



# Language learning and Identity construction

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## Abstract

The Jeju global education city project has been implemented from 2008 to enhance English education competitiveness in Daejeong-eup, Seogwipo-si, Jeju. The opening of this city will effectively mark Seogwipo's rebirth as a world-renowned destination for English education. Jeju has been planning to provide top quality educational services in Korea by means of attracting world-prestigious organizations from elementary school to universities since Korea has seen a lot of money flowing out of Korea for studying abroad. This project shows Korean government's desire to absorb those students who want to study overseas for their English education and to transform Jeju into an English educational hub in the northeast Asia by recruiting students from China, Japan, and the rest of Asia.

In addition, there has been a sharp increase in the number of tourists in Jeju, so the significance of English education cannot be overemphasized. There have been extensive researches on linguistic outcomes, while little attention has been paid on non-linguistic outcomes of English learning experiences in Jeju. Therefore, Jeju, in which rapid socio-cultural changes are occurring and the global education city project is implemented, is the proper place to investigate non-linguistic outcomes such as English language learners' identities.

**Key words:** Jeju global education city project, non-linguistic outcomes, English language learners' identities, Jeju free international city, globalization, tourism expansion.

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## Introduction

The special law for making Jeju a free international city was implemented in 2001 to develop Jeju a hub attracting a lot of tourists various international conferences. Through a free international city, Jeju will attract international companies, reduce regulations of economic activities so as to increase the quality of life, and ensure the convenience of the free flow of people and goods. This means that English will be an important communication tool and English education cannot be overemphasized in Jeju. Therefore, a lot of efforts for enhancing an English friendly environment have been made to change Jeju into a successful free international city.

Jeju has become a major hub for quality English education after the Jeju global education city project was announced. Jeju is reflecting policymakers' calls to revitalize the nation's international education, including English language. It has tried to bring in prestigious international schools for English education since affluent students in Korea consider them as an alternative way of studying abroad and a means to get admissions from top domestic and international universities. The education in these international schools can be accredited by Korea, England, and the United States, so the graduates from these schools are able to apply for universities in Korea and foreign countries. The estimated fees of tuition and boarding are approximately \$50,000 a year.

International schools in Korea were originally established for the purpose of educating Korean students who had studied abroad because of their parents' jobs or the children of foreign employees. Therefore, the applicants must have lived overseas for at least three years or have foreign nationality in order to apply to those international schools. Those schools have been in high demand among Korean students who want to study in an English friendly environment in spite of their higher annual tuition.

There have been some parents who manipulate their children's nationality or who send their children abroad for three years to satisfy the qualification for the admission to those international schools. Some Korean mothers intentionally gave birth overseas to get foreign nationality for their children. Furthermore, several hundred students were accused of entering the internationally schools illegally.

Because of the limited qualifications of admissions to international schools in Korea, a lot of Korean students have studied abroad for their English education and a considerable sum of money has flowed out of Korea. According to the data released by the Ministry of Education in 2010, as of 2008, approximately 40,000 primary and secondary school students stayed abroad to study English. Korea loses the foreign currency between \$300 million and \$500 million. In an attempt to slash the amount of money spent abroad for

education, Jeju has established several international schools which do not require students to have foreign nationality or overseas experience to reform the Korean English education system in Daejeong, Seogwipo-city. For instance, the U.K.'s North London Collegiate School Jeju and Canada's Branksome Hall Asia were established in 2010 to restrain spending on studying abroad, and make Jeju a global education hub in northeast Asia. These schools have offered the same educational curriculum as overseas schools and have taken over a certain portion of the local demand for overseas studies. The goal of Jeju global education city project is bringing in 12 foreign schools including foreign university campuses. In addition, it is significant to guarantee to secure outstanding teaching staff, high quality classes, and to expand the number of foreigners residing in this city to become northeast Asia educational hub by enhancing educational competitiveness.

The international schools in Jeju global education city will be developed into a complex for English education and culture with more than 9,000 students and 23,000 residents. They will provide education facilities as well as cultural, residential, commercial facilities. All the lectures in these international schools are provided in English except Korean language and Korean history so that students in these international schools are encouraged to use English in and out of school.

Furthermore, the English market for private English education has been increasing enormously since a lot of problems have been reported on public school English education in Korea (Hong, 2010; Lee, 2008) and high popularity of English. Jeju global education city project aims at reducing these private English education markets.

From the elementary to high schools in Jeju global education city has been implementing English immersion programs which are linked to regular school curricula and the nationwide-recognized certificates. Those international schools also provide scholarships for students from low-income families to ensure equal access to education.

As mentioned above, the Korean government has been implementing Jeju global education city project in order to provide an affordable quality English education and also to improve competitiveness of English education in Korea. The demand for study overseas for enhancing English capability has been increasing due to steadily deteriorated English public education in Korea.

In case of English education in Jeju, there have been a lot of problems reported on public school English education. Even though Korean students spend ten years studying English, starting from elementary school, their speaking competence is not satisfactory. One of the main problems which has deteriorated Korean English education is the instructional methodology of reading comprehension that is



mainly focusing on grammar and English sentence translation. This instructional methodology has made Korean students lose interest in English and has been criticized for its only focusing on college entrance examination. In other words, Korean English education from elementary to high school has been blamed for being impractical.

On top of that, Korean English education has been blamed for simple and routine teaching method. English teachers in Korea have been criticized for their boring teaching method such as memorizing English expressions and reading comprehension when they teach reading comprehension, sentence translation, and grammar.

After Jeju was designated as a free international city, the number of international tourists has been growing sharply. This indicates that the significance of speaking competence is becoming greater than ever before. A lot of attention should be paid to expand English teaching method to learning speaking and writing in addition to learning grammar, sentence translation, and reading comprehension.

Jeju global education city has been expected to resolve these problems. The government also hopes to construct an educational city which brings together education and tourism by providing a top quality of educational environment.

It is expected that Jeju will function as an English education hub in northeast Asia and also as one of the main centers of English education in Korea if the Jeju global education city project is successfully implemented. In addition, the use of English will increase the number of foreign visitors and this will influence the activation of the economy in Jeju by enhancing the inflow of foreign capital in the fields of education and tourism. The creation of favorable investment conditions due to the use of English in Jeju global education city will contribute to the solid entrenchment of Jeju free international city.

The implementation of Jeju global education project will contribute to the globalization of people in Jeju. Residents in Jeju will understand foreign cultures and realize the significance of internationalization and openness.

At much the same time, Jeju, the largest volcanic island in Korea, is famous for its scenic beauties of waterfalls, beaches, and caves. Some of the top tourist sites include Manjanggul Cave which is the world's longest lava tube that has been designated as a UNESCO World Natural Heritage, Seongsan Ilchulbong Peak with magnificent views, Hallasan National Park with its vertical ecosystem of plants due to the varying temperatures along the mountainside.

Jeju has entered a new era of international tourism. Since the implementation of free international city in 2001, Jeju has experienced exceptional tourism expansion. UNESCO also designated it a "biosphere reserve" in 2002 and added it to the list of World

Natural Heritage Sites in 2007. Jeju was also voted one of the new seven wonders of nature in an international poll conducted by the New Seven Wonders Foundation. These nominations have enhanced international awareness of Jeju. According to the Jeju Development Institute (2011), 777,000 international tourists or 10.3% of the total number of tourists visited Jeju in 2010. It is expected that the number of foreign tourists will be increasing sharply. Furthermore, Jeju has implemented an immigration program under which a real estate investor from overseas who invests 500 million won (\$480, 000), or more is given an F-2 residency visa, and then an F-5 permanent residency visa five years later.

As noted above, it is certain that English will be an important communication tool in Jeju and English education cannot be overemphasized because of Jeju global education city project and rapid tourism expansion. English education in Jeju has mainly focused on linguistic competence such as grammar and translation (Kim, 2010) but it is time to consider the influence of language learning on non-linguistic outcomes such as learners' identities as well as linguistic outcomes such as English proficiency in EFL contexts.

## Literature Review

The influence of language learning on learners' identities

Language plays an essential role in constructing an identity because using a particular language helps form the individual's identity. Over the past decade, a number of studies have argued that L2 learning will influence learners' identities (Kanno, 2003, Belz, 2002) and that "prolonged contact with an L2 and a new and different cultural setting causes irreversible destabilization of the individual's sense of self" (Block, 2002, p. 4).

According to Danielewicz (2001), identity refers to "our understanding of who we are and who we think other people are" (p. 10). The relationship between language and identity has long been a major area of sociolinguistic investigation and has become important over the last decade as identity has come to be seen as something that we actively and publicly accomplish in our interactions with each other. Bourne (1988) maintains that "using language in a linguistically diverse society involves making choices, each speech act becomes an 'act of identity'" (p. 93).

There have been a lot of studies (Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000; Norton, 1995) on learners' identities influenced by L2 learning. Poststructuralist theory (Butler, 2005; Weedon, 1997) emphasizes the relationship between language and identity. Norton (2000) claims that 'subjectivity' is important to comprehend identity in L2 learning. Weedon (1997) explains subjectivity as "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and



emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world” (p. 32). She describes the individual as diverse and contradictory and also maintains that “the political significance of recentering the subject and abandoning the belief in essential subjectivity is that it opens up subjectivity to change” (p. 33). She also asserts that “language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed” (p. 21). She suggests that identity construction “occurs through the identification by the individual with particular subject positions with discourses” (p. 108).

In addition to the above points, poststructuralists have viewed L2 users as agents who have multiple and fluid social identities. Wenger (2002) defines identity as “a layer of events of participation and reification by which our experience and its social interpretation inform each other” (p. 151), and a person’s identity is socially established, changed, and reconstructed. Luk and Lin (2007) have emphasized a person’s identities are not pre-decided, fixed and static but are “highly fluid, sometimes incoherent, fragmented, multiple, and conflicting” (p. 50). Weedon (1997) considers identity as “a site of disunity and conflict, and central to the process of political change and to preserving the status quo” (p. 21).

Norton (1995) also discusses L2 learning and identity by exemplifying immigrant women in Canada. She shows how Eva reconstructs her social identities as time goes on. Eva’s conception of herself as an immigrant who is an “illegitimate” speaker of English changed into a conception of herself as a multicultural citizen. Eva started to challenge her subject position in the workplace as an illegitimate speaker of English since Eva’s sense of how she related to the social world and who she was began to change. Norton (1995) focuses on three qualities of subjectivity ‘the multiple nature of the subject, subjectivity as a site of struggle, and subjectivity as changing over time (p. 15). She considers second language learners as active agents. Learners’ life changes influence his or her subjectivity, language use, and language awareness. She also illustrates social identity is nonunitary and contradictory through Martina case. Martina was an immigrant, a mother, and a language learner. She frequently described herself as “inferior” and “stupid” since she could not speak English fluently. In spite of feelings of shame and inferiority, in spite of what could be described as a high affective filter, she refused to be silent. Since her social identity as a mother led her to challenge what she understood to be appropriate rules of use governing interactions between Canadians.

Gao et al (2005) investigates Chinese college students’ self-identity changes during English

learning processes. The results indicate that English learning exerted influence on learners’ identities, the most prominent being self-confidence in the Chinese EFL context. Sex, college major, and starting age for English learning had important influence on certain types of self-identity change. English majors demonstrate more changes in self-confidence, productive, additive, and subtractive changes compared with social and natural science majors. Female students scored higher than male students on self-confidence and productive changes. The 9–12 group scores higher than the 13–15 group with additive change. With self-confidence change, those who started English learning under 8 scored lower than groups of higher starting ages.

According to Fairclough (1993), discourse is “way of signifying experiences from a particular perspective” (p. 138), and is an important form of social practice that “produces and changes knowledge, identities, and social relations including power relations, and at the same time is also shaped by other social practices and structures” (1992, p. 65). According to Fairclough (2003), “achieving social identity in a full sense is a matter of being capable of assuming social roles but personifying them, investing them with one’s own personality (or personal identity), enacting them in a distinctive way” (p. 161).

Davies and Harré (1990) assert that identities can be negotiated by those who wish to position themselves. Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) proposed three different types of identities which are assumed identities, imposed identities, and negotiable identities. According to Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004), “all three categories acquire a particular status within unique sociohistorical circumstances. Options that are acceptable for and, therefore, not negotiated by some groups and individuals, may be contested by other group, or even the same group at a different point in time (p. 21).

The relationship between identity and language becomes a significant topic of research in bilingualism and second language acquisition (Hall, 2002; Norton, 2000; Schumann, 1978). Language is not only an instrument for communication. It is related to cultural values that establish one’s self-identity. There is a set of “non-linguistic outcomes” where self-identity changes belonged after learning a new language (Gardner, 1985). Heller (1987) emphasizes the poststructuralist view of social identity which is subject to change and multiple and current conceptions of the individual in SLA theory need to be reconceptualized. Second language acquisition (SLA) theorists have not developed a comprehensive theory of social identity which integrates the language learner and the language learning context.

Many SLA theorists have distinguished between the language learner and the language learning context. The individual is described with respect



to his/her motivation to learn a second language. For example, Krashen (1981, 1982) hypothesizes that comprehensible input in the presence of a low affective filter is the major variable in SLA. This affective filter is composed of the learners' self-confidence, motivation, and anxiety state. All of these variables pertain to the individual rather than the social context. Furthermore, the personality has been explained unidimensionally as extroverted or introverted, uninhibited or inhibited, field independent or field dependent. Most definitions of the individual in SLA research presuppose that every person has a fixed, unique, and coherent core such as introvert/extrovert, motivated/unmotivated, field independent/field dependent. The concept of motivation as taken up in the SLA literature considers the language learner as having a coherent and unified identity which organizes the intensity and the type of a language learners' motivation.

On the other hand, poststructuralism explains individual as dynamic, diverse, and contradictory; recentered rather than centered; multiple rather than unitary. The conception of social identity as a site of struggle indicates that social identity is contradictory and multiple.

Other theories of SLA have paid more attention to social rather than individual variables in language learning. The social in this SLA theory indicates group differences between the target language group and the language learner group (Schumann, 1976). Since the language learners have a complex social identity that must be understood with reference to larger social structures. According to Heller (1987), it is through language that a person gains access to—or is denied access to—powerful social networks that give learners the opportunity to speak, and it is through language that a person negotiates a sense of self within and across different sites at different points in time. This indicates that language is not considered as a neutral medium of communication but is conceived with reference to its social meaning.

In the classical social psychological theory of language learning, two sets of learning outcome, nonlinguistic and linguistic, are proposed (Gardner, 1985). Nonlinguistic outcomes indicate more general changes in the learner and linguistic outcomes refer to target language proficiency.

Lambert (1975) proposed two different types of bilingualism, subtractive and additive, which indicate changes in the language learners' self-concept in the nonlinguistic outcomes (Lambert, 1974). With subtractive bilingualism, target language and cultural identity replace learners' cultural identity and native language. On the other hand, the learners acquire target language and cultural identity as well as preserve their native language and cultural identity with additive bilingualism. A few researchers (Schumann, 1978) consider subtractive bilingualism

as ideal while many researchers favor additive bilingualism. Since the 1990s, some attempts have been made to expand Gardner's classical model (Tremblay & Gardner, 1995). However, most of the expansions were about the influencing factors rather than the outcome of language learning. There have been a few studies on learners' identity changes (Norton, 1995).

Gao (2001, 2002) suggests "productive bilingualism" to substitute "subtractive and additive bilingualism." The command of the native and target language reinforces each other positively and productive bilingualism has a productive orientation in language learning.

Gao et al. (2002) show the development of three college learners' identities. They maintain that EFL learning can be "part and parcel of students' self identity construction" (p. 115) and demonstrate how English learners exercised different degrees of agency in the establishment of self-identity.

Furthermore, the widespread of English in the process of globalization causes a shift from nationalism to transnationalism and it has motivated increasing researches on the impact of English learning on learners' national identities (Block & Cameron, 2002; Joseph, 2004; Phillips, 1992, 2008; Risager, 2006). Some researchers (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000) even assert that English plays an invasive role that conflicts with the linguistic and cultural integrity of other nations.

A further group of researchers suggest that young English learners can have both a global identity and a local identity which "gives them a sense of belonging to a worldwide culture" (Arnett, 2002, p. 777). Ryan (2006) describes one aspect of identity of learners who study English as an L2 in their countries by expanding the concept of "L2 learners' global imagined identity" (p. 42). Ryan (2006) observes whether the culture accompanying the language of globalization adds to or subtracts from the individual's existing cultural identity is significant in deciding learner willingness or unwillingness to acquire that culture's language, and that "if English really is integral to the globalization processes and learners also feel a part of these processes, then an element of the 'foreignness' ...or threat, is removed" (p. 31).

## Conclusion

As viewed in the above, the relationship between identity and learning a new language becomes a significant topic of research in bilingualism and second language acquisition (Hall, 2002; Norton, 2000; Schumann, 1978). The context of Jeju, where the global education city project is implemented and where rapid socio-cultural and economic changes are occurring, appears to be an appropriate location for a study investigating the English language learners'



identities.

However, linguistic outcomes such as English proficiency have been mostly emphasized in Jeju because English is regarded as a significant instrument for globalization. According to Kim (2010), English education in Jeju has had problems with the instructional methodology which focuses on grammar and English sentence translation. The nonlinguistic effects of English learning such as the social contextual influences on self-identity changes and the mediating role of language in identity construction in English learning process have not received sufficient attention in Jeju.

In addition, initial studies of learner identity have been conducted in countries where English represents a dominant means of communication. Those empirical studies on identity in the field of language learning have focused mainly on immigrant learners' experiences of studying an L2 in their host countries or other similar locations where the learners are immersed in the target language and culture (Belz, 2002; Norton, 1995, 2000; Pavlenko, 2001, 2003).

Relatively few studies examine the influences affecting the identity construction of L2 learners who study a second language in their native or home countries, where the L1 not the L2 is the dominant means of communication (Gao et al., 2002). In the case of Jeju, there have been very few studies on learners' L2 identities. Therefore, it is a proper place for probing on the learners' identity changes since it is the place where the significance of English friendly environment is emphasized. A review of the relevant literature reveals aspects of L2 identity still require further investigation and research. There has been much debate on the role of English in shaping learners' national identity in the process of globalization (Joseph, 2004; Pennycook, 1998) and the mediating role of language in identity construction has not received sufficient attention.

Enormous efforts and investment will be required to make Jeju successful free international city. Especially fostering favorable English environment is really crucial to change Jeju into an English education hub in northeast Asia. In recognition of this fact, we need to consider not only English learners' linguistic competence but also non-linguistic competence such as English learners' identity changes during their L2 learning processes.

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