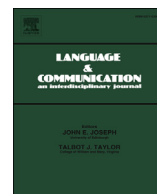




ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

Language & Communication

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/langcom

Relocation in space, language, and identity: Dislocated North Korean undergraduates in South Korean universities

Mun Woo Lee ^{a,1}, Sung-Ho G. Ahn ^{b,*}^a Department of English Education, Hanyang University, 12-406, Haengdang-dong, Seongdong-gu 17, Seoul 133-791, South Korea^b Department of English Education, Hanyang University, 12-608, Haengdang-dong, Seongdong-gu 17, Seoul 133-791, South Korea

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 15 January 2016

Keywords:

Identity
 Dislocated North Koreans
 Spatial mobility
 English language learning

ABSTRACT

This study examines how dislocated North Korean undergraduates enrolled in South Korean universities interact with their South Korean peers and construct their own identities. Data were collected based on records of meetings between students, short reflection journals completed after each of these meeting, and semi-structured individual interviews. During their interactions with South Korean students, the North Korean students agreed with their South Korean peers unconditionally, hid their North Korean accents, and avoided North Korean-related topics. These interaction patterns were directly related to their “peripheral” positioning in South Korean society. They placed an emphasis on proficiency in spoken English and viewed themselves as “deficient in that language, and thus, inferior”. This study clarifies the underlying language ideologies in South Korea and how such macro-level structures are intertwined with language practices and identity formation among disempowered transmigrants, such as dislocated North Korean undergraduates.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

This study explores the identities of dislocated North Korean² undergraduates enrolled in English classes at South Korean universities by examining their interactions with their South Korean peers. The number of dislocated North Koreans residing in South Korea has exponentially increased in recent years due to the deteriorating economic situation in North Korea. According to the [Ministry of Unification \(2013\)](#), more than 20,000 dislocated North Koreans reside in South Korea, and in 2012, 1397 dislocated North Korean undergraduates were enrolled in South Korean universities. Although the number of undergraduates has dramatically increased compared to that in 2008 (537 students), the college lives of dislocated North Korean undergraduates remain unfavorable. A survey conducted among 475 dislocated North Korean undergraduates in Seoul showed that approximately 40% suspended their education after entrance, and the drop-out rate of this population was 6.3-times that of South Korean students ([Hong, 2010](#)).

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +82 2 2220 1145 (office).

E-mail addresses: ppohi@hanyang.ac.kr (M.W. Lee), shahn@hanyang.ac.kr (S.-H.G. Ahn).¹ Tel.: +82 2 2220 2607 (office).² Other terms used for “dislocated North Koreans” are North Korean refugees and North Korean defectors. In South Korea, they usually engage in blue-collar occupations.

Such maladaptation of dislocated North Korean undergraduates enrolled in South Korean universities is attributed to two main spheres of difficulty: interpersonal relationships and English proficiency (Kim, 2012; Lee, 2011; Park and Kim, 2014). Dislocated North Korean undergraduates feel distanced and isolated from their South Korean peers, who mainly hold negative perceptions of them (Lee, 2011). They have difficulty keeping up with their classes, especially when the classes are taught in English (Kim, 2012). According to Hong (2010), more than half of North Korean students believe that English is the most important factor to success in South Korean universities because increasing numbers of classes are provided in English and/or use English textbooks.

North Korean students manage to get accepted into universities based on affirmative action policies, but their English proficiency is poor compared to that of South Korean students (Kim, 2012; Lee, 2011; Park and Kim, 2014). This is quite understandable, considering North Korean students' prolonged discontinuation of education due to their refugee status. Most dislocated North Korean students in South Korea have not received proper education, even in North Korea, due to their underprivileged economic and family backgrounds, and most of these students spent several years in China or other Southeast Asian countries alone without proper schooling before coming to South Korea (Lee, 2014).

Thus, it is unsurprising that one of the most challenging obstacles to North Korean undergraduates is completing mandatory freshman English classes immediately upon entering South Korean universities. "College English" classes are often required to fulfill graduation requirements (Park and Kim, 2014). The number of English classes that students are required to take differs from school to school, but most schools require students to complete at least one. English classes are based upon students' proficiency-level and mainly focus on four-skill training. Most importantly, English classes are usually taught by native English speakers, and even when classes are taught by Korean professors, English is the primary language used for teaching and learning. Dislocated North Korean undergraduates are thrown into such environments without proper preparation.

After entering universities, however, no special program exists to help this marginalized population. This is because North Koreans are the minority of the school community and there is an indifferent and/or negative atmosphere toward dislocated North Koreans in South Korean society in general (Kim, 2012; Lee, 2011). Although dislocated North Koreans share an ethnic and historical origin with South Koreans, the relationship between the two populations is fraught with various degrees of conflict, tension, and anxiety. Therefore, the present study, which reveals the discursive relationships among the spatial mobility, language, and identity of this marginalized population through their interactions with South Korean peers, contains socio-political and academic importance. This unprecedented way of examining the understudied population reveals their authentic voices in an in-depth manner and provides both North Korean and South Korean students with the valuable opportunity to better understand each other. The two research questions examined in this paper are as follows: (1) What are the characteristics of interactions between dislocated North Korean undergraduates and South Korean undergraduates? (2) How do dislocated North Korean undergraduates position themselves in relation to South Korean undergraduates?

2. Spatial mobility, language, and identity

In this interconnected and interdependent era of globalization, spatial mobility is maximized and produces an increasing number of transnationalists, who for various reasons are to cross national borders (Beck, 2002; Roudometof, 2005; Rizvi, 2009; Tan, 2004). As Blommaert et al. (2005) notice that space attaches different values and functions to sociolinguistic repertoires and influences people's identities either self-constructed or ascribed by others, such transnationalists will experience changes the status of their language and identity in their new "spaces". More specifically, first, translationalists will experience changes in "the value and function of their sociolinguistic repertoires" (Blommaert et al., 2005, p.203). Such modulations in language made by individuals should be understood not only as purely individual choices but also as results of indexicality, or the connection between language and context (Gu and Tong, 2009; Li Wei, 2011). Upon moving into a new context, transnationalists realize that the linguistic resources that they had and valued within the previous context are not valued in the same way within their new context. Therefore, they must navigate the new hierarchy of "center, semi-peripheries, and peripheries" (Blommaert et al., 2005, p.201) and realign their conceptions of their language(s) in accordance with these "scales" (Blommaert, 2007) of the new context. In other words, the indexical values of a language are externally determined based on the social, cultural, political, and historical patterns of the context; in this way, special mobility tightly correlates with identifying "a more valuable language" in a given context based on these scaling processes (Blommaert et al., 2005; Dong, 2009, 2010; Gu, 2011, 2014; Gu and Tong, 2009; Li Wei, 2011).

In addition to such changes in their sociolinguistic repertoires, border-crossers will also experience internal relocations or shifts in their identities (Dong, 2009, 2010; Gu, 2011, 2014; Gu and Tong, 2009; Li Wei, 2011). This is because "trans-languaging" (Li Wei, 2011) necessarily involves identity change (Deumert, 2013; Dyers, 2008; Giles and Johnson, 1987; Haque, 2012; Norton, 2001; Norton and Toohey, 2001; Olsen and Olsen, 2010). Language enables, maintains, and shapes sociocultural relationships, so it constitutes the core of identity formation. Classifying oneself socially, one acquires one's identity as belonging to certain groups; taking certain actions in social relationships, one perceives oneself as oneself (Hogg and Abrams, 1988; Katzenstein, 1996). That is, how people decide to position themselves or are socially positioned interacting in their languages is directly tied to their identity formation or adjustment. Further, it is noteworthy that their identity formation is inherently ideological. Socially sorting them on the basis of their languages is grounded in cultural beliefs and values, which are acquired explicitly or implicitly from social contexts or categories (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005). In fact, this is significantly another manifestation of "scales" (Blommaert, 2007).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/935150>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/935150>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)