

Learning Korean and Imagined Gendered Identities in the Autobiographical Narratives of Marriage Migrant Women in South Korea*

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Abstract

This study explores the ways in which the identities of migrant women married to Korean men in South Korea interact with their commitment to learning Korean as a Second Language (KSL) as seen in their autobiographical narratives. Through a qualitative content analysis of a selection of stories based on purposive sampling and by drawing upon Norton's notions of "investment" and "imagined communities," this study attempts to present the complex interplay between KSL learners' identities and their commitment to language learning. The findings demonstrate that migrant women's L2 learning identities are deeply interwoven with their gender identity and their sense of membership in the imagined communities. A migrant woman's imagined gender identity is based on their notion of "becoming a good mother," a mother who is responsible for bringing up her children to become good citizens in the host country they have newly settled in. Furthermore, their narratives on learning Korean indicate that Korean language learning serves as a conduit for them to earn cultural and social capital, allowing them to exercise their agency in the process of building up a transnational identity. Finally, some pedagogical implications for teaching KSL are provided.

Key words

investment, L2, Korean as a second language (KSL), imagined communities, imagined identities, marriage migrant women

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Introduction

As transnational migration has become a global phenomenon as a result of globalization (Cho, 2010; Wong, 2007), South Korea (hereafter, Korea) has also witnessed an upsurge in the influx of migrants since the 1990s and has gradually shifted to a multicultural society (Cho, 2015). As of 2018, the number of migrants in Korea was approximately 2,200,000, amounting to 4% of the Korean population (Ministry of Justice, 2018), an increase approximately five times greater than the one in 2007 (Ministry of Justice, 2007). One of the factors that contributed to Korea's rapid transformation into a multicultural nation is the increase in the number of international marriages, particularly of migrant women who migrated to become the spouses of Korean men (Cho, 2010; Kim & Chung, 2017). The number of these migrant women began to increase dramatically since 1995, when the Korean government implemented a policy called "Promoting the Marriage of Rural Bachelors," in an attempt to solve the shortage of brides for bachelors from rural areas. Furthermore, influenced by the Korean government's resumption of its diplomatic ties with China, the influx of Chinese migrant women, including ethnic Korean-Chinese, rose sharply. Since the 2000s, women from Southeast Asian countries such as Vietnam, Thailand, and the Philippines have constantly migrated to Korea (Nam, 2009).

Unlike other migrants who either moved to Korea as a family unit or resided in Korea temporarily for employment purposes, "marriage migrant women"¹ migrated to Korea with the aim of marrying Korean men. Although the Korean government has supported multicultural families in Korean society through the legal enactment in 2008, marriage migrant women continue to occupy a lower socio-economic position than other Koreans in Korean society (Cho, 2015; Kim & Chung, 2017). Most migrant women who migrate with the purpose of marriage come to Korea from lower-income countries in Southeast Asia, and often come with the hope of a better life. They choose marriage as a reason for migration because either it costs them a lot less than migration for employment (Cho, 2010), or they seek to provide financial support for their families suffering from poverty in their home countries. As a result, many Koreans tend to hold a prejudice against

¹ In this paper, the researcher uses the term "marriage migrant women" in line with Kim and Chung (2017) to refer to women whose purpose of migration was marriage with Korean men and also to those who came to marry Korean men after migrating with another purpose such as employment.

marriage migrant women and see them as gold diggers from underdeveloped countries who only marry Korean men for monetary purposes (Nam, 2009). Many of their Korean husbands live in rural areas and are in relatively low socio-economic positions in Korean society (Cho, 2015; Lee, Roh, Lee, Lee, Jung, & Choi, 2012; Nam, 2009). Studies have reported that these migrant women undergo multiple stresses deriving from language and financial difficulties, as well as difficulties in building relationships with their new family members (H. M. Kim, 2008). They are doubly burdened in the process of their settlement in Korean society because they are women and migrants (Kim, 2014).

In their new country, migrant women's ability to communicate is one of the most critical factors in the process of settling in successfully. For migrant women, learning Korean is the foremost strategy for their survival and for the maintenance of their relationships with their new family members such as their Korean husband and in-laws, and other community members. However, for migrant women, learning Korean has not only to do with the development of their communicative abilities for survival, but is also related to their identities and lived experiences (Duff, 2015). The purpose of this study is, therefore, to explore how the identities of migrant women in South Korea are intertwined with their experiences of Korean language learning in their personal narratives, particularly by focusing on the motivation behind learning Korean in their narratives of living in Korea. While a large proportion of the literature relevant to Korean as a Second Language has examined language teaching strategies, assessment, and development of teaching materials, studies focusing on motivation in learning Korean in KSL contexts in relation to the construction of identity are rare, particularly from a sociolinguistic and postmodern perspective. Therefore, as a means to fill this gap in the literature, this study attempts to investigate how marriage migrant women's language learning experiences inform the way in which their identities are constructed in relation to their commitment to Korean language learning.

Literature Review

Identity, Investment, and Imagined Communities

The three conceptual frameworks informing the current study are as follows: the notions of "investment," "imagined communities," and "imagined identities" as developed by Norton (2000, 2013). To understand these three concepts, an articulation of the concept of identity is necessary. In her exploration of immigrant wom-

en's L2 language acquisition and their identities, Norton postulated that a person's identity is socially constructed as well as constructing that person's social reality by drawing on poststructuralist theories of language and identity. Feminist post-structuralist Christine Weedon (1997) emphasized the role of language in the construction of a person's identity. She wrote, "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" (Weedon, 1997, p. 21, cited by Norton, 2013). By drawing on Weedon's notion of subjectivity, Norton argued that identity is relational. She wrote, "One is often subject *of* a set of relationships (i.e., in a position of power) or subject *to* a set of relationships (i.e., in a position of reduced power)" (Norton, 2013, p. 4, italics represent the writer's emphasis). Therefore, a person's identity, according to the poststructuralist perspective, is not coherent or fixed, but multiple, contradictory, and changeable based on what relation a person is in. Similarly, Block (2009) defined identities as being "about negotiating new subject positions at the crossroads of the past, present, and future. Individuals are shaped by their socio-histories, but they also shape their socio-histories as life goes on" (Block, 2009, p. 27). Norton argued, "Identity is influenced by practices common to institutions such as homes, schools and workplaces, as well as available resources, whether they are symbolic or material" (Norton, 2013, p. 2).

The concept of *investment* developed by Norton (Norton, 2000; Norton Peirce, 1995) is a theoretical construct to explain a language learner's motivation behind his/her learning L2, based on poststructuralist perspectives of identity. In her book *Identity and Language Learning* (2000, 2013), Norton asserted that the notion of investment is "a sociological construct" that can explain the complex relationship between language learner identity and his/her commitment to language learning, and that this concept was proposed to "complement the psychological construct of motivation in SLA" (Norton, 2013, p. 3). Through case studies of immigrant women living in Canada in the early 1990s, Norton proposed the concept of investment as a more comprehensive theory of language learner's motivation and its association with second language acquisition (SLA) than the previous theory of motivation and learner identity, which had been based only on a psychological model (Dörnyei, 2001). The previous accounts of a language learner's motivation from psychological perspectives dichotomized learners' motivation by dividing the learners into "motivated or unmotivated, introverted or extroverted, inhibited or uninhibited" (Norton, 2013, p. 2) and thus failed to explain the dynamics of immigrant women's learning English as an L2. Arguably, the idea of identity in this perspective was

based on the assumption that identity is essential, coherent, and unified, and thus does not change, remaining unaffected by the learner's changing contexts (Norton, 2013).

However, as Norton contended, immigrant women's narrative accounts support the idea that their motivation for learning an L2 cannot be explained adequately without considering the sociocultural contextual factors affecting their language practices, since these factors are closely tied to the learner's identity and other sociocultural factors. Learners may sometimes be motivated or demotivated based on where, when, or with whom they are communicating. Although a person may be highly motivated in language learning, she or he may choose not to actively engage in communication because of the prevailing power relationship, particularly if she is in a conversation with a native speaker. Therefore, investment seeks to make a meaningful connection between a learner's desire and commitment to learn a language on the one hand, and his/her identity on the other. Furthermore, the concept of investment is based on Bourdieu's (1977, 1991) notion of "capital," and refers to "the socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language and their often ambivalent desire to learn and practice it" (Norton, 2010, p. 353). Bourdieu (1977, 1991) argued that people invest in learning the target language because they believe that "they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital" (Norton, 2010, p. 353). For instance, L2 learners can commit themselves to learning a target language, which is a type of symbolic capital, with the desire to gain a job, maintain a friendship, or build up other forms of social capital.

The concept of imagined communities was originally coined by Benedict Anderson (1991). A nation, according to Anderson, is a type of imagined community as it is mostly unlikely for people to meet other members of a nation living in all corners of the country, but "in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (p. 6). The term imagined communities refers to "groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of the imagination" (Kanno & Norton, 2003, p. 4). It is the community that the learner wants to belong to when he or she learns a target language, whether it is a professional community, a nation, or any transnational ties. Similarly, imagined identities emerge from a sense of membership in his or her imagined communities or the identity he or she wants to assume in the future. In a language learning context, while most learning occurs through "engagement" (Wenger, 1998), people's investment in learning can also be influenced by the imagined communities they envision (Kanno & Norton, 2004).

L2 Learning, Gender Identity, Investment, and Imagined Communities

A number of studies have explored the construct of investment in language classrooms either in English as a Second Language or in English as a Foreign Language (ESL or EFL) classroom (Duff, 2002; McKay & Wong, 1996; Norton, 2001; Skilton-Sylvester, 2002; Wu, 2017). Norton (2001) illustrated one such case as to how a learner's reluctance to participate in an ESL class in Canada accounted for the relationship between the learner's degree of investment, expressed through her non-participation in a language classroom, and her sense of imagined communities. In Norton's study, a teacher's discouraging comments on the immigrant woman's English proficiency resulted in the student's non-participation as a means of resistance. In another class, despite the teachers' effort to respect cultural diversity in the language classroom, L2 learners' non-participation was a result of their fear of being humiliated in their interactions with their native speaker classmates (Duff, 2002). L2 learners' investment in learning English was also affected by the educational practices and visions, such as instructional methods, teachers' attitudes, or other sociocultural values attached to learning English in Korean college EFL classrooms (Kim, 2013; Wu, 2017). Similarly, learners do not engage in classroom language practices because of the unequal power relationship between other native speaker classmates and themselves, institutional practices (Wu, 2017), and people's valuing of learning English as cultural capital (Kim, 2013).

Other research has addressed how L2 learning commitment is closely associated with the language learners' gender identities (Menard-Warwick, 2009; Pavlenko, 2001; Skilton-Sylvester, 2002). In her study, which involved interviews with three immigrant women in the USA, Menard-Warwick (2009) argued that immigrant women's personal narratives about their L2 learning can help us understand the "participants' perspectives on gender and learning" (p. 49). She argued that the participants' gender identities emerged as "the key factor in their decisions to pursue or not pursue English language proficiency at particular times in their lives" (p. 48). Skilton-Sylvester (2002) researched four immigrant adult women from Cambodia in the USA to explore how their participation in the ESL classroom was associated with their gender identity at home. As all participants in her study were married, their roles as wives or mothers, with varying reasons, affected their commitment to learning English. Skilton-Sylvester (2002, pp. 22–23) contended, "their cultural experiences as Cambodian women who share a language, history, and experience of being transplanted from and to the same geographic locations have been an integral part of understanding their investment in participating in adult ESL programs."

Among the rare research conducted in the KSL context, Park (2017) investigated how marriage migrant women from Southeast Asian countries resisted and negotiated their identities in the context of the marginalization that derived from their low language proficiency and ethnicity in South Korea. Through a narrative analysis of the participants' interview data, Park reported that marriage migrant women in Korea felt that they were stigmatized by their linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and by the purpose of their migration, their class, gender, and race. These women attempted to exercise their agency by gaining legitimacy and by "enhancing their linguistic capital valued in professional settings" (Park, 2017, p. 118). The current study explores how the identities of marriage migrant women in Korea are interconnected with their investment in learning Korean through Norton's notion of investment and imagined identity.

Research Methodology

Research Context and Data Analysis

This study analyzed a selection of narratives written by migrant women who migrated to Korea for the purpose of marriage with Korean men, thus forming multicultural families in Korea. The analysis of these migrant women's autobiographical narratives can be advantageous to studies of L2 and bilingual studies as they can offer "insights into people's private worlds, inaccessible to experimental methodologies, and thus provide the insider's view of the processes of language learning" (Pavlenko, 2007, pp. 164–165). However, to avoid the pitfall that a content analysis of autobiographical narratives tends to merely become "a laundry list of observations, factors, or categories, illustrated by quotes from participants" (Pavlenko, 2007, p. 167), the researcher attempted to categorize the themes in association with each other based on the theoretical framework informed by Norton (2013).

The autobiographical narratives of migrant women in this study were selected from a collection of books that were originally compiled and published from 2007 to 2017 by the Research Institute of Asian Women at Sookmyung Women's University, South Korea. Since 2007, the research center has hosted a writing contest for marriage migrant women. Although each year, the title of the book has varied slightly with different subtitles, the main theme of the writing contest has always been "My Life in South Korea". In 2007, the first year of the writing contest, only migrant women who lived in Seoul were eligible to participate. From the following year, the eligibility was expanded to include any migrant women nationwide.

Numbering three to five pages on average, marriage migrant women wrote their memoirs in their native languages. These were later translated into Korean by a professional translator at the research institute before they were finally published both in their native languages and in Korean within a volume.

Of the 345 memoirs, the researcher selected 152 written by marriage migrant women from Southeast Asian countries in the first stage of sampling. The writers came from Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, Cambodia, and Malaysia. Of the 152 memoirs, the researcher analyzed stories published only in 2011 and 2015 using purposive sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), as the stories written by writers from Southeast Asian countries were mostly present in both volumes, best fitting the purpose of the current study. Although marriage migrant women's autobiographical stories included other themes such as difficulties in their relationships with mothers-in-law, happiness they experienced, and cultural differences between Korea and their home countries, the researcher specifically selected stories that included language learning experiences in detail.

The researcher employed an ethnographic content analysis method (Altheide, 1987; Grbich, 2013; Shan, 2015), which differs from traditional content analysis in that while the latter follows a sequential method in data sampling from categorization to sampling, the former can be conducted through "the reflective, interactive, and reiterative nature of the research process" (Shan, 2015, p. 50). The researcher constantly compared the data and returned to the data to find repetitive patterns and to understand the context of their occurrence through the narrative. As all narratives were written in Korean, the narratives quoted in this paper were translated into English by the researcher.

Research Results

"I Want to Become a Good Mother": Gender Identity and Investment

One repetitive pattern that emerged from the analysis was that their language learning motivation was deeply associated with their gender identity, in particular, their identity as mothers. The memoir written by a Vietnamese mother Ahn² titled "Foreigner Mom" illustrates her experience of how learning Korean can be essential for becoming a good mother. Ahn immigrated to South Korea to marry a Korean

² All participants' names in this study are pseudonyms.

man when she was 27 years old, after being introduced to a commercial matchmaking broker by her friend. She is now the mother of one son and one daughter and lives in Korea. In her first two years after immigration, she could not learn Korean because of her pregnancy and child rearing responsibilities. However, from the time she began sending her children to nursery school, Ahn began to understand how important it was to learn Korean to become a good mother. She wrote, "After the birth of my children, I came to realize that if I do not know Korean, my life will become very difficult and conversation with my children will also be difficult, and thus I would not be able to become a good mother" (RIAW, 2015, p. 31).

One of the episodes that Ahn introduced the reader to pertains to her children's expression of embarrassment because they did not take textbooks to nursery school for their class activities as instructed by their teacher. Since their mother was not able to read the daily note provided by the nursery school, she was not able to prepare the items that her children needed to participate in activities at school. In another episode, she narrated her frustration at being incapable of understanding her daughter's Korean expression, "My eyes are irritated by sunlight." Similarly, Ahn's experiences of several other difficulties as a result of being unable to communicate with her children and her decision to study Korean thereafter attest to the post-structuralist argument that a person's identity is constructed through the social context and through one's lived experiences. Being a mother who used Korean as a Second Language, she was forced to use it to communicate with her children to practice good motherhood. Arguably, Ahn's motivation to learn Korean was deeply associated with her identity as a mother. Her investment in language learning, as Norton argued, had an intense relationship with her identity as the mother of two young children, for whom she needed to devote every effort to learn Korean, so that she could communicate with them effectively and not make them feel frustrated or embarrassed.

The story of another woman from Vietnam, Jiyoung (Korean name), is a good example to demonstrate the relationship between the identity of a mother and the investment in learning Korean. Jiyoung had been living in Korea for 10 years when she wrote this story. She had lived in a rural area in Vietnam before that and had to stop studying when she was still in high school because of poverty. Later, she decided to marry a Korean man to pay off her mother's debts. She began to learn Korean at the Center for Multicultural Family. Jiyoung wrote:

Most migrant women who come to Korea try to get jobs in a restaurant or a factory, as they want to earn a lot of money quickly. However, I thought

to live well in Korea, I need to get adjust myself to Korean culture and communicate well in Korean. We can earn some money to some degree, but I thought that if I became a qualified person, a better opportunity to get a better job would come. Especially, above all, while I am rearing my kids, I need to know important information and to do so, I need to know Korean well. Because I thought I have to live as an honorable mother, and I thought that if their mother does not speak Korean, it will hurt them. (RIAW, 2015, pp. 435–443)

Jiyoung's narrative indicates that her motivation to learn Korean was associated with her sense of being an "honorable mother." Gaining knowledge and resources is also included in her idea of motherhood, and she could facilitate this through proficiency in Korean.

Sucha, who came from Thailand, had lived in Korea for eight years after marriage. She also referred to the relationship between being a good mother and learning Korean. Although her husband was not the first son, he supported his family as his older brother had cancer. Sucha expressed her life in Korea as a struggle, and wrote:

My dream is to become a good mother to my kids. My hope is that each of my children grows to become a great person and to be beloved and respected by other people. Although our family is struggling due to the poverty, we will bring them up as great citizens. (RIAW, 2011, pp. 276–277)

These narratives reflect three marriage migrant women's voices and show that the impetus for learning Korean and other related literacy practices in Korea came from their identities as mothers after marriage.

Investment and the Imagined Identities of a Professional Worker and a Transnational Being

In this study, two different types of imagined communities and identities emerged from the analysis of marriage migrant women's autobiographical accounts of their experiences in learning Korean. On the one hand, in most migrant wives' narratives, their aspiration to belong to their imagined communities was addressed through the notion of imagined identities emerging in the process of learning Korean, and the

imagined community in this case was a professional workplace. A common job they all wished to secure was that of a translator or interpreter between Korean and their native languages. This is particularly important to them as such jobs can help them maintain their identities as professional workers, and can offer them both prestige and financial support.

Furthermore, it could also help marriage migrant women stay connected with their native identities as Vietnamese, Filipinas, and Cambodians. Their attempt to invest in learning Korean to find jobs as interpreters and translators can help them access opportunities to develop their imagined identities of professional female workers and can help incorporate their pre-migration ethnic identities. A woman from the Philippines, Mary, narrated the difficulties she underwent while raising her son, who had autism. Her narrative demonstrates that her investment in studying in Korea by becoming a graduate student taking evening classes for an MBA degree was intermingled with her sense of imagined communities. Despite her circumstantial difficulties, Mary argued that the opportunity to learn gave her courage to live as a stronger person. She wrote:

Working and studying were like therapy to me. It was my “me time” away from home. I need to keep my mind and body healthy to be able to take care of my children. I have met new friends at work and in school even though it was difficult because of my limited Korean. (RIAW, 2015, p. 75)

Mary's sense of imagined communities was extended to the community of migrant women in Korea, where she served as a resource and helper to other multicultural families. She wrote:

As of now, I am still working for a Multicultural Family Support Center, and I am very happy that I have the opportunity to help other multicultural families and give them hope that all their problems can be resolved. I hope I can serve an inspiration to all the foreign wives who tend to give up. I would like to share my story that no matter how hard your problem is, never, ever give up. (RIAW, 2015, p. 76)

Eunsoo was a Vietnamese woman who had lived in Korea for 8 years when she wrote her story, “My Effort for Happiness in the Future.” When she migrated to Korea, she first worked for a company as a cleaner of large mineral water bottles, and worked long hours starting early each morning and finishing late at night.

However, her husband encouraged her to study Korean, since she would have access to better opportunities for work. Eunsoo wrote:

My husband told me to quit the job because I have to work for too long a time with very little money. Maybe he prefers getting smiles and happiness in our family to earning money. Then he said, “You will earn more money with less effort and time than now if you study Korean hard. There will be more opportunities for you.” I asked myself, “Can there be any work that I can do in this country?” After several months, I stopped working there. (RIAW, 2011, p. 123)

What Eunsoo’s husband mentioned indicates a cultural belief that language learning can be a channel through which a woman can gain economic, cultural, and symbolic capital, as Bourdieu (1991) argued. Although Eunsoo was skeptical of the possibility of gaining a decent job in Korea, where she was marginalized as a foreigner, she followed her husband’s advice. She wrote:

I studied Korean very hard, carrying a Korean-Vietnamese dictionary all the time. Or sometimes, I studied Korean through reading a newspaper when I thought it was not enough. My husband helped me a lot, explaining to me the meanings of vocabulary words in such detail that I could easily understand them. From that time on, I studied Korean very hard. I could understand Korean a lot by reading newspapers or children’s storybooks. (RIAW, 2011, p. 124)

This shows that her investment in learning Korean was not made in a formal educational institution such as a Korean language classroom, but was conducted in an informal setting where she relied on other resources, such as her husband, to learn. In the latter part of her story, Eunsoo narrated how she became an interpreter and translator in the Multicultural Center nearby. After discussing the matter with her husband and consulting with a staff member at the Multicultural Center, she decided to take a Korean Proficiency Test administered by a university in order to get the job. Finally, she went to work at the center as an interpreter and translator. Eunsoo’s story demonstrates that her commitment to learning Korean was influenced by her notion of both imagined communities and identities. Here, her aspiration to become a professional worker and her investment in learning Korean contributed to her development as a translator and interpreter. Toward the end of the story, Eunsoo wrote:

There are many marriage migrant women visiting the Multicultural Center because of their difficulties in language, cultural differences, social customs, or their husband. [...] I wish they could live a happier life by respecting each other, by following the models of other multicultural families living happily. [...] I have made a great deal of effort to solve these problems by offering counseling for them without being paid. Many people have difficulties. However, they should not give up their hope. I realized that we should put in more effort for a better life. I can remember my husband's encouragement. It was his encouragement that made me what I am. [...] Being able to be proficient in Korean became the biggest asset that I have today. (RIAW, 2011, p. 125)

Although Eunsoo's story attests to the fact that her being able to work resulted from her investment in language learning, it can be contended that her investment in L2 learning opened up more possibilities for her than just offering an opportunity to gain a decent job. Through her job, she found occasions to connect with other marriage migrant women and to build networks with them, thus finding emotional affinities. Her transnational identity arguably emerged from this opportunity, which was directly related to her sense of imagined communities and identities.

Hyun's story, titled "My Effort in Korea," also demonstrates how her investment in learning Korean led to a better life. Her story illustrates that language learning is deeply associated with the desire to gain economic, cultural, and symbolic capital and, as it was in Hyun's case, her desire to affiliate herself with her native community. A Vietnamese, Hyun married a Korean man in 2010 and became pregnant right after marriage. While her husband was away from home for work, she had to spend most of her time with her mother-in-law, and suffered from depression for a while. Through conversations with other marriage migrant women, she realized that she had to change her attitude. Hyun's investment in learning did not stop there. After her son turned 4 years old, she began to attend a Korean class offered by a community center for multicultural families. After a year, she received a certificate after taking the Test for Korean Language Proficiency and took teacher training courses to teach multiculturalism as a lecturer. She narrated the changes in her life and expressed satisfaction after her investment in learning in the following words:

I think it was from that time on when my life started to change. It was as if there was a new chapter opening up in my life. Now I am working as a lecturer who teaches Vietnamese culture in kindergartens. Although my

income is not high, I feel very rewarded through my work. I am very proud of myself as I feel I became a smart mom, capable home-keeper, devoted daughter-in-law, and multicultural instructor. I am really pleased to hear the cute kindergarteners calling me “a Vietnam Teacher.” (RIAW, 2015, p. 281)

Hyun’s narrative displays the process of how her investment in learning L2 became possible for her as she imagined the communities and identities that she wanted to belong to (Kanno & Norton, 2003). Hyun’s life story attests to the fact that one’s identity is in a state of constant change. Her identity as a low-skilled person with no language proficiency with lower class status in Korean society was a positive impetus for her to push herself to study Korean by imagining a community. Her decision to become a lecturer to teach Vietnamese culture can also be understood as her identity being expanded into a transnational identity in imagination, through which she was able to assert a part of her identity and feel connected to her culture.

Investment, Motherhood, and Citizenship

Another theme that emerged from the marriage migrant women’s narratives was the notion of citizenship in both their imagined communities and their identities. Their imagined identities were articulated in the discourse of motherhood where they positioned themselves as mothers of Korean citizens. Leah from the Philippines had lived in Korea for 15 years from 1996, when she married a Korean man. She wrote about her unfortunate married life with her husband. Her husband had an affair with another woman, ran away with her, and stopped supporting his family. With the help of her father-in-law and brother-in-law, Leah raised her two daughters, who were in middle school and in sixth grade, respectively, at the time of writing her story. Despite her unhappy marriage, she lives in Korea because of her sense of responsibility toward her children. She wrote:

I still teach students from afternoon to late at night in an academy. My children are the hope in my life. I am struggling to cope with my adversity. However, I am capable of raising my children all by myself. We are becoming stronger as time goes on [...] I became stronger thanks to the sense of responsibility as I realized what it means to become a responsible citizen. My daughters are invaluable not because they are my children, but

because they are the ones we need to protect and raise as members of this society. Children are the hope for our future. (RIAW, 2015, pp. 251–252)

Leah positioned herself as a citizen and a mother of citizens of Korea through the discourse of what it means to become a responsible citizen. Although her married life in the new country was not happy, it was her children who sustained her.

Nuen from Vietnam also illustrated her imagined identity through the idea of citizenship. She had been in Korea for five years when she wrote her story. Her husband, a poor man who had seven brothers and sisters, works as a deliveryman. They have two daughters and she was pregnant with a son at the time of writing her story. Not having their own house, they were forced to live in their boss's house with his family. Expressing her eagerness to learn Korean, she wrote: "I tried to participate in our children's school events in order to learn a lot." (p. 74) However, as she had not acquired citizenship, she wanted to apply for it. She wrote:

"I think I decided to raise my son who is God's present to me. As a Korean I will bring up my kids and help my country in the future. [...] I think that I have to become a better Korean citizen through learning Korean very hard and saving money. To become a good mother, and live a better life for my kids, I will devote all my efforts." (RIAW, 2011, pp. 74–75)

Nuen's narrative suggests that her life in Korea and her investment in learning Korean were closely connected to her identities as both a mother and a Korean citizen. She emphasized her position as a mother who raised the future workforce of Korea as well as her identity as a legitimate citizen of Korea.

Discussion

Pavlenko once argued that immigrant women's narratives serve as a good source of evidence to show how an individual perceives the social and cultural contexts while learning an L2 (Pavlenko, 2001). In this sense, marriage migrant women's narratives in this study demonstrate the interplay among language learning, investment, and their sense of identities in a larger social and historical context in Korea. Migrant wives' autobiographical narratives not only provide information on the process of how they learned their L2 in their receiving country but also inform readers of the sociocultural context in which the language learning took place. Unlike other immigrant women in the West, who usually migrate with their families as a

unit (Cho, 2015) or as laborers, marriage migrant women in Korea have different historical contexts in their purpose and process of migration. Therefore, their language learning experiences should be illuminated as such.

A fuller understanding of the marriage migrant women's personal accounts of Korean language learning can be possible only through an acknowledgment of their particular role as reproducers of the nation's offspring as well as their socio-economically marginalized position in Korean society. In their telling of their Korean language learning experiences, their gender identity emerged as a particularly salient feature, closely related to their motivation for learning Korean in the newly settled country. Their becoming mothers in Korea through marriage was their primary impetus for studying Korean. Their stories showed that they came to work harder at studying Korean to become good mothers who could educate their children to cope with all struggles in life. It can be argued that by telling their personal stories, marriage migrant women in this study "claimed to be a particular kind of a person" (Menard-Warwick, 2009), that is, a good mother who is capable of raising her children in the new country. Despite having constant challenges in their lives in Korea in the process of taking on the new roles of wife, mother, or daughter-in-law within the new family, these women stressed that the most important factor that made them continue studying Korean was the role they played as mothers. Like the Cambodian immigrant women in Skilton-Sylvester's study (2002), their married status and identity as mothers were deeply associated with their investment in learning Korean as their L2 in their new homeland.

It should be noted that the use of the mother's heritage language in educating the children of marriage migrant women has not been actively encouraged in Korean society, particularly in the early stages of the shift to a multicultural society in Korea (Kweon, 2017). It was socially agreed and expected that education for children with a multicultural family background should be conducted in Korean because of the strong belief prevailing in Korean society that Korea should be a homogeneous, pure-blooded nation (Lee & Kweon, 2018). However, as many studies have reported, some problems arising from not encouraging bilingualism, such as marriage migrant women's children's unstable attachment with their mothers (Yoon & Lee, 2011) and their relatively slower language development (B. S. Kim, 2008), the Korean government began to support teaching children of multicultural families their mother's heritage language at the institutional level more actively since 2009 onward. Although the percentage of marriage migrant women using both Korean and their heritage languages is gradually on the increase, studies (Kim, 2012; Kweon, 2017; Park & Han, 2010) report that many marriage migrant women are still re-

luctant to use their L1 in bringing up their children. This is partly because their Korean families discourage them from using their heritage language, and because of their own beliefs that using Korean to communicate with their children is more advantageous for their future (Kim, 2012; Kweon, 2017). In addition, their preference not to use their heritage language while raising their children is also related to their concern about how the use of their heritage language may affect their children's Korean language development (Park & Han, 2010).

As a marginalized group in Korean society both as migrants and as women, migrant wives account for their language learning experiences in support of Norton's contention (2000, 2013) that L2 learners' learner identities are deeply interwoven with their socio-economic status in a particular historical moment. Socially recognized and institutionally positioned as the one who assumes the role of mother or wife in the host country, marriage migrant women place their own identities as mothers at the center of their language learning experiences and their investment in learning KSL. Paradoxically, in this study, while the gender identity addressed in marriage migrant women's autobiographical stories reveals that their status in Korea is still circumscribed by traditional gender roles, the traditional role of mothers as caretakers and educators of their children serves as the facilitator for their own learning and the source of their empowerment in Korean society. This is because, as migrants in Korea, these women can strongly desire to be recognized as legitimate members of society, and it is only through the children they give birth to in the host country that they can be acknowledged as such (Yih, 2010). Considering that in most cases, their marriage is not based on romantic love but on economic necessity, migrant wives' emphasis on being good mothers suggests that this role may probably be the only security or comfort they can gain in their host country.

Moreover, as Mary's story suggests, for migrant women like her, investment in learning was triggered by the desire to become good mothers, but L2 Korean proficiency provided these women with the opportunity to build up their social capital (Bourdieu, 1991). On the one hand, language learning served as a conduit for their social mobility and helped them access better living conditions as it opened up the possibility for them to gain higher-paying jobs, thus improving their socio-economic status. On the other hand, attaining social capital, which can be earned through social relationships or networks, became possible through their investment in learning. Through language learning, migrant women's extended new identities were able to evolve when they formed new friendships, secured new jobs, and became graduate students.

The most compelling factor in the stories of marriage migrant women is that their

imagined communities and their sense of imagined identities could be constructed through emotional affinity and through what McMillan and Chavis (1986) termed as “shared affective connections” (p. 16). Although they did not physically reside in the native community territory, their sense of belonging in their imagined communities existed (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). It can thus be argued that the imagined communities illustrated in the marriage migrant women’s narratives redefined their identities, offered them agency, and promoted the development of their transnational sense of imagined communities and identities without their physical residence in their native countries. Therefore, arguably, the KSL learners’ identities as migrant wives were in a constant state of change in relation to investment, an identity in progress that constitutes and is constituted by the social factors (Norton, 2013).

In this study, marriage migrant women’s language learning identity recounted through the discourse of motherhood was positioned in a larger sense of community: that is, a nation. To put this differently, marriage migrant women from Southeast Asian countries positioned their individual identities in the larger imagined community, that is, Korea as a nation, with the desire to belong to the nation by asserting their positions as legitimate citizens and as important persons who are raising future Korean citizens. This account is in support of Kanno and Norton’s (2003, p. 7) argument that “humans are capable of connecting with communities that lie beyond the local and immediate and that investment in such imagined communities strongly influences identity construction and engagement in learning.”

At the heart of marriage migrant women’s struggle to survive in Korea lies the narrative of learning Korean, serving as a signpost to understand their life experiences: the effort they put into becoming good mothers, good resources for the extended community members, and finally good citizens of South Korea. Marriage migrant women’s autobiographical stories of their lives in Korea as learners of the Korean language illustrate the interplay of investment, language learner identity, and imagined communities in their situated social contexts. Their stories show that while marriage migrant women’s language learner identities were subject to their gender or ethnic identities, through their investment in Korean learning, they could exercise their agency in Korean society by positioning themselves as legitimate mothers, new citizens (Cho, 2015), or mothers of the future generation.

Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

This study explored the ways in which marriage migrant women’s identities related to learning Korean as their L2 in Korea. By drawing on the conceptual frame-

work of investment, and imagined communities and identities, this study analyzed the autobiographical stories of marriage migrant women from Southeast Asian countries published in both their native languages and Korean. Through the analysis, the researcher argued that marriage migrant women's narratives served as evidence to support the thesis that L2 learners' investments in Korean language learning were influenced by their identities and notions of imagined communities and identities in their lived experiences in a particular historical and social context (Norton, 2000). In particular, their gendered identities of being mothers and the mothers of citizens of Korea emerged as the key feature. Deeply tied to their particular position as marriage migrants in Korean society, migrant wives' gender identities became a strong impetus for learning Korean. Furthermore, their imagined identities as professional workers such as interpreters or teachers of their native cultures further propelled their investment in learning Korean and other subjects in Korean. The current study found that the interplay of investment, marriage migrant women's gender identities, and their sense of imagined communities demonstrated that their motivation for Korean language learning was both constructed by their social identity and was constructing their identities in a new way. Therefore, their investment in L2 learning contributed toward enlarging and developing their identities into legitimate citizens of Korea and transnational beings.

This study has a few limitations as well. The data analysis was based only on narratives in published books. Drawing on other sources of data such as oral interviews with the writers could yield more in-depth discussions. Furthermore, because migrant wives' autobiographical narratives were written for a writing contest, there could be some omissions in their accounts of their experiences. With their conscious awareness of a particular audience, it is highly likely that for them to win an award in the contest, their account of their language learning experiences, and other life experiences in their stories, may have been twisted by intentionally avoiding negative comments or by omitting any discrimination they may have experienced in their learning process in Korea.

The findings of this study have pedagogical implications for L2 teaching practitioners and researchers. First, despite the availability of language support programs for marriage migrant women nationwide in Korea, it is suggested that the development of online language learning programs for marriage migrant women be undertaken and such programs be distributed freely. This is necessary especially for those living in the remote rural areas and those who have difficulties accessing learning programs because of immediate pregnancy and child rearing right after marriage. Furthermore, implementing teaching programs for marriage migrant women's fam-

ily members in Korea should also be carried out more actively to teach them how to support and communicate with the newly migrated wives.

Second, although this issue is not directly related to L2 education, institutional and familial support encouraging marriage migrant women to use their native language while raising their children can be beneficial to both migrant wives and their children. For example, it is helpful for marriage migrant women in reducing stresses and difficulties that derive from their lack of Korean language ability while raising their children. Many studies have addressed the positive potential of implementing bilingual education for the children of multicultural families. For instance, it can lead to an improvement in the children's self-esteem and academic abilities and the realization of their potential to serve as resources in international relationships in the future (Cho & Kim, 2013; Lee & Kweon, 2018; Won, 2012). Therefore, education to change people's attitudes—particularly marriage migrant family members' attitudes toward bilingual education—is necessary.

Third, Norton's (2000, 2013) claim that the degree of L2 learners' commitment to language learning depends on contextual factors can be useful for Korean language teaching practitioners. As language learning is in a sense a process of identity development, any teaching environment that allows L2 learners to relate to their identity construction positively will become an important issue. Language teachers should consider how to integrate learners' identities in designing their lesson plans and in selecting teaching materials and framing classroom activities. Whether the learners are there for personal development or for their career aspirations, an L2 classroom should be the space in which learners' imagination can be expanded in relation to their future identities (Wu, 2017). Coupled with this, L2 language classroom teachers should make efforts to increase students' investment in language learning and to respect students' gender, race, class, or ethnic identities.

Last, but not the least, all of the aforementioned points can be linked to the question of how to provide L2 learners with classroom environments in which they can exercise their agency. A language classroom that enables learners to assert their agency is the place in which they can be empowered. One of the suggestions would be the development of pedagogical strategies for empowering students, such as the implementation of “culturally responsive language teaching” or “critical literacy pedagogy.” For L2 teachers to create an optimal educational environment for language and literacy development, not only should they impart linguistic knowledge to L2 learners but they should also consider pedagogical strategies that recognize and develop the learners' identities.

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