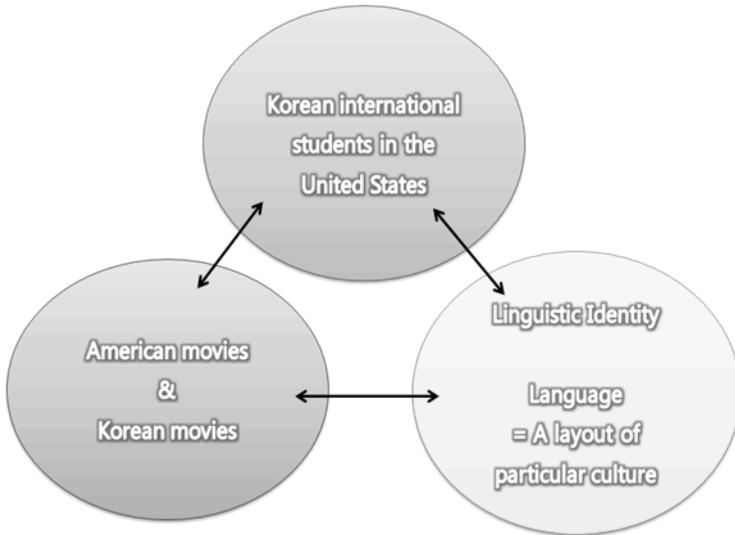


## Beyond Acculturation of Korean International Students:

### A Detailed Analysis of the Effect of American and Korean Movies on Linguistic Identity Formation of Korean International Students in the United States

Tae Woo Kim



In the twentieth century, an unprecedented high number of Korean international students were enrolled in the United States from elementary school to college. English became a crucial school subject for low and higher education institutions in Korea. Furthermore, fluent usage of English became an extremely important qualification for many job applicants. Many Korean middle school students, thus, poured all their effort to enter foreign language high schools, such as Yongin or Daewon foreign language high school, so that they can apply for Ivy League schools in the United States. As soon as Korean international students started to study abroad, they experienced a time of linguistic tumult. **D**uring the time of linguistic identity tumult, Korean international students in the United States started to question the ways in which they identified in Korea, because they were largely influenced by American mass media. During the cross-cultural adjustment period for Korean international students, did American movies and Korean movies motivate Korean international students to adopt American socio-cultural values, and remind them of Korean cultures and customs, respectively? Do Korean international students create

unique forms of linguistic identity and a distinguishable form of English during this cross-cultural transient state? I define Korean international students as Koreans who were born and raised in Korea for at least ten years before they came to the United States. Also, I define the active time of linguistic identity tumult as the period happens from Korean students enter the United States School to five years. Particularly, I decided to focus on Korean international students who lived in the United States from one to five years. Many authors claim that Korean international students tend to be Americanized instead of being bicultural because of the strong effects of the American mass media. These authors argue that exposure to American mass media encourages Korean international students to accept American social values and weakens Korean cultural identity. However, other authors claim that Korean cultural values within the minds of Korean international students influence how they interpret American social values in American mass media. Many authors also note that Korean international students in the United States confront conflicts between two different cultures, especially in terms of language. After a cross-cultural adjustment period, Korean international students are more bicultural than they are simply products of American socio-cultural assimilation because they keep many Korean values, and in part this dual culture is expressed through a distinctive form of English speaking.

In *“Beyond Yellow English : Toward a Linguistic Anthropology of Asian Pacific America,”* Adrienne Lo and Angela Reyes, as editors of this book, present two relevant articles about Korean students. Sung-Yu Park, in *“Illegitimate Speakers of English,”* states that Korean international students *“strongly identified with Korean national identity-that is, they would self-identify as ‘Koreans’ and not as ‘Americans’-though at the same time, they had much familiarity with mainstream American lifestyles as well”* (Park 199). Korean students, thus, maintain Korean identity along with American lifestyles. Juyoung Song, in *“Bilingual Creativity and Self-Negotiation,”* claims that Korean American students *“create new hybrid practices in collaboration with one another, redefining their social relationships through the dynamic means of language”* (Song 228). Because two cultures coexist in Korean students minds, two languages from two different cultures conflict each other.

In contrast to Park and Song from previous two articles, Seung-jun Moon and Cheong Yi Park, in *“Media Effects of Acculturation and Biculturalism: A Case Study of*

Korean Immigrants in Los Angeles' Koreatown,” argues that “even though Korean immigrants are frequently exposed to both American and Korean mass media, they tend to be Americanized instead of bicultural due to the strong effects of the American media” (Moon and Park 319). However, during the time of linguistic identity tumult, entrenched Korean culture and custom prevent complete Americanization. Negative stereotypes about Asians shown in early Hollywood movies also motivate Korean international students to accomplish a sense of independence rather than become completely Americanized. In addition, watching Korean movies, which emphasize Korean social cultures, reinforce Korean culture to these students. The pervasive American mass media in the United States, indeed, imposes Korean students with American socio-cultural values and norms. Even though the influence of American mass media, particularly American movies, is overwhelming, Korean students construct distinguishable styles of English as they confront and overcome the time of linguistic identity tumult. This can be seen in the survey I conducted at Rutgers University. The subjects of the survey were Korean international students in Rutgers University who have lived the United States for one to five years; there were eleven participants. I distributed the survey questions to these participants through e-mail; then, they sent e-mails with the answered survey questions to me. The survey is comprised of six questions about the relationships among watching American and Korean movies, forming linguistic identity, and learning English.

Before examining the ways in which Korean international students remain bicultural rather than completely Americanized, it is important to understand the language ideologies of global English, the power of movies to Korean international students, and the cultural value of language. Many Korean students are motivated to study abroad to the United States, because of distinctive language ideologies in Korea. In “Language Ideology and Identity in Transnational Space: Globalization, Migration, and Bilingualism among Korean Families in the USA,” Juyoung Song claimed that there are “two language ideologies of global English: (1) language as marketable commodity; and (2) language for cosmopolitan membership” (Song 23). Specifically, every multinational corporation use English in business transactions. Also, numerous countries in Asia and Europe began to adopt English as their second language, so English became one of crucial subjects in academic institutes in many countries. During their leisure time, many Korean international students watch both Korean and American movies for language and

educational reasons. In contrast to many other media, movies are not only visual but also auditory experience. Also, movies have the power to illustrate particular socio-cultural values. In “Bilingual Creativity and Self-Negotiation,” Song quotes Ochs when he writes about the concept of language as a “system of symbolic resources designed for the production and interpretation of social and intellectual activities” (Song 216). For Korean international students, a language, either Korean or English, is not only the representation of a particular culture, but also the tool to communicate with other students.

When Korean students watch Disney movies such as *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Aladdin*, they interpret American socio-cultural values depicted on Disney movies based on entrenched Korean cultural experience. In “Marry the Prince or Stay with Family-That is the Question: A Perspective of Young Korean Immigrant Girls on Disney Marriages in the United States,” Lena Lee explores how young Korean immigrant girls aged five to eight, interpret the American concept of marriages depicted on Disney movies in the United States. Korean immigrant girls’ interpretations of marriage are greatly influenced by Korean culture and norms. Lee states that leaving “their parents, who have sacrificed their whole lives for these girls, might constitute for them an act of betrayal and immortality, and guilt” (Lee 44). Because the independence aspect of marriage is less praised in Korean than in America, Korean immigrant girls and American girls understand the concept of marriages in Disney movies differently. Similarly, in “Boys Like Smart Girls More Than Pretty Girls: Young Korean Immigrant Girls’ Understanding of Romantic Love in American Popular Culture,” Lee explores how young immigrant children interpret romantic love in Disney movies. For Korean immigrant girls aged five to eight, Korean culture provided a framework in understanding romantic love within Disney movies. Because educational level has been regarded to be crucial factor in one’s success in Korea, Korean girls “considered inner beauty more essential for romantic love than many other characteristics” including physical attractiveness (Lee 92). All in all, Korean international students become bicultural, in that Korean socio-cultural values affect Korean newcomers to the United States in understanding American cultural values depicted on American popular culture. Park, the author of “Illegitimate Speakers of English,” states that a Korean student’s “position can be understood only with reference to the in-between-ness they hold at the intersection of Korea and the United States” (Park 210). The entrenched Korean cultural values within

the minds of Korean international students show that the experienced Korean cultural values cannot be eliminated by the powerful influence of American mass media, in particular, American movies.

Negative stereotypes of Asians shown in early Hollywood movies motivate Korean students to develop a sense of independence. In “Asian culture and Asian American Identities in the Television and Film Industries of the United States,” Hemant Shah presents four main stereotypes of Asian American: “Yellow Peril,” “Dragon Lady,” “Charlie Chan,” and “Lotus Blossom” depicted on Hollywood movies. Particularly, according to Shah, “Yellow Peril” is the depiction of Asian men “as menacing, predatory, and lusting after white women” (Shah 4). Also, “Dragon Lady” is the depiction of Asian women “as diabolical, sneaky, and mean, but with the added characteristics of being sexually alluring and sophisticated and determined to seduce and corrupt white men” (Shah 4). Nowadays, there are still implicit biases toward Asian Americans within Hollywood movies. Korean students maintain Korean culture within them in response to stereotypes and biases presented in Hollywood movies rather than just acknowledge such biases. For instance, “Yellow Peril” and “Dragon Lady” have been recently depicted on the television programs in 1990’s *Martial Law* and *Ally McBeal*, respectively. These films and programs show many negative stereotypes toward Asians living in the United States, which were depicted on many early Hollywood movies such as *Broken Blossoms*, *The Cheat*, and *Thief of Baghda*. Asian film companies including James B. Leong Productions and Haworth Productions aimed to depict the actual images of Asians living in the United States without the influence of these negative stereotypes. Park, the author of “Illegitimate Speakers of English,” claims that Korean students showed defiant attitudes against such prejudices “in order to make sense of their positions within U.S. society and culture and to reposition themselves within a network of new relational opposition” (Park 209). Collectively, many groups of Asians in the United States, including Korean students, strongly responded to the prejudices shown in American mass media so that they maintained their mother cultures in their minds.

Watching Korean movies, particularly *Take Off*, motivates Korean students to remember Korean socio-cultural terms and triggers patriotism. The background setting of *Take Off*, the Korean movie based on true story, is a small Korean town undergoing a large-scale construction in preparation for Winter Olympics bids in 1996. In this movie, a

Korean local committee receives a report that they have insufficient athletes to compete for Winter Olympics bids. So, they decided to make a ski jump team; former American Junior alpine athlete Bob, an adoptee who came to Korea in search of his mother, became the leader of the ski jump team. For Korean students, watching Bob learning how to use Korean words such as *dongssang* and *sensagnim* to refer to junior colleagues and ski jump coach, respectively, reminds of Korean socio-cultural terms. Korean has nominal substitutes such as *dongssang* or *sensagnim* to replace second-person pronoun, “these nominal forms encode social relationships between people in terms of age, social status, kinship, and in- and out- groupness” (Song 215). Nominal substitutes are the specific terms to describe social relationships between speaker and listener. Koreans more often use nominal substitutes than second-person pronoun to indicate other person, because they regard the direct description of other person using second-person pronoun to be impolite. Hearing such Korean nominal substitute words within Korean movies can activate “Korean side” of Korean international students. Also, as they use such Korean nominal substitute words each other in the United States, they begin to feel strong attachment to Korean cultural values. Yoon Chul, the author of “Unheralded Athletes Prove Korean’s Potential at Games,” pointed out that “Korean ski jumpers athletes of interest in Korea after a movie about the sport, ‘*Take Off*,’ became popular” (Chul). Considering that this movie is about national ski jump team in Winter Olympics, watching this movie inspires patriotism in the minds of Korean international students. To sum up, watching Korean movies like *Take off* helps Korean international students to retain Korean socio-cultural values in spite of the strong American mass media influence.

Watching Korean movies, specifically *Haeundae*, stimulates Korean students to conjure up a famous tourist region and a regional dialect in Korea, which trigger “Korean sides” in the minds of Korean students. Haeundae is the popular vacation place on the East Sea coast in one of Korean cities, Pusan. In this movie, Haeundae is hit by the mega-tsunami similar to the 2003 tsunami in Indian Ocean. Haeundae is one of three best beaches in Korea so that many Korean vacationers visit Haeundae for their summer vacations. As Korean students watch *Haeundae*, they think of their experiences related to Haeundae and Pusan, and can maintain their valuable memories related to Korea within their minds. Also, Pusan citizens use one of Korean dialects. In “KOREA ENTERS THE BIG POOL – Director and lead actress of *Haeundae: The Deadly Tsunami* reveal fond

memories of filming” written by Tan Kee Yun, Ji-Won, who is a Korean actress in *Haeundae*, says that in order to “perfect the Pusan dialect that my character spoke, I took language lessons for three months” (Yun). As Korean students hear Pusan dialect while watching *Haeundae*, their “Korean side” is instigated by the words of Pusan dialect in that they feel comfort and intimacy as they hear such words during the cross-cultural period. Song, the author of “Bilingual Creativity and Self-Negotiation,” states that “addressing is not only a linguistic practice that referentially denotes persons in discourse but also a social practice that indexes and makes relevant implicit rules and frames for individuals” (Song 214). Thus, as Korean students hear Pusan dialect address terms, they adopt Korean socio-cultural values imposed in those address terms at the same time.

As Korean students are largely affected by American popular culture presented in terms of English, Korean students undergo language shock in that they are not accustomed to using English for their everyday life. Park, the author of “Illegitimate Speakers of English,” states that Korean students often “renounces legitimate speakership of the language by acknowledging one’s incompetence” (Park 197). In many cases, a Korean student, at first, are not confident in learning English in that many Korean students regard legitimate speakership of English as both pretentious and showing off in Korea. In addition, Korean international students often create the mixed language of Korean and English, so-called Konglish. Among Koreans in both Korea and the United States, the term Konglish refers to the hybrid language that is almost impossible to comprehend. For example, cellular phone in English is “hand phone” in Konglish, window shopping is “eye shopping,” rear-view mirror is “back mirror,” mechanical pencil is “sharp pencil,” cheating is “cunning.” Leanne Hinton, the author of “Trading Tongues” in *Beyond Yellow English : Toward a Linguistic Anthropology of Asian Pacific America*,” mentioned that, for Korean students, “this mixed language actually becomes the main language used” for their daily life (Hinton 338). Because English beginners are incapable of making long sentences, Konglish is often shown as short combinations of words. Also, even though English beginners create long sentences, such sentences often have syntax problems in that the orders of the parts of speech such as subject, object, and verb in Korean and English are different. In Korean, the order of the parts of speech starts from subject to object to verb; in English, the order of the parts of speech starts from subject to verb to object. Specifically, in Konglish, Korean and

English words are organized in awkward patterns so that a person cannot communicate with others using Konglish.

As one of the participants of the survey I conducted in Rutgers University, the participant three said that “my main difficulty learning English during the cross-cultural adjustment period in the United States was learning the rules of English syntax, the word orders.” For Korean students, this time of linguistic identity tumult is enhanced by the conflicts between Korean and American cultures in that they become bicultural.

According to the participant seven from the survey on Korean international students in Rutgers University, “watching Korean movies while I was staying in Korean helped me become more fitted as Korean; watching American movies helped me to build ‘American sides’ of myself.” A language, indeed, is a layout for a particular culture. Especially, for Korean international students in the United States, English is a bridge to communicate with other students and their teachers. Also, Korean students experience American cultures in terms of English. During the time of linguistic identity tumult, watching American movies actually helps Korean students to learn English more effectively. As Korean students overcome the time of linguistic identity tumult, they develop unique styles of practicing English.

For Korean students in the United States, the difficulties in learning English are derived from the differences between Korean and English languages. Most prominently, the usage of first-person and second-person pronouns in English and Korean is different. In “Personal Pronouns in English and Korean Texts: A Corpus-Based Study in Terms of Textual Interaction,” Chul-Kyu Kim studied the comparison of usage of first-person and second-person pronouns in Korean and English in both Korean and English newspapers. According to his study, English first-person and second-person pronouns are about 3.8 times more used than those of Korean. Kim claims that the result of this study is affected by Korean socio-cultural context, specifically, “the preference for indirectness in text as a means of building harmonious relation with the reader and the collectivistic tendency in the Korean society” (Kim 2086). Because Koreans regard the practice of indirectness in language as the basis of politeness, they use less direct first-person and second-person pronouns. Song, the author of “Bilingual Creativity and Self-Negotiation,” states that “Korean does not have a neutral second-person form such as the English ‘you,’ nor a second-person pronoun that refers to a person regarded as socially superior” (Song 215).



Instead of neutral second-person term, there is an extensive usage of nominal substitutes for social positions and kinship terms. This explains the dominance use of *wuli*, *we*, than *tangsin*, *you*, in Korean, because Koreans prefer to use nominal substitutes rather than second-person pronouns. Because of this difference between Korean and English, Korean students experience the discrepancy between their Korean identity and English identity in that language is the layout of both cultural values and constituents' identities. Watching various kinds of American movies including Disney and Hollywood movies helps Korean students to learn the English usage of first-person and second-person pronouns. While watching American movies, Korean students can physically experience the wide usage of first-person and second-person English pronouns through both sounds and images. As they remain bicultural to both Korean and American cultures, they formulate a distinctive style of English because of Korean cultural experiences in the past. This style of English is the tendency to use many descriptive words such as adjectives or adverbs to define the relationship between the speaker and the listener more explicitly.

Also, the phonologies of Korean and English are different. In "Characteristics of Korean Phonology: Review, Tutorial, and Case Studies of Korean Children Speaking English," Seunghee Ha, Cynthia Johnson, and David Kuehn explore the characteristics of Korean phonology in contrast to those of English phonology. Specifically, because the vowel systems of English and Korean are different, Korean students have "difficulties with perception and production of some English vowels including /I/, /e/, and /æ/" (Ha, Johnson, and Kuehn 176). Moreover, the "English fricative and affricate consonants /f/, /v/, /w/, /ð/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /ʒ/, and /dʒ/ do not exist in Korean" (Ha, Johnson, and Kuehn 176). Particularly, according to the participant one from the survey on Korean international students in Rutgers University, "the prominent linguistic difference between Korean and English lies in the English alphabet which consists of twenty-one consonants and five vowels, whereas the Korean 'Hangul' consists of sixteen consonants and six vowels." Thus, Korean students not only cannot discern these kinds of sounds, but also have hard time pronouncing them. For these Korean students, watching movies such as Disney or Hollywood movies can provide opportunities to learn how to distinguish and pronounce English specific consonants and vowels in that they can be more exposed to English speaking environment. So, watching numerous kinds of American movies can help to adopt English fricative and affricate consonants and vowels so that they can both discern

and pronounce the sounds in conversations with others. According to the participant four from the survey on Korean international students in Rutgers University, “watching American movies helped me to learn English more effectively, because I was able to both identify and learn English specific intonations and pronunciations by watching American movies.” As Korean students remain bicultural to both Korean and American culture, two languages, the layouts of two cultures, influence each other constantly. Because of this interference, Korean students speaking English tend to show stopping during conversation, which is known as phonological interference pattern. This phonological interference pattern is one of unique characteristics of Korean students’ usage of English.

All in all, Korean students become bicultural rather than unquestionably adopt American socio-cultural values imposed within American movies, because they maintain many experienced Korean cultures. As Korea students become bicultural, they develop a distinctive form of English speaking. Particularly, more use of adjectives and adverbs to define the speaker and listener relationship clearly and phonological interference pattern are two prominent styles of Korean students’ English speaking. These distinguishable styles in English speaking of Korean international students and difficulties in learning English speaking result from the substantial differences between Korean and English languages. During the cross-cultural adjustment period, for Korean international students, watching either Korean or American movies play significant roles in reshaping their linguistic identities. Watching Korean movies stimulates “Korean sides” of Korean international students; watching American movies constructs “American sides” of them. In terms of learning English, watching American movies helped Korean international students to overcome the significant differences between Korean and English languages. Through watching American movies such as Disney or Hollywood movies, these Korean students are able to learn the English usages of first-person and second-person pronouns and learn the English intonations and pronunciations that do not exist in Korean. Considering that a language is the layout of a particular culture, watching Korean or American movies enhances the severity of the time of linguistic identity tumult. But, watching American movies also helps Korean international students to overcome their linguistic identity tumults by providing opportunities to learn the English usage of first-person and second-person pronouns and English specific pronunciations.

## Bibliography

- Chul, Yoon. "Unheralded Athletes Prove Korea's Potential at Games." *Korea Times*. 1 Mar. 2010. 10 Apr. 2010.  
<[http://docsnewsbank.com/s/InfoWeb/aggdocs/AWNB12E32A61CF7E4348/0DCEA1C6DFCA835?p\\_multi=SKTC&s\\_lang=en-US](http://docsnewsbank.com/s/InfoWeb/aggdocs/AWNB12E32A61CF7E4348/0DCEA1C6DFCA835?p_multi=SKTC&s_lang=en-US)>
- Duranti, Alessandro and Reynolds, Jennifer. "Phonological and Cultural Innovations in the Speech of Samoans in Southern California." *Beyond Yellow English : Toward a Linguistic Anthropology of Asian Pacific America*. Ed. Reyes, Angela and Lo, Adrienne Oxford; New York: Oxford UP, 2009. Print.
- Ha, Seunghee, Johnson, Cynthia, and Kuehn, David. "Characteristics of Korean Phonology: Review, Tutorial, and Case Studies of Korean Children Speaking English." *Journal of Communication Disorders* 42. 3 (2009): 163-179. Print.
- Kim, Chul-Kyu. "Personal Pronouns in English and Korean Texts: A Corpus-Based Study in Terms of Textual Interaction" *Journal of Pragmatics* 41. 10 (2009): 2086-2099. Print.
- Lee, Lena. "Boys Like Smart Girls More Than Pretty Girls: Young Korean Immigrant Girls' Understanding of Romantic Love in American Popular Culture." *Journal of Instructional Psychology* 36. 1 (2009): 87-94. Print.
- Lee, Lena. "Marry the Prince or Stay with Family-That is the Question: A Perspective of Young Korean Immigrant Girls on Disney Marriages in the United States." *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood* 34. 2 (2009): 39-46. Print
- Moon, Seung-jun and Park, Cheong. "Media Effects on Acculturation and Biculturalism: A Case Study of Korean Immigrants in Los Angeles' Koreatown." *Mass Communication & Society* 10. 3 (2007): 319-343. Print.
- Park, Sung-Yu. "Illegitimate Speakers of English." *Beyond Yellow English : Toward a Linguistic Anthropology of Asian Pacific America*. Ed. Reyes, Angela and Lo, Adrienne Oxford; New York: Oxford UP, 2009. Print.
- Shah, Hemant. "'Asian Culture' and Asian American Identities in the Television and Film Industries of the United States." *Simile* 3. 3 (2003): N.PAG. Print.
- Song, Juyoung. "Bilingual Creativity and Self-Negotiation." *Beyond Yellow English : Toward a Linguistic Anthropology of Asian Pacific America*. Ed. Reyes, Angela and Lo, Adrienne Oxford; New York: Oxford UP, 2009. Print.
- Song, Juyoung. "Language Ideology and Identity in Transnational Space: Globalization, Migration, and Bilingualism among Korean Families in the USA" *International Journal of Bilingual Education & Bilingualism*, 13. 1 (2010): 23-42. Print.
- Yun, Tan Kee. "KOREA ENTERS THE BIG POOL - Director and lead actress of Haeundae: The Deadly Tsunami reveal fond memories of filming." *New Paper*. 16

Oct. 2009. Web. 10 Apr. 2010.

<[http://docs.newsbank.com/s/InfoWeb/aggdocs/AWNB/12EAE0B12EAE0BD84CF0888/0DC2EA1C6DFCA835?p\\_multi=multi=SGPNP&\\_lang=en-US](http://docs.newsbank.com/s/InfoWeb/aggdocs/AWNB/12EAE0B12EAE0BD84CF0888/0DC2EA1C6DFCA835?p_multi=multi=SGPNP&_lang=en-US)>

### **Survey Questions**

1. How does watching Korean movies influence in your linguistic identity formation during cross-cultural adjustment period in the United States?
2. How does watching American movies influence in your linguistic identity formation during cross-cultural adjustment period in the United States?
3. What do think are the main differences between Korean and English?
4. What was the difficulty learning English during cross-cultural adjustment in the United States?
5. Do you think watching American movie helped learning English during cross-cultural adjustment period in the United States? (Yes/No)
6. If you answered (Yes) in question 5, how does watching American movies help learning English in that watching movie is both visual and auditory experiences?