

Tensions of Local and Global: South Korean Students Navigating and Maximizing US College Life

Yu-Kyung Kang University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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In the spring of 2012, the Korean Student Association (KSA) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) planned an ambitious series of events to celebrate Korean culture and Korean students on campus. One Saturday night, to commemorate and publicize “Korean Week,” the KSA hung a banner from a statue of the university’s Alma Mater.¹ Shortly after the banner was hung, it disappeared. The following day, while another banner was ordered, the staff attached a small South Korean flag and an American flag in the hands of the statue. But even before the KSA could process what had happened, let alone notify authorities, these flags were gone. Below the statue, in the chalk graffiti that celebrated Korean Week, there were new words—“I hate”—written inside the Korean flag.

Although I had expected the members to be very upset by the incident and even concerned about their personal security and broader acceptance in the university community, Kyung-Won, who had spent so many days creating the banner, had quite a different response. “Not really,” she said when asked a week later if the literal hate speech worried or offended her; on the contrary, she found herself “fascinated.” Her immediate response, she admitted, was “Wow! It was stolen?” delivered not with disappointment but with animation. Surprised, I asked her why. She explained:

I was *a part of* something big that happened at the university. I know that vandalism itself isn’t a good thing but it became a [significant/talked about] issue. It was in the DI [*Daily Illini*, the independent student newspaper at the University of Illinois] and it was on TV. And just the fact that I was *a part of* it, it makes it so exciting!

Her reaction was not one of anger or resentment but one of excitement and delight, brought on by a sense of affiliation and association with the university where she had been enrolled for three years. Ironically, as she saw it, the event did not isolate her as a racial or language minority but finally gave her recognition as a member of the university community.

This incident, along with others, signals two realities faced by many Korean students during their college years in the United States. First, despite claims that the university is a global campus that embraces diversity, the Korean students I worked with found that racism, segregation, and language discrimination were a reality of their campus lives. And second, despite their large presence at this campus,² these students had experienced themselves as basically invisible—so much so, in fact, that even this negative incident could become, for some, a welcome change from the status quo.

Much as Ralph Cintron explored how Mexican-American gang members in an Illinois town worked rhetorically through various linguistic and semiotic means to “create respect under conditions of little or no respect” (x), this article illustrates how the KSA, under conditions of “no respect,” worked to build, reestablish, and preserve Korean identity at the University of Illinois, to create conditions of respect and legitimacy through what I call literacy and rhetorical practices of *localization*. By *localization*, I am pointing to the active (but not necessarily intentional) ways in which individuals respond to multiple layers of local and global contexts in taking up a particular stance to being in their locality. In other words, literate practices become a means of responding to the exigencies that emerge at the locality, the active making and shaping of the locality. The KSA and its staff members foster their “Koreanness” not only through widespread and sometimes surprising use of the Korean language in a Midwestern town dominated by monolingual English speakers, but also by institutionally rebuilding Korean social practices and networks that have become strained over their many years of study abroad.

Ever since the social turn in Literacy Studies over two decades ago (Gee; Street), literacy scholarship has recognized literacy as a situated social practice that varies from one context to another and one culture to another. Complementing and evermore complicating this theory and earlier ethnographic work on situated literacy practices (Heath), literacy studies have attended to multilingual issues within a framework of globalization (Barton; Canagarajah; Duffy). More recently, scholars (Lorimer Leonard; Vieira) have complicated how and why literacy practices travel across borders with multilingual users. They have helped us see the fluid and entangled forces that both destabilize and shape literacy practices and complicate understandings of local and global (Blommaert *Sociolinguistics*; Latour, *Reassembling*; Lemke; Prior and Shipka). This paper explores what literacy and rhetorical practices of *localization* looked like for the KSA and its members enrolled at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. In the following sections, to make sense of these practices and the relationships, I draw out more of the salient historical, national, institutional, and ideological contextual layers that flow through local and global boundaries and co-exist specifically for a particular group of students at a particular locality at a particular time in history. For my transnational participants, I argue that these contextual boundaries are fluid, messy, and scattered: depending on where the transnational individual stands (physically, ideologically, emotionally) these contexts are both discretely and simultaneously local, global, and somewhere in-between.

TRANSNATIONAL LIVES AND LITERACIES

This research is a part of a larger project that examines the literacy and rhetorical practices of South Korean undergraduate students who had *jogi yuhak* (i.e., Early Study Abroad, ESA) experience in English-speaking countries—including the United States, Canada, Australia, Singapore, and Malaysia—prior to their matriculation at a US college. These students (henceforth post-*jogi yuhak* students) were part of a transnational educational migration trend prevalent in Korea beginning in the early 2000s.³ Although the phenomenon has been gradually losing momentum since 2010, according to the Ministry of Educational Science and Technology (Korean Ministry of Education),

the number of pre-college students who left Korea for study increased from just over 2,000 in 1995 to a peak of over 29,000 in 2006. And these numbers do not count the many students who accompanied parents temporarily working or studying overseas.

The steep rise in *jogi yuhak* has been a product of the unique conditions of contemporary South Korea: the nation's relentless pursuit of neoliberal economic advancement within the global economy mixed with an already deep-rooted "education fever" and "English craze" fueled *jogi yuhak* among countless middle- and upper-class Korean families.⁴ As scholars in diverse fields have shown (e.g., Kang and Abelmann; Kim; Park and Bae; Song) and as my study finds, the experiences of *jogi yuhak* students are not homogeneous, instead evidencing multiple trajectories of mobility that operate within and beyond South Korea. Still, a common goal for *jogi yuhak* in student accounts in interviews and everyday encounters is to acquire language capital, a fundamental requirement in joining "global elites." Yet, what that joining would mean is neither consistent nor transparent. For students, then, their English literacy is tied to a neoliberal promise that with more English, their lives will be economically and personally improved. However, the extent to which this promise is being fulfilled appears to be questionable.

Using a "rhetorical approach to literacy" (Duffy 42), this article portrays how post-*jogi yuhak* students "use language and other symbols for the purpose of shaping conceptions of [their] reality" (Duffy 41). Specifically, this article demonstrates how the KSA and its members' rhetorical literacy practices have been influencing, and have been influenced by, the transnational and institutional conditions they inhabit physically and psychologically. As it does so, particular attention is paid to the ecology of literacy development that shows how literacy is "tied up with the particular details of the situation and that literacy events are particular to a specific community at a specific point in history" (Barton 7). In order to understand the literacy and rhetorical practices of post-*jogi yuhak* Korean undergraduate students within the dynamics of the KSA, the university, and the larger local and global context, this research employs a mix of ethnographic, archival, and autoethnographic methods. In addition to my own experience in various teaching and administrative capacities on campus, I have examined interview and observation data of the KSA staff and university administrators and also conducted rhetorical analysis of institutional (KSA and UIUC) documents (e.g., websites, brochures, reports) collected from 2011 to 2013, with most focusing on the 2011-2012 academic year. Through these data, I was able to identify various contexts and forces that influence, and are influenced by, the research participants' literacy practices.

This article engages with several different literatures. Most significantly, it comes into conversation with scholars in the field of New Literacy Studies, specifically the emerging research on transnational literacies (Duffy; Berry, Hawisher, and Selfe; Prendergast; Vieira). Like most ethnographic studies on transnational migrants, this study provides empirical evidence of a conception of literacy as not only a locally situated social practice.⁵ It also further expands the perspective by addressing the literacy practices of non-immigrant individuals, individuals having less investment and/or stakes in US citizenship, whereas many studies examining transnational literacy practices of migrants within the US have focused largely on the immigrant experience. More importantly, it further complicates the notion of literacy contexts by presenting the contexts influencing and being influenced by literacy

practices as fluid and scattered variables determined by particular circumstances of the transnational individual. Therefore, depending on the perspective and circumstance of an individual, the local is the global and the global is the local. This analysis then suggests how local and global forces converge in situated practices, further questioning the all-too-tidy division between the local and the global.

In addition to examining the broad contexts of past and present national/Korean economic, educational, and social conditions as well as the specific contexts of (English) ideologies surrounding the *jogi yuhak* project, the rest of the article further combs out the entangled literacy contexts and practices of *localization* of post-*jogi yuhak* students at the University of Illinois. The following sections, although distinct in their organization, portray the blurriness of boundaries and the messy relationships among various contexts (e.g., institutional, ideological) and practices of localization that stem from tensions within the dynamics of the dispersed local and global. Drawing attention to the contradictory qualities imbued within the contexts and practices, I argue that within such contextual layers, the students are rereading the institutional, national, and global landscape and reframing their own and our understanding of the term *globalization*.

THE “DIVERSE” UNIVERSITY

With *Brown v Board* and *Regents of the University of California v Bakke*, the US Supreme Court made it clear that the United States had a compelling interest in creating an integrated society of learners. In the wake of these decisions and the social movements that led to them, many institutions of higher education have made *diversity* a key term in their institutional discourse. Throughout the decades, the University of Illinois, a land-grant institution, has espoused this agenda of ending segregation and incorporating a “diverse” student body. In the words of the university’s Diversity Values Statement,

As the state’s premier public university, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign’s core mission is to serve the interests of the *diverse* people of the state of Illinois and beyond. The institution thus values *inclusion* and a pluralistic learning and research environment, one which we respect the *varied* perspectives and lived experiences of a *diverse* community and global workforce. We support *diversity* of worldviews, histories, and cultural knowledge across a range of social groups including *race*, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, abilities, economic class, religion, and their intersections. (emphasis added)

With this statement, the Inclusive Illinois-One Campus, Many Voices initiative, and the Chancellor’s Campus Commitment to “prohibit discrimination and harassment [...and to ensure] a truly diverse, welcoming, and inclusive community of students, scholars and staff,” (“Campus Commitment.”) the University of Illinois embraces the integration of its campus community as a priority. Yet the ethos of honoring diversity has not always manifested in policies or programs that support the linguistic needs of international students.⁶ Since the inception of “Students’ Right to Their Own Language,” a 1974 National Council of Teachers of English resolution that called for literacy teachers and scholars to affirm the dialects and language patterns mostly of African-American students, there have been no professional documents or policy that so much as acknowledge “language diversity” within the

student body. Furthermore, language or linguistic discrimination is omitted from the long list of discriminatory items under “campus conduct” on the university’s Office of Diversity, Equity, and Access website.⁷ Given the recent soaring enrollment of international students, adding to the already linguistically diverse student body, the failure to institutionally and publicly recognize language as a possible site of discrimination is particularly noteworthy. Attending to “the problem of self-segregation” in her book *The Intimate University*, Nancy Abelmann argues that (self-)segregation at the university is not merely “a matter of cultural comfort” (3). Rather such “comfort zones” at a college are negative because college is supposed to be about valuing diversity. Thus, comfort zones oppose this aim, in effect “thwarting personal and academic growth” (5). But, as Abelmann further argues, there are larger forces behind the phenomenon—the zones are not solely the choice of the students but also the product of race and racism. Extending Abelmann’s argument to international students in general and the KSA and KSA members in particular, I argue that students’ segregation, self and otherwise, is driven by the lack of tolerance for language diversity at the university—by an unfavorable academic and social campus atmosphere suffused with monolingual ideologies and limited literacy support.

At the University of Illinois, all incoming first-year students are required to take one to three sequenced composition courses. International students in particular, depending on their TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language)/IELTS (International English Language Testing System) and/or ACT scores, are channeled into one of three course options: ESL writing courses (ESL 113, 114, and 115) provided by the Department of Linguistics; Rhetoric courses (Rhetoric 100, 101 and 102, 103 or 105) offered by the Department of English; or Oral and Written Communication courses (Communication 111 and 112) offered by the Department of Communication. After the students complete whatever course or courses are required in their first year, they are on their own to seek language and writing assistance during their remaining years in college.⁸ For many English as additional language (EAL) learners, this composition track, while typical to US colleges and universities, is insufficient to “succeed” or, according to Hyun Jung, “survive” in academics throughout college. During a writing group specifically for Korean undergraduate students,⁹ Hyun Jung, a senior majoring in psychology, talked about the lack of writing/language support at the university:

When I took the Rhetoric class, truthfully you really can’t ask about things like grammar. I was afraid the natives [speakers] would say something like why is she bringing that up here. So [even if I had a question regarding language] I would just forget since I would have other classes to think about. Even if there was something to ask the [Rhetoric course] instructor. I mean things I want to ask might be about content but there are times when I want to ask “how do you articulate” an idea [that I can’t in English]. You know, for natives that’s not that difficult. [Because for them] translating the idea to English is not difficult. It’s the making the logic that is difficult. So, during office hours, the instructors usually expect you to have questions about the reading but not about grammar or how to express things. I think the expectations are different [for the instructor and the student]. And because I know what the expectations are, I talk about the reading with [the instructors] and they tell me to take the language and grammar issues to the [university’s writing center].

As Hyun Jung reveals, what is lacking is not only the number or type of language courses but also the instructors' understanding, training, or aptitude for supporting EAL learners in their classrooms. These accounts point to the many tangible and intangible factors that indicate the insufficient support and unwelcoming academic climate that exists at the university as some of the forces interacting in literacy and rhetorical processes of *localization*. As I further elaborate in the following section, this kind of unfavorable climate at the UIUC has been escalating as the university seeks to further "diversify" the campus by bringing in an unprecedented number of international students but without sufficient preparation by university administrators, faculty, and staff.

“PUTTING OUT FIRES”

In the past decade, the atmosphere at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for international students has suffered with the university's lack of preparedness for dramatic demographic change in the undergraduate student body. In the name of internationalization—but as many suggest in response to the reality of deep cuts in state funding—many public higher education institutions are “diversifying” and “globalizing” their campuses by increasing the number of international undergraduate students. University administrators at public institutions have been seeking more out-of-state students, and international students in particular, to shore up school revenue. Since the mid-2000s, higher education institutions across the US have admitted unprecedented numbers of international students, primarily from such South Asian countries as China and South Korea. According to Open Doors (2014), with growth (mostly in the undergraduate population) over the past seven years, there are now 40% more international students than a decade ago, with a record high of 819,644 in the 2012-13 academic year. Exceeding the national trend, the number of international students at UIUC increased 105% in the last nine years (from 4,807 students in 2005-2006 to 9,871 students in fall 2014). The most noticeable increase has been in the number of international undergraduate students, which reached 5,332 (16.4% of the entire undergraduate population) in Fall 2014, a 370% increase from 2005-2006 when there were only 1,440 international undergraduate students;¹⁰ this increase gave UIUC the second largest number of international students in the US for the past four consecutive years, trailing the leader, the University of Southern California, by fewer than 40 students in 2012-2013.

With this huge increase, international students have been included, surely but passively, in UIUC's existing discourse on diversity: the university has used this growing population figure to tout both its diversity and its internationalization and globalization efforts. However, it has taken limited measures to effectively integrate the diverse population into academic and campus life. Thus, it is evident that UIUC was, and many claim that it still is, far from full and true integration, as the university faculty, staff, and students have not been adequately prepared to take on such a daunting task. According to UIUC's enrollment records, there had long been a steady growth in the number of international students (particularly in graduate programs). Nevertheless, the first steep increase that began in Fall 2005 caught various units, departments, and programs by surprise. The first impact was felt by ESL writing courses, according to Dr. Randy Sadler, the director of ESL Writing Courses

program. Just two weeks before the 2005-2006 academic year was to begin, Dr. Sadler recalled in our interview, someone in the “upper office” telling him something to the effect of, in his words, “I just want to make sure you guys are ready for the rise in the international student population which is going to start happening this fall.” He reported that this late and informal “check” was actually the first warning his program received, leaving almost no time to adapt. He remembers his office scrambling to find instructors and teaching assistants to teach ten newly added ESL writing course sections. And although the numbers continued to multiply, it was not until Fall 2011 that some departments, units, and programs came out of their respective corners to tackle the “problem” of international students. In that year, a series of cross-disciplinary (e.g., ESL Issues Campus Meeting) and in-college (e.g., LAS: International Education Symposium) meetings were called. Despite efforts to come together and seek opportunities for long-term collaboration, the few meetings and email exchanges ended with merely the recognition that everyone on campus, especially departments and programs with strong writing components, were struggling through difficult times, coping with whatever resources they had. The meeting made it clear that many were feeling furious at the failure of top administrators to properly support and prepare them for the soaring number of students from overseas.

In an interview with me, Dr. Alan Mette, a professor and Executive Associate Director of the School of Art and Design, recalled that he definitely felt the impact of the surge in international students. Dr. Mette, who also taught Art History, a requirement for all incoming freshman at the College of Art and Design, noticed that a significant number of international students were failing courses like his with heavy writing requirements, such as weekly journals and three to four short and long writing assignments. He remarked that there had always been international ESL “individuals that needed more assistance” in these courses, and that that had been manageable when there were only a handful. But now that these students constituted up to 15 to 20 percent of the class, instructors and teaching assistants were struggling. He lamented that, while needing to be just as prepared for the course as before the rise of international students, he “felt like [he] was putting out fires rather than being proactive” due to the lack of preparation. Enrolling all these students and not being prepared for their needs, Dr. Mette argued, was “really unethical,” elaborating that it is “wrong inviting and accepting a group of students and they’re paying a great deal of money to be here much, more than our domestic students.” He also worried that the sudden increase of students that need “extra help” might reinforce the stigma that they are “bad writers,” where the unpreparedness on part of faculty has been the actual root of the “problem.”

The shortage of staff and resources to attend to the rapidly increasing number of international students was a concern echoed by various administrators in both Student Affairs and Academic Affairs. Through my campus outreach work at the university’s writing center, I had the chance to meet and collaborate with many of the administrators across campus who had been directly impacted by the large number of international students in their respective units and programs. Andi Cailles, an assistant director at University Housing, explained during an interview, “We just don’t have the staff [...] [or] the resources to match the demonstrated need [much less] the anecdotal [one].” Many others, in units such as the university’s counseling center and career center, echoed this frustration,

finding themselves overwhelmed with the “extra work” added on to their existing duties.

Since Fall 2013, towards the conclusion of data collection for this study, there have been many initiatives to improve the transition, orientation, and support services for international students. In an interview with me, Nicole Tami, the Director of International Student Integration at the time,¹¹ stated that UIUC has put efforts into substantially increasing and improving services for international students in collaboration with campus units and registered student organizations across campus. Despite such recent top-down efforts of the university, my experience in the university writing center, with the KSA, and on campus suggest that much more needs to be done to cultivate a welcoming and nurturing academic and social environment for the ten thousand international students and to promote true integration and diversity for all university members. More importantly, all participants in this process need to meticulously define and redefine what “promoting integration and diversity” is for them and others as well as what that might look like. But until then, these post-*jogi yuhak* students are finding ways to make the most out of their college lives in seemingly “segregated” ways as they continuously redefine and make sense of globalization through their own transnational educational journey.

TRANSCENDING AND PERPETUATING LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES

Throughout Korean Week, as the KSA successfully implemented all the planned events, much talk and speculation surrounding the issue of “racism” on campus continued to surface with the disappearance of the KSA banner. The KSA staff members speculated on possible culprits of and motives for the offensive act: a domestic student who was bothered by the increasing presence of Asian students on campus; a domestic student who was offended by a foreign national flag being hung up on “his” Alma Mater; a disgruntled Korean student with bitter sentiments against the KSA. A local TV broadcasting station also aired the incident as its headline for the evening news and alluded to hate crimes on campus, noting that, at least officially, none had occurred for several years. Despite all the commotion over the who’s and why’s of the incident, talk of potential racism gradually faded amid the busyness of the week.

A semester after the disappearance of the Korean Week banner, I discussed the KSA with Kyung-Won. In our dialogue, she talked about how she had been addicted to KSA work, how she would constantly check her email inbox for more work orders and how she would think of ideas for the KSA at the oddest, most unexpected times. But this, for Kyung-Won, was a positive aspect in her college life. Later in our conversation, she mentioned how lucky she feels to have joined the organization.

K: The KSA is a place where I can do something. It’s where opportunities are. It’s a platform where I can feel free to do what I want.

Me: But why not other RSOs or clubs?

K: I think it’s because of culture and language. I know that there are clubs that Americans run. But even if I go because there is a “subject” that I like. Regardless, I think there will be *a limit* to how much I can participate.

Me: Why?

K: I still feel that I have *limits* in expressing. For example, I'm doing a project with an American girl now [for class]. But whenever I meet with her, I work as I feel the *limit*. It's even hard to explain [ideas] in Korean, so to do it in English is harder. I think and organize as I talk but then to do that in English is so hard. Too many times I stumble with the [English] language. The KSA is comfortable, no language wall. Can speak out when I want to. So I like it.

The sense of freedom to be and act afforded her by the KSA conferred emotional benefits as well: at the end of the conversation, Kyung-Won mentioned how people (Koreans mostly) posted praise on the KSA website for her unique and professional design of the K-Card discount card (see Figure 4). She explained that such acknowledgments are an important motivation for her and also a stimulus for her to devote endless hours to her work at the KSA. As an Industrial Design major, she went on to declare that she had never felt so proud and that despite the indifferent atmosphere at the university described above, she ultimately felt she had made a good choice to attend the university. A senior in fall 2013, she felt that she was really a "member of the university."

Another striking aspect of the KSA, taken as a given in Kyung-Won's reflection, was the dominance of Korean language usage, not only in backstage planning but also in public events. The decision for Koreans to use the Korean language in a Korean club might seem obvious on its face. And to those familiar with the hierarchical Korean society and culture and the complex honorific/hierarchical indexicals native only to the Korean language, it might seem obvious that Koreans might refrain from using English, which cannot express these honorifics, among other Koreans. To some extent, these assumptions hold. However, it is important also to consider the various other large and small factors that play into the students' rhetorical and literacy practices. One of them is the English ideologies held by Koreans in general and *jogi yuhak* students in particular within the national (Korea) and global context.

Joseph Park, in *The Local Construction of a Global Language*, argues persuasively that Koreans hold three English language ideologies:

- *Necessitation*: This ideology views English as a valuable and indispensable language.
- *Externalization*: This ideology views English as an external language, or as a language of an Other, treating it as a language that is incongruent with and opposed to the identity of one's group...
- *Self-deprecation*: This ideology views Koreans lacking sufficient competence to use English meaningfully, despite the abundance of English education they receive... (26).

I identified all three language ideologies among the post-*jogi yuhak* students in my study. For *externalization*, students remarked that there would always be someone in the group who would frown or cringe at the person speaking English. When I asked Woo-Bin, a staff member of the Public Relations Team of the KSA, why Korean students do not use English among other friends, he asked rhetorically, "Why would you speak English when you can speak *our* language? That would make

that kid look arrogant” (emphasis added).

The most salient of the three ideologies, however, was that of *self-deprecation*. As noted earlier, the majority of the Korean undergraduate population have had three or more years of studying abroad before enrolling at UIUC, giving rise to the notion that they possess a fairly good grasp of everyday spoken English and even of American and Western culture in general. Most Korean undergraduate students in the study, however, felt they lacked the English competency that they should have acquired from many years of studying abroad. As a result, many saw themselves as having failed to live up to one of the main goals of the *jogi yuhak* project, namely, mastering English and thereby becoming global elite citizens—a project premised on the belief that earlier is better for language acquisition. Because they have not yet, in their minds, accomplished the goal of “doing English well,”¹² they hide their English language from others, fellow Koreans in particular, as much as they can.

This self-deprecation ideology related to English prevailed in Soo-Jin’s adherence to the Korean language in the KSA and also among her Korean peers in general:

If I try to use English I feel a wall somewhat. Also, I get conscious of how [Korean peers] will think of my English. Since such thoughts come endlessly, I become very careful when speaking. So [I think to myself whether] this is something that I can say in English or not. Because I would hate to be looked down upon. I don’t want people telling others things like “I spoke with her in English once and she really sucks at it.” That’s why I purposely use Korean instead of English.

Soo-Jin, the director of the LET¹³ Team, a junior majoring in journalism and a reporter for the campus newspaper, the *Daily Illini* (DI), felt that she had reached only “50% to perfection” with English competence, and like others interviewed and observed, refrains from speaking English around Korean peers for fear of evaluation and criticism. So in the students’ everyday literacy practices among Korean peers, English words and phrases sporadically crop up in casual settings but in most other situations, Korean, which comes naturally and with less psychological burden, is invariably the language of choice.

Kyung-Won’s experience of English as a limiting factor in college life, Soo-Jin’s anxiety over acquiring “perfect” English, and Woo-Bin’s allegiance to Korean language use all reflect the converging language ideologies shaping post-*jogi yuhak* students’ literacy and rhetorical practices. The shifting and reshaping of ideologies within the dynamics of multiple local (e.g., the university, US race relations) and global (e.g., Korean ideologies, neoliberal ideals) contextual layers are reflected in the contradictory literacy and rhetorical practices of localization, where their actual practices of Korean language and culture override the pursuit of “doing English well” and thus becoming global elites. Like the ideas and ideals of language and language use, I further elaborate on the abstract aspects (e.g., feelings, sentiments) around the students’ experience with English language use in the US that influence their literacy and rhetorical practices.

As much as students talked about why they did not use English among other Koreans, they were equally forthcoming, if somewhat more unsure, about the detriments of English use to their interactions with native speakers, both within and outside academia. With the racist implications

of the banner incident during Korean Week, I became curious about students' perceptions of and experiences with race and racism in their college lives. When I asked if they had encountered any other racial discrimination on campus, most were ambivalent toward or even uncertain about the concept of racism and its long history in the US. Kyung-Won searched her memory and shared with me an incident that had occurred to her and her Korean friends at a train station in Chicago. When her party attempted to complain to the ticket office, the responding agent suddenly called someone from the back room to explain the issue since "they don't seem to understand English." Kyung-Won said she felt mortified and explained to the person that they understood everything and it was the agent who was not understanding. But after her account to me, she adjusted her thoughts and reflected, "I'm not really sure though. Now that I talk about it, it seems like we were treated that way because of our English. Maybe we just sounded different to [the agent]." Woo-Bin, one of the staff members of the PR Team, was so unacquainted with the idea of racism that he asked me, "Isn't it something like white people looking down on nonwhite people?" After giving me a few examples of what could be racism he went on to say, "I'm not sure. It's such an American thing."

While most students in the study were rather distant from or unfamiliar with issues of race and racism, they were more attuned to and sensitive toward bias and discrimination surrounding language—treatment that, they indicated, they experienced on a daily basis. Soo-Jin, who defined racism as "being treated differently than others," angrily narrated an incident in a course in the previous semester that she felt was "unfair": an instructor gave another classmate a better grade when it was "so apparent" she had put in much more effort all semester, while the other "white girl" had missed classes and assignments. When I asked if the professor was known for racial discrimination, Soo-Jin answered, "No. Since there are no other Koreans [to compare with]. I'm just ranting but [I] don't really think [he is a racist]. I just came to that conclusion because I don't understand why [she got a better grade]."

When Kyung-Won's previous three years in college are put into perspective, her earlier comments about finding achievement and fulfillment in the KSA become especially striking. Kyung-Won had declared that, entering school, she had no doubts about "succeeding" in college because she had adapted so well to her three years of high school in a small rural town in Arkansas, where her English advanced more than she had ever hoped. This rapid growth convinced her that she would ease right into a US college. However, that was far from the reality. Kyung-Won's first year, as she remembers it, was a "complete disaster." She was failing most of the "challenging" courses and barely surviving even in subjects she liked and had assumed would be easy. She felt that she could not say a word in class or group discussions out of the sense that her professors, instructors, and classmates were not as patient as her friends from high school. For a group project in an art studio course during her sophomore year, Kyung-Won recalled, her "White" group members gave most of the petty and behind-the-scenes tasks to her while they were recognized and credited for delivering the presentation in "perfect English" in front of the class. Kyung-Won confessed that she felt "invisible" and that her "English somehow was not ready for college." Her self-esteem was so low and she became so depressed that she eventually took a year off and spent time at home in Korea with family, exploring and regaining confidence.

Indeed, many post-*jogi yuhak* students that I have met with during my years of research and beyond associated negative, disappointing, and embarrassing moments in their college lives with their perceived English incompetency. Soo-Jin knew too well the importance of the English language in her college life. During our numerous conversations and also through my observations of her various life events, Soo-Jin used words such as “상처 (hurtfulness)” and “창피함 (embarrassment)”¹⁴ when a newbie got the promotion she felt she had earned, when a peer at the *Daily Illini* newspaper identified her as speaking “the worst English [of anyone] that I know,” and when she received a B on a paper that, in terms of content, was not even worth a C: Soo-Jin thinks the instructor gave her a better grade because the instructor overlooked the content issues blinded by the language issues.

In the field of second language acquisition, teaching, and learning, scholars have defined the causes, roles, and solutions of anxiety among students learning a second (or third, fourth, etc.) language in a classroom (e.g., E. Horwitz, M. Horwitz, and Cope; Kitano; MacIntyre and Gardner). However, less is known about language anxieties students experience in their campus lives outside of the classroom. The psycho-physiological symptoms such as anxiety, underachievement, humiliation, etc. hinder the language-learning experience of second language learners (E. Horwitz, M. Horwitz, and Cope). Such emotional and psychological burdens are common and prevalent among the students that I have met through research as well as through various writing courses and at the university’s writing center. However, these symptoms are not yet acknowledged within the university’s official institutional discourse.

The burdens felt by the post-*jogi yuhak* students at UIUC are created and compounded by the academic and campus climate: a climate where the students do not enjoy adequate literacy support, a climate influenced by a “tacit policy of ‘English-Only’” where “the ‘norm’ . . . is a monolingual, native-English-speaking writer writing only in English to an audience of English-only readers” (Horner 569), a climate where international students are constantly identified with and by their English language “deficiency.” The only possible outcome in such a climate is the perpetuation or exacerbation of existing deep-rooted monolingual assumptions and a self-deprecating linguistic ideology. For these students, “doing English well” was “doing English like a white person,” an unattainable ideal, embodied throughout their transnational journey. This sense among students that their English was not strong enough and that it was not an appropriate medium for most communication with other Korean students meant that Korean became quite a dominant language in the KSA. This is all the more why the KSA and other Korean islands provide a comfort zone, a place where Korean language use is valued, for Korean undergraduate students. The lack of respect, and consequent injury to self-worth, in the university waters is relieved on the KSA island, where limits due to language are less of an obstacle in fulfilling a college life.

KOREAN ISLAND IN AMERICAN WATERS

In the previous section, I explored the students’ own experiences with, and ideologies of, language and literacy as one of the key factors influencing the literacy practices of *localization* and why Korean undergraduates hold that priority so enthusiastically. This section explores how, despite

the KSA leadership's recognition and call for more campus integration and despite the students' own preliminary goal to acquire "perfect" English through such integration, KSA activities and programs eventually fostered more exclusiveness, localizing Korean culture and language. To the Korean undergraduate students at UIUC, these literacy practices of exclusionary activities were actually their attempt to strive towards inclusiveness, as Kyung-Won attested in the previous section, to finally becoming a respected member of the campus community. The KSA ended up engaging with an interesting and complex set of contradictions as desires for greater integration with the university community clashed with desires to build cultural and communicative practices. The KSA and its members were engaged in activities that promoted exclusiveness as they honed their own notion of inclusiveness by taking up a particular kind of US-college-student identity that would pave a way to return home to Korea.

The KSA was one of approximately 1100 registered student organizations at UIUC and one of seven registered student organizations of Korean students on campus during the period of my research in 2011-2013. With over 100 staff members, the KSA at UIUC prides itself for representing the world's largest Korean student population in a higher education institution outside of Korea. The KSA has adopted a rather sophisticated and rigorous organizational structure that resembles that of a Korean corporation rather than of a campus club. In the 2011-2012 academic year, the KSA, under new and centralized leadership, evaluated, revamped, and for the first time documented its mission and purpose within the university and the larger Korean community. Among the issues addressed, the new leadership was particularly concerned with the problem of self-segregation among Korean undergraduates on campus. In the *2011-2012 Academic Year Business Plan*, one of the ten objectives listed was to "pull international students out of the Island," or [섬 *sum*], a metaphor for the various small and large Korean groups or enclaves. To "help achieve ideal/good learning and experience," the KSA pledged to "[provide] opportunities and information for students to volunteer and build relationships/networks with the American mainstream society and the various ethnic groups in the community."

With this proposal to tackle the problem of self-segregation, according to their 2011/2012 annual report, the KSA leadership bore two broader missions in mind: one, to comply with the US college institutional ideals of personal growth through the experience of *diversity* and, two, to comply with the ideals of the transnational educational migration project of many Korean undergraduate students. This gesture outward was also signified in the KSA's membership qualifications: "the KSA membership is open to Korean students, Korean immigrant students, and *all UIUC students who are interested in the Korean culture and Korea*" (emphasis added) (*KSA 2011/2012 Annual Report* 5). Despite such explicit recognition of the need for and value of outreach, however, the organization went forward with practices that perpetuated the "problem" of self-segregation by existing as a comfort zone for so many. Throughout the 2011-2012 academic year, despite tactics and encouragement from the top leadership (who were well aware of and worried about this phenomenon) to connect with the various groups and university administration, most events and efforts by individual teams within the KSA centered on cultivating a stronger Korean circle, which led, for example, to promoting and practicing Korean language and culture within the circle.

In spite of many events and efforts to build unity and solidarity, the fact is that the Korean language was clearly dominant in all of KSA's modes of communication to its members and the public through media such as email exchanges, the KSA website (<http://illinoisksa.org/x/>) and Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/illinoisksa>). Thus, the KSA has been increasingly promoting exclusiveness rather than inclusiveness. In addition to the Korean language, various visual texts and designs used in these media were permeated by distinctively Korean themes and forms. The KSA emblem, the K-card (a discount card), and other displays on the organization website are mostly of traditional Korean letters and motifs, some dating back to the Josun Dynasty of the 1500s (see figures. 2-5). For example, the KSA emblem (see fig. 2) and the K-Card (see fig. 3) were designed with early versions of the Korean alphabets; the KSA emblem, in particular, uses Korean script—*ㅋ*, *ㅌ*, *ㅍ*—to denote the English letters K. S. A. The red dot, a vowel letter in the very first version of the Korean Writing system, was used to mark it clearly as the Korean alphabet from the 1500s.

According to the design team, much research and learning of Korean traditional cultural artifacts had to be undertaken before the final designs could be achieved. The Korean language and visuals did not come “naturally,” according to Jin-Hyuk, the director of the Internet Team responsible for posting announcements and responding to posts and inquiries. Jin-Hyuk spoke of having to “train” his team members, who were all post-*jogi yuhak* students, to write “proper” Korean, explaining that “the students who attended high school in other countries did not have the vocabulary or the cultural aptitude to do the job right. It’s been a few months and they are now getting the hang of it.” It is not only the traditional texts to which they were reoriented: the re-acculturation of these students extended to the highly traditional Korean visuals created and selected to represent the group. In recognition of the *jogi yuhak* transnational education that, to some extent, led students away from Korean culture and language, the KSA aimed to re-acculturate students to Korea so that there is a pathway home. *Localization* then is a very specific set of practices in this case that are adapted to the resources and contexts of the UIUC campus but oriented primarily to Korean forms of life.

Among the numerous activities and events organized and hosted by the KSA, perhaps the most notable has been Career School Illinois (CSI), a four-session series designed to provide programs for Korean undergraduate students pursuing employment in Korea upon graduation. With the objective to prepare students for re-entry, the four-day, three-to-four-hour sessions (usually held in the evenings or weekends) were strategically organized and dedicated to such practical topics as “Intro to Current Korean Job Market” and “Understanding the Korean Corporate World” and to such rudiments of job training as how to take Korean aptitude tests, draft personal essays, and deliver group presentations in Korean. The first page of the 35-page KSA record of the CSI sessions lists information regarding several Korean companies and states the four “Employment *Realities* of Current Korean Study Abroad (International) Students” (emphasis added). The use of the word “realities” in Korean indicates the recognition of daunting career prospects. Summarized, those realities are: 1) that the US employment rate of international students after graduation is only 10%; 2) that most US companies are reluctant to employ international students due to the costs of and challenging process of supporting visas for employment; 3) that most UIUC international students and Korean students in particular, return to their respective countries upon graduation; and 4) that

despite the need and efforts of the students, Korean study-abroad students have neither a suitable environment to prepare them for employment nor an understanding of the Korean corporate world.¹⁵

Addressing these “realities,” the decision by the KSA’s new leadership to overhaul the group’s prior organizational structure with a more sophisticated and rigorous structure resembling that of a Korean corporation rather than a campus club was not accidental. According to Un Yeong Park, then the KSA president, the intentional and rigorous transformation was brought on by the specific and concrete goals of not only “supporting the Korean undergraduate students by bringing out them out of their respective hiding places” at the university but also “helping the students to be more competitive in the job market back home in Korea after they graduate.” Although the organization’s Career Development Team was responsible for career related activities, the activities of the entire organization were geared towards cultivating and training the students to reenter Korean corporate society. The way the team was structured (with the director, co-director, and staff members), the implementation of budgeting management teams, the hierarchical reporting system, the strict use of titles and honorific registers, and the building of active alumni networks were all aimed at reconnecting students with Korean culture and Korean society.

The decision to focus on Korean job preparation and to restructure the KSA as a modern Korean enterprise came primarily from Park’s observations and experiences during and before his time at the University of Illinois. Park recalled that in the early 2000s, when he served as an executive at a prominent headhunting company in Seoul, returning study-abroad students were hotly desired by companies in Korea, presumably for their acquired “globalness” and their English language. However, this demand soon subsided with the companies’ realization that these graduates from US colleges were not adjusting to Korean corporate culture, which is extremely competitive and austere hierarchical. The companies gradually came to see that US university graduates with *jogi yuhak* experience were more likely to quit than endure the severe environment and, most of all, that their English, according to Park, was “not as impressive” as they had imagined. When Park began working as a graduate assistant at UIUC’s career center, he was surprised that Korean undergraduate students were not coming to the career center to seek help, despite their well-published struggles with career development. Park was also disappointed that the university could furnish no one to specifically help international students at the center, suggesting, if not outright indifference, at least an obliviousness to the students’ particular needs and wants.

The CSI, which has grown in popularity among Korean undergraduate students since its founding, seems to have filled this vacuum. Beginning in Fall 2012, six programs have produced more than 150 students who have completed the program and earned their certificates. The demand for the CSI is increasing with more sessions, more students, and more transnational outreach/networking activities connecting UIUC/KSA and Korea.

Most of the students covered in my study began their transnational journey strongly aspiring to participate in the US workforce as “global citizens” upon graduation. As these hopes gradually but significantly faded as they moved from freshman to senior year, the students increasingly looked for alternative paths to global citizenship. However, when they realized there are no options other than to return home, they also realized that they had not been properly prepared for the competitive

workforce climate in Korea. Through programs like CSI and other activities on a large and small scale, the KSA is laying a path for the students to renew their cultural ties and re-integrate into Korean society.

The KSA has come to offer a thread of hope for students returning home to Korea. As the vision of a Korean student body integrating into the campus community and, ultimately, into US society writ large became a vision of repatriation, so has the integrative goal of pulling students out of the Korean island in central Illinois been replaced with the goal of building a richer, *more* Korean island as a stepping stone back across the Pacific. It is this *localization* of Korea—of Korean language, culture, and job preparation practice—that has become the guidepost for many post-*jogi yuhak* students at the University of Illinois and that has begun to build a framework for respect and identity at a university that otherwise has offered an uneven degree of welcome, recognition, and specialized support.

CONCLUSION

In the name of globalization, in their early years in life, many Korean students embarked on a journey abroad to be trained as global citizens, to be equipped with broader, more heterogeneous perspectives and with advanced skills in the global language, English. After years devoted to this *jogi yuhak* pursuit, the Korean undergraduate students' actual literacy and linguistic practices show that they are contradictorily engaged in rhetorical practices of *localization* rather than globalization. In other words, it is not the idea of globalization or becoming global elites that is driving the students' daily practices, but this idea of *localization*, specifically of re-building their Koreanness, their Korean credibility, and their Korean social network.

In the name of internationalization and globalization, many universities actively recruit various social, cultural, and national groups while simultaneously erasing their presence on campus in order to represent, in Prendergast and Abelman's words, "a safe, secure, and only incidentally diverse community" (37). Part of the fallout from these conflicted efforts to value and devalue student diversity is that, once groups of learners have arrived, they may be rhetorically isolated, provided insufficient resources, and confronted with barriers in the academic and social climate to integrating into the university. As these groups become socially, culturally, and academically segregated, they are left to navigate a dubious space that is both welcoming and exclusionary.

Korea's *jogi yuhak* students' literacy and rhetorical practices of *localization* offer a particularly complex example of this general phenomenon prevalent in many universities across the US. As an organization, the KSA has thus emerged in a very complex and challenging ecology. It is an organization firmly rooted in the particular microenvironment of UIUC. It would not exist without the contexts of a global US research university and its attendant complications: dominant monolingualism, depleted state funding and rapidly increasing international undergraduate enrollments, and limited academic and social support systems for this growing international, mostly Asian, body of students.¹⁶ It is further predicated on participants whose study-abroad experiences have attenuated their home language, literacy, and culture. The KSA, then, has worked to fill the

void left by this institutional failure. Redirecting the rhetorical and literacy practices of the students more toward Korean language and culture, it has taken stock of their struggles and, accordingly, recalibrated its own mission: to act for students as a home away from home, a place in which to ground a particular kind of mobile identity as college students in a US university. The students are negotiating their liberal or rather neoliberal college dreams through seemingly Korean ways of language and literacy, ultimately redefining the meaning of globalization (by scrambling to adapt to the conditions that they haven't sought out) and paving their return to Korean society.

Work in composition studies and applied linguistics has addressed the increasingly multilingual, transnational, and transliterate character of academic worlds (e.g., Canagarajah; Horner, Lu, Royster, and Trimbur; Lu; Lillis and Curry; Matsuda). When concerning international ESL learners in academia, however, research has mostly confined its attention to common threads among international students within the classroom walls, with a pedagogical focus. That is to say, under labels such as “international students,” “ESL learners,” or just “foreigners,” these students have been considered one large homogeneous group in need of homogeneous language support. To understand the limits of such a blanket approach and to avoid deficit ideologies that focus primarily on what international students lack in language and literacy, my work goes beyond this focus by illuminating the extracurricular literacy and rhetorical practices of Korean undergraduate individuals with particular transnational experiences within the larger institutional, national, and global contexts. The KSA and its members’ practices of *localization*, practices at times contradictorily evolving within layers of multiple and fluid contextual boundaries, foregrounds the idiosyncrasies of literacy and linguistic practices that we should expect in all students.

I have considered how the strikingly transnational trajectories of this early group of students have ironically reinforced quite traditional language ideologies. This paradox, which has led to focus on building national identities in the home language, complicates both the learning of English for academic purposes and social adaptation to the wider culture of the university. As the literacy experiences and needs of international undergraduate students, and post-*jogi yuhak* students in particular, differ from those of traditional international graduate students in US higher education, they complicate already established notions and remedies for academic success at the university. This understanding of the complexity of multilingual backgrounds complicates singular notions of international students and suggests the need for institutional and pedagogical awareness of literacy varieties when institutions are experiencing an unprecedented increase in the number of international undergraduate students. The post-*jogi yuhak* students today foreshadow the more complex transnational trajectories that we should expect of international (and national) students in an increasingly globalized world. This academic version of the superdiversity that Jan Blommaert has analyzed in European urban spaces calls for new approaches and remedies to support academic success in higher education.

APPENDIX



Fig. 1. KSA staff members hanging the second banner (smaller than the first one) three days after the first banner was vandalized. Courtesy of KSA.



Fig 2. Korean Student Association emblem representing Roman alphabet (KSA) with traditional/early version of the Korean alphabet.



Fig. 3. Front page of an electronic card for the lunar new year. Literally written “New Year” in traditional Korean calligraphy (you can see the brush strokes).



Fig. 4. Korean K-Card issued in the 2011-2012 academic year. The card was a discount card, which was sold to anyone and could be used at various stores in the University community.

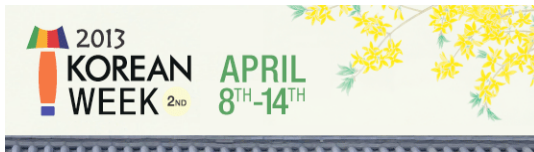


Fig. 5. Two website designs used in the KSA website: The first shows the title on a traditional Korean fan of traditional Korean colors and patterns. The second shows part of a rooftop with flowers from a tree hanging over in the right hand upper corner.

NOTES

¹ Alma Mater, which has presented the motto of “Learning and Labor” since its unveiling in 1929, is one of the most widely recognized symbols of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Located near the center of the campus, the statue has been used for displays representing various university and community events and is a very popular site for graduating students to take pictures each spring.

² According to the Division of Management Information at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, there were 802 Korean undergraduate students (with F1 Visas) in Fall 2014. Although the population is slowly decreasing from its peak of 999 students in Fall 2010, Korean international students continue to be the second largest international student population at the university, following Chinese international students.

³ The Early Study Abroad phenomenon was present even before the 1990s and has also become prevalent in other East Asian countries like China and Taiwan. See Min Zhou’s 1998 article “Parachute Kids’ in Southern California” and Pauline Hsieh’s 2007 dissertation, “Taiwanese Parachute Kids.”

⁴ *Jogi yuhak* is considered a personal and familial strategy of investment for a wide spectrum of South Koreans, as a means of accumulating capital to function more effectively in the globalizing and ever more competitive world.

⁵ Brandt and Clinton note that “more is going on locally than just local practice” (338).

⁶ The university’s commitment to diversity might also be questioned in other areas given. For example, controversy around the Chief Illiniwek (an American Indian mascot for athletic events) mascot misappropriating native American cultural figures and rituals lasted for more than two decades before the university retired it as a mascot in 2007. More recently, the controversy over the (non)hiring of Steven Salaita compromises the university’s vow of diversity.

⁷ For more information, see the Code of Conduct at the University of Illinois University (“Code”).

⁸ There are “advanced composition” courses, but these offer uncertain support for literacy development. An advanced composition course can be anything from a general education course with some attention to writing to an intensive capstone course, depending on the student’s major.

⁹ Since Spring 2011, as a staff member of the university’s writing center, I have organized writing groups for Korean and Chinese undergraduate students, facilitated in their respective languages.

¹⁰ For more information, see UIUC Student enrollment data (“UIUC.”)

¹¹ In response to the increasing demand for support for international students, new positions across campus, including the Director of International Student Integration, were created in Fall 2013 to manage and facilitate International Student Integration at the university. With Director Nicole Tami’s departure in summer 2015, the position and duties have disappeared from Illinois International’s bio webpage (“Illinois International Leadership”).

¹² This is directly translated from the Korean phrase “영어를 잘하다 (*yeongyulul jarhada*),” which connotes speaking English like a native or rather white English speaker.

¹³ The acronym stands for “Language Exchange Table.” Only the acronym is used in the KSA because the words themselves lost their literal meaning as the team expanded its activities beyond teaching English to Koreans (mostly to non-UIUC students) in the community. The English language conversation classes are only one of many activities that include volunteer and outreach initiatives.

¹⁴ Soo-Jin also used words such as *loneliness*, *discomfort*, *wall*, *obstacle*, *low self-esteem*, and *limitations* over numerous interviews and conversations during fieldwork.

¹⁵ Although not discussed in this paper, it is interesting to note that the CSI documents contain no suggestions that language issues are a factor in the low employment rate in the US.

¹⁶I should stress that, based on my readings (e.g., Stephens) and my experiences talking with faculty and students from other universities, I do not believe the situation I am describing is at all unique to the University of Illinois. However, Illinois may have reached a particular pinnacle of Korean student response to these conditions.

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