school report, they look much relieved. Then, however, they began to position me as their ally and friends to get through their practicum. Further, they demanded emotional support and validation, and wanted to “hang out” during their break. For

example, they invited me for watching movies, cooking for dinner, or taking a painting class together. While I openly discussed my educational and cultural backgrounds with my students to find commonalities and build trust with them in the beginning of the study, I gradually found myself making explicit efforts to draw a boundary between the participants and me, as a researcher. For example, I made explicit efforts to maintain a reserved demeanor during the interviews, including restraining myself from sharing my political views or suggesting certain pedagogical stance in their teaching. Furthermore, I was being cautious not to stand out from the school activities and teaching observations. It was my ways of covering my political stance detached from the school context. I wanted to perform a role of “a fly in the wall” in their teaching classroom, and teachers’ lounge to closely observe and listen to what my participants said to whom, and how they behaved and responded towards what. This includes the incidents that I wanted to make comments. For instance, teachers chatted with my participants about students’ vampire game that the game participants get to decide who extracts whose blood. When some of white students refuse to play the game with other students of color due to “non-pure” blood, teachers stepped in, and invited parents to discuss issues of diversity in classroom. The teachers and my participants appeared to be proud of addressing the incident with both their students and their parents. Yet I felt a sense of discomfort that the teachers did not even mention issues of “race and racism,” but merely emphasized the importance of “celebrating diversity in classroom.”

As anti-racist feminist researchers assert (Collins, 2002; Lather, 1986, 1993), research is both personal and political. Several studies on Korean researcher positionality with Korean participants either in Korean society, or transnational contexts pointed out how Korean participants collectively refer to both the researcher and participants themselves as *we/our/us* (e.g., Kim, 2012). Likewise, I also often found my participants using collective pronouns, “*we/our/us*,” to describe their own experiences. This appeared to reflect their assumptions that “*we*” all share the same sentiments and experiences as a migrant resident studying education in the U.S. However, a researcher’s ethnicity/race and cultural affiliation to the researched does not suggest a political kinship with the

researched (Kim, 2012; Lim, 2012). I found myself persistently juggling and negotiating tensions with respect to my perceived and claimed insider/outsider political positionality in the field.

3. The Researcher as a Political Insider/Outsider, and Advocacy Dilemmas at the Intersection of Privilege and Marginalization

1) The commitment to teaching for diversity, and politically charged research

I have studied im/migrant communities and students in Korea and the U.S. based on my strong commitment to advocate for marginalized groups of people. That said, my research is inevitably politically charged. For instance, the research on Korean im/migrant students in a rural elementary school in South Korea demonstrated those students' complex negotiations of their cultural and linguistic identities to develop literacy skills at home and school. The study aimed to challenge pervasive deficit views on Korean im/migrant students and their communities. Likewise, my study on "international" teacher candidates' experiences in a U.S. teacher preparation program revealed how those student teachers often encountered racialization and yet strategically navigated their learning and teaching. In this light, my study challenged the dominant perspectives on those teacher candidates that essentialize their multifaceted identities.

Regardless, I began to question what my advocacy means when I had to leave my fieldwork. In other words, I had to process what it means to be involved in the community and my participants' lived experiences, and then to leave the field. The very question is linked to the conflicting dimensions of qualitative researcher dependent on the researchers' relationship with participants, and the research agenda: Does the research exploit the participants' lived experiences in the name of research? What did my participants gain through my research, after all? (Tuck & Yang, 2014) The participants in Korea, for example, did not understand why I, a teacher, had to leave for her study abroad for "better" research education. The participants in the U.S. did not understand

why I, their fellow educational migrant, wanted to keep a distance from socializing with them outside the school.

From the researcher-as-activist approach, the researcher's insider position is not only beneficial, but also critical for political empowerment of the researched and their communities. In a similar vein, Lather (1986, 1993) called for catalytic validity in politically-charged qualitative research, noting that validity should be appraised by the extent to which researcher helped raising a sense of emancipation of the participants and communities being researched. Seeking this catalytic validity, I did my very best to describe their experiences from anti-oppressive and anti-racism approach through my academic writing and multiple publications (e.g., Kang, 2017; Maddamsetti, in press a, b; Maddamsetti et al., in press). However, more questions entailed after the study and writing, how much have I represented my participants' pain-based stories in my papers? What parts of their stories need to be left out without pouring stories into theoretical frameworks (Lather, 1986; Tuck & Yang, 2014)? I was very cautious not to operate the deficit-based discourses about my im/migrant participants in both South Korea and U.S. Yet those questions have been lingering with me even after my academic training, and writing for publications.

2) Tensions and advocacy dilemmas at the intersection of privilege and marginalization

During my study in the U.S., I had moments to question my advocacy approach when I encountered my participants' comments based on their internalized racialization, or their privilege accumulated in their home country. Because study-abroad often requires financial means and social capital, my participants identified themselves as "mainstream" individuals with middle-class, and social and cultural capital in their home country. As in many cases of middle-class im/migrants in the U.S., their experiences appeared to be intersected with both marginalization (e.g., racism, linguisticism) and privilege (e.g., higher education, higher income). Even so, my university-educated participants appeared to be clearly socio-economically privileged compared to other financially struggling

im/migrant students of color on campus, or outside. Also, they were privileged to be educated (e.g., taking courses, participating in various projects and community service learning) in a teacher education program that is committed to teaching for social justice and diversity in the field of education. In other words, my participants had a wide range of opportunities to see how their privileges and marginalization had been interwoven into their daily and professional lives.

Nevertheless, my participants show various level of (dis)comfort in addressing issues of diversity during the practicum. For instance, one teacher candidate showed her resistance and unwillingness in working in urban school districts where many students of color often experience poverty and challenges of gaining academic support by stating:

At the end of day, I have been enjoying living here in the states. I don't want to be perceived as being aggressive or a troublemaker by talking about how I feel marginalized or mistreated by other people. If you look around, there are always people who suffer more than you do. I think there is a dignity in silence related to these issues...it is better to be silent than speaking up.

Another teacher candidate working in an urban school described her prejudice on her students of color based on her internalized racism. She shared:

They are just so slow to follow the lesson. Especially, math, you know. After a couple of months later of the internship, I stopped writing lesson plan. My math method course instructor and field instructor kept pushing me to write lesson plans though. But then, I was like, what is the point of the lesson plan and flow if students don't want to think?

As I grounded my political beliefs and research in critical multicultural education and social justice, I found myself ambivalent and even resistant at times to advocating for my participants. Surely, not all of them were only interested in attaining various forms of capital through their educational migration. One participant, for example, demonstrated

her growing sense of interest and care towards marginalized students through her practicum experience as she realizes how her privileged and marginalized experiences are intersected.

As my political commitment to diversity and social justice at times appeared to be different from that of my participants, I felt that my participants positioned me as an outsider, such as not trying to share their opinions about working with students of color in their school, or changing interview topics about addressing issues of race and racism in classroom. However, this does not mean that I did not have to confront my own prejudice and pedantic attitudes towards my participants as if I know better than them, and I always align my political commitment in my teaching and research. Most importantly, this is not a critique of my participants. They were qualified, passionate, and empathetic teacher candidates who were willing to study education despite the uncertain possibility of gaining a job in the U.S. when they completed their study. Instead, it is my positionality that needs reconsidering through reflexivity practice, especially when I work with culturally, ethnically, and linguistically affiliated participants.

Post-structural feminist scholars have called for empirical research to advance emancipatory theoretical approaches and raise solidarity among individuals by confronting how individuals internalize dominant ideologies regarding one's social locations (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, language, dis/ability, etc.). For example, in Roth and Kim's study (2013), newly immigrant Koreans in the U.S. indicated stronger racial prejudice toward other individuals of color compared to the U.S. born Korean immigrants. Roth and Kim (2013) notes that such racial attitudes stem from their home country, Korea, where often promotes racial/ethnic homogeneity based on nationalism. Such racial attitudes are often transferred across national and cultural borders by im/migration. Korean im/migrants' racial prejudice is also found in the literature that their attitudes are attempts to enhance their own social location and identity by positioning themselves above those individuals/communities of color. Yet it still remains whether I truly contextualized their socialized understandings of diversity and social identity (e.g., race, class, gender), or transformed their "false consciousness" through my ideology-

embedded research (Lather, 1986, 1993). For example, I constricted myself from sharing my critical awareness of social and educational inequities during the research despite my participants' constant assumptions that "we" share the same stance on issues of diversity in education. Eventually, towards the end of research, I shared with my participants that my pedagogical choice and approach to students' needs and their families would be different in light of my political commitment and particular educational training in the U.S. Nevertheless, such tensions that I faced suggest that the researchers need to consider what it means to advocate for culturally, linguistically and ethnically affiliated communities in their home country, or in the context of transnationalism (Kim, 2012; Lim, 2012). Thus, I do not claim "native" or "indigenous" researchers should research their own communities given their insider knowledge of culture, history, and language of communities. Rather, I demonstrate the myriad of tensions between the researcher and participants despite the best of the researcher's intentions.

IV. Conclusion

As Pillow (2003) pointed out the practice of reflexivity is intricately linked to recognition of self in relation to other, and recognition of other, the researcher position in the fieldwork inevitably involves how the researcher positions oneself in relation to the participants, as well as how the participants and the socio-political and cultural contexts of the fieldwork position the researcher with respect to their social identity and research agenda. The researcher whose ethnic, cultural, and linguistic background is affiliated with their participants is often perceived as "insider," "indigenous," or "native" to cultures and communities of the participants. However, studies demonstrate that so-called "native" researcher's positionality in their own, or culturally similar communities often manifest multifaceted power-relations with the participants.

Korean Academics like me, who are currently located in Western academia, and work

with culturally affiliated communities, articulate how their self-identified and perceived positionality help them establishing legitimacy and access, as well as challenge them to negotiated their designated cultural, linguistic, and racial/ethnic association in the field. For example, Song and Parker's (1995) study, Song, as a Korean American researcher interviewing Chinese migrants in Britain, demonstrate how she was "sized up" (p. 249) by her participants as her Chinese migrant participants persistently negotiated how much information they would disclose during the interviews with respect to Song's language fluency in her mother tongue and English, gender, and cultural affiliations. Song and Parker (1995) eliminated how assumptions made by the participants regarding the cultural identity (e.g., race/ethnicity, language fluency) shape the interview process, and thus the participants' accounts. Likewise, both in my studies in South Korea and the U.S., my students claimed commonality and with me on the basis of language, race/ethnicity, culture, and gender. Through the reflexivity practice, I have also demonstrated the ways in which my both claimed and assigned positionality came to be scrutinized and shifted. Particularly in relation to the issues of interview language choice and translation, I "confessed" my practice of reflexivity as a form of transcendence (Pillow, 2003, p. 186) to release myself from the partiality of the truth and possibility of misrepresentation of the participants.

In Kim's (2006, 2008) study, Kim, a Korean American researcher conducted interviews and did her fieldworks with Korean immigrants in Los Angeles, and Koreans in Seoul, South Korea regarding Koreans' racial attitudes in the context of transnationalism, and their understanding of gender and masculinity in Korean and Korean American settings. Reflecting upon her fieldwork in Seoul, South Korea, Kim (2008) realized her outsider positioning as an American by many Koreans based on her citizenship status and Korean language fluency. She finally acknowledged how "this romanticism and my [her] subsequent rude awakening can inform our scholarly ruminations about methodology" (p. 263). My work touches on my initially romanticized researcher who attempts to "emancipate" my marginalized participants through raising their critical consciousness both in the studies in Korea and the U.S. Similar to Kim (2006, 2008), I also claimed my

social justice-committed political stance to raise awareness and responsibilities of both participants and educators in working with diverse students and teachers. In this sense, my study falls into value-added research.

Lather (1986, 1993) provides insights into ensuring validity in conducting value-added research including (1) triangulation of methods, data sources, and theories; (2) researchers' reflexive subjectivity, which is a documentation of how researchers' assumptions may have affected the analysis of the data; (3) face validity that emphasizes the rapport with the participants; and (4) catalytic validity that focuses on participants' transformative action and conscientization. My researcher positionality aforementioned reflects my reflexive subjectivity. In order to increase the face validity of my study, I made sure to address my personal biases by engaging in member checking with my participants, or sharing my thoughts and feelings with my advisor, committee members, and the participants. However, I admit that despite my value-added research purpose in relation to catalytic validity (e.g., changing participants' awareness and attitudes towards the notion of diversity), I was uncertain about sharing, or not sharing my value-added comments with my participants in actual fieldwork. During the study, I decided not to make any political statements, but to listen to what they had to say and document them. Thus, the data indicate the catalytic validity was minimal. My attempts to maneuver the "minority" participants' social identity at the intersection of privilege and marginalization to no avail are similar to Lim's (2012) attempts and her positionality in her study.

In Lim's study (2012), drawing on post-structural perspectives, Lim examined how she navigated and negotiated her insider/outsider positionality in researching Korean American im/migrant parents in U.S. school contexts. She also demonstrated her doubts and "ethnic dilemma" (p. 11) in advocating for her culturally, ethnically, and linguistically aligned groups. While she identified herself as an enlightened academic through her education, she described Korean American parents, especially mothers, as "mostly housewives; some of them had never worked outside the home. Their romantic, uncritical views of American lives may have been rooted in their [sheltered] unique

social realities” (Lim, 2012, p. 11). Although Lim’s (2012) such advocacy dilemmas echo with my bitter sentiment in advocating for seemingly privileged, and spoiled upper-middle class teacher candidates who were resistant against working with diverse students in high-poverty schools. Further, my reflexivity practice from post-structural views can be paralleled with Lim’s (2012) claimed and assigned positionality, and the precarious negotiations of such insider/outsider positions with the participants in the fieldwork. However, Lim’s (2012) study does not fully examine the possibility of misrepresentation of the communities “we” affiliated with. The ethical and political dilemmas that Lim (2012) faced appeared to be positioned in accordance with privilege of the researcher (e.g., critical awareness and commitment to social justice through U.S. higher education) and her participants (e.g., middle class, sheltered lifestyle). Lim (2012) appeared to fail to account why “we,” culturally, linguistically, and racially Koreans, are not all the same “we” in the fieldwork.

In this paper, I described how both the researcher and participants constantly position one another through their shifting and multilayered subjectivities during the interview process and in the fieldwork. However, my reflexivity practice in this paper is not to describe my redemptive and research for marginalized individuals in a confessional mode. Rather, my reflexive practice suggests transnational researchers’ contradictory, confused, and messy fieldwork while working with individuals from their own communities. Furthermore, this study resonates with Subreenduth and Rhee’s (2010) notion of transnational reflexivity that explains how transnational researchers can participate in ethnicized, racialized, classed, and gendered knowledge production despite the transnational researchers’ best intentions. Simultaneously, this study suggests a possibility that transnational researchers, who work with marginalized individuals either from their communities or not, can better understand the practice and theorization of reflexivity by looking into our own prejudice and social identity (e.g., race, class, gender, language) at the intersection of privilege and marginalization with respect to those of our participants. Such practice and theorizing reflexivity may begin by facing the messiness, gaps, confusion, and uncertainties inherent to fieldwork.

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