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MULTILINGUAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AND THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF KOREAN INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS

This longitudinal multi-case study focuses on the multilingual identity development of three Korean international students during their first three years of doctoral study. The themes identified from multiple rounds of interviews and prolonged observations were viewed in light of a theoretical framework that can be used to conceptualize multilingual identity development of international students in a new context. The framework comprises three multifaceted dynamics - target language characteristics, identity markers, and investment - that function to identify and interpret contextual and internal instances of multilingual identity renegotiation. Results indicated that the participants experienced numerous instances of marginalization in academic and social settings because of social status and language characteristics. It was also found that perceptions of mainstream ideologies held about Asians impact investment in interacting with local students, and that structured opportunities for interaction and social status changes within the institutional context can affect language development and self-esteem. Overall, the research findings indicate a need to internationalize close-minded curricula and pedagogical approaches, to create structured opportunities for positive intercultural exchange and understanding, and to foster a commitment among all campus stakeholders to embrace their roles in realizing a more identity-affirming experience for Korean graduate students.

Keywords: international students ◆ Korean graduate students ◆ multilingualism ◆ identity ◆ longitudinal multi-case study

Introduction

Researchers have provided qualitative and quantitative evidence that international students have difficulty acclimating to the culturally situated academic and social English language norms of Western, English-medium higher education institutions (Bastien et al., 2018; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Such difficulties often lead to confidence-loss, stress, or heightened social and academic anxiety (Lyken-Segosebe, 2017; Ra, 2016; Smiljanic, 2017). Alternatively, it is possible that academic and cultural differences may play an even more important role in learning outcomes than language differences (Safipour et al., 2017). Additionally, international students may experience difficulties during graduate assistantships due to language barriers and culturally bound workplace norms of the host culture (Ashavskaya, 2015; Kuo, 2011). This myriad of challenges can result in isolation, low academic performance, or discrimination (Yeo et al., 2019).

On the positive side, higher education institutions have responded by creating specialized support to accommodate international students' diverse needs, particularly in the form of tutoring services and first-year academic writing and intensive English courses. With around one million international students attending U.S. higher education institutions (IIE, 2022), it is imperative that such support systems are effective; however, many remain inadequate, and there is a substantial amount of room for improvement (Ammigan, 2019; Andrade, 2010).

Empirical research that critically examines support systems available to international students may be more crucial than ever, especially considering the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, anti-Asian sentiments catalyzed by COVID-19, the peak of the Black Lives Matter movement, and Immigration & Customs Enforcement's (ICE) attempts to strip certain international students of their visas. This makes it essential that challenges international students have traditionally faced are not pushed to the side as universities modify their services in response to these manifestations of underlying inequities in U.S. society. This exploratory longitudinal multi-case study follows three Korean international graduate students during their first three years of study to describe and understand the connection between their perceptions of their experiences during their transition to a U.S. university and the development of their multilingual identity. The goal of this study is to shed light on the reality of the adequacy and accessibility of institutional support available for international students. The overarching research question is: *How do Korean graduate students' perceptions of their experiences in a U.S. university inform the formation of their multilingual identity development?*

Related literature and conceptual framework

Linguistic and cultural differences are central to many of the academic and social challenges international students experience at Western universities (Heringer, 2019; Lyken-Segosebe, 2017). Reports of international students, faculty members, and researchers indicate that some international students have particular difficulties with various aspects of the reading, writing, listening, and speaking demands of their English-mediated academic contexts (Neumann et al., 2019; Sheppard et al., 2015). A number of studies also reported that the difference between international students' previous educational experiences and typical Western classroom practices, dynamics, and expectations can be sources of confusion and anxiety, which was found to be especially true for international students from traditionally Confucian heritage cultures. (Ai, 2017; Choi, 2015; Huong et al., 2017; Simpson, 2017). Additionally, linguistic and cultural-related difficulties may persist throughout the entire time international students are at their institutions, not just during the transition period (Lyken-Segosebe, 2017; Zhu & Flaitz, 2005) Multiple reports also indicate that professors did not see supporting international students' linguistic needs as their responsibility (Haan et al., 2017; Neumann et al., 2019), and instead tended to defer language-related teaching opportunities to other sources of English instruction, such as university tutoring services (Andrade, 2010). However, the adequacy of such tutoring services and English for Academic Purposes programs has been called into question by some researchers (Lyken-Segosebe, 2017; Sloan & Porter, 2010). It has also been found that some instructors hold deficit views of international students and their academic abilities (Heringer, 2019; Jin & Schneider, 2019); that international students and domestic students have limited or negative interactions (Yakaboski et al., 2018); and that instructors play a crucial role in facilitating interactions between each group (Yefanova et al., 2017). Research regarding East Asian international students' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic has also revealed widespread explicit discrimination and perceived racism (Koo et al, 2023; Koo & Nyunt, 2023). Similarly, research on the experiences of Korean international students during the pandemic has revealed comparable experiences of racialization (Qiu et al., 2023); however, there is a paucity of research that unambiguously distinguishes between Korean students and the experiences of other East Asian students in U.S. higher education settings, making inquiry into the reality of their lived experiences important to push this field of research forward. Overall, each of these fundamental and widespread issues needs to be taken into serious consideration by researchers and by host institutions at the institutional, departmental, and instructor levels.

In this study, a *multilingual identity* conceptual framework is used to understand why Korean international graduate students perceive their experiences the way they do and also to interpret how contextual influences may have led to identity renegotiation.

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Multilingual identity

The *multilingual identity* framework used in this study serves as both a conceptual and organizational framework. It is comprised of three core constructs: *language ability, identity markers,* and *investment.* The following paragraphs are organized according to each of these constructs and then followed by our interpretation of *context*, which includes *institutional*, *social*, *cultural*, and *linguistic* contextual influences.

Fisher et al. (2018) assert that *multilingual identity* encompasses psychological development in relation to relational/social and historical/contextual influences. This concept can also be more easily understood in terms of the provisional definition of *second language identity* provided by Benson et al. (2013), which refers to "any aspect of a person's identity that is connected to their knowledge or use of a second language" (p. 174). However, the term *multilingual* is used rather than *second language* to label this study's framework because we view it as a more respectful and empowering way to describe the participants of this study, and multilingual people in general. It also allows the framework to be more easily applied to speakers of more than two languages and those considered fluent speakers of a particular language that they acquired as an additional language.

The *language ability* construct of the *multilingual identity* framework consists of all the prescriptive characteristics that make up an individual's linguistic repertoire, including the languages they may speak, their language proficiency, and phonological, syntactical, semantic, and pragmatic features of their linguistic practices. Within this framework, we also emphasize that phenomena related to the intersection of *language ability* and identity development transcend prescriptive definitions of language proficiency because language is deeply connected with emotion. As such, both prescriptive characteristics and emotional implications of *language ability* are incorporated within this construct.

The *identity markers* construct of this framework is meant to denote and encompass a participant's static identity markers, or "'core identity' that holds more uniformly, for ourselves and others, across contexts." (Gee, 1990, p. 99). It is important to note that this view of identity is intentionally static, in the sense that it rejects purely postmodern definitions of identity as fluid and constantly shifting and, instead, adopts a dialogical view of identity. Akkerman & Meijer (2011) describe their interpretation of Hermans' (1996) view of identity as follows:

> Dialogical views provide a theoretical viewpoint that assumes a multiple, discontinuous and social nature of identity, while simultaneously explaining identity as being unitary, continuous and individual. In doing so, dialogical views combine a postmodern and a modern stance.

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Therefore, within the framework, *identity markers* and *multilingual identity* are interconnected entities but discussed separately in order to isolate the manners in which they can relate to one another. According to Block's (2007) *identity markers* include *ethnic*, *racial*, *national*, *language*, *gender*, *social class*, and *migrant identities*. These categories are meant to be viewed as socially constructed aspects of an individual's identity as ascribed by others and embodied by the individual. This interpretation of identity is especially appropriate because it incorporates what is termed *migrant identity*, as this study is concerned with the *multilingual identity* of a specific migrant group–Korean international graduate students.

In addition to *language ability* and *identity markers* the remaining component of the *multilingual identity* framework is *investment. Investment* broadly refers to the "socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language," and speakers of the target language "and their…desire to learn and practice it" (Norton Pierce, 1995, p. 10). *Investment* is multi-dimensional and encompasses learner perceptions of the target language, their power relationship with the target language, and their motivation to use and learn the target language (Norton Pierce, 1995). More specifically, within this framework, *investment* is understood as relative to both macro and micro-level *ideologies* held by the individual in relation to the target language and culture, and vice versa. It is important to note that this component of the framework encompasses language ideologies regarding linguistic resources and practices of oneself and others (Rosa & Burdick, 2017). *Investment* is also fundamentally related to the social, cultural, economic, and linguistic *capital* an individual has, or is perceived to have (Darvin & Norton, 2015).

Finally*, context* within this study encompasses target language-mediated environments, situations, and interlocutors that an individual is exposed to while in another context. We focus on four intertwined fundamental components of *context*: *institutional, social, cultural, and linguistic context. Institutional context* consists of the university the participants attend. *Social context* includes the social dynamics of their institution and community, and *cultural context* includes perceptions, beliefs, and practices of members of the local context. These notions of *social* and *cultural context* can broadly be understood as "a discourse community that shares a common social space and history, and a common system of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating, and acting" (Kramsch, 1998, p. 127) as a product of "…meaning making processes mediated by symbolic systems of various kinds…through various communication technologies" (Kramsch & Zhu, 2020, p. 1). However, when culture is viewed through this framework, the characteristics of populations described are not meant to be definitive representations of every member of the target culture, but rather from a critical standpoint, continually considering the individualistic nature of human beings and recognizing that "… as individuals, we belong simultaneously to multiple cultures and sub-cultures" (Nunan & Choi,

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2010, p.3). Alternatively, the *linguistic context* consists of characteristics of the dominant language of the host context, in this case English, which includes the *phonology*, *syntax*, *semantics*, and *pragmatics* of the language. This component also encompasses the language practices and language ideologies of members of the host context, which allows one to view how linguistic structures are practiced in a given social context and how they may either (re)produce or (trans)form linguistic features (Rosa & Burdick, 2017). We posit that such understandings are essential for educators and linguists as they navigate the intricacies of multilingualism and identity development in a foreign context. By examining these dynamics, we can also be better prepared to facilitate sociocultural adjustment in an identity-affirming manner.

To summarize, the study at hand uses the overarching *multilingual identity* framework to examine and interpret qualitative data regarding the participants' experiences at their university in order to better understand how they perceive their academic and social experiences and evaluate how their multilingual identity may have been renegotiated.

Methods

A longitudinal multi-case study methodology was chosen for this study due to its propensity to explore "real-life, contemporary bounded" (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p. 96) culture-sharing cases within a specific site over time. Data collection included interviews, observations, and field notes. The procedures were informed by Stake (1995) to generate reliable findings and valid interpretations. A proposal to conduct this study was submitted and approved by the university's IRB during Summer, 2020.

A private university in the northeastern United States served as this study's setting. The university is selective, and the majority of its students are white, upper middle-class, with 60% from the northeast region. Approximately 900 international undergraduate and 900 graduate students from 96 different countries are enrolled at the university (University Statistical Report, 2021-2022).

Criteria for being a participant in this study included being a multilingual international graduate student from a country where English is not the primary language spoken. A convenience sampling approach (Miles et al., 2018) was first used to find one participant that fit these criteria, then, a snowball sampling method (Baimyrzaeva, 2018) was used to find five volunteer participants from three different countries; however, only the data from the three participants from South Korea, as illustrated in Table 1.1, are utilized in this study because of their shared cultural, linguistic, and national backgrounds. Each of the participants was a graduate student in education who began their studies in the U.S. after serving as educators in their Korea.

Table 1.1. *Participant Information*

Pseudonym (Gender)	Region, Country	Languages	Degree	Years as a student in the US
Eunbi (Female)	Seoul, South Korea	Korean & English	3rd Year PhD	5
Min (Male)	Gangwondo, South Korea	Korean & English	3rd Year PhD	3
Gunwoo (Male)	Jeollado, South Korea	Korean & English	3rd Year PhD	3

Semi-structured interviews administered after each semester, starting after the participants' first year in their program, were employed to understand the context of the participant's experience and allow them to reconstruct and reflect on their experiences and their meanings (Seidman, 2006). Two participants underwent four rounds of interviews and the other participant participated in three rounds due to a personal situation that prevented the fourth interview from being conducted. These types of interviews allow researchers to ask participants to elaborate on their responses, provide more detail, or give specific examples (Baimyrzaeva, 2018). As a result, more accurate and nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences over time can be gained. Additionally, the researchers of this study were given consent to collect qualitative observational data from informal conversations with the participants and from course observations, which varied depending on the participants—Eunbi: 1 course (~32hrs), Gunwoo: 2 courses (~64hrs), Min: 3 courses (~96hrs). These observation-field notes provide more varied and naturalistic data, allowing for richer and more holistic interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

The researchers held both *insider* and *outsider* positionalities and perspectives related to this research (Banks, 1998). Two of the researchers are *insiders*, as they are native Koreans who have experienced navigating the study's institutional context as international graduate students themselves. We consider the other researchers to be "external-insiders" in relation to the participants because of their years of experience teaching, researching, and living in Korea. In addition to being critically conscious of our cultural, racial, and linguistic orientations in relation to the participants, we consider ourselves allies and advocates for students who hold the same identities as the participants, and we will continue to critically and intentionally interrogate and leverage our *insider* and *outsider* perspectives as we strive to find ways to improve their educational and personal experiences (Albert, 2005).

Findings

The following sections present the salient findings regarding how participants' academic and social experiences over their first three years in their program in the US may be connected to their re-negotiation of multilingual identity. These sections offer multiple perspectives on how context may influence the development of a multilingual identity by including representative reports of classroom, campus, and community interactions. The findings are organized in accordance with the constructs of the *multilingual identity* conceptual framework, which include *target language ability*, *identity markers*, and *investment* in relation to *ideologies* and *capital*. It must be noted that these constructs are inherently intertwined and presented separately within the following sections for comprehensibility and as illustrations of how each construct can influence multilingual identity development.

Language ability

Language difficulties were reported during each interview over the three-year period. In various cases, *language ability* proved to be the source of anxiety and feelings of inadequacy. However, the participants also noted numerous instances of significant developments in linguistic skills, which allowed them to become more comfortable navigating the U.S. Overall, although practice and exposure were beneficial for language acquisition, it was found that they may not address some of the deeper linguistic and emotional barriers that hinder Korean international students from fully engaging in their institutional and social contexts.

Initially, each participant expressed a sense of urgency about improving their academic English writing skills for their coursework and research. At the end of his first year, Gunwoo expressed the difficulties he faced adjusting to the linguistic norms upheld by his host institution, stating, "Even though everybody knows English is not my first language, and everybody tried to care about this…There were so many moments where I felt like I'm stupid… I feel like that kind of thing made me look stupid to somebody." In subsequent conversations, both he and Min elaborated that they expected these challenges, but as Gunwoo described, "I never thought it would lower my self-esteem like this." Later, due to the pandemic, Gunwoo relocated to South Korea and expressed various concerns about leaving the U.S., stating, "I'm really worried about [my] English ability every day… Even though I take class every day, I feel like I'm in a whole different world, left behind, like [something is] pushing [me] back."

Additionally, switching to online learning as a result of COVID-19 enhanced certain language difficulties. Gunwoo described how difficult it was to adjust to the transition to online classes by saying, "It is harder to understand what other people are saying, and it's harder to express speaking in English… I was frequently under stress… I couldn't deliver my intention properly.

The online format is even worse." Min detailed his online learning experience during his second and third semesters by saying, "It's very unilateral. I barely understand anything, so I can't participate." Overall, they found it difficult to communicate their knowledge and understanding, a problem that worsened in the online learning environment.

Divergently, Eunbi described how, while pursuing her master's degree, she felt that her language ability and her status as an international master's student were sources of marginalization. She explained, "[Domestic students] were ignoring my existence sometimes. Like they talk to each other and they assume that I don't understand what they're saying, but…international students understand more than what they [think]." She also described how, initially, domestic students seemed to consistently exclude her from groupwork or to disregard her whenever she attempted to introduce examples from Korea in class. However, this changed overtime; she explained this transformation stating:

> My English grew… my PhD student status made things different. So, my growth of English and my status change made me different, like protecting from discrimination, relatively. Not totally, so rather my identity is really changed.

In sum, she noticed that when her productive English skills advanced and her status changed from a master's to PhD student, her interactions with her classmates, and self-confidence, improved. Min and Gunwoo recounted comparable linguistic and social transformations when they began teaching in their third year. Each of them believed it was necessary to discuss how these positions influenced their language ability because this was their first teaching appointment in the US. Gunwoo, for instance, discovered that over time, teaching improved his receptive language skills, saying:

> … the first part of my semester… there are so many moments where I pretended to understand what they were saying… but… it felt kind of [like] listen(ing) practice. So, I realized that my listen(ing) skill has improved because I could understand what they are saying.

Gunwoo noticed an improvement in listening comprehension, but Min described how teaching for the first time in a few years in English gave him great confidence in his speaking. One day after teaching a class, he excitedly reflected:

> …suddenly I am so confident and fluent in my English. I don't even think about it anymore, I can just speak really well now… You know what it's from? From teaching! This semester I have taught three classes for [a professor], and I just realized it made me so confident in my English. You know, preparing and delivering the lesson was just

> so great for my confidence…it makes me think that all international students need to
> have this chance to teach.

Despite their changes in status within the university and their positive linguistic developments, each of them described situations where they felt marginalized by students due to how they perceived their linguistic repertoire and cultural differences. For instance, Gunwoo recounted how many of the types of othering he experienced as a student prior to starting his teaching appointment lingered in his own classroom, noting how, "the mild ignorance, mild racism, something like that, laughing and ignoring. …not responding is the most salient racism."

Identity markers

The first round of data collection for this study coincided with the first months of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, and both Min and Gunwoo noted how the rise of anti-Asian sentiments brought on by the pandemic had some negative consequences. For example, Min described how watching widespread viral videos depicting racism against Asians made him feel "scared of going outside because everyone is looking at me like I brought COVID to the U.S." He remarked that it was difficult to avoid the videos because his friends and family in Korea continually sent them because they were worried about his well-being. He was aware, however, that such incidents were less prevalent in reality than they appeared online. Min also mentioned that he was interested in using the university's free counseling service to help him deal with these feelings and improve his mental health, but he decided against it since he felt it would be too challenging to express his feelings in English. Alternatively, Gunwoo explained how he was told to "get out!" by a worker at a local restaurant after attempting to place a takeout order. Although it is impossible to know why the worker acted in this manner, Gunwoo believed these actions were attributed to him being Asian and were probably related to prevailing negative views against Chinese people's perceived role in the spread of COVID-19. This proved to be the first of many accounts Gunwoo shared where he felt discriminated against by campus and community members because of his race.

Of the three participants, only Gunwoo returned to Korea during the onset of the pandemic, and he went on to stay there for the entirety of his second year. While all of the participants reported experiencing significant changes in how they perceived their national, ethnic, and racial identities the longer they attended their university, Gunwoo believed that his extended stay in his home country had a substantial influence on his ethnic and racial identity. He compared his first and second years in his program by saying:

> after just coming to [this US city] to start my PhD program…I was not conscious about
> my Korean identities…but after coming back to South Korea again for the pandemic

and getting so much social network with my parents… I have had more feeling at the time, "Oh, I'm Korean."

Interactions with other Korean international students and alumni who had relatively more experience studying in the US, according to Gunwoo, were particularly influential factors in his racial identity development. He reported how many of them, "said that they lived as the…second class citizen" and reflected, "that is how I feel these days…maybe just from the language, how people treat me." Towards the end of his third year this became more of a concern, as seen by his statement that "I'm really serious about these issues because I feel I I'm losing myself here these days…I am still struggling with English… So, I feel like I am not welcomed by US society." In the end, the development of his Korean identities over time were intertwined with language and race, which was the same for Min. Min talked about how his disposition towards living in the U.S. evolved. When he first arrived, he was "full of hope" and enthusiastic about the "American Dream." A month later, he became frustrated with the need to keep repeating himself to be understood. The next year, he found that "people acknowledge me after I get more fluent in English," and after 1.5 years into the program, he began to experience "more racism", as previously mentioned. He explained how he began to experience discouragement at that point:

> I realized that, okay, I am a foreigner for my entire life. No matter how I mingle with people, with a good job, good background from a well-off family, no matter how many white guys around myself, no matter how professors and how many people… said that they support me. It doesn't change. I am forever a foreigner. I am and will be, so day after day, after day, I just admit it "I'm a foreigner."

Alternatively, Eunbi explained how the university – particularly the curriculum and the local students – had a significant impact on her Korean identity. She believed that "regardless of their personality," international students were "silenced" in most classroom since they were "very US-centric." She described how "American students did not notice (international students) kept silent" and how this widespread unawareness was "oppressive." Eunbi also observed that local peers were "not interested at all" when international students discuss their experiences in other countries. Similar classroom dynamics were noticed by Gunwoo on several occasions. He noted that anytime he attempted to use examples from Korea or from Asian Americans in class discussions, local students started to become "distracted," which felt "terrible." He continued by saying that he believed the "only way I [could attract] their attention" during these recurring experiences was to focus his comments on the US context, "…which is sad."

Investment: ideologies and capital

The research findings in this section show how societal ideologies might influence the formation of multilingual identity development. In the first instance, Eunbi mentioned how she became less outspoken during her second year in her program. She believed that the contentious immigration policies in place at the time had made her feel less comfortable expressing her opinions freely around Americans. To put this in perspective, many international students were left confused, scared, and searching for information when the Trump administration announced it would suspend all foreign worker visas in the summer (Venkartraman, 2020). Eunbi explained how she felt that this political shift exposed harmful mainstream ideologies about international students, which tilted her power relationship with the target culture. She continued by saying that this shift in context left her feeling "emotionally intimidated" and that "socio-emotionally the surroundings and environment…are not conducive, not favorable." She added that while her situation did not directly affect her class participation, it made her more cautious about being outspoken in the U.S., which led her to "take a much more conservative stance in school life." She was detained at a nearby airport and questioned about her intentions to return to the US during this period, which only made matters worse. Although it is impossible to say whether the political climate at the time and this experience were directly related, for her, this experience increased her sense of marginalization.

Eunbi expounded how this event affected how she perceived her university's support systems for international students in a different but related case. She explained how being held in the airport detention office made her feel as though her university did not care about her well-being. She said, "[my university] doesn't do anything about it, like protecting international students when crossing the border, but [my husband's university] does. [His university] gives like some guidelines, or like documents, or emergency contact." She eventually gave up attempting to get assistance from her university and had to rely on her husband's institutional support system, which also happened to be a university. She described her frustration by saying, "Why doesn't my school do anything? So, I should rely on [my husband's school] for protection? not [my school's] protection? …it was a bit shocking for me. Like, that was so scary." She continued by saying that a combination of these experiences and the pandemic made her deeply miss living in Korea for the first time since arriving in the U.S. three and a half years earlier.

In another instance, Min described how two professors repeatedly cut him off during a group discussion about promoting equity before finally signaling to him to stop talking and exit the conversation. Min claimed that he was introducing himself to the group members because it was his first time meeting them when, "…someone cut me off and questioned me in the

moment. It kept happening because of my language. It was embarrassing." He went on to describe the situation in detail:

> You know, I am a(n)… adult, I can read a room even though my language… I can read faces and expressions and situations. They cut in three times and made weird faces, they cut me off three times like this, and then they made me stop.

Since arriving at the university, Min expressed that this was the first and only occasion he had felt deliberately marginalized in an academic situation. He attributed his interlocutors' aggravated behavior to his English ability and believed that his perspective was dismissed because the other members of the group were teachers in the U.S, while his teaching experience was in Korea. Min reflected that it was ironic that a group of educators effectively marginalized a member of their group in a discussion about equity; he recalled how just moments earlier, everyone in his group had declared, "'Wow! We all need to be more equitable in our teaching.' But then they treat me like that!" In a similar spirit, Min expressed his frustrations that relocating to the U.S. drastically changed his social position. He stated, "I was so successful in South Korea…but not here… I won a national award as a young leader. I was an influencer, but last year I struggled. I have struggled from every single perspective." Min went on to explain how he changed from enjoying reading, writing, and giving presentations in Korea to finding it challenging to converse with others in the hallway and complete reading and writing assignments for his courses.

In this last example, Gunwoo shared how his prior educational experience in Korea made interacting and communicating with professors at his school challenging. He stated:

> There's big difference…I have the Korean version, or traditional relationship between all the professors and students. So even though I tried to change my mind, it's really hard to change myself. So, whenever I see my advisor, I feel tense. I feel nervous.

In other words, the contrast of the traditionally hierarchical relationship between professors and students in Korea and the more horizontal relationships characteristic of U.S. universities served as a major cultural barrier for him throughout his first three semesters.

Overall, although some of these findings are consistent with existing research on the experiences of international students, particularly in terms of cultural and linguistic challenges they encountered, the participants' experiences during their second and third year semesters were distinct because they were shaped by COVID-19, ICE's attempts to revoke visas of some international students, and the increased anti-immigrant sentiments that came with these phenomena. In this light, the discussion that follows provides fresh ideas about how the

participants navigated the unique host context while also making connections between the participants' experiences and existing research.

Discussion

This discussion serves as a nuanced and contextualized investigation of how the participants' perceptions of their experiences in their host *context* can be used to investigate *multilingual identity* development according to *language ability*, *identity markers*, and *investment*. It is in accordance with Darvin and Norton's (2015) notion that language acquisition research should go beyond addressing the question, "To what extent are learners invested in the language and literacy practices of their classroom and communities?"

Within the *language ability* conceptual construct, language characteristics, such as accent and register, are crucial for how international students develop their identities and perceive their environments (Benson et al., 2013). This construct is inherently intertwined with *multilingual identity* and *investment*, and it underlies each of the examples described in the Findings section. Despite the fact that linguistic challenges faced by international students are well documented in the literature (Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Wu et al., 2015), it is still necessary to have a brief discussion about how important target *language ability* is in navigating a new *context* and developing a *multilingual identity*.

The responses from Gunwoo and Min presented in the *language ability* Findings section demonstrated sentiments of inadequacy in their English ability, which was worrying because they were connected to significant language-related self-esteem issues that persisted into their third year. Research has shown that these types of issues can last through graduation (Lyken-Segosebe, 2017). In a similar vein, research that shows that the lack of, or fewer, social and verbal cues in the online setting is a source of difficulty for all students (Tichavsky et al., 2015), but particularly for international students who rely on these cues to process instructions and engage in discussions, supports the participants' comments related to English comprehension difficulties in synchronous online class sessions (Zhang & Kenny, 2010). Many of the reports also serve as illustrations of how language proficiency, self-esteem, and identity are inherently intertwined. As Peregoy and Boyle (2008) note, "the mother tongue is deeply connected to personal identity and self-esteem, and the new language involves forging new identities" (p. 54). Although the participants in this study may all be fluent English speakers, their English language ability and development were central to "forging" a multilingual identity during the study.

The findings also demonstrated how crucial *context* is to the formation of multilingual identity development. For instance, Gunwoo's sentiments concerning his feelings of isolation after

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returning to his home country is an example of how identity development and context are intertwined with language learning (Block, 2007; Norton & Toohey, 2011). Gunwoo effectively lost opportunities to converse in English by leaving an English-dominant context and immersing himself in a context dominated by his first language (Darvin & Norton, 2015). This created a feeling of being "left behind" despite his best efforts to improve his English ability, which highlights how *context* can influence *investment* in the *target language*, and, in turn, *multilingual identity*. Many international students found themselves in similar situations to Gunwoo during the 2020-2021 academic year, enrolling in foreign universities and taking online courses from their homes. Universities were faced with the unusual task of ensuring these students felt included in the campus community. When they returned for the 2021-2022 school year, the participants' accounts revealed that when they were eventually allowed to return to in-person classes, the crucial disruption in language development they encountered during the pandemic went unnoticed and unattended to.

While many of the participants' experiences showed a change in multilingual identity as a result of their language ability and context, most of the salient data represented relatively more multifaceted developments of multilingual identity. The first representative case revolves around Eunbi's reflections on how her growth as an English speaker and her transition from an MA to a PhD student fundamentally changed how she understood her context, particularly her interactions with domestic students. These statements can be viewed as a complex development of multilingual identity in terms of proficiency, social capital, and dominant ideologies of the target culture. These notions about how capital and ideologies can influence identity can be viewed as Block's (2007) "Power and Recognition" which denotes that,

> …identity is neither contained solely inside the individual nor does it depend exclusively on how others define the individual. Rather, one needs to consider both self-generated subject positionings as well as subject positionings that are imposed on individuals by others. (p. 31)

In other words, Eunbi believed that she had achieved a subject position where she felt less susceptible to being marginalized by her classmates. Her classmates seemed to recognize this positioning as she developed proficiency and rose in social status within the community and university. Similarly, both Gunwoo and Min reported that their initial teaching appointments contributed greatly to their language skills and their confidence. These accounts illustrate how increasing social capital within the host context shifted the power dynamics between the participants and the local students, allowing for more structured opportunities for interaction. Alternatively, teaching provided a unique platform to confidently voice their perspectives to an audience that is effectively put in a position where being sensitive to linguistic and cultural

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variations benefits them. Overall, these turned out to be critical learning experiences that bolstered self-esteem and agency while shaping how the participants perceived their identities.

Another example of how language ability and social status within the target culture may be perceived as sources of marginalization is Min's negative experience of being silenced by professors and peers. Members of the target culture perceived linguistic and social identity markers during this conversation as having less social capital. According to Blommaert (2010) different linguistic registers are measured based on the social and cultural norms of the context. Min believed that the ideologies held by his interlocutors diminished his linguistic and social capital. These professors refused to let him join into on the remainder of their conversation because they interpreted his linguistic ability and social status as being irrelevant, though there is no way to know for sure. Darvin and Norton (2015) describe such instances of marginalization by using "identities inscribed by race, ethnicity, gender, and social class, learners navigate through spaces where they are not only granted or refused the right to speak, but also the right of entry" (p. 43). The actions of the interlocutors can be seen as a manifestation of a combination of intercultural incompetence and pervasive deficit ideologies derived from perceptions of social and linguistic capital. It is likely that they would not have acted in this way if they were aware of how this student perceived their actions. This emphasizes the necessity for faculty and domestic students to have more cross-linguistic and intercultural competence.

Still, the most notable experiences that indicated a renegotiation of multilingual identity involved being racialized and linguicized (Flores & Rosa, 2015) by local students. Instances where a combination of racial and linguistic identities were perceived to be the sources of othering can be seen, for example, in Gunwoo's experiences of marginalization during a meeting with faculty and colleagues, Min's feelings of being disrespected by his students, and Eunbi's experiences of being silenced by classmates. The data indicated numerous analogous encounters with professors and community members. The more time individuals spent navigating their academic and community contexts, the more frequently such comments were found in the data. It was evident that each participant renegotiated their relationship to their host context and their multilingual identity as they continued to become more exposed to the racial and cultural dynamics of their environment. According to Norton (2013), identity is how one understands their "relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (p. 45). Linguistic racialization of Asians in the US has been an issue in certain communities, and discursive patterns of some Americans send the message that "living among whites is not the same as being accepted by them" (Lo, 2016, p. 110). US universities, which now enroll over half a million international students from Asian countries (IIE, 2022), remain predominantly white,

and, as a predominantly-white serving institution, the campus the participants navigated was no exception. Considering that Asian students have been reported to be racialized and lingualized across US campuses, their experiences were likely not atypical (Kutlu, 2020; Rubin, 1992). Min's acknowledgement of being "forever a foreigner" also illustrated how language acquisition can open doors, but it does not completely shield one from bias. In his case, this immigrant identity remained steadfast despite any accolades or recognition he would go on to receive toward the end of this study. This acknowledgment of one's foreignness, while often accompanied by feelings of disappointment and frustration, also highlights an enduring disconnection from fully embracing, or investing in, local communities—an experience that can be both isolating and enlightening. Overall, these findings show that students' multilingual identity trajectories are influence by their time at the university, their status within the university, and their level of English proficiency. They also give universities reason to consider how these dynamics affect student experiences.

The pandemic exacerbated the racialization and linguicization of those who held Asian and migrant identity markers (Hoang et al., 2021). The participants each shared reflections on how prevalent ideologies regarding their identity markers eventually rendered them as having less cultural capital than during the beginning stages of their studies. To illustrate, Eunbi believed that her school did not respect the social capital of students who had the identity marker of being international students, as seen by the inadequate support provided when the school returned to in-person learning. As she explained when she talked about adopting a more "conservative" stance while interacting with people of the target culture, this experience, together with the broader political climate at the time, had multifaceted implications on multilingual development. This serves as an example of how broad power dynamics and ideologies can manifest themselves in the classroom and in many facets of one's lived experiences. Such accounts detailing perceived anti-immigrant and anti-Asian sentiments also demonstrate how Korean students can identify the rise of widespread anti-Asian ideologies and stereotype-based biases, or "neo-racism" (Lee, 2020). Such ideologies and biases are racially and culturally founded and may manifest from a variety of sources, including through government dispositions, media, and first-hand experiences. Along with Eunbi's accounts, those from Min and Gunwoo exemplify how these ideologies are ubiquitous in campus communities through the media, from Korean peers with more experience studying in the U.S., and from personal experience. Consequences of these ideologies can also be seen in similar findings regarding the "migratory grief" some Asian international students feel (Ichikawa, 2021) and the sense of loss some Koreans feel (Park & Ablemann, 2004) when moving abroad. These phenomena are certainly complementary to how international students may reconstruct their multilingual identities concerning their perceptions of their cultural and social capital

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within a host culture as a result of prevailing ideologies held by members of the host culture towards racial and immigrant identities. Examples like these provide evidence that international students today face particular social challenges rooted in neo-racism, and their institutions need to be aware of these issues and address them by providing proactive, accessible, and appropriate support. These findings suggest that this university is not doing enough to encourage this group to utilize their existing services. They must explicitly inform international students about the reality of their predecessors' negative experiences and transparently emphasize the importance of such services in navigating the same context. It is important to note that the university in this study provides services for many of the aforementioned scenarios, but Gunwoo was unaware of them, Eunbi was unable to find them, and Min decided that they would not be worthwhile because they were English-mediated. Students should not be left in the dark about where and how to seek support and guidance.

Conclusion

Overall, this study provides a highly contextualized account of the experiences and maneuvers made by three Korean international graduate students over their first three years at their university. The candid accounts and nuanced discussions about multilingual development in this study can be used to inform the work of scholars and practitioners who are concerned with the success and general wellbeing of multilingual international students, and to contribute to the growing body of literature regarding language learners' multilingual identity development in a variety of contexts. Noteworthy findings indicated that the participants' perceptions of mainstream ideologies about individuals with Asian identities can influence investment in interacting with members of the host context. Additionally, there were reports of marginalization and discrimination due to social status and English language ability. These findings ultimately imply that the participants' university missed opportunities following the return to in-person learning to include strategies to help these students in meeting the challenges of contemporary society.

Higher education institutions can use this study to inform current institutional and classroom-level support systems, and, hence, build a more inclusive campus community and learning environment, despite the limitations that come along with being a case study with three participants. For instance, implementing more explicit, evidence-based orientations on management of the social and academic sides of their host context would be a good place to start. These orientations for PhD students must include procedures for intercultural communication and pragmatic English for academic purposes in addition to IRB protocols and academic integrity (Kim et al., 2014). According to the findings, some Korean students might imagine that by only remaining present for an amount of time, they will automatically adapt to

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the social, cultural, and academic norms of their institution and the community. In contrast, it seems that some local students and instructors are still unaware of how their interactions with international students are perceived and internalized by their international colleagues and students as instances of racial and linguistic discrimination. Host institutions have an ethical obligation to increase awareness of these realities and to provide faculty, students, and staff from both international and local environments structured opportunities to interact in meaningful and productive ways. This would foster a more identity affirming, interculturally engaging, and understanding campus climate in addition to assisting certain multilingual international students in navigating the linguistic conventions upheld by their host institution.

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