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Language learning as a site for belonging: a narrative analysis of Korean adoptee-returnees

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Through analyzing narratives of Korean heritage language (HL) users, this article explores whether and to what degree these language users experience social inclusion and a sense of belonging in Korean society. We expand the field of HL research by investigating the experiences of four Korean-born, US-raised adoptee-returnees who currently reside in Seoul, South Korea and speak Korean as an additional language. We employ ethnographically-informed narrative inquiry by drawing on interviews, observations, and the personal experience of the second author (a member of this community) to explore how adoptee-returnees' learning of Korean as a HL affects their settlement success, social recognition, and sense of ethnic and cultural belonging in the country of their birth. The participants' narratives show that they feel distanced by Korean citizens in daily interactions, and that they connect more closely with people on the margins of Korean society, including other Korean adoptees. Despite this apparent lack of social inclusion, adoptee-returnees do claim belonging through their participation in the *third place* of the adoptee-returnee social network in Seoul in a myriad of ways.

Keywords: heritage language; Korea; social inclusion; third space; international adoption; cultural belonging

Introduction

Statistics from the Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare (2002) show that about 150,000 international adoptions took place between 1953 and 2001,¹ and that approximately two-thirds of the children were adopted by families living in the United States. In this paper, we explore whether Korean adoptee-returnees (KADs) who were adopted to the United States are able to use their heritage language (HL) as an avenue for social inclusion and cultural belonging in the context of their lives in Seoul, South Korea. KADs are individuals who were born in South Korea, adopted by foreigners at a very young age, and then chose to return to South Korea as adults, typically to pursue birth search and/or educational and employment opportunities. In this article, we focus specifically on how the narratives of four KAD women illustrate opportunities to establish a sense of belonging as 'legitimate' Koreans and to participate more deeply in Korean social networks, despite the cultural and linguistic gaps that were established as a result of their adoption.

While this study focuses on social inclusion as a form of belonging, it is important to draw attention to some of the official ways in which KADs have already

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been granted inclusion in the form of legal rights. Due to the work of Korean adoptee support organizations such as Global Overseas Adoptees' Link in the late 1990s, KADs are now considered 'overseas Koreans', and are eligible to apply for an F-4 ('family relations') visa, which is the same visa that many Korean-Americans, or *gyopo*, use. This visa allows unlimited residency; permission to work; and treatment equal to that of Korean nationals in transactions of real estate, foreign currency, finance, and national medical insurance. In April of 2010, even greater official inclusion of KADs was enacted with the passage of the Nationality Law Revision by the Korean National Assembly, for it granted KADs the opportunity for dual citizenship. Once the regulations governing the law are approved by the Korean government, KADs will be able to apply for the right to re-gain their Korean nationality while retaining their adoptive country's nationality. This law came into effect on 1 January 2011.

These gains in the rights of KADs are truly tremendous achievements. Nonetheless, beyond legal status and official recognition by the Korean government, our research shows that KADs seek a sense of belonging at the emotional, psychological, and social levels in Korean society. This article investigates these forms of social inclusion through narrative analysis in order to assess to what degree knowing one's HL can afford people with avenues for greater social inclusion. Specifically, we investigate how KADs' stories about their efforts to acquire and use Korean as a HL reveals the emotional, cultural, and interactional issues that they experience.

At a broader level, this study contributes to the growing body of narrative research on identity formation and cultural belonging among transnational and dislocated/relocated peoples (Baynham and De Fina 2005; Blommaert 2001; De Fina 2003; Song 2010; Warriner 2007). Much of this research has explored the life stories and narratives of refugees, migrants, and (both legal and illegal) border crossers in an effort to understand how people experience shifting social spaces and identities in a world that is increasingly characterized by change and flow. This research also seeks to provide those on the margins with an opportunity to voice their own experiences, and to provide an alternative representation to negative accounts of immigration that blame migrants and refugees for failing to assimilate by acquiring the language and cultural practices of the larger community quickly and efficiently (Wodak and Reisigl 1999). In focusing on a transnational population that may be categorized as a 'victim diaspora' (Hübinette 2004), we seek to illustrate how a dislocated/relocated population is forging new forms of cultural identification that call for authentication and recognition by the mainstream.

Research on heritage language identities and cultural inclusion

Most sociolinguistic research on HLs shows a strong link between learners' cultural identities and their success in learning and using their HLs (Chinen and Tucker 2005; He and Xiao 2008; Tse 2000; Valdes et al. 2006). In a survey of narratives produced by heritage learners from various backgrounds in the United States, Tse (2000) reports that ethnic minorities who express ambivalence towards their ethnic identity typically evade HL learning opportunities entirely. On the other hand, several studies have found that learners who have enrolled in HL classes and who have high degrees of proficiency in their HLs not only explicitly affiliate with their HL ethnolinguistic identity, but also have greater cultural knowledge of values, ethics and manners of the heritage culture (Chinen and Tucker 2005; Cho 2000; Lee 2002).

Korean-Americans who have become proficient in Korean are described as enjoying more social inclusion in their communities at church, in interactions with Korean international students, and in sharing interests in Korean television dramas and other forms of popular culture (Cho 2000).

While HL studies generally show that most learners study their languages to maintain cultural identity and to more fully participate in heritage/ethnic communities, there has yet been little research that examines the ways that transnational and dislocated/relocated people may experience social inclusion through maintaining or (re)learning their HLs. Given the increasing numbers of individuals who cross borders as immigrants, refugees, and transnationals, and yet who retain ties to their countries of origin, such research is essential for understanding how people who live in-between cultures, languages and national boundaries might negotiate their identities through language. Research on dislocated/relocated populations is essential to understanding the social and psychological processes that such individuals experience as they seek a sense of social and cultural inclusion in their heritage cultures and among citizens of their nations of origin.

Belonging and participation as social inclusion

Like other papers in this special issue which extend the concept of 'social inclusion' beyond economic well-being, we extend the concept to include *cultural belonging*, and we use the tools of narrative analysis to examine how people express their sense of belonging in the world. We find the sociocultural perspective of language learning as *participation* (Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000; Sfar 1998) to be particularly relevant to our study, as we conceive of cultural belonging as equivalent to participation in communities and recognition through engagement with others. Both concepts are highly compatible with narrative approaches that rely on learners' accounts, for they allow us to dig into participants' perceptions of their own positionalities in Korean society with Koreans as well as with other members of the KAD community.

Fougère's (2008) discussion of identity as a spatial metaphor in identity construction is also useful for situating our study theoretically. He provides a framework for examining identity construction within the notions of 'insideness', 'outsideness' and 'in-between' in narratives. Taking the narratives of four male French university graduates who worked abroad in Finland, Fougère examines how the men positioned themselves in their narratives with reference to space. After experiencing the positionality of 'outsider', some of the men reverted to their 'originary' identity, articulating a strong sense of belonging that was firmly tied to their home cultures. However, others were able to experience outsideness and then 'hybridize' their identities, thus finding a comfort zone in a place somewhere between insideness and outsideness. One participant, David, expressed an evolving sense of self in his experiences outside of his French home culture.

To sum up Finnish culture, I think that... pragmatism, that's something they really have. Whether in their organization, in time, or whatever... even the way they see things. That's a quality I appreciate. Now there are other things in French culture that are also nice. I'm not a lover of Finnish culture more than of French culture, I enjoy them both. I try to take the best from each, from all the things I know, and with a little bit of Spanish features too, since I've lived there for a little while (Fougère 2008, 199).

David's excerpt is a good illustration of the numerous cultural flows the 'global citizen' now encounters in an increasingly borderless world. Citing Stuart Hall (1995), Fougère explains David's acceptance of an in-between identity as a result of his trajectory through various cultures and languages, an identity that is 'better represented by "routes" than by "roots"' (2008, 200). In focusing on the social inclusion and sense of belonging among KADs, we also seek to explore how they negotiate both their 'roots' and their 'routes' in stories about their experiences of living and working in South Korea.

Narrative analysis of social inclusion

We employ narrative analysis (De Fina, Schiffrin, and Bamberg 2007) to explore how adoptee-returnees discuss their learning and use of Korean in their narratives with reference to their social recognition as Koreans and their sense of ethnic and cultural belonging. We make use of tools from narrative analysis that help us to investigate how they position themselves vis-à-vis insiderness, outsiderness, and being in-between. We focus on shifts between the *storied world* and the *storytelling world* (Bamberg 1997), that is, moments in the interviews where the participants move from retelling a series of events (in which they are one of the characters) to commenting on the story that they are telling in the here-and-now of the interview.

To focus our analysis, we looked for retellings of experience that were surrounded by or interrupted with *evaluative comments* that revealed the women's positioning toward their identity negotiation. Here, we draw on work by other narrative researchers who have developed clear analytical tools for identifying narrators' positionalities. Taking Labov and Waletzky (1967) as a starting point, we view the evaluation of a narrative as 'that part of the narrative that reveals the attitude of the narrator by emphasizing the relative importance of some units as opposed to others' (1967, 32). To contend with the discursive aspects of evaluation in narrative data, we draw specifically on Goffman's (1981) work on *footing* to identify moments in talk where narrators move from their role as storytellers to evaluators of actions in stories. Specifically, we examine how the women express their stances towards their HL and towards Koreans when they shift their footing from *authors* and/or *animators* to *principals*. The women's discursive moves between the act of narrating what happened (author) to reported speech (animator) to an aside wherein some evaluative comment is made (principal) are moments in talk where evaluative stances are expressed. Evaluative comments were often voiced through reported speech, constructed dialogue or inner dialogue as the narrators 'ventriloquated' themselves or other characters in their retellings of events (cf. Ros i Solé 2007; Wortham 2001). Evaluative comments also occurred in the form of asides, mitigations, and concessions after events were recounted.

Much of the time, the women narrate stories of social exclusion, and they often highlight their own lack of Korean linguistic competence or shared cultural models. The narratives show that a frequent obstacle to achieving a sense of cultural belonging is Koreans' lack of acceptance of KADs as authentically Korean. In response to the lack of social inclusion afforded to them, the narratives reveal a strong sense of belonging with the KAD community in Seoul, rather than with 'Korean Koreans'. Rather than interpreting these narratives as evidence of failure to belong, we argue that KADs claim belonging through their participation in the 'third

place' (Kramsch 1993) of the KAD social network in a myriad of ways, thereby producing a new, and legitimate, ethnic identity of the 'in-between' Korean.

Data collection

The second author of this article, Kim Stoker, who is a member of the KAD community living and working in Seoul, used her contacts with her KAD friends and colleagues as a starting point for the data collection. Due to the personal nature of our research interests, we chose to select participants whom Kim knew rather well in order to encourage open and honest discussion of their lives. Kim invited six women to participate in the interviews, all of whom are active participants in adoptee organizations in Korea that Kim is also a part of. The women share a fair amount in common: they are all in their late twenties to mid-thirties, they have studied Korean in intensive language programs in Korea, and they teach or work in English to make a living. We also chose to limit the data collection to KADs who had been living in Korea for at least two years in order to see whether long-term residence in Korea had an effect on language abilities and the development of a sense of cultural belonging. Due to the limits of space in this article, we narrow our analysis to three focal participants. We include Kim as a fourth participant due to the nature of the data collection, which was carried out in the framework of *active interviews* (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). In contrast with more positivist and objectivist approaches, active interviewing is characterized by postmodern sensibilities wherein the boundaries between the interviewer and the interviewee are blurred, and the interview itself is more of a conversation than a fact-finding activity (Fontana 2000). In this way, Kim was free to draw on her own experiences and stories as a HL speaker of Korean as a means of encouraging the participants to share their own thoughts and memories. Table 1 summarizes the key biographical information of the participants.

Narratives were collected in the form of face-to-face interviews that lasted between one to three hours. The interviews were recorded with an audio digital recorder and later transcribed, maintaining all disfluencies that occurred in the interactions. The analysis of themes and shifts between the storied and storytelling world was shared by both authors of the study.

Table 1. Information about the participants.

Name	Years in Korea as a returnee	Age of adoption	Study of Korean	Occupation
Kim	11	Infant	As a graduate student in the US; irregular courses at a Korean university	English instructor
Kelly*	8	8	Basic study in college; irregular study at a Korean university	English tutor and filmmaker
Lori*	2.5	4	Completed all levels in Korean language program for foreigners	Student/English tutor
Anne*	4	Infant	Irregular coursework at Korean university	Editor (English language) and writer

Note: *Indicates pseudonym.

Analysis

In our analysis, we first explore what opportunities the women narrated for participation in conversations with Koreans, and for experiencing cultural belonging. Overall, these accounts demonstrate that the women did not find the subjectivities that Koreans offered to them to be appealing. Hence, we explore how they discursively construct identities that allow them to express how they find ways to fit into Korean society and to find ways to belong in a society that does not necessarily make them feel welcome.

The excerpts of narratives below all focus on being positioned by Koreans (sometimes referred to as ‘Korean Koreans’ by the women). These narrative accounts demonstrate how the women perceived the positionings afforded to them by Koreans, the cultural ‘insiders’ of their communities, with reference to Korean language use. To highlight the opportunities for belonging given by Koreans, reported speech in the voice of Koreans is put into quotes. Bold text is used to highlight the evaluative comments of the interviewees, and single quotes are used to bracket the inner speech they produce in the narratives.

Responses to spaces for belonging given by Koreans

A major theme that emerged from the data was the frustration the women felt as a result of the rather high expectations that Koreans had for their ‘innate’ language ability. According to the women, many Koreans expected them to have a strong desire to acculturate while learning Korean, which produced a mismatch with the identities the women projected for themselves. Moreover, Koreans often expressed a lack of patience with them if their Korean was still developing. In excerpt 1, Lori discusses how non-Korean foreigners are treated differently than KADs with regard to language and opportunities for belonging, and it shows her displeasure at being expected to behave in accordance with her ethnic appearance. As her narrative shows, Koreans treat her ethnicity as a common-sense basis for her language proficiency, and they fully expect her to have a deep desire to speak Korean fluently and to take on Korean behaviors because of it. In fact, Lori spends most of her time studying Korean at a university, but she evaluates this expectation in clearly negative ways. Similarly, in excerpt 2, Kelly describes Koreans as lacking sympathy for KADs’ unique circumstances. Both women’s evaluative comments indicate that they want to be understood as having special histories and distinctive motivations for living in Korea, but they say that Koreans often do not express this sort of nuanced understanding of their lives.

(1) ‘I look Korean, I look like I should speak Korean’

Lori: But coming here – I look Korean, I look like I should speak Korean, and even though if people know that I’m adopted it’s not just that-okay, they understand that I can’t speak Korean. They expect me to really, really want to speak Korean or really, really want to learn Korean which is sometimes so fucking annoying. That I should be expected to really want to learn Korean. But other foreigners it’s like a free pass – they never have to learn Korean and Korean people never care. Korean people don’t expect foreigners to learn Korean at all. In fact they say to foreigners they say ‘Why do you need to learn Korean? Why study Korean? You don’t need to learn Korean.’ But they expect Kor-like adoptees to not just be Korean but to want to learn Korean. Sometimes it’s really, I mean somedays it’s totally fine and I’m like yes, and other days it just really pisses me off.

(2) 'Become more Korean or act more Korean!'

Kelly: At that, that time [2001], Koreans were much less understanding about Korean Americans, overseas Koreans and adoptees coming back. And they had this expectation that being of Korean descent you should know your language and you should learn it, and quote unquote become more Korean or act more Korean!

The women's own status as KADs was a significant reason for resisting the subjectivities offered by Koreans and for asserting alternative identities. In excerpt 3, Anne expresses a lack of desire to take on a 'Korean Korean' identity, which she explains by highlighting her investment in her identity as an activist adoptee. Though she is aware of the 'rules' of Korean society, her purpose in living in Korea is not necessarily to connect with other Koreans, but to change aspects of Korean society linked to social welfare and adoption practices. Anne's main reasons for learning Korean were to communicate with her Korean family members and to work with various Korean organizations and government agencies to make changes in adoption law. Given these very personal motivations, she does not respond to the expectations of 'Korean Koreans.'

(3) 'I want to change the whole fucking society'

Kim: When can you pass as a real Korean, as a Korean Korean? Do you want to?

Anne: Oh I don't care anymore. I think I'm just beyond caring. I mean I think mh, it has to do with TRACK [an adoptee activist organization] and what I want to accomplish in Korea which is – I want to change the whole fucking society. I think there are certain rules like, if I would really try to pass, I should not tell anyone I'm divorced, I shouldn't tell people that. . . . but that's not conducive to changing Korean society. It's just to like fit into the mold that everybody else wants to fit into the mold of.

Kelly also referred to her adopted status in voicing her subjectivity as a KAD who resisted identifying strongly with Korean language and culture. She expressed why she had lost her motivation to study Korean after having numerous experiences such as these where Koreans placed high expectations on her. Though she made an effort in the beginning of her time in Korea, multiple experiences such as the one she narrates in excerpt 4 left her with resentment and hostility toward Koreans, and a lack of commitment to learning the Korean language.

(4) 'It's not good enough'

Kelly: I remember one time. . . . this cab driver started yelling at me because I didn't speak Korean. He was just, y'know, furious at me. And I don't think I was trying to speak English to him. . . . So it was probably a few words to explain where to go and he just exploded at me, and I remember thinking 'geez, y' know why are Koreans like this?' 'Why is it that I come back to this country and I'm trying to make an effort to live here and learn the language and all I get is "you're not good enough" and "it's not good enough"?' Like blaming me cause I don't speak the language and because I'm not Korean enough, when in fact I felt like all along that there was something wrong with Korean society for sending so many children abroad in the first place. So it was like this resentment towards society from the get-go because, as soon as I felt those negative expectations on me. I felt that they didn't have any right. So that also prevented me from learning the language because I was like 'shit, why should I even try to even bother learning this language?'

Like the other adoptees, Kelly connected her resistance to the loss that she experienced as a result of her adoption. Since she was eight years old when she was adopted, she had clear memories of being told not to speak Korean in the United States by her adoptive parents. In fact, she and her twin sister, who was also adopted into the same family, were beaten if they were caught speaking Korean

together. In her interview, she evaluates her current study of Korean as painful when describing how she has to force herself to learn Korean to communicate with her Korean brothers.

(5) 'I feel like that part of me was taken'

Kelly: It's revisiting this place of loss every time you're sitting in the classroom. It's a reminder that something. For me it's extremely sad – not that I want to make it sound like I had it hard or anything but because I was old enough to remember that happening and because I felt I feel such a deep sense of injustice in the fact that I was forbidden to speak my own language. I feel like it was taken from me I feel like that part of me was taken and stolen from me not by my choice and here I am as an adult, and I'm unable to speak this language and communicate with my family. And even though I really want to it's just hard. And I think that when it comes down to it I think I have to sit down and force myself to study.

Similarly, Anne describes her relationship with Korean as a painful one, though she does so with an activist-oriented defiance. For Anne, speaking what she calls 'broken Korean' is a political act that can draw Koreans' attention to the loss faced by adopted children and can shatter any illusions about adoption as a form of salvation.

(6) 'The broken Korean that comes out of my mouth'

Anne: So I want Korean people to hear the broken Korean that comes out of my mouth because I don't want them to have some fantasy that it was so wonderful and good to separate them from their families and send them to a place where, for instance my sister was four and a half years old at the time of adoption and she could not speak to anybody. For like six to nine months she didn't have a single word. . . . I think that's like cruel and tragic.

It is noteworthy that in Anne's published autobiographical books, she also writes in 'broken Korean' as a way to explore and express her fragmented sense of self.

Alternative ways to belong: in the margins and in the KAD community

Next, we examine some of the discursive identifications that the women articulate where they do feel a sense of belonging. Interestingly, rather than showing strong affiliations with passing as Korean or striving to achieve cultural and linguistic nativeness, the women's narratives point to an alternative set of identity options that can be described as transnational, in-between, and liminal. Despite their non-mainstream identifications, the narratives show that the women still wish for Koreans to recognize them as having a legitimate place in Korean society.

In her interview with Anne, Kim tells a story in excerpt 7 in which this alternative sense of belonging is expressed clearly and evaluated very positively. In telling about a time when she visited a shoe shining kiosk that was run by a Korean worker, she notes that she was clearly marked as an English speaker by way of her English newspaper and English mobile phone conversation in English. Nevertheless, the worker identified Kim as an 'overseas Korean' – rather than pointing out her weaknesses in Korean or her lack of attention to Korean culture and behaviors. Kim's evaluative language, and especially her soft and delicate intonation used in reporting the dialogue used to recount the event, indicates how rare such an interaction is for the KAD community:

(7) 'She treated me normally'

Kim: It's this rare experience but I was getting my shoes shined and I went into the little booth on the street. And when I went in I was talking to somebody on the phone in English, and I went in and I was reading also an English newspaper at the time. But when I was done I asked how much and paid, and the woman looked at me and said "oh you must be an overseas Korean" in Korean. I was amazed [. . .] And I was like "wow, she was so" she was nice, she didn't look at me like I was a freak... But she was just like "oh you must be an overseas Korean" (uttered in a soft, sweet voice) and kind of smiled and I was like "yeah I am" (uttered in a soft, sweet voice). And I was like wow, that's very nice. And that was it. She treated me normally, like a normal person.

Kim's narrative and her very positive evaluation of her treatment by Koreans as 'an overseas Korean' shows the possibility of expanding the concept of 'Korean' to include KADs, overseas Koreans, and second generation Korean Americans. This expansion of identity options in Korean society is precisely what the interviewees generally spoke of when talking about greater degrees of social inclusion in Korea.

In a similar vein, Lori expressed a desire to expand the linguistic options that she faces in her everyday life to her 'ideal' situation. Rather than to learn Korean to speak with Koreans on their terms, Lori imagines a world in which both she and her Korean interlocutors can feel entirely comfortable in expressing themselves in their first languages.

(8) 'If I could have an ideal situation'

Lori: The truth is that when I first started studying Korean – this would be interesting for you I don't know why but maybe – the goal was to be able to speak Korean, now –
Kim: You can speak Korean.

Lori: Yeah, and speak Korean easily, well. But now the goal is more – if I could have an ideal situation it would be that Korean people would speak to me in Korean that I could understand, and I could speak to them in English and they could understand me.

Because most interactions with Koreans do not allow for Lori's 'ideal situation,' and because it is a 'rare experience' to be treated well as an 'overseas Korean' by Koreans, one way the women found comfortable places to belong was through making connections with 'non-mainstream' Koreans. In excerpt 9, Lori describes her Korean boyfriend as an atypical Korean by describing a behavior many Koreans would be too self-conscious to do, which she evaluates as a 'cute' personality trait. Interestingly, Lori's boyfriend is also unusual in that he has expressed no interest in practicing his spoken English with Lori, despite his access to the all-important 'native speaker,' an invaluable commodity in the eyes of most mainstream Koreans.

(9) 'Most people do not do that'

Lori: He'll just like be walking down the street and he'll just jump on [a concrete block] and then leap off of it as if there's nobody around him, you know what I mean? Most people do not do that because they're too concerned about what people think y'know. He just does that he'll be holding my hand and then he'll suddenly go dashing off to jump on this thing and then like leap off.

Kim: It's kind of endearing.

Lori: That's why I first started liking (him) cause he's cute like that.

Similarly, in excerpt 10, Kelly describes the Korean people she knows best, and with whom she feels most comfortable using Korean, as being 'on the fringe,' and hence, more open to accepting a range of difference. Since Kelly is a documentary filmmaker, she is in frequent contact with other filmmakers, artists, and writers.

(10) 'The fringe of Korean society'

Kelly: Um, I've built some closer relationships actually with um a couple of the subjects from my film that I'm working on about international adoption from Korea and birth mothers as well as a couple of the crew members who are Korean. Um, and those relationships have been really meaningful because I've been able to meet Koreans outside of um outside of the normal um segment of society. At least with my crew members –they're not your typical Korean in the sense that they're artists and they um are kind of on the fringe more on the fringe of Korean society so they tend to think differently.

Kelly also connects with the subjects of her documentary films on adoption and is able to feel comfortable acting as a translator for adoptee returnee children when they speak with their birth mothers. Because the birth mothers and their returnee children can sympathize with her life history, she feels most linguistically capable when communicating with them. In excerpt 11, she describes her film subjects as people who 'know her' and are 'extremely patient' and 'accommodating,' evaluative language that stands in stark contrast with her descriptions of other Koreans in earlier excerpts.

(11) 'The emotional energy'

Kelly: And y'know I think that's really I mean I don't think I have the emotional energy to do it with just anybody but I think I can do it with them because I know them and they know me, and they're both extremely patient. So even though my Korean really sucks sometimes and sometimes I say 'Well actually I don't know how to explain that in Korean' or vice versa, they're both pretty understanding about it. And you know, they've also given me so much with the film. I mean they've been extremely patient and accommodating with all the filming with them just giving their time and so I've been more than happy to help them. I feel like it's the least that I can do.

Rather than making connections with Koreans on a personal level, Anne finds her comfort zone to be in the realm of adoption activism. She is a founding member of an organization that seeks to revise adoption laws in Korea, and she spends a great deal of time networking with others in her organization. In excerpt 12, she describes her reaction to being othered in Korea as an outsider because of her non-native speech. Though she is Korean by birth, many people ask her if she is Japanese upon hearing her speak Korean. Rather than getting upset, Anne channels her energy into talking about adoption with anyone who asks her about her identity and uses it as an opportunity to practice her Korean.

(12) 'A chance to proselytize about adoption'

Anne: Well everybody's, 'Hey like are you Japanese?' *Wollye hanguk saram indae haewae ro ibyang desseoyo* ('I'm originally Korean but I was sent for overseas adoption') it's like boom, I give them my sentence and I give it to them and they're like okay. And then you see where it goes from there and some people are curious about 'Where did you get sent?' and other people are like 'Did you find your family?' And so actually all of those conversations, I view taxi drivers as free language tutors. It's fine I don't have to be emotional about that. And it's like a little bit of a chance for me to proselytize about adoption.

Interestingly, in discussing her own 'ideal' Korean language learning situation, Anne selects a Korean member of her adoption organization as a 'dream' teacher. In describing his characteristics, she focuses on his willingness to understand her and to accept her, no matter what. His connection with her adoption organization is likely the key factor in his ability to be patient and understanding of her emotional needs as she struggles to acquire Korean.

(13) 'My dream situation'

Anne: I think my dream situation is our guy from [adoption organization], I really love him. He's so patient with me. He will, I get so irritated sometimes because I just don't feel like speaking Korean and it's probably obvious that I'm irritated, but he never gets irritated back at me.

Similarly, Kelly finds that she belongs in Korea as a member of the KAD community, 'in her own way,' and not in a way that is necessarily appreciated by most Koreans. Importantly, her identity is a choice, rather than a subjectivity provided for her, and she asserts a confidence in rejecting the idea of ever being 'Korean' yet still claiming a legitimate place for herself in Korea as a KAD. In her interview, it is clear that her life trajectory, and especially, the loss of her cultural heritage through her adoption, have strongly influenced her choices and have given her a great sense of resilience.

(14) 'I belong here in my own way'

Kelly: I choose not to integrate myself into Korean society because I know that I will never be, quote unquote, Korean.

Kim: Why not?

Kelly: No matter how hard I try I will never become like another typical Korean because I didn't grow up here. I don't understand the nuances or just the culture. I mean I think I can understand it to a certain degree. I also don't want to because I am who I am and why should I? And I am living in a country which is a part of me and it's a really important part of me, but it doesn't mean that I have to integrate myself or assimilate myself in order to feel like I belong here. I belong here in my own way, which is sometimes I think a bit sheltered in the adoptee or foreign community but why chase something that I'm not? I mean I spent all of my life in America doing that all of my childhood.

Alternative identity zones and cultural multiplicity as a site for belonging

The narratives examined above challenge the monolithic conceptualization of a Korean cultural and ethnolinguistic identity. Through their talk, the KAD women resist Korean norms for linguistic and cultural practices, and they assert their right to be seen as legitimate members of Korean society. Their liminality resonates quite strongly with the marginalized positions of other populations who have been studied in applied linguistics and related fields, including many immigrants and refugees, Japanese *kikokushijo* ('returnees') (Kanno 2003), 1.5 generation students caught in-between literacies, cultures, and education systems (Harklau et al. 1999), heritage learners struggling with ethnic and cultural identity (e.g. Kang and Lo 2004), and international students who live and study in 'global contact zones' (Singh and Doherty 2004). Rather than imposing acculturation to a particular monolithic version of culture as the only possibility, these researchers have increasingly been recognizing the multiplicity involved in identity formation in the modern era and the relevance of the 'third place' (Kramsch 1993) as an authentic zone for social belonging and inclusion. At the same time, this research recognizes the difficulty encountered in trying to challenge fixed notions of cultural and ethnic identity.

The narratives of the KAD women suggest the need for Koreans to expand the identity options for 'being Korean' to *all* members of Korean society and clearly advocate for the inclusion of their own KAD third place as a legitimate Korean (and American) identification. Lori explains that though 'being Korean' is part of her, her trajectory of having lived as a Korean adoptee in the United States is a more significant aspect of her identity.

(15) 'Being Korean in America'

Lori: You know I lived here for four years and maybe there is some element of me of being Korean that I've lost that I can that's still part of my identity or whatever. I mean I definitely think that being Korean that is part of my identity but it's being Korean in America that is more probably my identity than being Korean actually. Do you know what I mean. So I guess being Korean in America sort of made me who I am.

Similarly, Kelly focuses on her 'routes' rather than her 'roots' to describe herself as someone who is now the result of her dislocation and (agentive) relocation to the country of her birth.

(16) 'Not a part of mainstream society'

Kelly: I'm not a foreigner in the sense of what the word foreigner means like I don't really think I'm a different person from another place – I felt like that when I first came here. I consider myself as a *gyopo*-overseas Korean and I consider myself as an adoptee who is a member of society, but not in, not a part of mainstream society.

Finally, Anne considers the question that she gets asked by people who she encounters in everyday life. Rather than feeling othered by the constant categorization of herself as an 'outsider' through this question, she also explains her roots/routes to choose an identity option. She asserts her legitimacy as an authentic Korean, and acknowledging others' reluctance to do the same, she feels comfortable in her own sense of belonging.

(17) 'I view myself as Korean'

Anne: 'What country are you from?' (...) I can have this conversation with any taxi driver. 'I'm originally a Korean person but I was adopted to the United States' (...) I think this idea of like who's a real Korean or whatever, I view that as other people's problem, like if other people don't see me as Korean. I guess I view myself as Korean and if other people can't see that it's like what's wrong with you. It's not what's wrong with me; it's what's wrong with you.

Conclusion

This study has endeavoured to explore the identities that KAD women experience and the role of their HL in their identity negotiation as 'authentic' Koreans in Korean society. Along with improved legal rights for their immigration and residency status, they are fighting for increased recognition through advocacy to change adoption laws in the form of filmmaking, writing, and other forms of expression that draw attention to adoption and adoptees in Korean society. KAD art exhibits such as the 2007 exhibit *Adoptee and Alien: Visions from the Periphery* (Seoul) and films like *Resilience* (2009) by Tammy Chu, which tells the story of an adopted son returning to Korea to find his birth mother are examples of such advocacy. These art forms are drawing attention to KAD issues and concerns, and they are acting as spaces for KADs to express liminal, yet authentic, identities.

Rather than seeing KADs and other dislocated/relocated peoples as constantly on the 'outside,' these third places provide zones of social inclusion in new societies forged by the dislocation and relocation of people, culture, and languages. In turn, it seems inevitable that societies will continue to be pushed to become more pluricentric and to rethink static notions of citizenship, ethnicity, and linguistic identity.

Note

1. International adoptions of Korean children are still taking place at the time of writing.

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