

BE(COME)ING AN ENGLISH SPEAKER:  
POSITIONING OF SOUTH KOREAN STUDENTS  
IN A CANADIAN UNIVERSITY

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**FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH**  
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## Abstract

The growth of international students across Canadian universities means classrooms are increasingly linguistically diverse. This change affects the learning and relationships that occur between English language learners and speakers. Grounded in poststructuralist understandings of language and identity and Davies and Harré's (1990) positioning theory, this thesis explores six South Korean student's English language experiences in a Canadian university. Through informal conversational exchanges, narrative dialogue journals, and a personal researcher diary, this qualitative study is concerned with student subject positions and identity construction pertaining to language. What emerges from the data is what I term *moments of tension* which include students' encounters with ESL labels, native-speaker identity, desire for fluency, English fear, imagined communities, employment in Canada, teacher respect, direct communication, and Korean relations. These moments of tension serve as entry points for exploring similarities and differences across participants' experiences of being an English speaker. Students accept or reject varying subject positions within discourses that position and construct their identity in particular ways. Students negotiate silence, emotion, and responsibilities of interlocutor burden in intercultural communication—unveiling complex, evolving understandings of identity negotiation, power in communication, and English speaker legitimacy. The findings of this study reveal implications for EAP programs in universities, teacher education, and future theoretical directions in second language education.

Key words: *identity, positioning, power, language performativity*

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## Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my family; thank you...

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **My Research Journey**

I began my journey into this thesis in my Introduction to Educational Research class when my professor said these words: “we all have a lens through which we view the world, every one of us, what is yours?”

“Hmmm,” I thought to myself.

My professor’s words reverberated deeply inside me. They stuck. His prompt was a catalyst for critical self-reflection and discovery. Sensoy and DiAndelo (2012) say, “the way we make sense of our world (or our theories about the world) is often invisible to us” (pg. 7). This invisibility was certainly true for me. For the first time in twenty-seven years, I was encouraged to question who I was. It was then, at that epiphanic moment, that I began the (uncomfortable) journey inward – which might be just a nice way to say that I was experiencing my first ever identity crisis in trying to answer the fundamentally burning question of “who is Jennifer?”

This thesis is not specifically a study about me per se, but as with any qualitative research I am indeed a critical part of the research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). I will touch on my role as a researcher, my researcher positioning, in the third chapter in this thesis, but for now I want to explain how what I learned in my graduate courses changed the way I thought about my past experience as an English language teacher in Seoul, South Korea. Looking back at my experience with a different lens allowed me to set the foundation for how I came to be interested in this study.

In 2005, after completing my degree in Justice Studies, I ventured to Seoul, South Korea to teach English overseas for a year. Korea treated me well and one year quickly

turned into five. Somehow, with no teaching credentials or previous teaching experience, I was the English-language expert. After I returned to Canada in 2010, with my Korean husband, I began my graduate studies journey. I started to think more critically about the relationship between language and power. Who knew such things existed? At that time, I certainly didn't! The more I read in my graduate classes, the more I clearly understood my role as an "English language expert" in Korea. I put *English language expert* in quotations marks because I now realize that my expertise as an English teacher was awarded to me because I am Canadian, my skin is white, and my first language is English and not because of any formal education or experience in this professional domain. Wierzbicka (2006) reminds me that, "in the present-day world it is *Anglo English* [italics mine] that remains the touchstone and guarantor of English-based global communication" (p. 14) which explains why I was able to secure such amazing teaching opportunities in Korea when I had no formal teacher education. With no curriculum, textbooks or lesson plans, and sometimes making up to \$120 per hour, I would sit in coffee shops and speak English with Koreans. The demand for English skills in Korea provides the economically privileged with a better chance to be successful (Park, 2012). In Korea, I was a hot commodity, selling my time and getting paid to just be myself. I thought I was a great teacher (and it's not that I wasn't) but there was more going on under the surface that, at that time, I didn't realize.

Nearly five years after I began graduate classes, I am beginning to understand my privilege: I think back to the time when my recruiter, who was sending my picture to schools in Korea, asked me to make myself look as white as possible. "Ah-ha! You see, now I'm beginning to connect the dots," I think to myself. These realizations come in

moments of great discomfort when professors and classmates in my graduate classes challenged the way I thought about myself in the world. Specifically, there were two significant observations that led me to my research topic: the changing demographics at the university and the sociocultural rules for appropriate communication.

The first observation that I made when I was back in Canada, after my five-year tenure abroad, were the vast number of international students on campus. In the five years when I was gone, the university exploded with difference; buzzwords like “internationalizing the university campus” became commonplace. “Who are these people? Where did they come from? Why are they here?” I thought to myself. I yearned to know more about their experience as international students: “what is it like for them to study in Canada? How are they adjusting to their new learning environment? What challenges do they encounter?” My mind flooded with questions. Looking back at that time, I realize now that my desire to learn more about other international students’ experiences was because I was seeking to connect with others who “knew” what it was like to live in a place that was “foreign.” I sought this connection with international students on campus because Korea changed me in ways that I couldn’t explain to my family or friends in Canada. My experience in Korea changed how I perceived my position in this world. I began to question taken-for-granted assumptions about what I perceived to be the “right” and “only” way because I got to experience first hand how others lived differently. While every international student’s experience abroad is unique, diverse and certainly different, I feel we share a peculiar common ground—a starting point of understanding that I find hard to describe in words because I liken it to more of a feeling. An analogy may help: no matter how much I tried, I couldn’t “fit” into my

former life in Canada much like a puzzle piece that cannot be forced into a different place in the picture. If I am that puzzle piece, then Korea changed my shape; Korea softened my edges. When I returned home I did not fit back into the picture like I imagined I would. Connecting with international students allowed me to accept my new shape and made me realize I became a piece of a different puzzle. This observation relates to my research because it explains my initial curiosity and desire to understand other students' experiences in Canada.

The second observation happened one evening around my parents' dinner table. My father asked my Korean husband if he wanted more potatoes. My husband politely declined the offer but then complained to me after dinner that he was still hungry. It was then that I remembered, "ah-ha, in Korea you would offer food not once, not twice, but three times!" This is because the etiquette is to refuse the first offer even if indeed you want more. I told my father that there were different "rules" for communicating in Korean and the next time at dinner my father jokingly said: "do you want more potatoes, do you want more potatoes, do you want more potatoes?" We all laughed; this became our family joke. But then I thought to myself, "if this is happening at my own home, then I wonder what kind of communication breakdowns and misunderstanding are happening in the classrooms, especially with all the international students on campus?" It was because of this experience that I narrowed in on language and classroom communication as my research interest. Combined, these two observations and my growing criticality formed the initial spark of interest in my research topic. I provide rationale for my research by presenting an overview of international students in Canadian universities next.

## **International Students in Canadian Universities**

As a result of mass migration, university initiatives and study abroad programs, the global student body in institutions of higher education in Canada continues to expand. The Canadian Bureau for International Education (2015) reports that there were 336,497 international students in Canada in 2014, representing an 83% increase since 2008, and students from South Korea make up 5.8% of Canada's international student population. While the number of international students increases, so too does the diversity of educational institutions. The growth of international students means classrooms are increasingly linguistically and culturally diverse. International students bring their own culturally and socially constructed world-views and styles of communicating into the classroom (Kramsch, 1998). This change affects the learning and relationships that occur and since institutional environments operate to transform specific sets of ideas into dominant ideologies (Fairclough, 1989), language and power in interactions between English language learners and speakers need to be considered.

In addition, given the multicultural setting of the university where several cultures coexist (albeit, I believe not equally) and in a time where internationalization of university campuses is high priority, it is increasingly important to understand international student experiences with English while studying in Canadian universities (Altbach, 2016). Because the global student body continues to expand, it is increasingly important for educators, policy-makers, and higher administrators to understand the international university population and their concerns. The research presented in this thesis looks at the language experiences of South Korean students at the University of Regina in Canada.

The number of international students at the University of Regina has grown by 77% over the last five years (Timmons, 2016) which makes this university an ideal site for my study. Dr. Vianne Timmons, President and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Regina, suggests that these international students “enrich the student experience by bringing global perspectives to our campus community.” (Timmons, 2016, n.p.). As such, as part of the strategic plan at the University of Regina, increased efforts have been made to enhance international educational experiences for domestic and international students. Yet, international students at the University of Regina continue to have language problems affecting their success in their programs (Sterzuk, 2015). If the university mandate is to improve the quality of education for international students then I argue that their language struggles need to be examined further in detail. This is why language is the focus on my study.

My study examines South Korean students’ language experiences, specifically, for two reasons. First, in 2011, President and Vice-Chancellor Dr. Vianne Timmons was named honorary Consul General for the Republic of Korea. Second, in 2011, the University of Regina signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Kookmin University in South Korea. Both of these events point to a growing relationship between South Korea and the University of Regina. The implications of these institutional changes are that the University of Regina can expect an increase in Korean students among the international student population. Specifically, my research considers the influence of stereotypes and interactional misunderstanding on South Korean’s educational experiences because communication misunderstandings and stereotypes greatly impact and affect students’ access to learning. This topic is significant because all students,

despite their country of origin, should have access to equitable education.

Communication differences should not be masked as deficiencies in language abilities and English proficiency. The multitude of experience and rich culture that international students bring to Canadian institutions should be considered advantageous and not as an obstacle, especially in our ever connected and growing globalized world.

### **Research Purpose**

The research purpose for this qualitative study is to identify how Korean students' subject positions pertaining to language play a role in the creation of their student identity. For instance, students may be positioned by their classmates or instructors as a "poor English speaker." How students negotiate these subject positions by accepting or rejecting these subject positions tells us more about who they are, their identity. Identity is important because students' identities affect the ways they learn (Darvin & Norton, 2015) and language is the vehicle in which learners express their identity. For example, if students think that their English isn't good, they may not claim the right to speak and they will not get to learn to their full capacity, which may lead to misunderstanding and stereotyping of international students.

My study is guided by the following two research questions:

1. What accessible student subject positions pertaining to language can be identified in the student narratives about what it is like to be a South Korean student studying in a Canadian university?
2. How are these subject positions made use of in the negotiation of student identity?

I will explain the conceptualization of the research questions in detail in the methodology section of this thesis. Now, I'd like to outline the overview of this thesis.

### **Thesis Overview**

There are five chapters in this thesis. In Chapter One, I provided my research journey to explain how I came to conceptualize my research. Due to the increasing number of international students, there is a necessity to better understand international students and their needs. The focus of this research is on the language experiences of South Korean students in a Canadian university. In Chapter Two, I theoretically ground my research in poststructuralist approaches to language and identity. Then, I describe positioning theory's contribution to my research and locate my study in a body of literature on second language learning and identity. In Chapter Three, I detail the research design and methodology of this study. First, I introduce the participants and the data collection methods. Then, I detail the participant relationships and outline my data analysis approach. Finally, I end by discussing my researcher positioning. Chapter Four is the analysis of the participants' English language experiences as they encounter what I term *moments of tension*—I use these moments of tension to serve as an entrance to explore some similarities and differences across their stories. Finally, in Chapter Five, I answer my research questions and explore the implications for teacher education and English for Academic Purpose (EAP) programs in Canadian universities. I also suggest future research directions, comment on theoretical orientations to poststructuralist approaches to language and identity research, and end with some concluding thoughts.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### Introduction

The purpose of Chapter One is to set the overview of this study which I did by explaining my personal research journey, providing some background information on international students studying in Canadian universities and describing my research objective. In the first chapter, I explained two observations that sparked my initial curiosity and attraction to connect with the international student population at the University of Regina. While I was certain about my desire to know more about the international student experiences on campus, I was uncertain as to which direction my thesis would travel. Then, I remembered the words of my research professor who gave me this advice, “if you don’t know where to start, start by reading!”

My process to sort through the literature was both time consuming and exhausting; as I travelled down one road sometimes I would reach a dead end and other times I would stumble upon an article or book that would lead me down a different path. Although this process was frustrating, it was also very rewarding. The process of sorting through literature was a necessary one for me to experience, as it was a personal exercise in this study’s conceptualization. In Chapter Two, the literature review, I present an on-going always-evolving conversation on scholarship.

I begin this literature review by outlining the theoretical framework in which I ground my research; this study uses poststructuralist understandings of language and identity. I describe three points of overlap between performativity, positioning, and feminist poststructuralist perspectives because the second language education (SLE) research on language and identity that I draw from adopts differing poststructuralist

approaches. Next, I explain what Davies and Harré's positioning theory offers to my study. Finally, I end by synthesizing related studies on language and identity in second language education (SLE) research.

### **Poststructuralist Perspectives on Language and Identity**

There has been much debate in applied linguistics on the “theoretical and analytical approaches” that best “conceptualise the relationship between language and identity” (Baxter, 2016, p. 34). Poststructuralism is one of the more recent approaches adopted by researchers working in the field of second language education (SLE), and my work draws from SLE research rooted in poststructuralism as its underlying theoretical framework. The challenge, however, is that since there is no single, fixed or unified definition of poststructuralism, conceptualizations of language and identity that are theoretically grounded in poststructuralism are often contradictory, multiple and competing. This challenge has led to points of tension within the field of SLE research as various researchers use poststructuralism in differing ways. My point here is not to argue for a cohesive, single, or neat and tidy way to take up poststructuralist theories on conceptualizations of language and identity in SLE research; rather, I want to briefly address points of connection and difference across varying poststructuralist perspectives to explicate the complexities of working with poststructuralism as a theoretical perspective. Another reason why I outline points of similarity and divergence across poststructuralist perspectives is to situate my research within and among more than one poststructuralist perspective.

Perhaps part of the reason why poststructuralism is so often contested and difficult to define is because of its broad application as “a mode of thinking, a style of

philosophizing, and a kind of writing” (Peters & Burbules, 2004, p. 17). As mentioned prior, my research is informed by language research rooted in poststructuralism; however, before I outline the poststructuralist perspectives that I draw upon for this research, I attempt to describe poststructuralism and acknowledge what it offers my research. Broadly speaking, poststructuralists aim to deconstruct, decenter, or destabilize structuralist binaries like male/ female, black/ white, subject/ object in order to uncover how these binaries create a hierarchy that privileges one set over the other. We perform within systems and discourses in education that are entrenched with binaries that frame what we perceive as a “good” and “bad” student (Søreide, 2007). Poststructuralists are uncomfortable with such binaries and believe that structures must become unstable or decentered. Derrida (1970) asserts that through binary deconstruction we can identify the in-betweens and the marginalized.

From a political standpoint, “poststructuralism aims to expose structures of domination by diagnosing ‘power/knowledge’ relations and their manifestations in our classifications, examinations, practices, and institutions” (Peters & Burbules, 2004, p. 5). In viewing language from a poststructuralist lens, I am able to see how English is embedded with power and reinforced through the recurrence of ordinary and familiar ways of behaving (Fairclough, 1989). A poststructuralist lens allows me to question taken-for-granted assumptions of English language practices among the participants in this study. To lay the theoretical groundwork for my study, I will explain how the various poststructuralist perspectives that I draw from similarly and differently conceptualize the connection between identity and language.

Baxter (2016) identifies four key poststructuralist perspectives: 1) performativity; 2) positioning; 3) feminist poststructuralist; and 4) enunciative pragmatics. I namely ground this study in the positioning perspective, yet I draw on SLE literature from the first three perspectives. As such, I will briefly outline three points of overlap among these perspectives as identified by Baxter (2016), which are: all perspectives have postmodernism as their philosophical origins, they have similar conceptualizations of language and meaning construction, and they adhere to the idea that identities are discursively constructed.

Firstly, performativity, positioning, and feminist poststructuralist perspectives are similar in that all three perspectives are philosophically rooted in postmodernism. Postmodernism and poststructuralism are “two movements that overlap philosophically and historically” (Peters & Burbules, 2004, p. 7); whereas postmodernism is a broad movement encompassing a spectrum of “fields and disciplines” such as “philosophy, politics, architecture, art, literature and the social sciences” (Baxter, 2016, p. 35), poststructuralism relates to primarily a linguistic movement. Postmodernists, and in turn poststructuralists, reject the idea that it is possible to know the world by “dissecting it through apparently objective methods of inquiry” (p. 35) because knowledge is constructed socially. Thus, there is no universal truth out there in the world waiting to be discovered, and any “attempt to fix knowledge permanently” is “an expression of coercive power” (p. 36). Then, since there is no single fixed knowledge awaiting discovery, postmodernists advocate for a more fluid-like concept of knowledge construction that moves between a multiplicity of theoretical positions to enrich, colour challenge, or disrupt what counts as knowledge. This approach makes space for multiple

truths and various ways of being. So, we do not discover ‘the truth’ but rather construct our relative truths. Postmodernist philosophies have greatly influenced approaches to language and identity research. From the 1960s onwards, there has been a social turn in language studies from structuralist theories of language to poststructuralist theories of language (Norton & Toohey, 2011). This social turn is important in the context of my research because it changes how language is conceptualized and how meaning is constructed—the second point of overlap between the three poststructuralist perspectives.

Secondly, performativity, positioning, and feminist poststructuralist perspectives share similarities in terms of how they conceptualize language and the construction of meaning. Regarding language, poststructuralists assert that language does not reflect an “already given social reality” but rather “constitutes social reality for us” (Baxter, 2016, p. 36). As such, “poststructuralist thinkers consider that language is the place where our sense of self and our identity or ‘subjectivity’ is constructed and performed” (Baxter, 2016, p. 36). Identity is also constructed and performed in what we do, not simply what we say. Like postmodernists who do not adhere to the idea of a pre-given universal truth because they recognize knowledge as socially constructed, poststructuralists assert that it is language that constitutes our social reality. Language systems, therefore, cannot be trusted to convey any one particular truth. In other words, there is no single universal truth. Similarly, speaking about the production of meaning for poststructuralists, Baxter (2016) says the following: “meaning is produced *within* language rather than reflected *by* language” (p. 36). Again, this quote points to the very productive, rather than fixed, conceptualization of language. Understanding poststructuralist theories of language is

necessary background knowledge for my research study because it allows me to think about how language constructs social realities for the participants in this study.

On the contrary, structuralist theories of language view language learning as a set of skills to be acquired and developed through the process of grammatical, lexical, and phonological acquisition that the learner applies in a variety of different circumstances; in other words, master the rules, master the language. What is lacking from the structuralist approach to language is that it presupposes everyone has equal access to obtain and acquire these skills. Structuralist approaches to language do not focus on the application of language, which begs the question: do language learners have the ability to apply the acquired skills in a variety of cultural contexts? Therefore, language researchers who draw on poststructuralist theory challenge the idea that once students have reached a particular level of English expertise, they should be able to successfully function in any English language environment with little difficulty because they assert that language is inextricable from the contexts of its use; language proficiency has different meanings within different contexts (Benzie, 2010) and meaning is only fixed temporarily because it is dependent of its discursive context.

The body of literature on identity in SLE research that I draw from adopts varying poststructural understandings on *discourse* as this term relates to language and identity. The term discourse is one of the most widely used, yet least defined (Mills, 2004). Discourse, for Fairclough (1989), positions language as a social practice. Fairclough's use of the term discourse as it relates to the field of applied linguistics as described by Pennycook (1994) includes both "chunks of language as it's actually used" but also "relates language to other social practices," viewing language practices as

socially determined (p. 121). According to Bourdieu (1977), linguistic discourses are intertwined with power; yet, through the recurrence of ordinary and familiar ways of behaving, social language conventions take relations and power differences for granted. Bourdieu (1977) draws attention to the importance of power in structuring discourses, with interlocutors rarely sharing equal speaking rights. According to Foucault (1984), the range of subject positions that language offers always already exist within discourses; unlike Fairclough who views ideology as larger than discourse, for Foucault everything exists within discourse. Realizing the depth and complexity of conceptualizations of discourse, I am unable to theoretically align myself with only one theorist. My current understandings of power and discourse as they relate to language and identity are too simplistic for me to be firm in my decision; some days I am drawn to a more Foucaultian perspective and some days Fairclough appeals to me. As such, I exercise fluidity across ideas—like the fluidity in poststructuralist conceptualizations on identity—and purposefully choose not to locate myself into one particular way of thinking.

Moving on, discourse produces discursive practices—the ways in which people produce psychological and social realities (Davies & Harré, 1990). However, discourses are not inherently dangerous in and of themselves; the danger lies in that which we consider rational, commonplace, reasonable, taken-for-granted, and commonsense because when taken-for-granted discursive practices are repeated they become natural and normal and frame what we experience and think as possible, “rendering some things common sense and other things nonsensical” (Youdell, 2006, p. 35). It is pertinent then that discourses be critically examined by asking questions such as: ‘what is accomplished by these discourses?’ and ‘who is benefiting from them?’ Identifying and

understanding the role of discourses and how they regulate the participants in my study are “important tools in dismantling” (Sterzuk, 2011, p. 47) dominant discourses operating in university institutions.

The third point of connection between performativity, positioning, and feminist poststructuralist theory identified by Baxter (2016) is an understanding that identities are discursively constructed:

a poststructuralist posits that individuals are never outside cultural forces or discursive practices but always ‘subject’ to them. Their identities are governed by a range of ‘subject positions’ (‘ways of beings’), approved by their community or culture, and made available to them by means of the particular discourse operating within a given social context. (p. 37)

Baxter (2016) explains that identities are produced by the subject positions made available to the individuals within a discourse. Within a discourse there are given but messy subject positions that are available for people to draw on since “every discourse has implicit within it a number of such ‘subject positions’” (Burr, 1995, p. 141).

Institutional settings, like the university, offer subject positions to students (Blunden, 2005). An example of a subject position as it relates to my research could be ‘*this student is a poor English communicator.*’ Subject positions provide us with particular ways in which to act, behave, think, and do. Therefore, when a student is positioned as having a poor English accent, they may not claim the right to speak in class which may lead to misunderstandings and stereotyping, for example. Davis and Harré (1990) refer to subject positions as a ‘structure of rights’ which provide the limitations on and possibilities for what individuals can and cannot claim for themselves within a given discourse (Burr, 1995).

Foucault (1984) provides another example of the discursive production of identities. Foucault (1984) accords that identities are recognized and regulated by discourse; these discourses are often competing and serving different political interests, vying for power and status among one another. Additionally, for Foucault (1984) as explained by Baxter (2016), the identity construction process is “reciprocally achieved through the *agency* of individual language users which are subjectively motivated to take up particular positions within multiple discourses and through the ways they are variously *positioned* as subjects by the social, normalizing power of discourses” (p. 37). Similar to the complexities in the conceptualization of discourse, identity is also a difficult term to define.

Poststructuralist theories remind us that identities are shifting, contingent, and context-dependent. Identity is about belonging (Nunan & Choi, 2010) and involves negotiations with ourselves. Every time we speak, we are in a process of negotiation. These negotiations are laced with power, ideologies, and politics, as well as speakers’ views of their own and others’ identities (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). Well-known feminist poststructuralist scholar Chris Weedon (1997), whose work informs much of the identity research in second language studies, posits that it is through language that individuals construct their subjectivity. For Weedon (1997) subjectivity is defined as “the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself, and her ways of understanding her relation to the world” (p. 28). Feminist poststructuralists approach identity, or what Weedon (1997) terms *subjectivity*, in a more “dynamic, agentic and fluid” (Baxter, 2016, p. 43) manner. Drawing on Bourdieu, Bonny Norton’s work with Canadian immigrant women in the late 1990s was important

in changing the terrain of identity work in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research. For the context of my research, I use Norton's (2013) concept of identity, which she defines as "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (p. 45). Norton's work informs my understanding of identity because her contribution ties power relations to English language learners' identities.

The three points of connection between performative, positioning, and feminist poststructuralist perspectives described by Baxter (2016) are: 1) their philosophical ties to postmodernism; 2) their view of language and the construction of meaning; 3) and their ideas around identities as discursively constructed. By adapting a poststructuralist understanding to language, my research opens up a discussion of the larger discursive forces working in the background as students behave and perform and accept and reject particular subject positions. Martin-Beltrán (2010) puts it nicely when she says the following:

everyday language practices and choices to participate reflect the way that societal power structures, such as the dominance of English, shape the way the students and teachers make choices about how they use language and position themselves as members of discourse communities. (p. 273)

Given the multicultural setting of the university where several cultures have the ability to coexist, although I argue not equally, this poststructuralist lens can create spaces for conversations of Korean student experiences with language, inside and outside the Canadian university classrooms. Despite the overlap between poststructuralist perspectives, there is still debate among theorists as to the notion of identity. One reason why my study focuses on the positioning perspective is because much of the SLE research adopts the positioning theory as a framework. The second reason why my study

focuses on the positioning perspective is because positioning work is important in SLE research. Whether intentionally or not, how others position students has great implications for how they perform and behave as students. Thus, positioning theory has value in SLE research.

### **Positioning Perspective of Language and Identity**

*Positioning*, which has its roots in linguistically oriented social psychology in the 1990s, is used in the place of the more static term *role* (Yamakawa, Forman & Ansell, 2005). Two prominent theorists in this area, Davies and Harré (1990), conceptualize positioning as the discursive process whereby identities or “selves” are located in conversations as subjectively coherent participants in “jointly produced story-lines” (p. 47). This means participants bring their “history as a subjective being” (Baxter, 2016, p. 41) to a situation. The history that Davies and Harré (1990) are referring to is one of multiple subject positions and in varying forms of discourse. From this positioning perspective, language and identity are viewed “in terms of a balance between the ways in which discourses position participants as ‘subjects’ in competing ways and the ways participants make their own and other people’s actions socially determinate” (Baxter, 2016, p. 41). Hence, there is space for participants to use their agency by exercising choice in their practices to comply or resist discursive practices, which, in turn, assists in constituting the very discourses of which they are a part. Positioning is not solely an individualized choice because it is dependent on the use and recognition of forms of discourse that construct an identity through particular social experiences.

Positioning can occur in what Harré and van Langenhove (1991) describe as orders: *first order positioning* occurs in the original conversation. But, if the positioning

in this original conversation is challenged, then this is what is referred to as *second order positioning*. However, it may happen that the positioning is never challenged in the original conversation but in another conversation about the first conversation—what Harré and van Langenhove (1999) refer to as talk about talk, or *third order positioning*. My study explores Korean students' language experiences in *third order positioning*. Positioning can be *interactive* and *reflexive*, yet it is not always intentional. *Interactive positioning* is when what one person positions another and *reflexive positioning* is when one positions oneself (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991). Positioning is important in the context of language studies because the act of positioning people in particular ways either limits or extends what students and instructors can say and do (Adams & Harré, 2001). As such, positioning students as 'intelligent' may allow them the ability to improve their performance whereas positioning them as 'deficient' may deny them the opportunity to correct their deficiencies (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003). A critical caveat here is that positionings such as 'intelligent' and 'deficient', although named through psychology in the form of labels, are used in this research with a view to their social representations as found in discourses.

A number of language and identity studies in applied linguistics use positioning theory, not as a method or technique, but a framework for understanding classroom dynamics (Yoon, 2008). Specifically, this framework is useful for understanding how language is used to situate students as valued members in a classroom (Vetter, 2013). Additionally, positioning theory is significant as a theoretical lens because positioning is thought of to be a "powerful tool to analyze identity in discourse" (Kayi-Aydar, 2015, p. 95). The reason one's position within a given conversation is important is because this

positioning has implications for how students perform. If teachers or classmates position students in particular ways, then the students' learning potential may be affected. Take, for example, the study by Menard-Warwick (2008) when, on a unit about employment in her ESL class, the teacher positioned her Latina student, Fabiana, as a *homemaker*; this act of positioning by her teacher prevented Fabiana from speaking up and projecting her identity as a businesswoman in her home country—the identity she wished to project. Menard-Warwick (2008) determined that positioning was closely entwined with students' second language development. This finding has implications for the students in my study because of the interconnection of positioning and English language development and use.

In a study looking at classroom interactions among adolescents of Asian and Pacific Islander descent in one high school classroom in Hawaii, Talmy (2004) observed that 'generation 1.5' students who lived in Hawaii for several years resisted being assigned the negative subject position of *ESL student*. These students resisted the subject position of *ESL student* by challenging their teacher's positioning and positioning newcomer classmates as FOB (fresh off the boat)—a position which led them to perpetuate the very stereotype as exoticized newcomers or what Talmy (2004) refers to as "a cultural and linguistic Other" (p. 169) they were trying to resist. Othering, which can be thought of as a form of positioning, occurs when difference is thought of as inferior (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012). In Talmy's (2004) study, this positioning led to a negative classroom atmosphere where little learning occurred. Since some of the participants in my study have studied in the ESL program or are currently ESL students,

Talmy (2004) helps me understand how institutional labels like “ESL” may negatively impact the learning experience of the Korean students in my study.

Among students in the classroom, power differentials impact positioning and relationships. Similar to the linguistic Othering in Talmy (2004), Feuer (2008), an ethnographic study of national and ethnic identity in a Canadian language class, found that even though Jewish Canadian born students identified more with their heritage than their Canadian background, they were Othered by their Israeli classmates for their inferior Hebrew linguistic skills. Talmy (2010) identifies a racist hierarchy that positions Micronesians at the lowest among students of East/Southeast Asian inheritance. He calls for educators to understand the racialization and racism that occurs with positioning; additionally, he calls for educators to challenge reproductive potentialities that happen if we are not conscious of the social construction of race and how they play out in our classrooms.

Similarly, a case study of two Korean adolescents learning English provides evidence for the co-regulatory process which facilitated or inhibited their language use. The outcome of this process mainly depended on “the ways the students positioned themselves or were positioned by the other participants in the interaction” (Jang & DaSilva Iddings, 2010, p. 365). This study found that a social comparison based on English proficiency was taking place between the two Korean students which created a hierarchical relationship among them. A greater understanding of power differentials among classmates may be particularly telling in the Korean students’ communication experiences in my study as it relates to positioning particularly because power structures

shape the way students make choices about how they position themselves and use language (Martin-Beltrán, 2010).

In Ryu's (2013) study of Korean immigrant adolescents' discursive participation in science classrooms, the primary reason for the Korean students choosing not to speak up had to do with "discomfort talking with non-close classmates, from whom they often felt othered" (Ryu, 2013, p. 657). In other words, the Koreans in this study were not active in class discussions because they didn't have close relationships with the other classmates. There are three reasons why the Koreans in this study felt Othered: first, their classmates lacked connection to them; second, there was a shortage of shared background knowledge on the subject material; and finally, the Koreans were positioned as non-native English speakers. Many of the Korean participants were quiet in class, and according to one student, the teacher's reaction to student responses was crucial in determining how she participated in class. For example, if the teacher was disrespectful in regards to the students' incorrect answers, this Korean participant felt discouraged to speak. Ultimately, Ryu (2013) calls for an understanding of why students do not speak in class. Although this study was in the context of a high school science class and conducted with Korean immigrants, it is important in the context of my study because it provides an understanding of some of the obstacles the Korean students may face, specifically in regards to choosing silence or being silenced.

Anderson (2009) notes that only a small number of studies that take up positioning theory have acknowledged that classroom life—and the effects of classroom life on student learning and identity development—is complex and multi-faceted. For example, in a study looking at the language learning experience of two talkative

students, Kayi-Aydar (2013) found that one student became an accepted member of classroom talk by using humor and building friendships with particular students whereas the other talkative student was excluded “because his participation behavior was not accepted by his classmates, who positioned him as an outsider” (p. 708). Kayi-Aydar (2013) concludes by noting the relationship between positioning and one’s identity; she calls for a heightened awareness among teachers to develop strategies to shape classroom discourse with the goal of helping learners’ position themselves in ways beneficial to their language learning and identity development. What is interesting about this study as it relates to my research is: firstly, being more talkative does not necessarily guarantee student acceptance as a member of the class (Kayi-Aydar, 2013) and secondly, there are certain classroom participation behaviours which may or may not be accepted by classmates and therefore play a role in how a student is positioned and how their identity is constructed. It is important to consider what types of participation behaviours are considered acceptable in Canadian classrooms. We also need to pay attention to particular discursive practices that influence communication behaviours among Koreans.

Students bring their own culturally and socially constructed world-views and styles of communicating into the classroom (Kramsch, 1998). Sociocultural competence relates to international students in academic settings because the rules for appropriate classroom behavior are not universal, but rather are learned behaviours. In order to participate in a discourse community, interlocutors must share not only linguistic competence, but also sociocultural competence—that is, the cultural rules, values and conventional norms of a particular discourse community (Lee, 2009). Knowing this, it is

critical that educators direct their attention to possible cultural factors that may affect Korean learners' interactive behaviour in the Canadian classroom.

Park (2012) notes “people in the same cultural and linguistic environment tend to share cultural characteristics with respect to self-expression and share concepts about appropriate behaviors via interactions with others” (p. 232). In her research on communication with Korean university students in South Korea, Park (2012) identifies four discourse patterns that affect Korean learners' communication behaviour which are: 1) *individualism and collectivism*; 2) *indirectness*; 3) *hierarchy* and 4) *harmonious relationships*. As an example, it is possible that a Korean student may be less likely to disagree with another classmate in front of his/her teacher and other classmates as one way to maintain harmonious relationships among the group. So, if expressing individual thought via critique regardless of the other students' viewpoints is understood as an appropriate participation behaviour in Canadian classrooms, then Korean students may miss out on opportunities to participate because they may be operating with a different understanding of what is acceptable classroom practice. These discourse patterns identified by Park (2012) are useful to acknowledge because they may affect students' classroom behaviours based on what they perceive to be acceptable or unacceptable behavior. I am cautious though; I do not want to limit my analysis solely to these cultural discourse patterns, nor do I want to suggest that *all* Koreans behave in a particular way.

Positioning theory is “linguistically oriented in social psychology” (Baxter, 2016, p. 41), yet a large body of literature in SLE research uses positioning theory as a framework to study identity. The use of the term position as it is used in psychology

conceptualizes an autonomous identity described by a label that is readymade in advance. This psychological approach to positioning does not align with poststructuralist conceptualizations of positioning. Positioning in poststructuralism is intended with a view to its social and material representations as found in discourse. Since I am drawing from SLE literature that uses positioning theory as a framework and poststructuralism as a theory, I acknowledge there may be some hints of psychology in the ways SLE researchers are taking up notions of positioning which can be found in the static naming of identity categories. I acknowledge that I risk some slippage in terms of my language in regards to the participants' English speaking experiences.

### **Identity and Second Language Education Research**

Bonny Norton (2000), initially writing as Norton Peirce in her publications in the mid-nineties, introduced important theoretical underpinnings to the field of applied linguistics in the area of language and identity. Her work informs my understanding of language learning and identity because she was significant in advancing the area of second language acquisition (SLA) research, as identity was not an aspect of SLA research before her work. First, I will introduce her sociological construction of investment. Prior to the 1990s, most research used the psychological construct of *motivation* with learning a language. Motivation was framed as a fixed characteristic of individual language learners. Norton Peirce (1995), however, rejected language learning motivation as a fixed trait because motivation did not account for power relations between language learners and target language speakers. Rather, she suggested that learners *invest* in the target language at particular times and settings; this investment is based on the symbolic and material resources it affords the students. Hence, students

may be highly motivated but lack the investment in a particular language practice in a given classroom. In turn, students then may be perceived as unmotivated or poor language learners, negatively positioning them as deficient language speakers (Harklau, 2000). Norton's conceptualization of investment in place of motivation is significant to the field of second language work grounded in poststructuralism because investment considers a more fluid, dynamic, and evolving approach to understanding identity. Norton's work is significant to the context of my study of language learning and identity because particular discursive patterns, like silence, may be an active resistance to practices in which these language learners occupy "unequal relations of power vis-à-vis local English speakers" (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 421).

Norton Peirce's (1995) study on language and identity draws from a longitudinal case study of immigrant women. Participants in her study were positioned as "migrants," or as "mothers." In Stephen Price's article in 1996, he scrutinizes Norton Peirce for these "migrant" and "mother" positionings and critiques her work for failing to account for how participants' interests and identities "change as a function of ongoing discursive practices" (p. 332). Because Norton Peirce draws from poststructuralist theories to address the conditions under which language learners speak, Stephen Price also critiques her work for under-theorizing her use of agency and for not "theoriz[ing] how it is that agency operates" (Pennycook, 2001, p. 148). Stephen Price concludes his 1996 article by challenging the extent to which Norton Peirce's practical suggestions "grow out of issues raised by poststructural thought" (p.336). In response to Stephen Price, Norton Peirce counters by stating it was "never [her] intention to serve as an apologist for poststructural theories. Instead, [she] drew on poststructuralist theories to

help [her] make sense of [her] data and to examine how they might inform second language acquisition theory” (p.338). From this perspective, Norton uses poststructuralist theories to “help [her] understand the conditions under which language learners will speak” (Norton Peirce, 1996, p. 338). Like Norton, my goal is to use poststructuralist theories to help me understand my data, rather than examining how my data fits poststructuralist theories.

In a study about identity negotiation and multiple languages, Christison (2010) explores the conflicting choice to acquire a second language stating that “by embracing a new dialect, I lost much of my intimate connection I once had to my childhood community practice” (p. 78). Christison’s words are powerful in that they confirm communication as a process involving negotiations between our sense of self in relation to larger social worlds because language plays a part in shaping and constructing our identities.

Identities are unfinished and continually in process. Students must be made aware of what identity positions afford them particular opportunities so they are more conscientious, critical, and well-equipped to understand the role language learning plays in constructing their identity. A one-year case study of the interconnections between language and culture in a Canadian post-secondary ESL classroom by Lee (2008) shows the difficulty in enhancing the range of identities to students when customary classroom practices re-assert fixed positions that Other students. Pedagogical decisions in the classroom reinforce subordinate student identities, limiting students’ access to more desirable identities. Customary classroom practices may position students in undesirable ways by reinforcing stereotypes even when students try to present counter discourse:

The irony was that when students, indeed, seized the opportunity to present alternative voices on the subject, instead of encouraging this counterdiscursive strategy, instructors appeared to strengthen in their resolve to reassert their own perspectives and to further (de) legitimate and silence particular views of the world. (Lee, 2008, p. 101)

This example shows that even when students try to push back against essentialist ideas that Other them they aren't necessarily successful. Similarly, a case study of transitional youth in Vancouver by Lee and Marshall (2012) demonstrates the flexibility and fluidity of Amy's multilingualism as she moves between writing in Cantonese and English in an email exchange between her uncle and herself. In this context, Amy is able to use her language skills for specific purposes in culturally appropriate ways. For Amy, language becomes a vehicle of communicative expression. In other words, by consciously choosing to move between two languages to suit her specific communicative needs, Amy exercises her agency. Such performances allow Amy to explore various identity positions as a counter-discourse to dominant discourses; in this context, Amy creates a safe haven in which she simultaneously plays with both languages. However, despite having the skills to negotiate and use two languages successfully, similarly to the study by Lee (2008), Amy is required to perform particular language practices and identities to pass her assignments in the academic university setting – a setting that is based on monolingual standards that “perpetuate the centering of English as superior form” (Lee & Marshall, 2012, p. 78). As a result, Amy struggles when trying to adapt to two different languages and cultures (Lee & Marshall, 2012).

Canagarajah (2004) talks about students creating *pedagogical safe houses* which serve as sites of identity construction for students, allowing them to negotiate the contradictory tensions as members in a language community. Canagarajah (2004)

explains that in understanding why students seek alternative places in the classroom to construct multifaceted identities, schoolteachers need to be understood as “power-laden site[s]” (p. 120). He explains further:

Students may be so intimidated by the authority and power of the teacher that they desist from presenting identities that are not institutionally desired. Also, examinations, tracking, and other institutional reward systems place subtle restrictions on the extent to which students can resist the subjectivities desired in the school. In interaction with students from a variety of backgrounds (some from more privileged backgrounds), students are under peer pressure to conform to the dominant discourse and identities preferred in the classroom. These are but some of the mechanisms through which the school functions as a medium of ideological and social reproduction. (Canagarajah, 2004, p. 120)

Students can create safe spaces in the classroom. For example, unconventional identity constructions may be playing out between students as they whisper between one another when a teacher’s back is to the board. Pertaining to the Korean participants in my study, I am curious if students create spaces for identity construction in innovative and unexpected places. In sum, the body of literature on identity in second language education research is pertinent to my study because I am interested in how South Korean students’ subject positions pertaining to language play a role in the negotiation of their identity. Students can resist identity positions and “create innovative and unexpected identity relationships” (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 434).

## **Conclusion**

I began this chapter by theoretically grounding my study in poststructuralist perspectives on language and identity. Next, I described the three points of connection between performativity, positioning, and feminist poststructuralist perspectives as: originating from postmodernism, shared ideas on the construction of language and meaning, and similar understanding of the discursive construction of identities. Since

my study adopts a positioning perspective, I described Davies and Harré's positioning theory and synthesized studies in Second Language Education research that use positioning theory as a framework. Finally, I concluded this chapter by synthesizing studies on language and identity that draw mostly from positioning theory but also from performative and feminist poststructural perspectives. In the next chapter, I detail my research design.

## **Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology**

### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I laid the theoretical groundwork by outlining poststructuralist approaches to understandings of language and identity. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the methods used for my qualitative study. This chapter begins with my research questions. The context and participants follow the research questions. Here, I provide some background information on each participant. Next, I describe the three data collection methods used in this study. I elaborate on my personal philosophy of interviews which focuses not on just the ‘what’ of data collection but also on the ‘how.’ I elaborate on some of the tensions I experienced and how I navigated concerns of transparency in participant relationships. In the data analysis section, I describe the analytical process as one full of mistakes and reflexive choices. Finally, I end this chapter with a discussion on my researcher positioning.

### **Research Questions**

The conceptualization of my research questions came about through an extensive review of literature and my experiences in practice. I was originally drawn to Søreide’s (2007) research on teacher identity of five Norwegian female elementary school teachers because of the unique combination of theories used to study, analyze, and understand the construction of identity as a narrative and discursive process within institutions. Søreide (2007) identifies four major identity constructions in total, which are: 1) ‘the caring and kind teacher’; 2) ‘the creative and innovative teacher’; 3) ‘the professional teacher’ and 4) ‘the typical teacher.’ In addition to these four identity constructions, more than 30

subject positions were identified. The teachers constructed possible identities based on whether they identified with or positioned themselves from the subject positions.

Søreide (2007) notes that these identities are loose and “clusters” and are not “sharply defined identities” (p. 536). I used Søreide’s study as a framework, but the more I became familiar with the theoretical tenants of poststructuralism, I found her analysis methods to be too restricting and rigorous. My goal is not to identify as many subject positions as possible but to show how the participants are constructed as beings through what they do, specifically drawing on the discursive production of power embedded in language.

Thus, drawing from poststructuralist perspectives of language, this study is guided by the following two research questions:

1. What accessible student subject positions pertaining to language can be identified in the student narratives about what it is like to be a South Korean student studying in a Canadian university?
2. How are these subject positions made use of in the negotiation of student identity?

My goal is not to identify as many subject positions as possible but to show how the participants are constructed as beings through what they do, specifically by drawing on the discursive production of power embedded in language. Now, I detail the context and participants of the study.

### **Context and Participants**

This study was conducted at the University of Regina, in Saskatchewan, Canada.

My study focuses on language experiences of the South Korean international student population.

**Selecting the participants: the who.**

The South Korean students selected for this study met all of the following criteria:

1. Students who *personally identify* as Korean. Therefore, individuals who are permanent residents (PR) or Canadian citizens may also be included if they self identify as Korean;
2. Students who were born in Korea;
3. Students who have completed high school in Korea at a non-international school;
4. Students who are currently attending a post-secondary education in Canada either part-time or full-time; and
5. Students who speak Korean as their first-language (mother tongue)

I chose students using these criteria because I did not wish to restrict individuals who are “Canadian” by the passport they carry but still personally identify as Korean. How each participant defines what it means to be “Korean” will be unique to him or her. Since I wanted to look at South Korean students’ experiences with language in a Canadian context, it was important that the participants had studied in Korea for a significant period of time. Finally, I did not limit the participant selection to credit programs only, which means that some of the participants were in the non-credit English as a Second Language (ESL) program.

**Selecting the participants: the how.**

There were six participants in my study. My participant selection was not random because, in my study, I was “not working towards representativeness or generalizability” (O’Leary, 2010, p. 168). I approached one South Korean student to

participate in this study using what O’Leary (2010) refers to as handpicked sampling. Because an important part of qualitative research is the relationship between participants and researcher, I started my recruiting process by contacting a former Korean ESL student whom I taught when he first started studying English in the university’s ESL program. I asked if he would like to volunteer for my study and he agreed. Once my initial participant was selected, I asked if he would identify others who met the criteria for my study, which is a form of snowball sampling (O’Leary, 2010). The following three participants were selected by snowball sampling. In the university hallway one day after class, a former ESL student introduced the last two participants to me and they both volunteered to participate after they learned more about my study.

Before the data collection process, I sought and received permission from the Research Ethics Board for my study (see Appendix A). Each participant was asked to sign a participant consent form and informed of the time commitment required and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any moment (see Appendix B).

### **Meeting the participants: the hello.**

In this section, I introduce each participant first. I selected English and Korean pseudonyms for each participant to correspond to the real names they identify with. Pseudonyms were used for the six participants; however, my participants know that I cannot guarantee anonymity since I am working with in-depth interview material. Next, I provide background information on the relationship I developed with each participant in this research process. This brief introduction allows me to personalize the participants and contextualize our experience in this qualitative study.

Kevin was a former ESL student and graduated from the ESL program at the University of Regina in 2013. I taught him for one semester in the ESL program in 2010. Before coming to Canada, he studied for two years in a university in Korea. At the time of data selection, he was in his 4<sup>th</sup> year of a bachelors program in computer science in the Faculty of Science. He came to Canada in 2010 and at the time of the study, was 27 years old.

Reflecting back to our time together in ESL, I recall he was nervous when he participated in a speaking activity that required him to call a pizza restaurant to inquire about the price. In my first informal conversational exchange in the student lounge on campus, Kevin requested that the next time we meet I provide him with the list of questions ahead of time so he could prepare his answers. My experience with Kevin prompted me to memorize the questions I wanted to ask in subsequent exchanges with him and the other participants so that our exchanges were more free flowing conversations. Given that I memorized my questions, the subsequent conversations unfolded in a more natural way.

Sinyoung was also a student in the university's ESL program. She studied ESL at the university for two semesters then returned to Korea. In Korea, she took the TOEFL exam, which is a standardized English language exam that measures one's ability to understand and use English at a university level. After completing and passing the TOEFL, Sinyoung returned to the University of Regina to study in the Faculty of Engineering. She has since graduated with a four-year Engineering degree and returned to Korea. I met and interviewed Sinyoung when she was in her last semester as an undergraduate student. She was 26 years old at that time.

Sinyoung was heavily involved in student events on campus, so I often bumped into her in common spaces on campus. We would always take the time to stop and update each other on our life status. She invited me to her student office on campus for the informal conversational exchange. I thought of postponing the exchange because the morning of the day I met her I lost my voice. We continued on with our exchange despite me not being able to talk much because she was eager to share her English language study and work experiences.

Twenty-four year old Eric was my third participant. When I met with him for our first conversational exchange in 2015 he was an ESL student in his last semester (the highest level). When I met him a second time he had passed the final ESL level and was in his first year of Economics and Statistics at the University of Regina. He came to Canada in 2014. Because of a recession in Japan, he came to Canada to study English. In addition to Korean, Eric is also fluent in Japanese and was majoring in design at a university in Japan. He chose Regina because his elder sister lives here.

My conversations with Eric were always pleasant. In my first conversational exchange with Eric, it wasn't until I told him that our conversation was over and asked if there was anything he wanted to add that he really started to talk more deeply about some of his language experiences; this was really the beginning of a richer conversation. Since the audio was still recording, I was able to make use of what Eric said after our informal conversation. When Eric was more comfortable he spoke with less hesitation and more confidence. Our first exchange was on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor of the Administration Building—a building where I would often find him hanging out with his Japanese and

Korean friends after class. The sense I got from Eric was that he didn't like being put on the spot, and that he was comfortable in environments that were familiar to him.

Jihye is a 35-year-old female student. She started at the beginning level in the ESL program and completed the language program in two years from start to finish. When I met her, she was in her last semester of the ESL program and she has since enrolled in her first semester of an undergraduate program in Kinesiology. She would like to work in Canada after she completes her studies. She dreams of travelling the world.

My experience with Jihye was much different than with the other participants in this study. She was one of the participants that I struggled to connect with. Our conversation was more surface level pleasantries, so our exchange wasn't as deep or as rich as I had planned. Yet I was not certain as to the reasons why. Here is an excerpt from my diary that describes how I felt:

*Well...that exchange wasn't very good. She didn't seem like she wanted to meet with me. Her responses were short and she didn't elaborate much. Maybe I was having an off day. Was I too tired? Was the school cafeteria the right location for that exchange? Maybe she didn't want to meet me but felt like she had to...was she tired? She didn't really appear tired to me. She was more curious about my experience in Korea than she was sharing her experience with me. Was she nervous? Maybe she was stressed? After the exchange I asked if there was anything I could help her with. She mentioned she's not doing well on her listening exams, so I showed her two free websites. She seemed to be happy about that. I'll never know...*

One reason why this personal researcher diary excerpt is important to this study's findings is because it provides some points of consideration in my researcher experience with Jihye. My experience with her as it relates to my research is that because of the

lack of depth in our exchanges, I wasn't able to pull as many conversational excerpts to include in the analysis.

When I met with Judy she was in her final semester of the ESL program at the university. Before coming to Canada to study English, Judy tutored English to Korean high school students in an affluent neighbourhood in Seoul. She wanted to improve her English with the intention of returning to Korea to volunteer tutor English in a community center or organization for poorer families. She is a 44-year-old woman enrolled in a ten-month Educational Assistant course at a local college at the time of writing this thesis. Upon completion of her course, she intends to return to Korea.

I've lost count of the number of times I've met with Judy. Our relationship has evolved beyond the bounds of this study. We are no longer merely participant and researcher; we are friends. We share parts of our intimate lives that we wouldn't share with others. Our topics of conversation have ranged from mundane topics to more thought-provoking ones. Sometimes we would talk about our experiences in Korea and the societal expectations placed on women: how Korean women are positioned as compared to Canadian women. We have discussed our future goals, our fears and dreams. Some parts of our deep discussions cannot be written about in this study due to an understanding and respect for privacy. I will remember the stimulating conversations we shared long after she leaves Regina.

Anne-Marie was on an eight-month temporary leave from her work in Korea when I met her. She works as an administrator and writes reports to the Korean government to set up construction plans. She has a Masters degree in Geography. She decided to come to Canada to study ESL for two semesters, even though English is not

required or used in her job. Since my interview with her, she has returned to Korea to continue working. She wants to speak English in order to communicate and understand other cultures and ways of thinking.

The first time I met with Anne-Marie was when I picked her up in front of the mall downtown. She lost her way to my house and although she insisted she could ride the bus to my place, I knew it would take her another hour to arrive and I didn't want to wait that long. With Judy in my car, Anne-Marie hopped in the back seat, a smile on her face. She started chatting as if we'd known each other for a while. Anne-Marie was very pleasant and upfront in our exchanges.

### **Data Collection**

This study uses three data collection methods, which are: informal conversational exchanges, narrative dialogue journals and my personal researcher journal. I describe each method in detail below.

#### **Informal conversational exchanges.**

Talmy (2010) argues for greater reflexivity of interview methods used by qualitative applied linguistics by contrasting "*interview as researcher instrument* perspective with a *research interview as a social practice* orientation" (p. 138). The analytical focus of *research interview as a social practice* is on "what" and "how." In other words, it differs from the *interview as researcher instrument* perspective because it focuses also on the "*process* involved in the coconstruction of meaning" (p. 132). I adopt the *research interview as a social practice perspective* because it best describes my perspective of an interview. By adopting this perspective in my study I do two things:

first, I challenge the word *interview*; second, I include details of the interview process—the “how”—by talking about some of the challenges I encountered in my interviews, which I will describe below.

Since my study is about language and “language is infused with ideology” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012 p. 180), I would like to elaborate on why I do not like to use the term *interview*. According to Rugg and Petre (2007), the word *interview* can be “applied to so many different things that it has become almost meaningless” (p. 135). To me, *interview* sounds highly rigid, suggesting that I have some sort of insider knowledge and perhaps that I am meeting with my participants to consult, evaluate, or question—that it’s me that gives voice to the participants. While it is true that I am the “researcher” who asks the participants “questions”, I make the choice to move away from this traditional term commonly found in academic literature and here forth call the interviews *informal conversational exchanges*. My choice of words, *informal conversational exchange over interview*, reflects more accurately the approach I had when meeting with the participants.

My focus was on making these informal conversational exchanges as natural as possible; I strived to create an authentic conversation like the kind you would have with a friend in a coffee shop. My goal for these conversations was to go as far as I could. What I mean when I say to go as far as I could is I wanted informal exchanges that included meaningful, deep, thoughtful, and rich responses, rather than surface level pleasantries. The quality of these exchanges was dependent solely on my participants’ personalities and the relationship I formed with them. So, instead of asking my participants for an interview, I invited them for a coffee date. In addition, after the first

conversational exchange with the first participant, I decided to place the questionnaire sheet and digital recorder out of sight of the participant. Reflecting now, given my efforts to exercise reflexivity in this data collection method, I am still aware of the very humanistic nature of these informal conversational exchanges because as Mazzei (2013) says, “we as researchers ask participants to be selective in (1) their telling, (2) their interpretation of experience, (3) their representation of themselves, and (4) the assumptions that they make about who that self is (during the telling)” (p. 735). While the aim of each informal conversational exchange was to “obtain contextualized accounts of participants’ experiences, rather than ‘information’” (Josselson, 2013, p. 18), I acknowledge that the participants’ experiences are fragmented, partial, incomplete, and always evolving.

All of the informal conversational exchanges were conducted face-to-face. I met the participants several times over the course of the research collection process from February to June 2015. For O’Leary (2010), prolonged engagement is defined as “investment of time sufficient to learn the culture, understand context, and/or build trust and rapport” (p. 115). The purpose of the six-month duration of data collection was to assist in building relationships with the participants over time (Gallucci, 2014), which was one way to help ensure credibility in this study. The exchanges were digitally recorded, loosely guided by a set of open-ended questions (see Appendix C) and then later transcribed. During the informal conversational exchanges I made a conscious effort to repeat back what the participants were saying in ways to check my understanding of what was being said by repeating the participants’ words or paraphrasing. The participants either corrected me by explaining again, in a different

way, what they meant or confirmed that I understood them correctly. The longest informal conversational exchange was over lunch in a café and lasted seventy-three minutes; the shortest was twenty-two minutes in a university cafeteria.

### **Narrative dialogue journals.**

The second data source was student narrative dialogue journals. At the end of the first informal conversational exchange I gave each participant a small notebook with four questions to respond to if they chose (see Appendix D). The purpose of the narrative dialogue journal as a data collection method in my study was to provide the participants with another means in which to express themselves. I wanted to “gather information in a less formal way, so the [six] participants could see there was not a strict agenda” (Galluchi, 2014, p. 924). I use the term *narrative*, not so much as a research methodology, but more as a way of gathering data. The purpose of the narrative dialogue journals was “to create a conversation that invites the telling of narrative accounts (i.e., stories) that will inform the research question” (Josselson, 2013, p. 18). In this case, narrative means story.

I used narrative dialogue journals as my second data source because I determined that some of the participants might be nervous speaking English to me, so the narrative dialogue journal gave them the opportunity to think about and share their experience and stories by responding to questions at their own pace. Some participants wrote lots, some participants did not write anything at all. Some participants recounted experiences, while others told personal stories. Because I wanted the journals to also be a dialogue with me, I responded to their writing by either posing more questions, making comments or sharing stories. One of the journals was exchanged back and forth six times.

Sometimes the journal responses served as a springboard for further discussion in our informal conversational exchanges.

The narrative dialogue journals and informal conversational exchanges co-occurred and were both conducted in English—the language the participants are expected to use in the university setting. I deliberately made this choice for two reasons. First, I wanted to encourage the participants to use the language they are studying in, and second, having a translator does not automatically eliminate issues that can affect the ability to collect credible data (O’Leary, 2010). At times, I used my Korean language skills to code-switch when participants were looking for words to describe their experience. This was helpful in circumstances when Korean words did not have direct English translations. In a few instances, an electronic translating device was used. The instances of Korean language use weren’t simply about communicative translation purposes. It is also possible that my ability to code-switch, even if it was only in small ways, assisted us in developing and building our relationships.

### **Personal researcher diary.**

The final data collection method was my personal researcher journal. I used this as a platform to make sense of my research process. It was a safe place to express myself, to write about how I felt before, during and after the interviews. I wrote about the details of each conversation that I couldn’t catch in the audio recordings of the informal conversational exchanges. These details included emotions and feelings of the participant and myself as well as body language. I took note of my perceptions of how each participant spoke to me, whether or not they seemed to be comfortable, tired, bored, or animated. I know that a large part of qualitative researcher involves reflexivity

(Josselson, 2013); as such, introspection throughout my research process is crucial. My personal journal is an extension of myself, an exercise in reflexivity. I will share a more detailed account of my experience of the research process in the final chapter of this thesis.

### **Transparency in Participant Relationships**

For Josselson (2013), the “research relationship is fundamentally a special case of a human relationship, and we have to be thoughtful about the relationship dynamics that are being created between us and our participants” (p. 38). Due to the importance of researcher relationship dynamics, I would like to share an experience I had with two of the participants in this study as one way to better demonstrate the “how” (the process) of my informal conversational exchange experience. In a café one day over lunch I talked openly with Judy about my personal struggles in my marriage. This was only the second time we met, but I confided in this participant. After sharing my experience, the participant leaned over the table and said, “okay, I will tell you something about my secret.” I believe that sharing my personal and private struggles in an honest and frank way set the stage for an open and genuine exchange. I did not use this as a tactic to get my participant to open up; rather, I felt a “reciprocal desire to disclose, given the intimacy of the details being shared by the interviewee” (Ellis & Berger, 2002, p. 845). When I walked away from our lunch that day I knew that a real, genuine and honest conversation between two people (or more rigidly, the “researcher” and the “researched”) had happened.

Not all of my informal conversational exchanges were so eloquent. The following excerpt from my personal researcher journal describes my experience with Jihye in more detail:

*My informal conversational exchange with Jihye was quite short. She didn't reply with elaborate answers and I struggled as a researcher to go deeper with her. It wasn't the kind of "conversation" I was hoping.*

I struggled with knowing how much of myself to disclose to my participants. Another excerpt from my personal researcher journal explains this in more detail:

*How much exactly do I tell my participants? They are fascinated with my experience in Korea. They want to ask me questions: what was Korea like for you? I gladly answer their questions and tell them it's my journey in Korea that got me interested in my study. Most of my participants know that I'm married to a Korean because the Korean community is quite tight-knit in Regina. They ask questions about my husband. But...I'm separated from my husband. We don't live together anymore. Do I tell my participants the details of my personal life? How can I dodge these questions? Should I pretend I'm not separated?*

The preceding excerpt shows the confusion I was experiencing during my informal conversational exchanges. After much reflection, I decided to be more transparent. I knew that it was important that I establish a good rapport with the participants so they were cooperative and gained confidence in me, as the researcher, to share their experiences (Josselson, 2013). If I wanted my participants to share their experiences candidly, then how could I expect to build trusting relationships with them if I wasn't honest and upfront myself? The decision to open up my vulnerabilities meant that some of the participants felt safe enough to share some of their struggles and "secrets."

Another way I built connections with the participants in this study was by drawing upon my experiences as an educator and student in Korea. I recognize that my experiences in Korea are much different than those of the participants, yet I felt that my interest in Korea, and in the Korean language in particular, gave me some credibility

among the participants. The participants were curious about what it was like to be married to a Korean man and to be living with a non-English speaking mother-in-law. In all of the informal conversational exchanges, my experience in Korea came up as a topic of discussion. The following is an excerpt from Judy's narrative dialogue journal:

To be honest, I was **really glad** to see her [Jennifer] **because she has lived in Korea before and she knew Korean culture and Korean language a little bit**...it is lucky for me to meet Canadian Jennifer...Strangely, I have never been nervous in talking with Jennifer...I know that she likes to meet me, but I hope our relationship will last longer...I think that my decision to go to Regina was wonderful

What is important to note in this reflection is that Judy felt a certain level of comfort due to my familiarity with Korea. Also, I believe being married to a Korean man allowed me to gain a richer understanding of how cultural differences can contribute to communication misunderstanding, especially pertaining to the socioculturally defined expression of negative and undesirable emotions (Kim, 1993). I cannot say that all of the participants in this study felt the same as Judy, but I believe my five-year tenure in Korea along with my communication experiences helped me to establish relationships with the participants.

### **Data Analysis**

Just as there are tensions among poststructuralist perspectives, so too, are there tensions regarding which analytical approach is best suited to explain the relationship between language and identity. Over the last three decades, this analytical tension is one of the central debates within applied linguistics (Baxter, 2016). While there is a plethora of approaches to applied linguistic analysis, this thesis briefly discusses two approaches—critical (Critical Discourse Analysis) and poststructural (Poststructural

Discourse Analysis). The relationship between theory and analysis is an important one because theoretical frameworks shape data analysis (Jackson, & Mazzei, 2011). Thus, I begin by foregrounding my study by addressing some points of tension between these two analytical approaches, as this is necessary background knowledge for understanding the analytical choices in this research.

First, for CDA and PDA, power is inscribed within institutional and social discourses, and this power permeates all linguistic encounters. According to van Dijk (2001), CDA starts with the experiences of dominated groups as a way to support struggles against inequalities. PDA, however, does not adopt CDA's rather emancipatory approach to discourse analysis. One reason being that, in Foucault's (1980) words, a 'will to truth' always becomes a 'will to power'. One criticism leveled against PDA is that it is apolitical, but Baxter (2016) points out that PDA tends to back small, localized social transformations that challenge 'grand narratives' that oppress people. So while CDA locates a group identified as disadvantaged and deconstructs ways they are victimized through institutional language, PDA considers the agency of the oppressed peoples, allowing them to "self-reflexively transform their identity position through acts of negotiation, challenge, self-reflexivity and resistance" (Baxter, 2016, p. 47).

Another difference between CDA and PDA is how each approach conceptualizes the discursive contexts of materiality in the construction of identity. For Fairclough and Wodak (1997), CDA assumes a dialectical relationship between language and discourse with the material world. So while discursive events may lead to material practices in CDA, PDA is more anti-material in that social "realities" are viewed as produced by

discursive practices. PDA acknowledges the existence of material conditions but considers these conditions as “a function and effect of discursively formed viewpoints” (Baxter, 2016, p. 46). PDA is critiqued for making grand “claims about the effects of language and discourse without the tools to analyze the microactions of language” and activity (Pennycook, 2001, 109). The point of contention between critical and poststructuralist scholars is “the extent to which discursive effects interact with the material world” (Baxter, 2016, p. 46). Norton (2006), whose work informs my research, confronts this divide between critical and poststructural perspectives by drawing on a broad spectrum of sociocultural theories, and, as quoted in Baxter (2016), “argu[es] that material hardship does not impinge upon discursive identity construction” (p. 46). Being aware of some of the tensions between critical and poststructuralist thinkers with respect to language and identity is pertinent to my research because I draw from scholars who use each approach of analysis.

The style of analysis used for this study aligns nicely with the methodological discourses of Kumaravadivelu. In a plenary presentation at an international qualitative research conference in 1997 Kumaravadivelu noted that there are no specific strategies and techniques to follow, and that researchers have to make both critical and reflective decisions as a demonstration of the best way to represent the social dynamics under study (as cited in Clemete & Higges, 2008). Regarding CDA, I am less interested in Fairclough’s (1992) more textual analysis (tools of linguistic analysis like pronouns, linking devices, adverbs, and such) of signifying relations among interlocutors. Like Fredeen (2013), who writes about discourses of im/possibility of international students at a Canadian university, my interest in CDA is because of my desire to pay deliberate

attention to “the language people use to describe their day-to-day experiences” (p. 51). Also, unlike PDA, CDA allows me to explore the material effects of discourse on the students in this study. So, while I do not employ either CDA or PDA directly as a methodological tool, my analysis focuses on the ways in which language is used to structure particular social worlds and material circumstances for the participants, provide meaning to events, and suggest certain subject positions for South Korean international students to take up or resist (Cameron, 2001). As St. Pierre and Jackson (2014) put it, I “do not follow a particular analytical method; rather [I] borrow concepts, invent approaches, and create new assemblages that demonstrate a range of analytical practices” (p. 717). As such, I adopted a processual approach to analysis. In the analytic process, I highlighted key phrases in parts of the text that identify discourses to explore how students experience English and the role it plays in their being.

The data analysis for this study was a process with neither a specific beginning nor clear ending point: I moved in a back-and-forth manner between the text, audio recordings, literature, field notes and participants. This process began very mechanically and systematically with an Excel spreadsheet and a very reductionist attempt to fit the participants’ stories into categories. I made the reflexive choice to abandon the rigorous step-by-step data analysis procedure because I felt I was losing the authenticity of the participants’ narrative experiences (Golstejin & Wright, 2013). I did my best to embrace the uncertainty and messiness of qualitative research, realizing now that I was being influenced heavily by the dominant discourse of positivism. Next, I sorted through parts of the text where participants were speaking about their language experiences; I began highlighting parts of the text where I observed positioning was occurring and asked

myself these questions: What is the positioning?; Who is creating the positioning?; Are the participants positioning themselves, positioning others, or are they being positioned by others?; How is this positioning related to the creation of their identity? (Golsteijn & Wright, 2013).

Much later into my analysis process, in the interpretation of my participants' experiences, a committee member (thankfully!) called out my tendency to create ready-made subject positions which appeared as stand alone categories created ahead of the subject—the dominant humanist discourse in which I am entrenched. This committee member encouraged me to show, not tell or interpret, what I found from my data. I struggled constantly with gravitating. I returned to my data to ask much broader questions, like: What is happening here?; What is this participant telling me?; How are they negotiating their sense of self in this situation? Poststructuralists are concerned not with the meaning of discourse, but with how discourse functions, where it is found and how it is produced and regulated? Instead of identifying subject positions, a better question was to ask how discourses construct identities.

### **Researcher Positioning**

The words of famed writer Anaïs Nin are helpful to me when I think about my own positionality as a researcher. Nin suggests that, “We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are.” This quote is useful to me because it reminds me that, as a qualitative researcher, I see the data through my own discursively constituted lens. Additionally, Creswell (2007) highlights the importance of clearly detailing researcher assumptions and Merriam (1998) states, “because the primary instrument in qualitative research is human, all observations and analyses are filtered through that human being's

worldview, values, and perspective” (p. 22). Our worldviews are partly discursive and partly embodied, experiential, and relational.

I acknowledge that the identification of my own perspective is partial as it is only available to me through the fog of discourses that constitute my own subjectivity. As Carrillo (2014) notes, reflexivity literature “calls for the researcher to examine his or her pre-existing meanings, identities, and representational practices” (p. 54). So, the question that I pose to myself is: what discourses am I entrenched in that I cannot see and how entrenched am I in the discourses that shape how I conceive what counts as knowledge? As one way to “call into question the production and re-production of inequitable power relations” (Carrillo, 2014, 54), I discuss three positions below: humanism and poststructuralism, teacher/ researcher and student/ participant relationships, and language and white-English.

### **Humanism and poststructuralism.**

There are critical differences between how humanism and poststructuralism theorize concepts of “being a person” (Davies, 1991, p. 42). Humanism purports that there is a fundamental *essence* of an individual’s being. Rejecting this concept, poststructuralists accord that subjects are called or as Althusser (2006) terms ‘hailed’ into being through discursive practices; thus individuals speak or are spoken “into existence within the terms of available discourses” (Davies, 1991, p. 42). I am embedded within the dominant humanist discourse. One of the reasons why it is so easy to remain comfortable in this discourse is because of the privilege it afforded me; for the most part I am on the privileged side of the binary. St. Pierre (2000) states, “those on the wrong side of humanism’s binaries may be eager for access to analyses that can shift

those power relations” (p. 506). In addition, because humanism is a “familiar discourse” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 478), it “seems fairly easy to understand” (p. 478) and thus is presumed to be right. However, familiarity is not synonymous with being “right.” In describing how humanism functions in the world, St. Pierre (2000) says it best:

Humanism is the air we breathe, the language we speak, the shape of the homes we live in, the relations we are able to have with others, the politics we practice, the map that locates us on the earth, the futures we can imagine, the limits of our pleasures. Humanism is everywhere, overwhelming in its totality; and, since it is so “natural,” it is difficult to watch it work” (p. 478).

My educational research professor describes the dominance of the humanist discourse, in particular, by likening it to a fish doing an anthropologic study whilst failing to study ‘the water.’

My entanglement in this dominant discourse is mostly evident for me in my choice of words in the analysis and findings section of this thesis. I was doing more interpreting and explaining: the subject position is this; the subject position is that. I was assigning fixed positions to students because I was lacking a more in-depth understanding of an individual’s agency within poststructuralist discourse. There is much muddiness in language and identity research grounded in poststructuralism due to various approaches and orientations of adopting poststructuralism. I am unwittingly influenced by language and identity scholars, so it is possible that even my best intentions cannot protect me from slipping or falling into the trap of humanism.

### **Teacher/ researcher and student/ participant relationships.**

There is an expression in Korea that students should never literally step in the shadow of their teacher, as this is a sign of great disrespect. From my experiences in Korea, teachers are valued and respected for their authority. As such, I acknowledge that

I have a lot of power because I am a teacher and in a position of power as a researcher. I am cautious of the risk of portraying the Other (the participants in this research) as different, which translates into inferior (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012). Yet despite my awareness, this excerpt from my personal researcher diary shows how easily it is to slip into dominant categories that reinforce inferiority:

*I met with my supervisor to go over some edits in the second draft of my analysis chapter in this thesis. My supervisor asks me questions about how I am choosing to position the participants in my study. I realize that I differentiate between the participants, by positioning them in two groups: university students and ESL students. In doing this, I'm reinforcing the subject position of ESL student – the very subject position one participant is distancing himself from. I realize that in the writing of this thesis, I run the risk of reinforcing dominant discourses in interactively positioning the participants in my analysis. I need to be conscious and critically aware of the language I am using.*

In sum, St. Pierre (2013) says it best, “we [poststructuralists] surely have our work cut out for us as we try to set aside a system of thought, an order of things, that is so powerful we can slip back into it with a single, telltale word” (p. 655).

### **Language and white-English.**

My communication experiences in Korea may have helped in the development of possible effective communication techniques and strategies that allowed me to balance certain cultural differentiations as one way to ensure plausibility in this study. That said, there were other challenges pertaining to language that I encountered in my data collection process. Because I lack sufficient proficiency in Korean, the informal conversational exchanges and narrative dialogue journals were conducted in English, which could have led to misunderstandings between the participants and myself. They may also have benefited here. For example, when I ask Judy to describe the relationship

she has with me, she writes: “these things such as writing a journal, communicating with Jennifer have made me improve my English skills.” Regarding the Korean language, social status, family background, job, age and level of familiarity all play important roles in the rules for communicating in Korean—on whether or not one would use honorifics or different vocabulary words to show respect, for example. A consideration of discursive Korean communication practices as they relate to researcher positionality on a study of language and identity is critical given that power differentials are always playing out between interlocutors in every language experience.

Another point of concern about language as it pertains to my study is of the participants’ perceptions of me as a white Canadian native-English speaker. The participants in this study may have been more cautious of what they were saying because it is possible that they viewed me as the “expert” in the English language (Lee, 2015b), especially given that they all knew I was an English as a Second Language (ESL) instructor at the university. What is also important here, which will be discussed in further detail in the analysis, is that I speak a privileged dialect of English because I am white. I recognize my privilege and desire to distance myself as the “expert:”

*At times I asked myself if my discomfort with traditional research methods is connected somehow to a subconscious desire to distance myself from my position of authority and yet I cannot get away from the reality that I am the authority. I am benefiting from these informal conversational exchanges. The benefits are huge: I get a thesis!*

Yet despite my desire to distance myself from positioning myself as the English “authority,” I actually enforce this position subconsciously when, in the informal conversational exchanges, I began to correct the participants’ grammar and vocabulary. By doing this, I reinforce the dominant discourse that positions me as the English

language “expert”—reproducing my position as the individual with power and authority. Because researcher positionality impacts the analysis that follows in the next chapter, the purpose of this discussion on humanism and poststructuralism, teacher/ researcher and student/ participant relationships, and language and white-English has been to reveal some of my grappling with researcher positioning.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter presented and explained the research design and methodology for this study. First, I presented the two questions that guided this research, which are:

1. What subject positions pertaining to language can be identified in what it is like to be a South Korean student studying in a Canadian university?
2. How are these subject positions negotiated in the construction of student identities?

Next, I introduced this study’s context and the guidelines for the who and how of participant selection. I provided background information on each participant. After that, I outlined the three data collection methods, which are: informal conversational exchanges, narrative dialogue journals, and personal researcher diary. Because this is a qualitative researcher endeavor and participant relationships are of particular interest to me, I wrote about some of the tensions I experienced as a “researcher,” navigating concerns around transparency and trust. In the data analysis section, I provided some points of contention between poststructuralist approaches to data analysis. Laying this foundation allowed me to flush out some of the uncertainties I had with wanting to locate myself in one particular method of analysis. I describe my analysis process and some of the reflexive choices I made along the way. Finally, since this study is about positioning

of South Korean students at a Canadian university, it was critical that I exercise some reflexivity in trying to see that which is so difficult to see: the dominant discourses in which I'm so heavily embedded! My researcher positioning allowed me to think more deeply about power in relation to who I am: a native-English speaking, ESL teaching, white Canadian woman. I became more conscious in my role in producing and reproducing discursive practices that reinforce dominant ways of thinking, doing, and being. What follows next in the analysis chapter is an exploration of the participants' experiences as English speaking students.

## Chapter Four: Language and Power

### Introduction

This chapter describes participants' experiences as English speakers in a Canadian university. This chapter is organized around what I term *moments of tension*. These moments of tension are not themes because pertinent in this qualitative study is an appreciation for the differences, in addition to similarities, across the participants' experiences. Thus, the moments of tension are entry points into explorations of six Korean students' English language experiences. In these moments of tension, I consider how the participants negotiate their various subject positions within the dominant discourses of "being" English speakers in Canada. I put the word *being* in quotation marks because each participant's understandings of what it means to "be" an English speaker is unique and complex. In addition, this chapter also explores some pre-discursive thoughts as participants' feelings also come into play in their experiences.

Regarding the style of participant representation, I have consciously chosen to present the data within the literature. While some researchers present the data first and then engage with the literature in a subsequent discussion, I weave in the literature throughout the data in this chapter because it would be naïve of me to pretend I am not influenced by the literature I have read. Regarding the formatting of text in the data excerpts, the italicized text beginning with *Jennifer* represents my voice and the text with the pseudonyms represents the participants' voices. The bold-faced words are used for emphasis and the [parentheses] are my added explanations. When I have placed three full stops (...) in the text, it is because I have omitted part of the conversation that I judged not pertinent to the analysis.

### The ESL label: “ESL title is pretty embarrassing”

When I asked Eric to describe his experience studying English at the university, the following conversation unfolded:

*Jennifer: so when you came here you started in the 020 ESL program?*

Eric: uh-hun

*Jennifer: and how did that feel?*

Eric: pretty **embarrassing**

*Jennifer: embarrassed?*

Eric: **embarrassed yah**, because like I said many people, Koreans, go over [higher] than 030 level, but I couldn't do that...yah, they asked me, 'where do you belong in the ESL program?' and I said '020' and they **said '020? Do they teach you about apples? Or some easy grammar?'** like, **they are saying your English is so poor, I implied they judge me, my English is so poor**

*Jennifer: you had that feeling?*

Eric: yah, that's how I felt

*Jennifer: how do you feel now?*

Eric: Now it depends on the situation, when they [Korean people] ask me where I belong in the ESL program I say 050 [highest level], **I'm pretty embarrassed again**, now I want to be a university student, that **ESL title is pretty embarrassing.**

Discourse and experiences seem to produce Eric in a way that he feels embarrassed about his English studies. Eric's embarrassment is an embodied even palpable experience, yet also impacted by what other Korean speakers have said. What is interesting to me in this exchange is that he “want[s] to be a university student.” One possibility about his embarrassment is, “ESL is a hindrance to [his] future, whereas the mainstream represented the imagined community of freedom” (Cohen, 2012, p. 277). Ofelia Garcia's body of work on the implications of labeling students who speak languages other than English is critical in unpacking the complexities in Eric's positioning. Garcia (2009) suggests that the term *emergent bilingual* is more appropriate

for English language learners like Eric because it refers to a student's potential to develop their bilingualism rather than deficiencies or limitation when comparing these students to English speakers. The theoretical position Garcia (2009) takes around her discussion of terminology is summarized quite nicely when Eric tells me, "the ESL title is pretty embarrassing." The deficit discourse towards second language speakers of English constructs them as the educational problem (Shapiro, 2014, p. 386) and positions them with the conversational burden—in other words, they have the problem; henceforth, the onus of responsibility in solving this problem rests with them. Therefore, Eric recognizes the deficit discourse inherent in ESL and identifies it as such in his response by describing it as "embarrassing." His feelings are impacted by discourses around the ESL label.

Educators ignore the linguistic capital that students bring with them to the classroom and focus on what they are lacking as English speakers (Garcia, 2009). Eric tells me, "in English class, I gotta speak only English, right." However, outside the classroom Eric is able to exercise some agency as a "multi-competent speaker" (Pavlenko, 2003, p. 261) of Korean and Japanese. In the excerpt below, he describes his ability to switch between multiple languages:

I made a girlfriend here and she is Japanese and we usually talk Japanese and Korean, she can understand Korean too, so I switch, many times I switch the language, Japanese, Korean, English.

Interestingly, Eric's multilingual speaker identity is not performed inside the classroom. His capability of being able to speak more than one language has no currency in his "only English" classroom. The significance here is this: when discursive classroom practices do not make space for a student's multiple linguistic competency, English is

positioned as more valuable than other languages. My point is that languages do not have to compete; thus, there should be no threat to English when a student brings their multilingualism into the classroom. Arguably, not acknowledging the value of a student's multilingualism means a part of who they are, their multilingual speaker identities, may be left outside the classroom.

Marshall (2009) says, “many students, who may be identified as ESL due to physical appearance, accent, or use of a language other than English, do not in fact have English as a second language” (p. 47). In Eric's case, he is fluent in Korean and Japanese with English being his third language; yet, in many cases, there is not always clear distinction between an individual's first, second, and third language (Marshall, 2009). Therefore, Eric does not necessarily escape the “ESL label” once he enters mainstream university classes. His physical characteristics and the way he uses English, for example his non-native speaker accent (Sterzuk, 2015), put him at risk for forever being positioned by others as an incompetent English language learner/ speaker rather than a multilingual global citizen. In its use of “ESL”, the university perpetuates a standard of English benchmarked on international students' English language deficiencies, rather than drawing upon and harnessing the immeasurable potential of their multilingualism.

### **The “Native-speaker” Category: “I want to be like a native-speaker”**

In the following exchanges, I asked Anne-Marie and Judy about their choice to come to Canada to study English. Anne-Marie replied as follows:

Anne-Marie: ...pronunciation. **I want similar to American.**

*Jennifer: why do you want similar to American English?*

Anne-Marie: for a more **common** and **soft sound, natural**

*Jennifer: oh, so if you went back to Korea with an Australian English accent then what would happen?*

Anne-Marie: actually, it doesn't matter in Korea, but **I want to speak like an American.**

*Jennifer: do you know why you want to speak like an American?*

Anne-Marie: **tone and accent**, I like this tone and accent

Anne-Marie wants to speak like an American because American English is “common” and “natural.” She elaborated:

Anne-Marie: I have a **special accent in Korean** and other country people [other international students] have special accent and pronunciation so when we talk together **we didn't understand** [each other] the first time

*Jennifer: so it takes some time to get used to the different ways of speaking? So then what did you think about having a non-native speaker as your teacher?*

Anne-Marie: ...um, it's not bad, but I think [pause] **native speaker is better**

*Jennifer: because?*

Anne-Marie: for example, when I have some questions sometimes I don't understand a sentence meaning or vocabulary, **I ask some native speaker teacher to explain the meaning, it's very clear and I can accept, but different culture teachers, non-native speakers, they think a lot, it's not clear**

In this informal conversational exchange, it is Anne-Marie that is positioning native English speaking teachers as “better” than non-native English speaking teachers. Judy's goal to “be” like a native-English speaker is represented as follows:

In my case I had a **study dream**...I wanted to be like a **native-speaker**...Ahhh it means when I was a private [English] tutor I saw some people talking with foreigners, international person in English fluently on the street, whenever I saw them I just concentrate on their talking, just English ability, so I **envy them**...I always thought...**I want to be them.**

One dominant discourse that emerges from Anne-Marie and Judy's experiences as English speakers is connected to what Holliday (2006; 2008) refers to as native-speakerism. Native-speakerism is defined as a “pervasive ideology within ELT [English Language Teaching], characterized by the belief that “‘native-speaker’ teachers represent a ‘Western culture’ from which spring the ideals both of the English language and of

English language teaching methodology” (Holliday, 2006, p. 385). This ideology is deeply rooted in institutional practices and policies (Canagarajah, 1999; Holliday, 2006; Lui, 1999) and therefore, if left unchallenged, has major consequences for classroom discourses.

After my first exchange with Judy, I asked if she was interested in meeting me again; she replied:

yah of course, I want to make international friends, not Chinese, not Japanese, others...it's not easy to meet Canadian student so in the ESL program only Chinese and Japanese yah sometimes Saudi guys...so I found out that it would not be good for me to improve my speaking English.

There is a tendency to assume that Standard English (read: upper-class British or white American/ Canadian English) is synonymous to correct English (Braine, 1999). This type of thinking is dangerous because when native-English speakers, such as myself, get benchmarked as the linguistic ideal, then societal inequities are reproduced; the consequences of using native-English as the benchmark is discrimination against anyone who does not sound like a “Canadian” or, in Anne-Marie’s case, an “American.” Pertinent here is the acknowledgement that there is nothing inherently neutral about the way a Canadian speaks, nor does a homogenous variety of Canadian English exist (Boberg, 2008).

Poststructuralism allows for a reconceptualization of native and non-native English speaker categories given the multiplicity and fluidity of an individual’s identit(ies), or subjectivities in a performative perspective. That said, discourses produce discursive practices that continue to reify these categories: the Korean students position themselves or measure their legitimacy as English speakers as benchmarked against

white Canadian (or American) native English speakers. In Anne-Marie's case, this discourse manifests itself in pronunciation; in Judy's case, it's fluency. Dichotomizing views of nativeness and non-nativeness continue to play themselves out in the everyday language practices of students in Canadian universities.

The implications fixed labels like “native English speaker” and “ESL student” have for student identities and their influence on language learning should not be overlooked. Poststructuralism allows for a different way to think about dichotomies that position one particular group as superior to another. Cook (1999) says it best: skilled, second language users should be viewed as “successful multi-competent speakers, not failed native speakers” (p. 204). If “non-native” English speakers are consistently measured or compared to “native” English speakers, either by their own positioning or others, then how can “non-native” English speakers be recognized as legitimate speakers of English? Unfortunately, Judy and Anne-Marie are “paradoxically contribut[ing] to their own subjugation through the performance of hegemonic practices” (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 47). This subjugation being: their desire to speak English in a particular way—the legitimized and privileged dialect of white Canadian native-speaker English.

### **Desire for Fluency**

In this study, the native-speaker discourse produces participants in ways that position them as legitimate English speakers if they are “fluent,” as benchmarked against white Canadian native-English speakers. Judy told me:

To be honest with you, I think I'm not sure I don't know how big, how large, how much my English ability has increased, just it means, at school I learned just academic [English], read, write, not speak, not listen, ESL just writing, **few opportunity to practice**, still poor, whenever some of my Korean friends [in Korea] ask me about my English, I said 'you know it's almost the same' [as when

she first came], not big changes...**they think ‘Judy, she can speak English fluently’, but no...I don’t think so...**you know hesitation, in my mind a lot of words, **I need some time...for me to speak**, I asked my host mom, ‘I improved my English?’ She said, ‘yah you improved a lot.’ **But still I don’t know.**

What is interesting here is Judy asks a native-English speaker, her white-Canadian host mother, for confirmation of her English improvement. Yet, this affirmation isn’t enough for her to “know” if she is improving. Meanwhile, her friends back home have “imagined” Judy to “speak English fluently.” Discourse produces Judy in a way that she doubts her English abilities. From the text above, hesitation and thinking time are two reasons why Judy doesn’t think she is a fluent English speaker. Judy continues:

for me to recognize myself as a good English speaker...I have to face lots of [personal] challenges including nice pronunciation...I heard many people [native-English speakers] tell me that my pronunciation is good so it made me have confidence.

In a longitudinal case study looking at how one Korean international graduate student’s motivation had an impact on her English language improvement, a student named Mina had an experience similar to Judy. Mina says, she “really did not like that her pronunciation was so different from the native speaker, so she practiced hundreds of times until she achieved near-native like pronunciation” (Lee, 2014, p. 444). Native-like pronunciation is linked to Judy’s confidence as a “good” English speaker.

Correspondingly, when I asked Kevin if he was an English speaker, he paused and reposed the question back to me, saying: “you think?” There was a pause in our exchange as he waited for me to answer him. One possibility for this re-phrasing is that Kevin is seeking confirmation of his English fluency from me: a white Canadian native-English speaking ESL teacher. Like Judy and Kevin, Eric described his English experiences regarding fluency in a similar way:

**I don't think I can speak in English fluently as domestic student** within just 3-5 years. I've been trying to improve my English skills and actually **put a lot of effort on it**. Like watching TV, reading books, doing homework, **everything can be part of my effort to improve the skill**.

Similarly, Eric is positioning his English fluency in relation to “domestic student[s];” in other words, white Canadian native-English speakers. What Judy, Kevin, and Eric have in common regarding their desire for English fluency is an uncertainty about their English abilities and a comparison of their abilities to native-English speakers. The “non-native English speaking movement has been instrumental in documenting the privilege of native speakers” (Aneja, 2016, p. 1), and poststructuralism gives us the ability to challenge abstract categories that perpetuate false discourses of an inherent correctness in native-speaker English. Yet, Subtirelu (2013) notes that native speaker debates in language learning are still unresolved. Evidently, the English language experiences of the participants in this study unveil the ever-present desire for native-speaker fluency; the dominant discourse abounds.

### **English Fear**

The six participants in this study speak about English fear as they grapple with experiences as English speakers; although all six participants experience fear as it relates to English, the origin of their fears and how they navigate their fears is unique and different for each of them. Eric's investment in improving his English skills after he graduated from the ESL program is important because he feels “fear[ful]” that his English level will fall, expressed in the above excerpt. He spends a lot of time “trying to improve [his] English skills and actually put[s] a lot of effort on it...like watching TV, reading books, doing homework, everything can be part of [his] effort to improve [his]

skill.” One reason Eric invests his time and energy in maintaining his language skills is because of his fear. Eric told me that because of the various organizations he belongs to on campus, “making domestic students as friends is not tough.” In comparison to Eric, Jihye has a different experience:

Jihye: I think for one year, I didn't say something to other people [in English], **I didn't talk.**

*Jennifer: one year?*

Jihye: yah almost one year...

Jennifer: why did you feel you couldn't talk?

Jihye: uh, I don't know, I think, **I feel shy and I don't have confidence with my English**

Jihye's lack of confidence with her English speaking abilities isn't only outside of the classroom. She also didn't speak in class because, “my teacher was so strict, and I feel afraid.” One possibility for Jihye's English fear is if she doesn't speak perfectly others may position her in rather negative ways. The possibility of this deficient or negative positioning has implications for how she performs as an English speaker in Canadian classrooms. In addition to Jihye, Sinyoung shared her experience and fears as an English-speaking student in Canada:

Sinyoung: when I go out and meet new people, if there's an event like, **I'm a quiet person sometimes**, I'm okay you know talking to new person at the event you know becoming friends if she's like a person that I like and that I could become a good friend with and the next day, we go out. It was really a **natural thing to mingle with people, but here [in Canada] I start hiding myself, I'm trying to be anti-social sometimes. Like, you know, I get fear sometimes you know to go and introduce myself and get to know this person and what if this person doesn't really like me, what if this person starts thinking I'm stupid and cuz, when I'm nervous I will make more mistakes.**

*Jennifer: like with your language?*

Sinyoung: yes! And that's when I realized you know I can do this when I'm back home [in Korea] **but I cannot do the same thing here** [freely introduce

herself] and you know sometimes **I tried to be brave and** tried to you know go and introduce myself and try to be friendly **but I don't get the same reactions**, sometimes people, like people are nice **but sometimes people don't get it and I feel like you know maybe the way I speak is wrong.**

There are many interesting points of consideration in Sinyoung's exchange above, but what is intriguing is when she talks about hiding who she is in Canada when she is mingling with people she meets for the first time. The fear of making mistakes and appearing unintelligent is strong. The very material effects of discourses of intelligibility on a participant's English performance are significant. Being positioned as "stupid" by the dominant group, which is native-English speakers in Sinyoung's experience, is one way for dominant groups to maintain their position of power. The (re)production of this dominant status is dependent on the discursive practices that keep it in place. When Sinyoung speaks, she risks being positioned as "stupid." Yet, when she exercises her agency to resist being positioned as "stupid," she risks being someone she's not: someone who has to "hide." Discourses of English speaker legitimacy present Sinyoung with limited positions: speak English and be positioned as stupid, or be quiet and be someone you're not. While the positions may be limited, they are never simplistic or static; thus, I acknowledge the complexity in participants' choices in navigating the shifting terrain of language performativity and English positioning as discourse produces participants in this study in particular ways. How Sinyoung negotiates these positions, in particular, tells us more about her identity construction process as a site of struggle (Peirce Norton, 1995). She continued:

Sinyoung: So listening and reading was fine, and speaking to professors were was fine too, but still with your classmates, when you go out and you communicate, but **you can't be who you are as like a person.**

*Jennifer: Okay, describe that to me.*

Sinyoung: Ummm, okay like **in Korean, in Korea I can fully express** who I am, my personality and how critical I am sometimes, how funny I am sometimes, but **with English it was really hard for me to express who I am** and when I was trying to do that, I kept um making mistakes and people were like lost, [mimics friends] ‘what are you trying to say?’ and they kind of ah **hurt my feeling** and they were nice but it kinda hurt my feeling, **I became shy and just didn’t try**, and I **tried to become a person who never make mistakes and doesn’t try to show myself to other people, so, sometimes when I meet my [Canadian] friends I feel they don’t really know me.** And that’s **when I say something from my deep inside, they don’t understand.** [mimics friend] ‘really were you feeling this? I thought that you were not that type of person’ so I um faced that type of difference

Native-speaker positioning creates English fear that can lead to changes in the material lives of the participants. The material effects for Sinyoung were how she took up what it meant to be an English speaker in Canada. She described to me that in Korean she was more of an active person, an active speaker. But she identified more as a passive listener when she performed in English. These English experiences and the fear that accompanied them had an impact on her future:

*Jennifer: Do you think you’ll ever return to Korea?*

Sinyoung: I’m actually eventually planning to go back, you know when I was in Korea or whenever I visit Korea, I still complain about the culture in Korea, you know how men treat women, I always complain, but I don’t really complain the culture here [in Canada], but I feel more happy there

*Jennifer: in Korea?*

Sinyoung: yah, in Korea. **I feel less stress** so I’m planning to go back, yes yes

The impact of English fear on the trajectory of these participants’ lives and future should not go unnoticed.

In the following exchange, Anne-Marie talked about not being understood by her classmates and how that affects her view of herself as an English-speaking student:

Anne-Marie: sometimes when I talk about something, they [other classmates] **don’t understand my meaning**, sometimes they told me ‘your sentence **is not clear**’, and many times when I talk I hesitate with ‘ah, ah, ah’ then I say ‘that’s

okay' **I gave up many times** [stopped speaking], so my friends tease me, '**are you sure** you are in 040 class?'

*Jennifer: so how do you feel in those situations?*

Anne-Marie: I know he's just teasing me, now I understand but already...**some students ignore me**, I felt that, so **I lost a lot of confidence**

Anne-Marie's hesitation when speaking results in her classmates positioning her as inferior: "are you sure you are in 040 class?" Even though Anne-Marie acknowledges that these students are simply "teasing" her, she also "feels" that some of her classmates "ignore" her. Anne-Marie also "gave up" and stopped speaking when her teacher cut her off in class:

Anne-Marie: I had some **problem with speaking** when my teacher asked a question ...so **at first I thought** and then answered the question, but I didn't say the conclusion, **but my teacher interrupt me and I couldn't say my conclusion**

*Jennifer: oh, so what did you do?*

Anne-Marie: I gave up! [stopped speaking]

Anne-Marie does her best to participate and speak in English but because she hesitates and is not fast enough, her classmates either ignore or tease her and her teacher interrupts her. Anne-Marie becomes a silent student. This experience is what Coombs, Park & Fecho (2014) refer to when they describe the invisibility that often accompanies silence as a response. When students are silent they also become invisible. This invisibility suggests that students must be vocal if they want to be recognized as legitimate members of the classroom community.

When Anne-Marie's teacher interrupts her, she gives up and stops participating in class discussions—she chooses to be a silent student. Lee (2014) notes that English learners' "lack of communicative competence in the target language prevents L2 [second language] learners from gaining legitimate peripheral participation and membership in the target discourse communities" (p. 447). The discursive classroom practices limit

Anne-Marie's potential to be an active participant in class discussion. Anne-Marie uses her agency in a way that allows her to perform a more desirable identity as an English speaker. She carves out opportunities for herself to speak outside of the classroom: "but now I try to talk a lot with my friends and every weekend I have some experiences or hangout with my friends, so I find the chance to speak." Although Anne-Marie is silent in class, she is negotiating a powerful identity for herself and claiming what Lee (2014) calls the "right to speak" (p. 442) outside of the classroom.

Suresh Canagarajah (2004) refers to spaces where students aren't pressured to adopt uniform linguistic classroom identities as *pedagogical safe houses*. Anne-Marie's safe house was outside of the classroom; she was able to create a safe space among her friends that didn't require her to adapt to the mainstream classroom communication practices of speaking quickly enough to avoid being interrupted or cut off. In other words, she made the choice to "purposefully divest from particular language and literacy practices" (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 47) in the classroom and invest in language and literacy practices with her friends outside the confines of the classroom. Understanding classroom discursive practices is necessary background knowledge for knowing what kinds of identities are available to students, and is a precondition for understanding the prospects for "'breakthrough' action and change" (Baxter, 2016, p. 43). That said, not all students take up opportunities for change.

Judy explained an experience of an ESL teacher positioning students as "poor at English:"

**some teachers ignore the international students English**, so, yah, I know some poor, some students who are poor at English, don't make efforts, **but some students still making efforts, their efforts, but some teachers don't know that**, just when they are in class they ummm what, evaluate the scores or

intimacy with each other so and I heard many times this, about this, ‘you are **poor at English, that’s why you are here, came here, so your pronunciation, your reading skills, your speaking skills are like 020 [lower level], you have to go down to 020**, sometimes it **can hurt students’ desire to study English**, or, they, after **they are hurt that their motivation to study English will go down**.

Yoon’s (2007) study on classroom teachers’ positioning and its effects on students’ identities shows that when students are positioned by their teachers as “resourceful and intellectual instead of powerless and inferior” (p. 221) there is an increase in the language learners’ interaction with peers. In the above situation, the teacher is positioning the entire class quite negatively, which Judy says “can hurt students’ desire to study English.” This type of positioning also has an impact on the language learners’ classroom participation practices. Further, teacher positioning cannot only “hurt students’ desire to study English” as Judy says, but can also create fear for students. As such, teachers play a powerful role when they position their students as “competent” or “incompetent” language learners. This positioning has a great impact on the students’ learning process and on their language learning identities. Learning a new language is a very personal and intimate process because it lends itself to considering a new way of being.

### **Imagined Communities: “Fantasy of...Canadian culture”**

Anne-Marie’s English language learning experiences are much different in her “reality” than they are in her imagination:

*Jennifer: do you like to speak English?*

Anne-Marie: **yah**

*Jennifer: why?*

Anne-Marie: by speaking English **I can communicate with many other people from other country so it’s very interesting and easy to understand other, to communicate their culture and their thinking, so it’s good**

*Jennifer: Do you think Canadian culture is different than Korean culture?*

Anne-Marie: actually, I have some **fantasy of American culture or Canadian culture**, but when I came here it's a little bit different [than she imagined]

*Jennifer: and what was your experience?*

Anne-Marie: ...I think in Korea before I come here **I imagined** before I go to Canada [that because] I can't speak **English a lot** and I will have many experiences and **I can improve my English skill in a very short time**, just 3 months, but I can't speak a lot...

*Jennifer: that's what you thought?*

Anne-Marie: yah, **my image**, but I stayed in Regina for almost 4 months, 5 months **but my imagine and real life is different**

*Jennifer: how?*

Anne-Marie: how? Ummm this university curriculum has listening, speaking, writing, and reading, **I want to speak a lot and I have to practice listening** but sometimes **I have a lot of homework...so I have to stay in my room alone**, in my case, I have to [want to] talk a lot and practice listening, but I don't have enough time [to do that because she is doing her homework], **I don't know if this is my excuse or not**

Norton (2001) explains that when learners invest in an imagined community they also invest in an imaged identity. Thus, sometimes the communities that learners want to be a part of are only “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1991). These imagined communities are sustained by a person's romantic images—or in Anne-Marie's words: “fantasy of American culture or Canadian culture”—of the target language along with their desire to make this image real (Gallucci, 2014). The idea of “imagined communities” is pertinent to this study because Anne-Marie speaks about her desire to improve her “English skill in a very short time.” Discourses of English language proficiency in a relatively short period of time do not match up with Anne-Marie's experiences as a second language learner in Canada: “but my image and real life is different.” Discourses that shape how a Korean student's desire or fantasy of the West influences their language learning and use are worth exploring further; classroom language practices and curriculum objectives may be limiting students' agency to

achieve their desired identities. Anne-Marie “want[s] to speak a lot:” however, the class workload has her studying in her room alone.

### **Employment in Canada: “I’m not Canadian”**

When I was talking with Anne-Marie, she was very open to the idea of immigrating to Canada if she met a man here, but she explained some of the limitations she may experience:

*Jennifer: would you ever stay and live here in Canada?*

Anne-Marie: I have to go back to Korea, but I already told you, it’s **not important where I live** [in other words, she can live anywhere], I know Canada is a very good place but **I’m not Canadian**, so I think the Korean government protects Koreans, so I think if I’m Canadian [English speaker] I think Canada is the best place, but

*Jennifer: how do you become a Canadian?*

Anne-Marie: it’s good, but I think **even if I become Canadian I am limited to find my job**

*Jennifer: why?*

Anne-Marie: **because of language, language and many immigrants work in restaurants, laundry, cleaning**, I think their job is valuable but I want to work higher than...

Anne-Marie’s poignant words, “I’m not Canadian,” are worth repeating. What is important to note from this phrase are the very material effects on possibilities of employment based on being positioned as an “immigrant” “because of language.” Anne-Marie’s experience is similar to Latina student Fabiana in Menard-Warwick’s (2007) study when the teacher positions Fabiana as a homemaker, thus preventing her from projecting the image of businesswoman. Anne-Marie is a young talented and educated woman with a Master’s degree and although she values “restaurant, laundry, cleaning” jobs, she aspires to “work higher” and project a different professional identity.

In a study by Frank and Ilieva (2015) on the professional identity of twelve internationally educated teachers who immigrated to Canada as teachers, “language and linguistic abilities emerged as a pervasive theme” (p. 139). Specifically, the international English teachers in this study questioned their teacher identities as a result of being negatively positioned because of their language proficiency and English accent. Frank and Ilieva’s (2015) study relates to my research because of Anne-Marie’s English language experiences and observations of immigrants in lower jobs. Of significance here is that while no one has told Anne-Marie she cannot get a job in her profession, she has observed the positioning of immigrants in the workforce in Canada.

Anne-Marie identifies and rejects the discourse that positions second language English speakers in “socially recognizable categories” (Menard-Warwick, 2008, p. 285), such as service industry workers. So, Anne-Marie is able to identify discourse that positions second language English speakers in service industry jobs; she is also “capable of exercising choice in relation to [this discursive] practice” (Baxter, 2016, p. 41). Thus, even though Anne-Marie “know[s] Canada is a very good place,” she exercises her agency in her choice to “go back to Korea.” Frank and Ilieva (2015) state, “the success of Canada’s immigration policy is intrinsically tied to employment of an immigrant workforce” (p. 139). Immigrant positionings may offer participants, like Judy, less than desirable professional identities.

Sinyoung described her language experiences at her student workplace:

Sinyoung: seriously, when I was in ESL, I was naïve and young. I was fine, but now I’m more yah, worried from doing Co-op, working like when I was doing a professional job, **I was trying to be careful with what I was saying, it kinda scared me**, cuz when you are **at work they don’t expect you to make mistakes [in English], they expect that you are capable of doing your job**

Jennifer: yah

Sinyoung: **I'm getting more and more scared**

Jennifer: *ah, that's interesting.*

Important here is how Sinyoung positions herself as naïve when she was an ESL student. Professional identity discourse seems to have produced Sinyoung in such a way that she fears making English “mistakes” at work and is “getting more and more scared;” the stakes are higher for her in these workspaces as errors in language are equated with being “[in]capable of doing your job.” Sinyoung fights against discourses that link English performance to workplace competence.

### **Respect for the Teacher**

How students are positioned in relation to their teacher is significant because a teachers' positioning “can be a critical factor in influencing ELLs' [English Language Learners] interactive patterns” (Yoon, 2008, p. 516). The students in this study are very much concerned with the respect of the teacher. Judy says, “I should respect my teacher, it's my responsibility.” The significance in this utterance is that Judy accepts respecting her teacher as a responsibility. This position doesn't mean Judy isn't frustrated with her teachers: “I am angry at Susan's marking, she's a teacher! She knows my mistakes, my weak points, my faults, so still I think I have to respect her [not challenge her].” In this utterance, discourse of teacher respect may limit Judy's choice to take up a concern with her teacher. One of Judy's classmates told her, “you should not touch her [the teacher's] feelings or mood because she is very sensitive, so if you complain to [about] her marking, probably you will be treated badly.” At last, Judy tells me about a time when she received a low mark on an essay and wanted to talk to her teacher about the score but didn't because she didn't want to affect the other students' grade (Burton, 2016).

Similarly, Jihye shared what her idea of respect means to her: “I feel that’s why I couldn’t say something to my teacher, I think “just respect my teacher,” so other students think the teacher is like a friend, they talk very friendly, it’s hard for me.” Similar to Judy, Jihye remains quiet as one way to “respect” her teacher. Respect for Jihye also means not being too friendly with the teacher. She later explained that she is surprised that teachers are also “advisors” and do more than simply teach. The discourse of teacher respect has implications for how the participants in this study perform as students, which impacts what they can say and do in the classroom.

I share my reflections on the discourse of teacher respect with this excerpt from my personal researcher journal:

*It doesn’t surprise me that respect for the teacher is important. I also understand respect to mean different things to different people. In Canada, for instance, it is respectful to hold the door open for the person behind you, but it is not considered rude if you don’t do this in Korea. If you bump into someone in Korea, you don’t need to apologize; whereas, in Canada, it may be considered rude if you don’t apologize. I think I need to ask my participants further into what it means to “respect” their teacher. How do they conceptualize this term? What does respect mean to them?*

Judy described “respect” as follows, “concentrate on class, not be rude, complete assignments in time.” Performing as a “good” student is Judy’s way to demonstrate respect. What is interesting is she also makes a distinction between respecting the individual and respecting the profession: “I respect his position as a teacher, not his/ her personality.” Judy used a fascinating analogy to describe what it means to “respect” a teacher: “a bad law is still a law.” In other words, Judy’s job as a student is to respect her teacher even if she doesn’t like or agree with her teacher.

Similar to Judy, when I asked Eric to clarify what he means by “respect” he said, “even if I use the word respect, it doesn’t mean that I respect him or her [the teacher]

personally. It does mean that I just respect the profession...and I have to follow and I'm obligated as to what I've been taught." Further, Eric explained how he's been educated to think about teachers when he said, "Koreans have to respect the teachers as elders. Many Koreans don't just think their teacher as just a person teaching something. We have all been educated that all teachers are great, so we have to oblige and respect them." Eric's statement reveals some complexities in the presentation of self in every day life. His statement is significant in the context of English communication with instructors in the classroom. One possibility for Korean students not challenging or questioning their teachers may be because of how they conceptualize the professional identity of the teacher. The discourse of respect for the professional teacher produces discursive functions. These discursive functions limit what students can and cannot say to their teachers. Power and language use are intertwined.

### **Direct Communication**

Three of the participants in this study recognized differences among English speaking discursive practices. Sinyoung talked about her language experiences at her place of employment:

Sinyoung: like it could be a really short statement but **I prefer to make it longer to be polite**, like when I have to ask a favour from like friends or people at work, they're like, **they think that it's impolite** sometimes like [mimics coworker] **'just tell me what you need'** [laughs], **they get frustrated sometimes** and they start getting lost with what actually **I'm trying to say, yah and the politeness**, how we [Koreans] speak, **how we put the sentence, that really yah effects when I'm speaking in English** cuz I feel like **that would work the same here but it doesn't**

*Jennifer: it doesn't?*

Sinyoung: no, and that's like something you can actually learn here, yah you cannot really learn in Korea

Sinyoung's description of her language experiences showcases the very social practice of language. Language as a social practice means that language and society are not separate entities and therefore cannot be studied in seclusion. As such, conventions of politeness as a signification of respect means that Sinyoung "prefer[s] to make [her statements] longer." However, her co-workers take up her discursive performance of English politeness as something different - "they think that it's impolite." The following statement is striking: "how we put the sentence [in Korean], that really...affects when I'm speaking in English...I feel like that would work the same here but it doesn't." The subject positions available to Sinyoung as an English speaker, based on discursive language functions in Canadian classrooms, are different than those subject positions in other discourses.

In her time in Canada, Judy has adapted the way she communicates:

Judy: in my mind I **still have Korean culture that I express my feelings indirectly**, so yah, as I told you, for my previous Japanese host sister, at first, I expressed my feelings indirectly, **I showed not the hurt her**, but she didn't understand, so after having problem, I **decided to say something to her in direct way...**

*Jennifer: how did you feel?*

Judy: after that my stress flew out and **my relationship became** better than before, so that's important to me...[Judy has asked me to remove part of this conversation as it is very personal] so now I learned to speak English...no no no, **communicate with international people using English, I have to tell them directly, it's a more effective way**

Unlike Sinyoung, Judy speaks directly with others when using English. She describes this way as "more effective." Even though Judy is influenced by her Korean communication behaviours, she is able to shift between context dependent discursive practices by performing English in different ways for different purposes. This example

points to students' ability to negotiate multiple subject positions across competing discourses.

Eric's language experience is similar to Sinyoung's:

Eric: **to say 'no' directly is a very rude behaviour in my culture because of our tradition**, traditional thought, so umm in Canada many people who want to hang out with me always ask me 'when do you have time?' and at that time I really wanted to just study English and not hang out, I **wanted to say 'no' but I couldn't say no because of my traditional thought** so all the time I just said 'well if I have time I will call you' or something like that and yah 'some day let's hangout' ...and **many Canadian friends don't understand me** because I always say 'let's hangout' and then they ask [mimics English speaking friends] 'when? Exactly when?' [laughs]

Eric's experiences are similar with Sinyoung's in that he uses the discursive communication patterns influenced by his first language. Eric explained further:

Eric: 'I'm really busy' yah it implies that I'm really busy so can you understand my case and my situation? [which is: I can't meet you]

Jennifer: *rather than saying 'I'm really busy, sorry I can't meet'*

Eric: yah, yah, so if I'm not busy I will call you, but Canadians are different [mimics English speaking friends] '**so when exactly** can you meet?' They don't try to guess what I'm saying

Jennifer: *right, they're looking for*

Eric: **directly**

Jennifer: *right, so when you say 'some day' they ask 'which day?'*

Eric: yah, so **they don't care about my problem, they don't care about my circumstance**, of course it's not a bad thing, but I just want them to imply [understand] my situation, my circumstance

Jennifer: *imply?*

Eric: yah, imply

Jennifer: *you could say read between the lines. Do you know this expression?*

Eric: yah, true, right

What is interesting in how Eric positions himself as an English speaker is with regards to where he assigns the responsibility for understanding. That responsibility rests with the Canadian English speakers; in other words, the onus is on them to "imply [his] situation." Eric's experience demonstrates how meaning is only temporarily fixed in

place because it relies on the discursive context. Rather than adopting a more “Canadian” discursive practice, even though he is aware of the difference, he continues to communicate in a way that is familiar and comfortable to him—an exercise in resistance. Eric is resisting a discourse that typically positions him as the interlocutor with the conversational burden (Phillipson, 1994). Instead of accepting this burden, he shifts some of the linguistic demands on his interlocutor, lessening his linguistic burden.

### **Relations with Koreans**

Each participant in this study had his/her own uncomfortable or awkward moment when speaking English with other Koreans in Canada. For instance, Jihye chooses not to speak English in front of other Koreans who are better English speakers than her:

Jihye: yah, in my case with Korean people, **I can’t speak English**

*Jennifer: in front of them?*

Jihye: yah

*Jennifer: why is that?*

Jihye: **similar level is okay**, but if they speak very well, yah, **I think they judge me**

The reason why Jihye does not speak English in front of other Koreans who are not at a similar level to her is because she thinks they will judge her. I find it noteworthy that she does not want to be positioned by other Koreans as inferior or superior at English. Jihye’s wanting to speak with only Koreans at an equivalent English proficiency level supports Jang and DaSilva Iddings’ (2010) study which found that a social comparison based on English proficiency was taking place between the two Korean students and creating a hierarchical relationship among them. Jihye’s language experience reminds

me of a similar language experience I had in Korea. I recall being in an awkward position as a teacher in my classroom:

*I remember a discussion one day with a group of four students who spoke English quite fluently. After sometime into our discussion an older student joined the English class. I welcomed him into the group discussion, but something odd happened – all four of the students stopped talking. When I asked them questions they would answer in short simple sentences. The class was no longer a group discussion. It was such an awkward moment for me as a teacher and I remember being so confused. When the older student left the room I looked at the four students and asked ‘what was that about?’ They explained that they chose to remain silent so the older student could speak English. They explained to me that because he was older and in a higher position (in the workplace) than them, they did not want to make him feel inferior because their English was better than his. This was a strategic move on their behalf as to not shame their senior. I remember walking away from that class with a whole new perspective on power relations in communication.*

When second language speakers make the decision to speak English in front of their first language group, they place themselves in a vulnerable position to be judged as “better” or “worse” than others. Being positioned as “better” or “worse” than other speakers may appear on the surface as rather trivial or unimportant; however, these positions have major implications for working relationships and discursive classroom practices. A Korean participant named Tom in Vasilopoulos’ (2015) study on language learners’ investment and identity, had this to say about Koreans speaking English with each other: “speaking English to Koreans, especially when your language proficiency is more advanced is considered to be showing off and is frowned upon” (p. 69). The significance of Vasilopoulos’ (2015) study as it relates to my research is that it demonstrates how language choices are embedded in power relations among interlocutors.

My experience in Korea is also an example of how language is entrenched in discourses of power. Not every English speaker is equal. As such, Korean English speakers in Canadian classrooms are negotiating and renegotiating relationships amongst

one another inside and outside of classroom interactions. This discursive positioning and repositioning of themselves and who they are as English speakers is a constant negotiation always in flux; this negotiation and renegotiation involves making decisions and choices to draw on various subject positions within and among competing discourses. So, a student may take up the position of “poor” English speaker at a given time, for a particular purpose or reason. Choices are made about when and when not to speak but also on how to speak.

When Sinyoung first came to Canada she tried to befriend some Korean ESL students, but she had a bad experience. This bad experience resulted in her making friends with other international students, rather than with Koreans. In the following excerpt, she described these encounters:

I won't try to find Korean people and try to be friends with them, I'm happy when I meet people from my country, so I met a few times, people in ESL, but ESL rule is you have to speak English all the time, right, so I tried to communicate in English and they felt like [mimics Korean students] '**she's not even good at English**' These 2-3 people started uh, kinda **hating me** and **talking about me** and it **kinda hurts me** and I was like, all people from my place started being not really nice with me and you know what, I didn't know them before [she came to Canada] so I don't care about it **and that made me build my friendship with people from different places** and that friendship kept me going until now.

In the above exchange, Sinyoung notes that she makes friends with other international students, not other Koreans. Notice here how she is being positioned as “not even good at English.” This positioning “made [her] build [her] friendship with people from different places.” Sinyoung's choice to befriend international students is pertinent because as McCloud (2015) says:

it demonstrates how aware students were of their cultural and linguistic difference within the school space. Building relationships with other English language

learners provided the opportunity for students to enter into the school's social and institutional context as English language learners. (p. 269)

Just like Sinyoung who made friends with students from other countries, Anne-Marie did the same. Anne-Marie also chose not to hang out with Koreans:

*Jennifer: do you speak English with your Korean friend?*

Anne-Marie: **actually I don't want to meet Koreans**, so usually I speak English with people from other countries

Anne-Marie was in Canada for the shortest period of time among all of the participants and Sinyoung was in Canada for the longest, yet both of them chose not to make Korean friends. Each befriended other international students, using English as the communication medium.

In Eric's experience, he chooses not to use English to practice or improve his speaking fluency outside the classroom with members from his first language community:

Eric: if I try to speak English in front of him [his Korean friend] maybe he will **get upset**

*Jennifer: get upset?*

Eric: yah

*Jennifer: oh, why do you think that?*

Eric: because even though he is working downtown, he is **getting a lot of stress** with his language.

What is pertinent in Eric's utterance is his consideration for his friend. Similarly, Kevin talks about an unspoken rule where he "has to speak Korean" rather than English when he is with a group of Koreans:

Kevin: sometimes I feel like, with Koreans if I speak English, **I feel awkward**, like my friend Mark, he is Korean, when we are in a group and we speak English, I feel awkward, like **there is a rule**, if there are Korean people, we **have to speak Korean**

*Jennifer: ...so when you are in a group of Korean people you speak Korean?*

Kevin: yah, like sometimes I **feel a little bit of pressure**, it's **not a rule but it's**

**like a rule, you have to follow it, but it's unwritten, a common understanding**

*Jennifer: so if you start speaking English, then what happens?*

Kevin: some guys start to say that **my Korean is weird or my Korean accent is weird** because I spoke some English

*Jennifer: oh, how do you feel about that?*

Kevin: [laughs] **so I can't speak English very well, I can't speak Korean very well** [both laugh]

One significant finding from Eric and Kevin's experiences of speaking English with Koreans is how language choices impact group membership. Christison (2010) expresses personal concern of losing the close connection to childhood community practices in making the decision to learn a second language. By speaking English, Kevin is positioning himself away from his Korean community and speaking Korean may be one way to maintain group membership. When Kevin performs in ways that go against these "unwritten common understanding[s]," in other words by speaking English, he gets positioned as an illegitimate speaker of both Korean and English—a rather dichotomous position to be in.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter was organized around *moments of tension*. The moments of tension discussed in this chapter are: ESL label, the native-speaker category, desire for fluency, English fear, imagined communities, employment in Canada, teacher respect, direct communication, and Korean relations. These moments of tension are not themes because not all participants shared perspectives on all of these topics; the moments of tension are entry points that allow for further exploration of similarities and differences across the six participants' English language experiences. Moments of tension allow viewpoints into the workings of positioning, discursive practices, and identity construction of particular English language experiences. The degree to which a student

accepts or rejects their subject position is a matter of conceptualizations of agency—an ongoing debate among differing poststructuralists positions. Yet, whether the participants in this study are aware or not, identity construction is also given to subjects through social practices. Thus, identity construction is never an individual, independent practice. Therefore, rejecting a subject position is always a practice with limited options. In sum, this chapter was a way to address my research questions, which follow in the next and final chapter of this thesis.

## Chapter Five: Conclusion and Suggestions

### Introduction

In Chapter Four, I explored the similarities and differences in participants' *moments of tension* in their English language experiences in Canada. These *moments of tension* include students' encounters with ESL labels, native-speaker identity, desire for fluency, English fear, imagined communities, employment in Canada, teacher respect, direct communication, and Korean relations. In Chapter Five, I address the research questions, discuss implications for teacher education and EAP programs in Canadian universities, and offer suggestions for future research directions. Finally, I end this thesis with some points of consideration and concluding thoughts.

### Approaching the Research Questions

I *approach* the research questions rather than *answer* the research questions because there is no neat or tidy way to address language and identity instantiations. This research was guided by these two questions:

1. What accessible student subject positions pertaining to language can be identified in the student narratives about what it is like to be a South Korean student studying in a Canadian university?
2. How are these subject positions made use of in the negotiation of student identity?

What emerges from the data is what I term *moments of tension* which include students' encounters with ESL labels, native-speaker identity, desire for fluency, English fear, imagined communities, employment in Canada, teacher respect, direct

communication, and Korean relations. By exploring participants' narratives across moments of tension, participants provide insight into some of the ways dominant discourses get produced and reproduced in the everyday interactions and practices within the university setting. Participants' English language experiences reveal regulatory processes that determine what are and aren't acceptable ways to speak, think, and behave as English-speaking Korean student in a Canadian university. Language, as a regulatory force, offers participants in this study a range of competing subject positions across varying discourses. My approach to research question one is to discuss some of the ways participants in this study were positioned as English speaking Korean students through the sharing of their stories.

Davies and Harré's poststructuralist positioning perspective is one approach to discuss some of the ways the participants in this study were positioned as English speaking students. This poststructuralist approach recognizes that individuals emerge through the process of social interactions and the constitutive force of discourse; thus, who an individual is, or must always be, is reiteratively the positionings made available to them within discursive practices, and the stories and experiences, within those discursive practices, by which they make sense of who they are (Davies & Harré, 1990). As mentioned in the literature review, because participants are recounting their experiences, they are engaging in *third order positioning*, which is "talk about the talk." The two types of positioning, which are usually unintentional, are *interactive positioning* where what one person positions another and *reflexive positioning*, whereby one positions oneself (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991).

The positioning approach considers “language and identity in terms of a balance between the ways in which discourses position participants as ‘subjects’ in competing ways and the ways participants make their own and other people’s actions socially determinant” (Baxter, 2016, p. 41). Discourses can compete with one another to offer different and “incompatible versions of reality” (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 2). For the participants in this study, discourse offers them subject positions or ‘ways of being’ legitimate English speaking students. Participants described their experiences of being English speakers in mostly negative ways using words like “uncomfortable,” “awkward,” or “weird,” for example. The participants were interactively positioned as *poor English speakers* by their teachers, professors, employers, classmates and friends as unveiled by their talk about their experiences in Canada. They also reflexively positioned themselves as poor English speakers to varying degrees—sometimes as a result of specific experiences with interlocutors in Canada, and sometimes these reflexive positions were the reasons that lead them to pursue English studies in Canada.

Because each participant’s experiences are unique to him or her, the position of being a *poor English speaker* manifests in various ways: in the way they speak (their accent, pronunciation) and how they speak (fluency, response time, silence). Also, a critical caveat here, in participant representation and interpretation, is acknowledgement that participants are sharing incidents that are not always reiterations of their language experiences but, at times, interpretations of their experiences. It is possible that participants may have shared the same class experiences, but it is their perceptions of that experience that is unique to them.

There are implications for being positioned as a poor English speaker.

Participants struggled to know if they could even consider themselves English speakers. Discourses of native-speakerism and comparisons of their English to standard white-native speaker English were referenced throughout the course of their narratives as they recounted their experiences. Another implication of poor English speaker is in how participants take up professional identities. Being proficient at one's job was connected to making no English mistakes. In the workplace, Sinyoung was influenced by the discursive communication practices in Korea of being more indirect as a form of politeness. So while she was reflexively positioning herself as polite, her interlocutor, who wanted her to get straight to the point, may have been simultaneously interactively positioning her in another way. As she negotiated these points of conflict she had to make choices about what were appropriate ways to communicate in her workplace. These conflicting positions became moments where her positioning choices, within the confines of a larger discourse, limited or encouraged what she could say and thus shaped how she behaved. Sinyoung's workplace experiences are an example to explicate how discourses compete with one another to offer different and "incompatible versions of reality" (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 2).

Despite the negative positioning as a poor English speaker made available by discourses of what and who constitutes English speaker legitimacy, participants took up alternative ways to counter such negative positioning. If they were poor English speakers, then surely they could make up for this by working hard and being "good" students. Judy performed as good student by doing all her homework and getting the top grade in her class. She also did not confront her teacher when she needed more

clarification because she didn't want to hurt her teacher's feelings. Anne-Marie's resistance to being positioned as a poor English speaker was by withdrawing from classroom discussions. So while Judy and Anne-Marie experienced frustration and anger at times, they did not show their emotions, respectfully suffering in silence. One possibility for this silence is because of how their conceptualization of respect for the teacher limits what they can and cannot say and do.

Participants were able to express some of their emotions, their frustrations, and their worries to me. They were quite expressive in telling me what they thought was fair and not fair based on their experiences of being a student in a Canadian university. One of the more pertinent emotions revealed in this study's findings is fear. Every participant is fearful. Fear is a factor in who they are and how they want to present themselves as English speakers. Several of the participants feared making English mistakes due to how those mistakes would position them as illegitimate English speakers. Fear played a role in determining who participants wanted to interact with and in the choice of language within those interactions. Some participants were fearful of English speakers—one possibility being because of the power embedded in communicative encounters and the dominant discourses that determine English speaker legitimacy.

My second research question is on the negotiation of subject positions in the construction of student identity. The ways in which participants in this study grapple with being positioned by others and positioning themselves as English speakers provides some insight into who they are, their identity. Identities are constantly shifting, moving, and evolving, and “the regulatory effects of discourse upon identity construction can be observed within institutional settings” (Baxter, 2016, p. 38). Both critical discourse

analysis and poststructural discourse analysis view identities as constructed within the “dynamic process of linguistic interaction” (Baxter, 2016, p. 46). In the context of my research, I was concerned with how participants navigated subject positions offered to them in discourses of English speaker legitimacy, and how they negotiated within themselves to make sense of who they are as English speaking students in Canada.

While identity is a widely used term adopted across various disciplines, for the context of this study on language and identity, I adopt Norton’s concept of identity because she ties English language learners’ identities to power relations. Norton (2000) views language learning as a social practice and argued that, “the learning of a second language is not simply a skill that is acquired with hard work and dedication, but a complex social practice that engages the identities of language learners” (p. 132). Norton defines identity as “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (p. 45).

As an introduction to approaching the second research question, I share an excerpt from an informal conversational exchange with Sinyoung. This excerpt demonstrates the obtrusive complexities in negotiations of understanding of ourselves as beings; this exchange draws forth the three points of Norton’s definition of identity:

Sinyoung: **I’m actually getting confused these days. I was telling you that I feel like I’m a different person when I’m speaking English but it has been almost 5 years being that person**

*Jennifer: yah? Being that different person?*

Sinyoung: yah, being that different person, and **maybe that’s a different part of me**, maybe not just because of language and when I go back to Korea, I’m not the same person when I left there, and I’m getting mature and growing too. **I’m a little bit confused...**

Identity construction is contradictory and, in the words of Sinyoung, “confusing.” Since the data collection process took place over the course of six months I was privy to some of the participants’ identity negotiation processes over time. Sinyoung’s words are telling. She is conscious of being a “different person when [she’s] speaking English. What’s more, she has been this “different person” for so long that she is confused, “being that different person...maybe that’s a different part of [her].” English and its discursive functions change people. English has transformative power in providing possibilities for and restrictions upon who people can and cannot be. As participants in this study went through the personal process of accepting and rejecting the positions made available to them through discourse, whether these processes were conscious or not, they were involved in their own unique ways of making sense of their place in the world.

In considering Davies and Harré’s two types of positioning, reflexive positioning provides the means in which the participants have agency to position themselves in particular ways. According to Baxter (2016) when describing the positioning perspective as a poststructuralist approach, “there *is* place for agency as more than simply individual acts of resistance or compliance to discursive practices, but rather as recognition that people are capable of exercising choice in relation to those practices” (p. 41). Participants in this study, as an exercise of their agency, were able to make choices in relation to the discursive practices that positioned them as poor English speakers.

As mentioned previously in this chapter, one way participants countered being positioned as poor English speakers was by performing as good students. One way to perceive the choice of performing as good student is as a submissive act to their teacher

because they are on the receiving end of unequal power relations. Another way to perceive this choice by students is as an agentive act of resisting being positioned as a poor English speaker. The students performed as good students by doing their homework, studying for exams and demonstrating respect to their teacher in their actions and behaviours—even if they did not actually respect their teacher individually. There was one student, however, who made a different choice. Anne-Marie exercised her agency, investing her time in activities that allowed her to perform as an English-speaking student in more desirable and personal ways. The discursive classroom practices positioned her as an incapable student who took too long to reply to questions. Resisting this positioning she created spaces for her to perform her English speaker identity in ways that didn't position her so negatively—she started hanging out with English speaking ESL friends and staying up late, she spent less time studying for her quizzes, and she didn't tell anyone, including me, if she passed her exams. Anne-Marie's experience is an example of her resisting discourse that positions her as a poor English speaker.

Considering Norton's concept of investment, as I described in the literature, when language is conceptualized by way of investment, rather than motivation, learners have the ability to exercise their agency and decide where and when to invest their time and energy based on their particular desire to attain a specific identity (Norton, 2000). Anne-Marie was a student who stopped talking in class. Her silence was an active resistance to practices in which language learners occupy "unequal relations of power" (Norton, 2000, p. 421). Anne-Marie was highly motivated but lacked the investment in a particular language practice in her ESL classroom because she was positioned as being a

poor English speaker, thus preventing her from achieving her desired goal of being/becoming an English speaker. Anne-Marie's experience is an example of why "symbolic and material resources" need to be considered in language and identity research because they increase the value of English language learners' social and cultural capital. This experience also helps to indicate how identities compete with one another. Anne-Marie grappled with being positioned as a "good" or "bad" student as she negotiated what English could offer her.

### **Critical Self-Reflection**

This thesis allowed me to explore some of the ways South Korean students studying in a Canadian university were positioned. Exploring these positions through similarities and differences in moments of tension was one way to examine how discourses play themselves out in everyday language practices in everyday university settings. However, I acknowledge that there are no concrete or easy answers to complex understandings of language and identity; understanding who and what we are is inevitably an uncertain and messy process. A critical caveat here is an acknowledgement to the necessity of my own interaction and interpretation where more detailed actual participant stories were not possible. I did my best to include excerpts of participants' experiences as they played out, but I recognize some excerpts included in this thesis are participants' interpretations of incidents. Also, I know that I can never represent someone else. I can capture, to the best of my ability at a given time, what it may be like to be an English-speaking Korean student at a Canadian university; yet, it is always more complex than I will ever be able to articulate here.

One benefit of this thesis journey is a more conscious awareness of my privilege and the responsibilities that accompany that privilege. However, in thinking about power, I am still quite unsettled. Becoming more aware of my privilege in the act of “confessing” my researcher positioning, as I outlined in Chapter Three of this thesis, is not synonymous for power redistribution. Likewise, in considering power relations in the context of this study, I ask this question: if students have agency, and they can exercise their agency to resist being positioned in negative ways, and this agency means students are capable of exercising choice, what does this actually mean for them in with regard to redistributing power? Finally, in the remaining pages of this thesis, I end with some implications and future considerations, but first I share the final excerpt from my personal researcher diary:

*Questions approached, complexities uncovered,  
Interview questions or performative encounters?  
Informal conversational exchanges, as memories unfold,  
language experiences in Canada,  
stories perhaps never before told*

*Discourses of language and power,  
spilling forth before me,  
emotions.  
fears.*

*Positionings and negotiations of identities  
In the face of English speaker legitimacy*

*Process messy, filled with much ambiguity  
brings forth questions of knowledge construction...  
...Ontological and epistemological perspectives  
...Theoretical frameworks,  
...Poststructuralist theories*

*Forgetting not, and with greater awareness,  
participant representation, researcher interpretation*

*As this research experience comes to an end,  
The formal “exit,”  
neither swift, nor easy for me*

*perhaps embracing this discomfort, helping push forth  
my thinking, leaving space to  
explore forth come  
a more disruptive qualitative inquiry*

## **Implications for Teacher Education and EAP programs in Canadian universities**

### **Adjusting to linguistic variety.**

Work needs to be done on how language differences and varieties can be reframed in a more inclusive way to adjust to hybridity of communication in globalized times. What is needed is a pluralistic orientation to language. For Canagarajah (2007), this involves a shift: a move away from a ‘common’ understanding of English to preparing students to accept differences in communication—creating a greater development of metalinguistic awareness. Adjusting to linguistic varieties is one of the changes that needs to be addressed by university institutions. Pertinent here is the knowledge that adjusting to linguistic variety is not the same as lowering English language standards in Canadian universities. One way to conceptualize language differences as positive and beneficial rather than negative, is to draw on English language varieties and multiplicities to enrich classroom communication practices. Adjusting to linguistic variety in our classrooms means that educators need to share the responsibility of the linguistic burden by not placing the expectations for adaptation solely on the students. Also, the onus of accepting multiple views of English needs to move beyond the responsibility of the teachers and students themselves. Language practice and policy, which Makoni and Pennycook (2007) say is founded upon a very specific view of language, need to make space for evolving linguistic varieties.

Another implication is that educators should consider giving more response time to Korean students as one way to embrace linguistic differences. All too often I hear

teachers make generalizations about Asian students with regard to their linguistic performance: “if they are here in Canada, they need to learn how to speak; isn’t that the reason why they are studying English?; It’s their responsibility to speak up in class; I can’t make them speak; They don’t even speak English outside of class, so how do they expect to improve?” I want to trouble this type of thinking: first, it is dangerous to make assumptions about an entire group of people based on the actions of a few; second, simply because students are quiet or slow, teachers cannot assume these students aren’t interested in speaking; third, interrupting or cutting off students because they are too slow, while this may seem petty or trivial, may have lasting impacts on their English speaker identity. When I asked Anne-Marie what her teacher could have done differently she responded with, “give me more time.”

As such, one consideration for EAP and teacher educators in Canada is to be aware that while international students may be speaking English (and different varieties, too!), they may not be operating with the same set of discursive practices for what is deemed acceptable behaviour in Canada. My research contributes to a call by Coombs, Park, and Fecho (2014) to more closely examine the intricacies of silence. In the context of my study, silence was an act of resistance that participants enacted to avoid being positioned in rather negative ways by their classmates, teachers, and friends. Silence was also used as a discursive classroom practice as to avoid “touching” the teacher’s feelings. The implications are that silence needs to be troubled: silence is a communication choice; silence is not synonymous with compliance. Educators in university settings need to become familiar with silence as an active way of being an

English speaker for Korean students. These choices may be rooted in discursive communication practices based on power relations among Korean students.

Finally, the last implication in relation to teacher education and EAP programs in Canadian universities pertains to positioning. Teachers, students, classmates, and friends need to be conscious about language positioning: what it is, how it works, what it does. Understanding more about positioning is critical given that positioning impacts how students perform as English speakers in institutional settings. Because of the long-term effects of positioning on students (Yamakawa, Forman & Ansell, 2005), it is crucial that university institutions become more familiar with positioning in language practices as one way to adjust to linguistically diverse classrooms.

### **Future Research Directions**

#### **Emotions.**

Because language learning lends itself to be a personal and intimate process, a greater emphasis is needed on the effects of emotions on positionings as they relate to identity construction in university settings. Hiding or suppressing negative emotions was commonplace among all participants' experiences. Judy was afraid to approach her teacher when she wanted to challenge how her writing was being assessed. She decided not to approach her teacher out of fear that challenging the scoring system would result in her classmate receiving a lower grade. Instead, she remained silent but angry four months later (Burton, 2016). Judy's experience created an emotional response that remained with her long after the completion of the semester. Understanding emotions as they relate to power dynamics between classroom interlocutors and multilingual English speakers is necessary for gaining a better understanding of long-term effects of

positioning. Further longitudinal research is needed to study the relationship between emotions and positions.

### **Korean relations and English spaces.**

Kim (2013) notes: “language is a key boundary maker of nationality and of national identity” (p. 19). While all participants in this study want to be English speakers, there are invisible power dynamics playing out in the background that influence Korean speakers’ decisions on language choices inside and outside the classroom. Relations among Koreans and the impact these relations have on language choices needs to be explored further. Specifically, research is needed to understand how these relations influence Korean students’ choices to take up certain subject positions in English: what does English offer these students that Korean doesn’t? The implications for having partial understandings of positioning without a greater breadth of knowledge on Korean positioning means that English reigns as the dominant medium in which we examine positionings.

### **English desire and gender.**

Participants in my study desire to be English speakers. English is a tool for identity transformation. Yet, further study is needed to unpack some of the complexities of my participants’ English speaking desires as they pertain to discourses of gender. Takahashi’s (2013) work explores the origin of Japanese women’s English language desire. The Japanese women in her study desired mobility, the West and its masculinity by learning English. I have questions as to whether Koreans also desire the West and its masculinity. Further research is needed to investigate such questions as: Do Koreans

think the West is masculine?; How does masculinity play out in language spaces?; How are Korean students gendered by language?

### **Theoretical Orientation**

One of the things I struggled with while doing this thesis was sorting through second language education literature framed as poststructuralism in theory, but humanist in approach. Because of tensions between theory and research, I assert that some language and identity work is actually humanist in approach and application, and only poststructuralist by name. Researchers are describing their work as being grounded in poststructuralism, and yet the humanist approach continues to be apparent in the ways identity is being spoken about in the literature. I noticed this most in studies where positioning and poststructuralism were used in conjunction to explore identity. By considering what poststructuralism can offer to language and identity research, positioning is recuperated from its origins in psychology, as one way to square poststructural orientations with psychology themed positionings. What is needed in studies taking up poststructuralist approaches to language identity is a more delineated teasing out of theory as one way to bridge the tensions between theory and research.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Due to the rapidly increasing number of international students in Canadian universities, it is imperative that institutions are equipped to adapt to change. I argue that Canadian universities need to adjust to the increasingly linguistically diverse classrooms, given the growing number of international students on university campuses. For Altbach (2016), internationalization includes specific policies and programs

undertaken by different systems such as academic institutions to cope with globalization. Therefore, it is not enough that linguistic differences are accepted solely in classroom practices; these classroom practices also need to mirror language policies—the relationship is one of reciprocity. While the relationship between students, educators, researchers, and policy makers is complex, it is a critical one to get right so that linguistic differences in institutions can be embraced, not feared.

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## Appendix A: Research Ethics Board Certificate of Approval



### *Research Ethics Board Certificate of Approval*

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR Jennifer Lynn Burton	DEPARTMENT Education	REB# 2014-223
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SUPERVISOR  
Dr. Andrea Sterzuk

FUNDER(S)  
SSHRC – Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship

TITLE  
South Korean Students' Experiences with English Language in a Canadian Context

APPROVAL OF Application for Behavioural Research Ethics Review Appendix A – Possible Journal Starter Questions Appendix B – Possible Conversation Starter Questions Participant Consent Form	APPROVED ON January 8, 2015	RENEWAL DATE January 8, 2016
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Full Board Meeting

Delegated Review

#### CERTIFICATION

The University of Regina Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above-named research project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The principal investigator has the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol, consent process or documents.

Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair for Research Ethics Board consideration in advance of its implementation.

#### ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the REB Chair for Board consideration within one month of the current expiry date each year the study remains open, and upon study completion.

Please refer to the following website for further instructions: <http://www.uregina.ca/research/REB/main.shtml>

Dr. Larena Hoeber, Chair  
University of Regina  
Research Ethics Board

Please send all correspondence to:

Office for Research, Innovation and Partnership  
University of Regina  
Research and Innovation Centre 109  
Regina, SK S4S 0A2

## Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

**UNIVERSITY OF REGINA**  
**FACULTY OF EDUCATION**  
**Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada S4S 0A2**  
**Fax: 306 585 4880**  
**[www.uregina.ca/educ](http://www.uregina.ca/educ)**

*Participant Consent Form*

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**Project Title:** South Korean Students' Experiences with English Language in a Canadian Context

**Researcher(s):** JENNIFER BURTON, GRADUATE STUDENT, EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF REGINA, 306-XXX-XXXX, Jennifer.Burton@uregina.ca

**Supervisor:** DR. ANDREA STERZUK, EDUCATION, 306-585-5607, Andrea.Sterzuk@uregina.ca

**Purpose(s) and Objective(s) of the Research:**

- The purpose of this study is to understand what it is like to be a South Korean student studying in English at a Canadian university.

**Procedures:**

- In order to more deeply understand your experience as an international student in an academic institution I would ask you to keep a personal journal (maximum of 10 entries). This journal will be an entry point to the one-on-one conversations that we engage in.
- You are invited to participate in a one-to-one conversation that will last approximately one hour and subsequent conversations if you are available and willing.
- The personal journal and conversations will occur simultaneously over the course of two months.
- You will speak about your experiences with English language during your studies at the university.
- The conversation will be tape-recorded, with your permission, using a digital audio recorder and the conversation will be transcribed.
- The conversation will take place at any location of your choice.
- You are encouraged to ask the interviewer any questions about the study, specifically, the procedures and goals of the interview as well as the study, and your role as an interviewee.

**Funded by:** SSHRC – Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship, SSHRC – Michael Smith Foreign Study Supplement

**Potential Risks:**

- There are no known or anticipated risks to participating in this research, however, you may experience emotional stress due to speaking about personal experiences.
- Should you experience any distress and wish to speak to a professional, you may contact:

**Counselling Services  
Rm 251 Riddell Center  
3737 Wascana Parkway  
University of Regina  
303-585-4491**

**Potential Benefits:**

- One potential benefit to you (the participant) could be a better understanding of your position as an international student studying in English.
- I anticipate a change in the way I personally approach the relationship between identity and language teaching and how this research will impact my pedagogical teaching practices
- The results of my study may inform other professionals in the field of language and education, as well as those teaching international students

**Confidentiality:**

- Your confidentiality will be assured. Your name or any other personal descriptors of you will not be used. I will use false names when writing or speaking about your experience in my thesis and with my committee members.
- **Storage of Data:**
  - Any information you share will be audio-taped and downloaded to my personal password protected laptop after our conversations. Then, the conversations will be removed from my digital recorder.
  - Our conversation will be audio-taped on a digital recorder. The digital file will be downloaded to my personal password protected laptop immediately after our conversations. Then, the conversation will be deleted from the digital recorder.
  - Your journal entries will be locked in a password protected case during transportation.
  - Copies of this consent form, transcripts of our conversations and audio recording set, and your journal entries will be placed in a secure storage locker in my graduate office for a maximum of 5 years at which time all data will be destroyed.

**Right to Withdraw:**

- Your participation is voluntary and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. You may withdraw from the research project for any reason, at any time without explanation or penalty of any sort.
- Please note that your right to withdraw data from the study will apply until 15 days after the last conversation. After this date, it is possible that some form of

research dissemination will have already occurred and it may not be possible to withdraw your data.

- Whether you choose to participate or not will have no effect on your grades or how you will be treated as a university student.

**Follow up:**

- A copy of my thesis will be emailed to you upon publication.

**Questions or Concerns:**

- If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact me at [jennifer.burton@uregina.ca](mailto:jennifer.burton@uregina.ca)
- This project has been approved on ethical grounds by the UofR Research Ethics Board on (date to be determined). Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to the committee at (585-4775 or [research.ethics@uregina.ca](mailto:research.ethics@uregina.ca)).

**Signed Consent:**

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the description provided; I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my/our questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

<i>Name of Participant</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>
<i>Researcher's Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>	

***A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.***

### **Appendix C: Informal Conversational Exchange Questions**

Possible Conversation Starter Questions:

What is it like to be an international student?

Tell me about your experience with learning English.

How confident are you with English? Why?

Have you ever had a time where you felt uncomfortable speaking or communicating?

Why did you come to study in Canada?

What language do you communicate in with your friends?

### **Appendix D: Narrative Dialogue Questions**

Journal Conversation: I'd like to have a conversation with you in this journal. Please use these questions as a guide to start our dialogue. You may say anything you like. There is no correct answer. You can write as much or as little as you want. There are no restrictions or limits. I'm interested in hearing about your experiences. We will pass this journal back and forth. Please write in English. HAVE FUN!

1. What is it like to study (English) in Korea?
2. What is it like to study (English) in Canada?
3. Tell me about your experience studying in Canada.
4. Tell me a funny story about a mistake you made in English or about a time when you were misunderstood.