Modern English Education

http://dx.doi.org/10.18095/meeso.2018.19.2.07

Case Study on One North Korean Defector College Student's Journey to Learning English in South Korea

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ARTICLE INFO

Received 6 April 2018
Revised 1 May 2018
Accepted 4 May 2018

Examples in: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable Levels:
Secondary/Higher Education

KEYWORD

North Korean defector
learner identity
positioning theory
북한이탈주민
학습자 정체성
상대적 위치이론

ABSTRACT

This case study examined one female university-level North Korean defector's (NKD) identity construction as an English language learner. Grounded in positioning theory, this study aimed to illustrate the modes of positioning the participant took up in different English language learning contexts and their influences on her English learning practices. Data were collected from multiple resources including interviews, reflection notes, and class observation. Qualitative data analysis revealed that the participant positioned herself differently in each English learning setting and displayed different attitudes and participatory behaviors in accordance with the positions she took up. In this process, she was able to reshape her mindset toward English learning as her first order positioning was continuously questioned. She actively took advantage of her role as a student in an effort to adapt to the environment she was exposed to, but her personal traits and perception of the self-other relationship also had a strong influence on her English learning practices. Pedagogical suggestions are offered that may make English education better suited for NKDs' various needs.

I. INTRODUCTION

> Taking English courses in the university was like a hell. Adjusting to a new environment like a college was already too difficult for me, and to make matters worse, I had to study English. (November, 2015)

The quote above shows how Mihee, the focal participant of this study, felt about her English learning experience in college in South Korea. This rather strong remark illustrates the difficulties many university-level North Korean defectors (hereafter, NKDs) face when adjusting to higher education and especially English education in South Korea. Considering the increasing influx of North Korean defectors, young adults in particular, the factors that may prevent them from successful resettlement in South Korea deserve closer attention.

The number of NKDs in South Korea has been rising steadily since the late 1990s (H. J. Lee, 2015; M. W. Lee, 2014). It has been estimated that there were more than 30,000 NKDs living in South Korea as of 2013, and more than half of them were young adults in their 20s and 30s (Ministry of Unification, 2017; E. Park & O. Kim, 2014). This translates as an increasing number of NKD students who are in need of higher education. (M. W. Lee, 2014). In recent years, more and more NKDs have enrolled in univer-

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sities in hopes of getting a good job and raising their social status in South Korea (Ministry of Unification, 2013).

Most school-aged NKDs had substandard or interrupted educational backgrounds while in North Korea, China, or other Southeast Asian countries during their transit period (M. W. Lee, 2014). This means many university-level NKDs lack in foundational academic knowledge, which results in maladjustment to the university environment. Under this circumstance, a much higher number of NKDs take a leave of absence or drop out of universities compared to their South Korean peers (Y. H. Choi, 2014). Y. H. Choi has also pointed out that a deficiency in English language skills is one of the biggest challenges NKDs face in the universities and plays a key role in their deciding to give up pursuing higher education.

In spite of the fact that English is a primary factor for NKDs' difficulties in adapting to university education, studies that explore NKDs' English learning in South Korea are still scarce. In addition, while previous studies revealed NKDs' difficulties in English learning, they could not provide in-depth understanding about their experiences and perceptions as English learners. To be more specific, relatively little attention has been given to how they construct identities as English learners and to how their identity formation affects their English learning.

The current study strived to address this gap in the literature and to investigate one NKD's identity formation in the process of English learning. In recent years, language learners' identity construction has been considered a quintessential part of language learning process, as echoed in what Norton (1997) said:

> Every time language learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with their interlocutors; they are also constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. They are, in other words, engaged in identity construction and negotiation. (p. 410)

In other words, language learners, who are "concrete socially constituted and always situated beings" (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000, p. 155), have different interactions and discursive practices in different social settings and these have an impact on their identity construction and negotiation (M. H. Kim, 2016; Rajadurai, 2010).

In analyzing one NKD's identity construction and its effect on her English learning, this study uses the concept of positioning (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré & van Langenhove, 1999), which is described in more detail in the next section. The present study was guided by two central questions:

1) What positions did the NKD participant take up as an English language learner before and after she defected to South Korea?

2) What do these positions reveal about the participant's English learning?

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK & LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Positioning Theory

Harré (2012) defines a position as "a cluster of short-term disputable rights, obligations and duties" (p. 193). People bring beliefs about their own rights and duties when they try to understand and take part in social actions, so Davies and Harré (1990) point out that "once having taken up a particular position as one's own, a person inevitably see the world from the vantage point of that position" (p. 46). Positions are considered different from roles in that the latter is like a prescribed and static conception and the former is somewhat fluid and changeable. Since positions are not fixed in the stone, Harré and his colleagues suggest that they can be redefined and reconstructed through discursive practices.

If positions are individuals' beliefs about their rights and duties, positioning (as a verb) is the act of locating themselves and others according to those beliefs. Harré and van Langenhove (1999) describe positioning as "the assignment of fluid 'parts' or 'roles' to speakers in the discursive construction of personal stories that make a person's actions intelligible and relatively determinate as social acts" (p. 17). Since people understand themselves in relation to others according to the understanding of their rights and duties, positioning occurs in moral contexts in relative ways.

Harré and van Langenhove (1999) explain that a person constantly changes his or her positions in order to cope with various situations in real life, so there are differences in positioning within the same person. At the same time, differences in positioning exist between individuals because of their different personal attributes (e.g., the "capability" and "willingness' to position themselves and others) and social attributes (e.g., "powers derived from specific locations in social orders and networks") (p. 30). This means that to better understand an individual's act of positioning, it is essential to comprehend it from both personal and social standpoints.

Harré and van Langenhove (1999) offer various modes to explain or classify the different kinds of positioning. Three modes are important to this study: first and second order positioning, moral and personal positioning, and self and other positioning. Harré and van Langenhove define first order positioning as the way people position themselves and others by using existing social categories and storylines, which are usually understood and agreed upon by the people involved in the discourse. On the other hand, second order positioning occurs when the first order positioning is challenged by the people involved in the discourse.

Moral and personal order positioning refers to the degree to which people position themselves and others according to the social norms within certain institutional settings. Harré and van Langenhove (1999) state that

moral positioning is like following "the roles that people occupy within a given moral order or to certain institutional aspects of social life" (p. 21). However, people are not always positioned within their given moral order; they can also be positioned in terms of their personal characteristics. When a person's actions become hard to apprehend by his or her roles, Harré and van Langenhove explain that personal position is more likely to be prominent.

The third mode of positioning is self and other positioning, which is how people position others at the same time they position themselves (Harré and van Langenhove, 1999). McVee, Baldassarre, and Bailey (2004) elaborate on self and other positioning by subcategorizing it into four types: Self As Other (e.g., "I am you."), Self In Other (e.g., "I am like you."), Self Opposed to Other (e.g., "I am not like you."), and Self Aligned with Other (e.g., "I am sympathetic to you."). For this study, we have used their expanded version of self and other positioning.

These types of positioning are useful tools to interpret data in the current study, whose focus is to understand what rights, duties, and obligations the participant conceives of as a student (Harré & Gillet, 1994), what and how the student says and does in relation to the social context she belongs to, and how she oriented herself and others in her discourses (Davies & Harré, 1990).

2. Previous Studies on NKDs in South Korean Universities

1) NKDs' Adjustment to University Education in South Korea

As more NKDs aim to pursue higher education, universities in South Korea offer special admissions for them. They do not have to take a college scholastic ability test nor any other types of test administered by the university (Y. H. Choi, 2014). Instead, they are required to submit an essay to introduce themselves and illustrate their study plans and to have an interview. All of these efforts have been made to provide opportunities for more NKDs to attend university in South Korea.

Another measure to ensure NKDs' pursuit of higher education is financial support by the government. According to Y. O. Paek and J. A. Yoo (2011), approximately 1130 NKDs had received financial support from the South Korean government to attend university as of July, 2011, which was a considerable increase from about 460 in the year 2007. Although these university- and government-level policies and supports have contributed to the increase of the number of the NKDs enrolled in South Korean universities, they have reported that many NKDs still experience difficulties adjusting to their university life.

NKDs' maladjustment to the university setting often results in their taking a leave of absence or dropping out of school. According to the Ministry of Education (2013), more than 28% of the NKDs admitted to South Korean universities dropped out of school and more than 43% took a leave of absence; these numbers are much higher than for their South Korean peers (H. J. Lee, 2015). Despite the support systems that aim to provide for a higher education and thus smooth transition into South Korean society, many NKDs seem to fail to successfully adjust themselves to university life in South Korea. This indicates that it is an urgent matter to figure out the obstacles that NKDs face in the university setting and provide the support they need.

2) University-level NKDs' English Education Context and Issues

Previous studies pointed out that one of the frequently mentioned reasons that university-level NKDs give up their university education is academic difficulties, especially English, due to their lack of foundational knowledge (Y. O. Paek & J. A. Yoo, 2011). They do not have basic English proficiency to follow the university-level English curriculum, and to make matters worse, English classes delivered in the medium of English burden them even more.

Y. H. Choi (2014) pointed out that as university-level NKDs are well aware of the need to improve their English proficiency in order to graduate from university, they feel a great degree of pressure throughout the school years. In particular, they are afraid to take major courses and mandated general English courses for graduation, which are often taught in English and use textbooks written in English. In addition, they often feel burdened by certified English scores, such as TOEIC and TOEFL, which a majority of universities mandate as one of the requirements for graduation. These pressures related to English skills often lead university-level NKDs to take a leave of absence and postpone their graduation or even to drop out of school.

In response to the challenges that university-level NKDs are confronted with regarding English, several studies called for extra support to help them improve their English. For instance, S. R. Jung and H. W. Lim (2009) strongly recommended specialized English programs for NKDs considering the importance of English in terms of South Korean education and employment. In a similar vein, Y. A. Cho and W. T. Jeon (2004) found that NKDs' successfully completion of their undergraduate study is predictive by two factors: how much English is used in their major courses and how familiar they are with English. In this regard, they concluded that NKDs should be provided with additional help with their English in the form of English tutoring programs and/or foundational English courses that they can take prior to the required ones.

Y. O. Paek and J. A. Yoo (2011) also advocated customized English programs for NKDs. According to their survey, approximately 75% of the respondents mentioned that English- related courses were the most challenging in their undergraduate study. Based on this finding, they predicted that the number of NKDs who give up their study will be significantly reduced by offering programs that can

assist them to improve their English proficiency.

More recently, M. Kim (2016) examined one female university-level NKD's identity transformation as an English language learner, illustrating how the participant displayed different identities in the process of English learning at university. She changed from being a reluctant English language learner who didn't want to give up her identity as a North Korean, to a struggling one who had hardship following English courses, and finally to a more active one who realized the value and need of learning the language. Unlike other studies mentioned above, Kim's study provided detailed descriptions of one NKD's identity formation process and showed how not only linguistic but also other sociocultural as well as linguistic factors played an important role in her adjustment to the English learning environment.

As illustrated above, many studies have pointed out the difficulties that English causes for university-level NKDs. However, there is a gap in the current literature regarding issues related to NKDs' English learning contexts in the university setting. Research conducted so far has revealed the obstacles or difficulties that prevented NKDs from adjusting to their college life. In other words, they investigated types of difficulties NKDs have through either survey or interview and suggested potential solutions on the basis of those findings. However, except for M. Kim's (2016) investigation, little of the research on NKDs has provided in-depth understanding of their difficulties as language learners with a focus on their identity construction and negotiation. To address this gap in the literature, this study adopted a case study method to closely investigate one female university-level NKD's identity transformation in the different English learning contexts she experienced and to describe how this had an impact upon her attitudes and participatory behaviors in class. Using the findings, this study aims to provide a greater understanding of her identity formation and her language learning process, and provide some insights into how to provide NKDs with adequate support in English classrooms.

III. METHOD

1. Focal Participant: Mihee

Mihee defected from North Korea alone when she was 17 years old. Before entering the university, she attended a specialized school for NKDs. At the time the study was conducted, Mihee was 23 years old and attending a private university located in Seoul. She was in her fourth year and was majoring in Social Welfare. She had aspirations to finish her undergraduate studies in the hope that it would help to raise her social status in South Korea. Her dream was to live a stable life in South Korea; she wanted to continue to study by getting into a graduate school, to work as a social worker, and to marry a South Korean citizen.

The first author, E. Bok, first met her in an English tutoring program specially designed for the NKD students at the university Mihee was attending. Bok was one of the three instructors who volunteered to create the program for the NKDs and teach them English. Six NKDs attended the program, and they all consented to participate in the research project. We selected Mihee as the focal participant for the current research because she provided the richest data, having the most interactions with E. Bok through interviews, informal talks, and tutoring sessions.

2. Data Collection and Analysis

Due to easy access to the research site and familiarity with the participant, E. Bok took charge of data collection. Data were collected from multiple sources adopting qualitative research methods from September 2015 to January 2016. In-depth interviews with Mihee and her English tutors and observations in the tutoring sessions constituted the primary sources of data. E. Bok conducted three formal interviews with Mihee before, during and after the tutoring program, and each lasted from 60 to 90 minutes. In addition, she held a formal interview with each of Mihee's tutors individually. All the interviews with Mihee and her tutors were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim in Korean, which later translated into English.

The interviews were semi-structured in the questions were adjusted depending on the interviewees' responses. For Mihee, the formal interview questions centered around prominent features of her English language learning experiences in the different settings she was situated in and her positive or negative feelings toward them (see Appendix 1 for the list of preliminary interview questions for Mihee). In the interviews with Mihee's tutors, the questions focused on their overall teaching approaches and perceptions of Mihee's participation and English learning in the tutoring program (see Appendix 2 for the list of preliminary interview questions for the tutors). In addition to the formal interviews, E. Bok had informal interviews with Mihee and her tutors when she needed to ask follow-up questions regarding any noticeable points that were found in the previous interviews and/or classroom observations for further exploration.

For observations, E. Bok visited the first orientation session and the last five tutoring sessions, each of which lasted about 90 minutes. During each visit, she took field notes, focusing on Mihee's participation in the activities and interactions with her tutors and peers. In addition to the direct observation notes, we relied on the tutors' weekly report which they kept to describe their teaching contents and the tutees' reactions. The tutors were asked to record anything either interesting or important they noticed in the conversations that happened in their sessions. For example, one tutor kept notes about Mihee's struggles to cope with the people around her in South Korea, such as her boss at her part-time job. This helped us to understand Mihee's day-to-day life inside and outside the school at a deeper level.

Informal chats with Mihee through an SNS, Kakao

Talk, played an important role in providing a glimpse of her everyday life and building a close relationship between Mihee and E. Bok. Through this, Mihee became more willing to share her opinions and feelings. These informal talks, however, were not used as data for this research.

Data analysis went on simultaneously with data collection. Data analysis was two-fold. In the preliminary analysis, we first followed Strauss and Corbin's (1990) open coding, which is the process of breaking down, examining, and conceptualizing data. To obtain a big picture, we read the data multiple times and annotated anything that came to mind. We did this in an effort to exclude our prefixed assumptions which we might possibly have had since we felt familiar with the data already in the process of data collection. After doing this process, several distinctive themes related to Mihee's attitudes and experiences regarding English learning emerged.

In the next step, we tried to identify Mihee's positioning in the annotated parts. We closely examined Mihee's and her tutor's discursive practice, such as their stories and word choices, and coded them according to how she positioned herself or was positioned by others. We went though this process several times to refine our analysis. In order to ensure the reliability of our analysis, we coded the data separately and then compared each other's coding. When the results of our analysis were not the same, we tried to resolve our discrepancies through discussion. When we discussed, we always referred to the operational meanings of different modes of positioning suggested by Harré and van Langenhove (1999) and McVee et al. (2004). Through these processes, we found that first/second order, moral/personal, and self/other positioning were the most frequently identified types in the data. At the end, we tried to understand how Mihee's positioning relates to the ways that she participated in English learning settings in South Korea .

IV. FINDINGS

1. Mihee's Positioning Before Entering University

1) Forming First Order Positioning: Neglecting English Learning

Regarding her English learning experiences in North Korea, Mihee confessed that she had not learned any English in her home country. Mihee explained that foreign languages were taught starting in secondary school, and the most common ones were English followed by Russian. In her case, the school decided for her that she should learn Russian as a foreign language. Therefore, Mihee had no formal exposure to English at all while in North Korea. She described a foreign language as a skill that was not necessary for success in North Korea.

According to Mihee, the Russian language was usually taught by rote memorization and repeated practices of vocabulary and simple sentences. She also added that foreign language classes were heavily influenced by ideology so that most of the vocabulary and sentences she memorized reinforced respect and loyalty toward Kim, Il Sung and Kim, Jung Il. Mihee expressed her negative attitude toward her foreign language learning experiences in North Korea as follows:

> We had to just repeat and memorize simple words and sentences and it was not fun at all. I hardly remember anything in Russian. To my surprise, one of the NKDs I met at the school [in South Korea] still remembers the Russian sentences she learned in North Korea, something like "Thank you, Great Leader Generalissimo Kim Il Sung." (October, 2015)

Reflecting on her experience of learning Russian before she came to South Korea, Mihee portrayed herself as a student who did not feel a strong need to learn a foreign language since it had no impact on one's success in the country. In addition, she did not feel any interest in learning it because of the way it was taught in North Korea (i.e. in non-motivating ways for ideological purposes). Thus, by the time she defected to South Korea, she had already formed her first order positioning that it is normal for students not to invest their time to learn a foreign language. Therefore, it was a surprise to her when she encountered a NKD who remembered a simple expression of "thank you" in Russian.

2) Keeping the Previous First Order Positioning: Playing a "Good Student" Role

The way that Mihee located herself in the moral context where students' neglect of foreign language learning was taken as acceptable behavior continued in the alternative school she attended in South Korea. After arriving in South Korea, she got into an alternative school for school-age NKDs where she was given an opportunity to learn English, but she commented that she did not pay much attention to English classes. Regarding the reason, she said that she did not realize the importance of learning English at that time:

> I wasn't interested in English at all at that time because I didn't understand why I had to study English. I guess that's because I didn't have to back in North Korea. Learning a foreign language was not really important there. (October, 2015)

This comment suggests that Mihee took up the position that made connections with her own past experience in North Korea. She did not realize the importance of learning English in South Korea because her attitudes or perceptions toward the foreign language remained the same as those she used to have back in her home country despite the fact that she was in a whole different social context. Trapped in the previous education system, Mihee was indifferent to learning English.

As time went by, this first order positioning still remained the same. Mihee clearly remembered that her alternative school prioritized other subjects than English because many students had to pass the qualification exam for high school graduation in order to be eligible to apply for a university. Since the majority of NKDs attending Mihee's school had little English experience and did not even know the English alphabet, it was considered impossible to receive a high score by studying English. In this atmosphere, the students focused on subjects other than English in order to pass the exam in a relatively short period of time. Mihee recalled that English was not the main subject dealt with at the school since most of the students there were in a similar situation to hers:

> I was pretty new to the country. I had a lot to learn, but English was not one of them at that time. Besides, I had to prepare for the school qualification exam, which alone was difficult for me to handle. I studied hard because I really wanted to enter university to have a good job which I needed to settle down in South Korea. (October, 2015)

As demonstrated in the interview, Mihee had a desire to belong to her new country and to establish a stable life in a new environment, and this motivated her to study to enter the university, which in her mind would help her to get a descent job. In other words, she decided to take on the role of a good student in order to prepare for the exam successfully. However, a general consensus had been formed in the alternative school setting that learning English was not helpful to pass the school qualification exam, and therefore Mihee ended up neglecting learning it.

Although Mihee's first order positioning was prominent in the alternative school, there was time that second order positioning occurred, questioning her preset mindset. In her alternative school, tutoring services had been consistently provided for NKD students by college volunteering students. Since Mihee was often asked to set up appointments with them, she became gradually aware of the importance of English in South Korea. Nevertheless, she did not take advantage of those chances to meet with volunteers and get help from them. Regarding this experience, she recalled as follows:

> Some volunteers brought worksheets each time and I remember they taught me some reading and vocabulary. I really didn't like learning from the volunteers. I was too embarrassed about my English. I mean, they were all nice and kind to me, but I was not close. I did not want to show my terrible English to them, so I tried to make excuses to cancel the teaching sessions. (November, 2015)

Mihee recognized herself as having little English proficiency, but she did not feel comfortable enough to reveal herself to the tutors as a low-level English student. Although they were "nice" and "kind" to her, she was too shy to take their English lessons. She also tried to keep an emotional distance from the tutors because they were thought to be not "close" enough to hear her "terrible" English. From her point of view, they were "not like her," so she positioned herself as opposed to them and ended up intentionally avoiding the English learning opportunities.

2. Mihee's Positioning After Entering University

1) Forced to Embrace Second Order Positioning: Feeling Opposed to Others

As described above, Mihee had little experience learning English before and after arriving in South Korea and was keeping the first order positioning, considering her neglect of English learning as non-problematic behavior. After Mihee successfully got into the university, however, this first order positioning was questioned by the university's policy of requiring all students to take two basic English communication courses during the freshman year and an English reading and writing class during the sophomore year. As described in the previous section, Mihee had felt no need to learn English and tried to avoid learning it as much as possible, but she was put into a situation where she had to deal with it once she started to attend university. She described the freshman English course that she took for the first time at university as follows:

> General English in the freshman year was like a hell. I felt like crying everyday. University life was new to me. To make it worse, I had to take an English class from a native speaker. I hated to go to school every Monday because of the English class. (November, 2015)

This excerpt shows how much stress and burden Mihee had from the English class. With little exposure to English learning, taking an English-mediated class was the ultimate fear for Mihee.

As a way to cope with this difficulty, she took on the role of student; that is, she decided to follow the social convention that students can ask their teachers for help when they are in trouble. Thus, one day, Mihee explained her situation to the instructor, who was a native speaker of English and asked for extra help and consideration. She said:

> I was desperate. One day, after class, I met the professor. She did not seem to know that I came from North Korea. I tried my best to ask for some help, but I could not communicate with her because of English. There was not much difference since then. I didn't try any more. (November, 2015)

Mihee nerved herself to meet with her instructor and to ask for extra assistance from her, but she felt that she was not able to make herself fully understood due to her poor English proficiency. She at least let the instructor know that she came from North Korea, assuming that the instructor would know NKDs need extra help with English, but it did not mean much to the instructor.

Realizing that the instructor could not be of much help

for her, there was no other choice for Mihee but to seek assistance from her South Korean peers in class. Mihee looked back on this experience as follows:

> All my classmates seemed to have far better English skills than me. Because I didn't understand the native instructor at all, I had to ask to the classmates sitting next to me all the time about what she said or what the assignment was. It is not like asking classmates once or twice. I felt so miserable and ashamed. (November, 2015)

Having to rely heavily on her peers appeared to lower her self-esteem rather than offering learning opportunities for her. Feeling "miserable and ashamed," she started to see herself as different from her South Korean peers.

In another interview, Mihee also mentioned that she was quite reluctant to communicate with other students in the English class:

> I spent time only with the people from North Korea when I was in the alternative school. However, the situation was different at university. All around me are South Koreans. I could not erase my North Korean accent and it clearly showed that I came from North Korea. In addition, I didn't understand what they were talking about and I don't even know whether it is in Korean or in English. I should have asked around more whenever I had something that I couldn't understand, but it was not easy for me. (November, 2015)

Mihee took up Self Opposed to Other positioning with her South Korean peers. She was conscious of the differences between her and her classmates not only in terms of their English proficiency but also their Korean accents. As a result, Mihee saw herself as opposed to them and felt "miserable" and "ashamed" about her English proficiency. In addition, Mihee was not as proactive as she should have been in terms of asking for and receiving assistance from her South Korean classmates because she was shy about her North Korean accent which could easily reveal her identity as a North Korean defector. Having a low sense of belonging and positioning herself in opposition to her South Korean peers undermined her self-confidence and willingness to speak, which seemed to be a major obstacle to Mihee's participation in the English class.

In these circumstances, Mihee ended up receiving a failing grade in two out of the three required English courses. She said:

> For one class, I gave up on the final presentation project, which was, beyond my capability. For the other one, honestly, I still don't know why. I know my English was bad, but I did everything the instructor said. I can only guess she gave me an F because my English level was the lowest. I didn't ask the instructor about the reason for the failing grade because I didn't have the courage to talk to the instructor. Especially since then, I started to have a kind of phobia about English. (November, 2015)

Based on Mihee's descriptions so far, her moral positioning was prominent in the process of coping with her difficulties with English, but it did not go well with her instructor and classmates. Her insufficient English competency also led Mihee to position herself in opposition to her South Korean peers and as a result, Mihee marginalized herself from the English learning community. Going through these experiences exacerbated her inferiority and fear toward English, which made learning English even more challenging for her.

2) Embracing Second Order Positioning: Feeling Aligned With Others

It was August 2015 when Mihee was informed that an English tutoring program for NKDs would begin at the university she was attending. By that time, Mihee was not active in learning English. In fact, Mihee confessed that due to the negative experiences she went through in her English classes, she avoided taking any English courses except the ones she had to retake for graduation. Worried about her English, she bought some English grammar books to study English by herself and to prepare for employment. However, her determination did not last long and she ended up "only studying the first couple of pages." Despite her reluctance in learning English, she decided to participate in the tutoring program when she heard about it because she knew she needed it:

> I have kept putting aside English. I was afraid of trying it, but I knew I really needed it because I was thinking of going to graduate school. That's why I took part in the program. (October, 2015)

Unlike in the specialized school where English was not considered an important subject to prepare to enter the university, Mihee was fully aware that she needed to have a certain level of English proficiency to graduate and seek further education. At this stage of her life, her first order positioning was shifted to playing the role of a student who takes English learning seriously.

Her decision to continue to study put her into a situation where she had to study English. Despite this, it was not easy for her to make up her mind to study English due to her lack of foundational English knowledge and confidence. Although she tried, she often failed to maintain her resolution, so Mihee set a goal to attend every English tutoring session. She achieved the goal by attending 14 sessions out of 15. She was absent once due to a meeting with her academic advisor. Considering that her previous attempts to study English had resulted in failure, this was a huge achievement for Mihee. At the end of the program, she said:

> I was so proud of myself. I thought that I must give it a shot this time. I felt that it was a kind of last chance to learn English. (December, 2015)

Mihee had the highest attendance rate in the program,

was recognized by the instructors as one of the hardest-working students in class. One of the instructors mentioned Mihee as follows:

> Mihee was the one who always came to the class. As far as I remember, she was never late for the class. She was polite and thankful toward me. In class, she followed the direction well and worked really hard. (Instructor A, December, 2015)

As Mihee participated in the program, her attitude changed from being quiet and passive to being more active. Regarding this, another instructor mentioned:

> She was really shy at first. She seemed to be not confident about her English and didn't really say anything. However, as time passed by, I was able to notice the difference happening to her. She started to talk. Of course, her English was not perfect, and it was not a drastic improvement, but at least, she didn't seem timid any longer. (Instructor B, December, 2015)

Based on the instructor's description, it appeared that Mihee started out passive and inactive as she had been in other English classes. However, she came to display a different attitude and participated in class in a more active way. In fact, she frequently answered the instructors' questions without much hesitation. Toward the end of the program, Mihee even asked questions of the instructor in class. For example, below is the field note describing a part of the 12th session when the tutor and the students went through the vocabulary from the main reading activity:

> The tutor is asking whether students know the meaning of a "thumb", but some students are just looking at the tutor and some students are shaking their heads. The tutor explains that it is the first finger of a hand. Some students say "ahh," and Mihee starts to ask, "How about other fingers?" The tutor starts to name all the fingers and ask why the fourth finger is called "a ring finger." Mihee turns to a student sitting next to her and ask whether it is "bahnji." The tutor asks her to say that aloud to the class. She says, "That's bahnji." (November, 26, 2015)

This observation illustrates Mihee's transformation into a more active English language learner. Mihee was engaged in the class and interacting with her tutor and peers.

Mihee mentioned several reasons for the changes in her attitude in class. The strongest reason was that she was learning English with other NKDs. Mihee said:

> I liked being with the people form North Korea together. I did not feel inferiority because we were all similar. When I am with South Korean students, I think they are 10 and I am one. They and I have too much gap in terms of English level. When learning with the students from North Korea, I cannot say I fully enjoyed learning English, but at least, I didn't lose confidence. (December, 2015)

This comment shows the different positioning she took up compared to her general English courses. As described in the previous section, Mihee felt ashamed of her English and detached from her South Korean peers in class. In contrast, Mihee positioned herself as aligned with her North Korean peers. When she was with people from a similar background and proficiency level, Mihee felt comfortable. Being situated in her comfort zone, she was not afraid of failing but rather encouraged to participate in class in an active fashion by asking and answering questions.

Mihee also mentioned that the usefulness of the lessons made her want to attend the class:

> One of the things that I liked about the program was that we did not learn English only. I learned Korean and loanwords as well. These were useful because I have still so many words that I don't know. I sometimes don't understand what other students are talking about. Also, when we learned new words, we made sentences using them. I really liked that the professors taught something that we can use in our daily lives. (December, 2015)

As described before, Self Opposed to Other positioning was the dominant mode in her general English courses, and her North Korean accents and loanwords were reasons why she felt shy with her South Korean peers. However, in the program, she had chances to learn English words and their corresponding Korean words or loanwords which may not exist or have different usages in North Korea. In other words, for Mihee, learning English was not only about learning the language, but building a sense of belonging and thus, being able to position herself as aligned with her South Korean peers. Through these kinds of positive experiences, she became more actively engaged with in-class activities.

Enhanced interaction with instructors was another reason for Mihee's active participation in the program. Mihee had attempted to communicate with the native English speaker who taught her in the freshmen English class, but due to the language barrier, she could not deliver her intention effectively to the instructor and this resulted in her drifting further away from the class and English language learning. In contrast, when she was taught by bilingual instructors who could understand her linguistically and culturally, Mihee was able to adjust herself to the program without much problem. Mihee shared her impression about her instructors as below:

> I cannot say that I was completely relaxed because they are professors, so I was hesitated to speak at first…(omitted) I was really thankful for their time and effort to teach us. They tried to understand us more. I felt a lot closer to them by talking with them not only in class but also before and after class. They really took care of us. (December, 2015)

The instructors in the program strived to get to know the NKDs. Since they had seldom had chances to meet

NKDs in their own lives, the instructors tried to learn about them, such as their North Korean dialect, prior experiences before arriving in South Korea, and their life in South Korea. They invested considerable time listening to their stories. Through the frequent interactions with the tutors, Mihee appeared to be able to position herself as aligned with them. In other words, the instructors' effort helped Mihee to alleviate her initial fears or stereotypes about professors and to open up and feel secure to share her lived experiences. This enhanced interaction between Mihee and the tutors helped her to feel cared for (Noddings, 1984) and comfortable enough to be in the program and furthermore and to try to speak English.

To summarize this section, Mihee displayed somewhat different positioning in the English tutoring program specially designed for the NKDs. Different factors such as her felt purposes to learn English for graduate school admission and come to belong in the South Korean community and being surrounded by people whom she could align herself with contributed to her transformation from a passive English learner who felt miserable and inferior to an active one who was willing to try to interact within the English learning community. These changes did not mean that she completely overcame her fear of the language but show that she was starting to engage with English, which could lead to her further interest and investment in learning it.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research illustrated the journey of English learning of Mihee, an NKD, by referring to the positions she took up in the process of learning English and their effects on her English learning process. When she was in North Korea, the view of not taking English seriously was prevalent among students, and this social norm was continued and reconfirmed even in the alternative school she first attended in South Korea. Although second order positioning occurred when this first order positioning was questioned by South Korean college students who volunteered to tutor NKDs in English, Mihee was not ready to receive help from them due to her personal characteristics (i.e., being shy about her English) and her positioning as opposed to others (i.e., feeling not close enough to the instructors to show her poor English).

Mihee started to understand that she had to take English learning seriously after entering university in South Korea, and she intentionally tried to take on and follow the role of a student by asking for help from her English instructor and classmates. Unfortunately, this moral positioning did not help her to get through the challenges she faced, and she ended up staying away from English learning practices, feeling that she was not like the South Korean students. However, once she joined the English tutoring program for NKDs, she felt connected with not only other NKD students who were like her but also English instructors who tried to understand her status as an NKD and to incorporate it into their teaching. In the end, Mihee was transformed into someone who was active and persistent in English learning. These results indicate that a close examination of NKDs' positioning is useful to understand their English learning experiences.

Examining Mihee's transformation, we found that the first order positioning she had formed in North Korea did not change at once just because she entered a South Korean university. It took her time to reposition herself as someone who fully understood the importance of English; she had to go through the alternative school and mandatory general English courses at university, experiencing many difficulties. After Mihee started to change her first order positioning (although it was forced by the university policy), her attitudes and behavior toward English learning began to change as well, but she failed to receive enough aid due to her personal traits and the way she viewed those who provided help for her. Only when the altered first order positioning was internalized and she was exposed to an environment where she could align herself with others, was she able to positively open her mind to English learning.

The findings of this study offer some suggestions for English education for NKDs. To begin with, NKDs could be provided with various opportunities to experience the reality of the South Korean education system, in which great emphasis is placed on learning English. In Mihee's case, having lived in an environment where the situation was different, she inevitably kept neglecting it. Although it was once questioned by the English tutors in the alternative school, her long-standing first order position was not easily changed by this single case. Providing various channels in a consistent manner can lead to an easier adjustment and smoother transition to English education for NKDs in South Korea.

Next, English teachers should have a better understanding of NKDs. As illustrated in the earlier part of this study, Mihee suffered from her lack of English proficiency in general English courses and tried to approach her English instructor in an effort to fulfill her role as a college student taking a required English course. However, due to the instructor's insufficient understanding of Mihee's situation, she was not able to receive adequate assistance and remained marginalized in class. This points to the necessity of English teacher education that emphasizes the importance of teaching English language learners with multicultural backgrounds including NKDs. Only when pre- and in-service teachers understand their sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds, they can not only assist English learning more efficiently in class, but also have an impact on their positive identity construction as an English learner.

Lastly, there should be more specially designed English programs for NKDs. One of the most salient findings of the current study was that Mihee was transformed from a marginalized to a more active English language learner in the NKD-focused tutoring program. As many previous studies have revealed, the majority of the NKDs do not

have adequate levels of English proficiency at the time of university admission and so experience great hardship in English courses, which causes them to stand in opposition to their South Korean peers. Therefore, universities should provide more specialized English programs for NKDs to lessen the burden of taking English courses. More customized program designs considering NKDs' English language experiences, characteristics, and specific needs are more advisable to help them feel more comfortable and satisfied. In the end, this kind of effort can contribute to closing the English gap that NKDs have and helping them to become "full members" (M. W. Lee, 2014) instead of remaining as "permanent underclass" (Fackler, 2012) in South Korea.

A limitation of this study should be acknowledged. The findings about Mihee's positioning as an English language learner in North Korea, the alternative school and her general English courses at the university were based on her recollections of her past experiences. This might bring up some plausible problematic issues regarding the trustworthiness of the study such as Mihee's inaccurate or incomplete portrayals. However, we were aware of these issues and made several efforts to establish trustworthiness including asking the same questions in different ways through multiple formal and informal interviews with Mihee. A longitudinal study is highly recommended as a future research direction for studying NKDs' English learning and their identity construction so that various types of data can be collected in a more timely fashion as the main events occur.

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APPENDIX 1

Formal Interview Questions for Mihee

The first formal interview questions for Mihee

1. When did you defect from North Korea?
2. Do you live alone or with family from North Korea?
3. What was the last school that you attended in North Korea?
4. What did you do before you defected?
5. Did you learn any foreign language including English back in North Korea?
6. If so, how did you learn it? Did you enjoy learning it?
7. How long have you lived in South Korea?
8. What were the areas that you felt were the most difficult to adjust to?
9. Which educational institutions did you go to before entering the university?
10. How were the learning experiences there?
11. What kinds of differences between education in North Korea and in South Korea did you notice?
12. How and what did you prepare to enter the university?
13. What made you decide to go to university?

The second formal interview questions for Mihee

1. Please describe how you felt when you first started university life.
2. What did you like the most?
3. What was the most difficult part?
4. What made you decide to choose your major?
5. What is your goal after graduation?
6. Which English courses have you taken so far?
7. How did you feel in your English classes?
8. What was the most difficult part of your English classes?
9. Besides taking English classes, what have you tried to improve your English?
10. What made you decide to participate in the tutoring program?
11. Tell me about any activities that you enjoyed the most in the program.
12. Do you have any suggestion for your tutors?

The third formal interview questions for Mihee

1. What differences between other English classes and this tutoring program have you noticed?
2. What did you find the most useful in the program?
3. What did you like the most about the program?
4. What did you find the least useful in the program?
5. What did you like the least about the program?
6. Have you felt any differences before and after participating in the tutoring program?
7. Do you wish that there were more programs like this? Why or why not?
8. Would you recommend this kind of program to your NKD friends? Why or why not?
9. What are your plans for your English study after this program?
10. Do you have any final thoughts or suggestions on the program that you would like to share?

APPENDIX 2

Formal Interview Questions for Tutors

1. What made you decide to volunteer for the English tutoring program for the NKDs?
2. What were the key aspects that you kept in mind when designing the program?
3. Have you had NKDs in your classes before?
4. If so, what was your experience like?
5. What kinds of images did you use to have toward NKDs before teaching them?
6. How did you feel about your tutees' English proficiency?
7. How did you feel about your tutees' attitudes or participations in the sessions?
8. What were your teaching goals for the NKDs in the tutoring program?
9. Please describe some of the activities you did with the tutees.
10. Have you noticed any changes among your tutees during the program? If so, in what ways?
11. If you teach NKDs again, what would you do the same or differently?
12. After teaching NKDs, what changes have you felt in yourself as an instructor?
13. Do you have any final thoughts on your tutees or the program that you would like to share?