

**MEDIATING GLOBALIZATION:  
AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE “ENGLISH PROBLEM”  
THROUGH NORTH KOREANS’ ENGLISH LEARNING  
WITH SOUTH KOREAN EVANGELICALS**

**by**

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**A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
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**Abstract**

This ethnography examines the place of English in South Korea through the experience of North Korean migrants in South Korean evangelical institutions. The central thesis is that English in South Korea is both i) a terrain where the tensions in/ of the globalizing (divided) nation-state play out, and ii) a means of mediating those tensions.

A central characteristic about the place of English in the South Korean state is the contradiction between the rise of an English testing system for social selection and the limited use of English for everyday communication. This shows the tensions of the neoliberal state, which include notably the tensions between i) globalization and Korean nationalism, and between ii) social stratification and democracy. The English testing system, at the same time, neutralizes these tensions by achieving to a certain extent the competing interests on both sides of the tensions.

Evangelicals' educational institutions for North Korean students are mediating spaces for the North Korean young adults who are directly impacted by the state tensions. They do so by allowing the students to be i) both Korean (national) and English-speaking/ learning (global), and ii) both "North Koreans" (other) and fellow Koreans (us). The evangelicals' English teaching practices work to mediate their own tension between "*helping* and *evangelizing*" (Varghese & Johnston, 2007), because English learning is valuable for both neoliberal and evangelical self-development and thus meets the interests of both the evangelicals and the North Koreans.

For the North Korean migrants in South Korea, they face the tension between being a South Korean (by citizenship) and not being a South Korean (by cultural habitus). That is, they are given, on one hand, political significance and social advantages through nationalistic/ evangelical institutions (e.g., English support programs particularly for North Koreans), but, on the other hand, they experience barriers in the neoliberal competition (e.g. English testing system). English, however, served as resource for constructing a "third-place" identity for some North Koreans who become fluent English speakers. They had been, in their migration process, less socialized into nationalistic ideology which makes English unspeakable for Koreans.

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## Chapter 1

### The English “problem”

I remember it to be January of 2011. In the Korean ethnic church I was attending in Toronto (which I call *Toronto Church*), I was introduced to a university student from South Korea. This student, whom I call in this study *Han-Young*<sup>1</sup>, turned out to be a North Korean in his twenties. He was the first motivation for me to begin this study about the “problem” of English.

The pastor of Toronto Church was highly active in North Korean ministry, providing aid to North Korea and to the North Korean migrants in the local community. A small community of North Koreans was forming in the church, most of whom had (or were applying for) refugee status in Canada. Han-Young had a different status than the other North Koreans I met at the church. He came to Toronto as a South Korean citizen. I was introduced to him by a church staff member to help him register in an ESL program in Toronto. With my prior interest in North Korea, at first sight, I had a sense that he might be from North Korea, from his slightly smaller height and his slight North Korean accent. He later told me that he was indeed from North Korea, and that he was supported by both his home church in Seoul (which I call *Seoul Church*) and Toronto Church for this study abroad opportunity. The two pastors at Seoul Church and Toronto Church, through their transnational network around North Korean ministry, had

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<sup>1</sup>I am using pseudonyms for most of the institutions and individuals in this study, unless stated otherwise. I am trying to protect the personal information of the North Korean participants as much as possible. The North Korean migrants vary from person to person in their tolerance for revealing their personal information, but many of them hide their real names and do not allow being photographed for security reasons, particularly for the family members in North Korea. From personal communication with the participants, the family members of the defectors are known to be under heavy surveillance and often penalized in a variety of ways both minor and major.

somehow agreed to select and sponsor a North Korean student for a study-abroad in Canada. Han-Young was the one selected, and I happened to be there, at the church cafeteria, when he arrived.

This small story implies some larger stories. Firstly, English is an important thing in South Korea. It is heatedly pursued by many people to the extent that South Korea is often described in the media and in research as suffering from “English Fever” (Krashen, 2003; Park, J.K., 2009; Park & Lo, 2012; Piller & Cho, 2013; Shin, 2010). As Park & Lo (2012) describe, the place of English in Korea is intriguing in its intensity. The ‘symptoms’ of the fever include transnational migration and even breaking-up of families. There is the massive expansion of the English industry consisting of private educational institutes (called “*hagwon*” in Korean) that provide customized services such as one-on-one tutoring, test-preparation class, and study-abroad programs.

I was lucky because I acquired English much more easily than other Koreans my age when I lived in Canada for three years in my adolescence. With the English ability that I have, I have profited from such a linguistic environment. However, growing up in South Korea in the 80s and the 90s, and perhaps because of the distance which my English ability allowed me to have about the social phenomena, it has been a big puzzle for me why people are, literally, *crazy* about English. The totality of the issues related to English is commonly referred to with a somewhat vague, all-encompassing term, “the English (education) problem (영어(교육의) 문제)”. I have been trying to understand, if not solve, this problem of English which seems to cause a lot of pressure and “suffering” (Piller & Cho, 2013) to Korean learners of English. Piller & Cho (2013) begin their account of the English Fever in South Korea with a university student committing suicide from the pressure to learn English. Coming from the field of applied

linguistics and researching in the field of sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, my academic journey has been an attempt to understand this English puzzle.

Secondly, there is the growing presence of “North Koreans” outside North Korea. I am frequently asked, when I say that I am from Korea, “which Korea?” I answer, “of course, South Korea!” because I think it can hardly be the case that someone is from the North and be in a position to receive such question. North Korea is one the few remaining socialist states in the world (with Vietnam, Laos, and Cuba), and has particularly strong isolationist policies. It does not allow mobility of its people across its border. The illuminating account of North Korean migrants by Barbara Demick (2010) shows that North Koreans are heavily restricted in moving from one place to another even within North Korea.

Crossing the border, then, must be even more unthinkable, but this was before what the North Koreans call the “Arduous March”, or the devastating economic crisis in mid 1990s. The extreme starvation from the crisis, which has claimed the lives of at least several hundred thousands of North Korea’s 25 million population (Demick, 2010), pushed many people to cross the border. The border here does not mean the border to South Korea, which is a band of Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) established after the truce of the Korean War (1950 – 1953). A legacy of the Cold War that divides the Korean Peninsula, the Korean DMZ, is ironically one of the most militarized regions in the world. It was the border to China that people began to cross, and eventually show up in places like Seoul and Toronto.

Lastly, the North Korean migrants are often found with South Korean evangelical Christians. South Korean evangelicals are particularly keen on helping the North Koreans, and the particularly strong link between the North Korean migrants and the evangelical Christians is noted in many studies (Jeon & Cho, 2003; Jeon, Yoo, Eom, & Kim, 2009; Jung, J.H., 2011; Han,

J., 2013). As a South Korean growing up in the aftermath of the Cold War, I had never knowingly met a North Korean in South Korea (I might have met some, but if so, they did not identify themselves to me as “North Korean”). It was in evangelical institutions, like Toronto Church, that I saw a community of people presenting themselves as North Korean.

My interest in North Korea itself came from growing up in evangelical churches. I grew up in churches and Christian fellowships where we prayed for the North Korean people in poverty and isolation in North Korea and for Korea’s unification. We listened to guest speakers telling us about their visions and experiences in North Korean ministry, encouraging us to also join the mission for North Korea. Many missionaries have gone to China to help the wandering North Koreans who do not have legal status and are highly vulnerable to deportation and human trafficking. If the North Koreans get caught on their way to South Korea, they are deported back to North Korea where they face harsh interrogation and punishment. Missionaries and NGOs have sheltered them and helped some of them to secretly travel to South Korea where they can acquire legal status. An increasing number of North Korean asylum seekers are found in Canada, in Europe, and a smaller number in the U.S. Many North Koreans become Christians in this process.

When I met Han-Young, it brought together these three threads of my personal interest: English, North Korea, and evangelical Christianity. They have been personally meaningful and important themes in my life but I had never thought of linking them. The link between these themes which I saw in Han-Young’s story sparked my curiosity. Why is he here? What does this mean? What led this North Korean-born South Korean citizen to come to Toronto to learn English, and why were these two distantly located churches actively investing in his English learning? What does this tell us about language and about our changing, globalizing society?

These were the incipient questions that led to this study. I felt this was not an isolated case, and this proved to be the case, as I will show in this chapter.

Eventually, I found literature about missionary English teaching (e.g., Pennycook & Coutand-Marin, 2003), others' observations that North Koreans were particularly "obsessed" with English (e.g., David-West, 2010), and other sites where South Korean evangelicals were particularly active in supporting their English learning. I sensed that I was seeing a phenomenon of globalization, intertwined with language, religion, and migration. I felt this could illuminate, at least partly, my puzzle with the English Problem in South Korea. All these thoughts from meeting Han-Young developed into this study.

This study examines the place of English in South Korea through the experience of North Korean migrants in South Korean evangelical institutions. I ask why Global English works the way it does in South Korea, and I attempt to give an account, through the experiences of North Koreans, in terms of competing interests, ideologies and identities. In this introductory chapter, I will present why I ask the question, why I ask it the way I do, how I have tried to answer the question, and the structure of thesis of this study. The central claim I make in this thesis is that English in South Korea is both i) a terrain where tensions in/of the globalizing (divided) nation-state play out, and ii) a means to mediate those tensions. I will elaborate this thesis in terms of the social actors that emerged as the major players in this account: the state, the evangelicals, and the North Koreans.

I further make the case for the *social* approach I am taking to the topic of English in South Korea, bearing in mind particularly the field of applied linguistics in South Korea (or what is often called as the field of "English education" in South Korea). I am evoking here the *cognitive vs. social debate* in the larger field of applied linguistics (centrally around Firth &



Wagner, 1997, which I will explain in more detail below) and how a *critical* approach is strongly questioned in the field in South Korea. I attempt to demonstrate how the critical approach, i.e., explaining in terms of *power*, is relevant to the pedagogical concerns of applied linguists. In short, I argue that understanding our political economic conditions – what is called variously globalization, late capitalism, neoliberalism, new globalized economy – is key to understanding Global English and the difficulties the field of applied linguistics has in dealing with the current social conditions.

In the first section, I will again present a story of my personal experience (which followed after meeting Han-Young) to be connected to some larger stories. It is what I experienced when I visited Han-Young's Christian community in Seoul Church, particularly with one of the North Korean members of the community, which served as my entry point to North Koreans and into the topic of this study. I will present the story in some detail here. It not only became the direct motivation for this study, but also directed its key issues and modeled its methodology. In the second section, I will explain the *social* approach I am taking to what I was seeing in the story. In the third section, I make connections to larger stories in terms of the issues, or tensions, of English which I saw in the story. In the fourth, I will elaborate the methodology. In the fifth, I will present the central thesis of this study and overview of chapters.

## **1. My entry**

### **1.1 Seoul Church**

Han-Young told me that if I am interested in North Korea, I should visit his Christian community in Seoul Church. It was one of the many smaller communities within the church specifically for serving North Korean migrants. About half of the members were North Korean

migrants, and the other half were South Korean volunteers. For the four months I was in Seoul that summer in 2011, I participated actively in the community (serving as one of the singers during its Sunday Services). At the time, I did not intend to research this community. North Koreans have been my great personal interest, I was excited about being in a community of both South and North Koreans in lively interaction, and I was familiar with the Christian culture.

Several colleagues have asked me how I gained access to North Korean participants because many researchers have experienced difficulty in getting access to North Koreans. They are a small minority in South Korean society, they are not easily identifiable (they look similar and speak more or less similarly with South Koreans), and they do not easily identify themselves as North Koreans to strangers. For me, it was my background in evangelical churches which made this possible. The North Korean migrants gathered as communities in evangelical churches. My Christian network, particularly through Toronto Church and Seoul Church led me to the North Korean participants and related institutions. My active participation in the community also helped build trust with the leaders to later give consent to this research.

During that time in the summer of 2011, when I made friends with many North Korean young adults in Seoul Church, I again saw the link between English, North Koreans, and evangelical Christianity which I had not previously expected. This further led me to do this study in this community. However, this community, after having agreed to participate in the study in 2012, later became hesitant about being identified in this study in 2016 when they saw the draft I wrote, about which I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter. According to how I compromised with the church, I am restricting myself here in describing the community in more detail. Nevertheless, this community was where I met many North Korean young adults highly interested in English, who later became the focal research participants of this study. Some

of them were friends from this summer of 2011 (e.g., Han-Young and Mee-Soo whom I discuss below). The others were introduced to me or I approached with research intention when I began my fieldwork in 2012. The community was also the springboard of further learning about many other Christian communities and institutions working with North Korean young adults, which became the participating institutions of this study. It was especially my experience with Mee-Soo, one of the North Korean members in Seoul Church, which became the direct motivation of this study.

## **1.2 Mee-Soo and I**

My closest friendship was with Mee-Soo. She was a student at a top university in Seoul. Our friendship, or the mode of our interaction, developed in three phases over that summer of 2011. What I did with Mee-Soo, when I think back now, became a model of what I did later with each of the focal participant in this research. It became a type of pre-fieldwork.

The first phase began as we spent a lot of time together. It was a decision we made one day when we were sharing our worries about not being productive with our studies (Mee-Soo in her test-preparation work, and me in my doctoral studies). Since both of us were on our university breaks and had flexible time schedule, we thought working together would help each other to be more productive. I ended up following her to the resource she knew in Seoul, which was a free study space at an English *hagwon* (educational institute in the private sector). She took me to Pagoda Hagwon (real name), which was a top-brand mega-hagwon in the English industry of South Korea, which was giving tuition discounts to North Korean students. Through this “North Korean” benefit, Mee-Soo was taking classes at Pagoda and knew of the study spaces at the hagwon. Pagoda occupied an entire building and had one of its floors open to its

students for self-study and group-study. For about a month in July of 2011, we met there during weekdays to do our own work, and I could observe Mee-Soo and a lot of other South Korean young adults studying English.

Mee-Soo and the other students in this studying space were mostly studying TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication administered). Mee-Soo spent roughly about half of her time practicing test-taking and the other half memorizing her list of English vocabulary. Practicing for tests involved quickly going through given passages and multiple-choice questions, and quickly identifying the clues pointing to the right answer. She occasionally asked me about difficult test questions in this TOEIC preparation material. As I helped her with this, I often found that she did not fully understand the passages or the choices, or rather she did not need to. She was following the patterns or strategies she had learned from hagwon which helped her to guess the right answer. I had heard about this kind of test-preparation method, a wide social practice among South Korean young adults, which I did not really know because I did not have to go through such practice myself. With the educational and linguistic background that I had, I did not have to learn the strategies for the tests I needed to take, such as CSAT (university admission exam) or TOEFL. I could read the whole passages and understand what they meant, and choosing the right answer was not so difficult. I could do all this within the time limit. Mee-Soo could not do this within the time limit of the test, so she had to do it strategically.

This led us to the second phase of our interaction, which was a lot of conversations about English. I asked her many questions about English. I found out that by the time I met her in the summer of 2011, she had already taken TOEIC nine times over the course of about a year. She was a university student in the field of accounting, and she wanted to be a Certified Public

Accountant (CPA). In order to be qualified to take the CPA exam, she needed to submit a TOEIC score of over 700 (out of 990). Her TOEIC score started from the 400 range and continually improved, but she scored in the 600 range four times, failing to cross the required score. She was preparing for the tenth TOEIC test, and had already spent more than the equivalent of \$1500 (Canadian Dollars) for hagwon tuition (even with the discount for North Koreans) and test-taking fees.

In August, she again began to take a TOEIC class at Pagoda. Our daily study meetings were over, but as I continued to meet her at Seoul Church, I heard about her hagwon classes. Her class was from 9AM to 1PM, and her study group met from 2PM to 5PM, Monday to Friday. Then she did homework in the evening. She told me that after all day of test practicing and rote memorizing, her head would become so tired that she would read something meaningful in the evening, which was Plato's Republic at the time. She was working hard but she seemed stuck in some kind of contradiction.

What was distinct about her English learning was that her other South Korean university colleagues at her accounting department usually passed the TOEIC requirement within a year or two, but she was the only one left behind the TOEIC barrier. She could not even begin to study for the CPA exam itself. She had been actually avoiding English in her career choices (in choosing her major, in choosing courses, etc.), and she could manage to do so until this point of trying to get into a high-wage, white-collar job. At that point, English became a critical barrier she could not avoid. I remember her sigh as she said, "I wish I could have a life without English." There was a conversation I had with her after a Sunday Service, right outside the chapel, as we sat on a table together. I said to her, "I didn't think English would be so important to the North Koreans in South Korea, or is it because of my interest in English?" She

answered, “No! It’s a matter of survival!” When I heard the word “survival (생존)” linked to English, that was when I thought I wanted to take this issue seriously as a research topic.

She had been receiving help with English from many people, particularly the Christians. She told me about another top-brand English hagwon (other than Pagoda) which gave discounts to North Korean students. For the discount benefit, the hagwon asked the North Korean students to do some volunteer activities and Bible study. This was when I was really struck that there could be a significant link between Christianity and English teaching for North Koreans. I could also see that she did not enjoy the Christian requirement. She liked the discount program at Pagoda because it did not have any requirement.

I myself embodied the link between Christianity and English teaching. As a Christian with some passion for North Korea, I wanted to help her too. When I saw the intensity and the consequences of her struggle with English and considering the English ability that I had, I felt I had to do something to help her. This led us to the third phase. I suggested offering free English tutoring sessions. Based on my training in the field of English education and applied linguistics, I quickly diagnosed the issue as a “problem” of learning method; I felt that she was excessively oriented to test-preparation. I tried to present a new way of learning English which I believed at the time to be both effective and meaningful, that is, learning English based on the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and through Christian practices. CLT’s basic principle is that you learn to communicate *through* communicating. It contrasts with the kind of learning where you do rote repetition, memorization, or guessing on multiple-choice questions. CLT aligns with task-based learning, or content-based learning, where language learning takes place incidentally while you accomplish a task or study a content subject. My own theory, as a Christian applied linguist, was that doing Christian practices through English offers one of the

best learning environments for CLT. I loved “doing Christianity” (reading the Bible, singing Christian songs) through both Korean and English. I did with Mee-Soo what I had done in my Christian English practices: reading the English Bible, writing summaries and journals, and singing translated Christian songs in its original English lyrics which we had sung during Sunday services. Mee-Soo seemed to like it as well. She often exclaimed, “Wow, I am writing in English for the first time!” or “This is living English.” She once even remarked, “I can see hope in my future.” I told her about other ways of doing CLT by herself, explaining the theories of second language teaching methodologies and stressing the actual use of English.

What struck me was her response afterwards. I had thought she would change her way of learning English after having experienced this. I think I was expecting that she would not take TOEIC classes again. However, she applied for TOEIC class again for the upcoming test. And, also importantly, it was difficult to continue our free English tutoring without immediate compensation for both me (e.g., money) and her (e.g., improved scores). The score of her tenth TOEIC, which she took not long after our few sessions of English tutoring, was again below the passing line.

At the time, I could not understand what the problem was, or rather I did not have a framework to make sense of what I was seeing. I felt a barrier on my part trying to persuade CLT to a student learning English in test-driven way. I felt there was a strongly established way of learning English in South Korea and many social mechanisms such as university policies and employment policies that reinforce this practice. I also felt the *English barrier* that Mee-Soo said she was feeling. I felt probably for the first time in a very concrete way how language can be a “social barrier” for people without capital, and how it could widen existing inequality. It seemed that if she continued the way she was studying English, she would remain blocked by

the barrier.

## **2. Approaching the problem**

There were at least two different approaches I could take regarding this “problem” of English in South Korea, vividly exemplified by the story of Mee-Soo. The first approach was to look for ways to solve the problem, to find ways for Mee-Soo to overcome the barrier to English. It was a barrier against better English ability (i.e., higher TOEIC score), a better way of learning English (i.e., which I believed was a communicative way), and a better social status (i.e., becoming a public accountant). This was a pedagogical approach, which a teaching practitioner with the goal of English teaching should and often take.

The second approach was to try to understand what the “problem” was about. In other words, it was to locate the phenomenon in a larger context and put it into perspective. This meant a suspension of judging high test score, CLT, and white collar jobs as “good” and judging low test scores, test-driven learning, or low social status as “bad”, but rather asking why they were happening to certain people. This meant not assuming that “English”, and all that it entails, was something good which should be achieved, but rather questioning why English was socially constructed as something to be achieved, and at the same time, difficult to achieve for certain people.

In my view, this issue of which approach to take is related to a long debated issue in the larger (U.S.- and U.K.-centered) field of applied linguistics about how to understand language and language learning. It is often called the “cognitive versus social” debate, which began most visibly with a 1997 article by Firth and Wagner, published with prominent respondents in a



special issue of *Modern Language Journal*. In perhaps a simplified framing of the debate, it is about whether to understand second language learning primarily as “cognitive” development of a learner’s linguistic system or as “social” practice embedded in its political, economic context. Firth & Wagner (1997) criticized the striking dominance of individualistic, cognitive, and experimental orientation with an “oversimplified manner” (285) in the study of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), and called for a more balanced, holistic approach which includes social, contextual, and anthropological orientations to language. They wanted to make take-for-granted concepts, such as “native speaker” and “interlanguage” (“a continuum between first language and second language along which all learners traverse”, Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991 cited in Firth & Wagner, 1997, 292) as the very *topic* of investigation. The response from the cognitive side has been that *the cognitive* and *the social* are distinguishable albeit connected, and greater insight into the social context is secondary or supplementary at best for understanding “the most important SLA topic”: which is to “explain the cognitive process of second language learning” (Larsen-Freeman, 1991 cited in Zuengler & Miller, 2006, 36) necessarily understood as cognitive. For them, the cognitive development of second language is assumed to be something “good” and something to be achieved.

In my view, this debate is on-going and still significant. It was revisited in 2007 in another special issue of the *Modern Language Journal*, and in numerous other articles (e.g., Hulstijn, Young & Ortega, 2014; Zuengler & Miller, 2006) and conferences (e.g., a panel on this issue in 2015 conference of one flagship organization, the American Association for Applied Linguistics, or AAAL). The contributors of Hulstijn, Young & Ortega (2014) acknowledged that the gap between the two worlds is still a controversial issue. They expressed diverse opinions, such as denying the gap, seeing the gap as a sign of two separate disciplines, or suggesting ways

to bridge the gap.

The fact that this issue is on-going and controversial to many applied linguists, in my view, is itself revealing of the tensions of our time. Research has shown that conditions of globalization, or the globalized economy, have resulted in conflicting ways of constructing language, which include the tension between standardizing endeavors versus dealing with variability (Heller, 2013). For the field of applied linguistics, the tension arises between establishing pedagogical standards for learners versus giving accounts of the increasingly diverse situations, trajectories, and forms of inequality which the process of globalization entails. The changing conditions beg the question why certain language variety is given more dominance than others.

This tension has to do with what this field is about. I have somewhat struggled with what exactly defines “applied linguistics” while making sense of this debate. The International Association of Applied Linguistics, in its official website, defines the field as dealing with “practical problems of language and communication”. However, this label might be misleading if we consider that, historically, the primary concern of applied linguistics has been English Language Teaching (ELT). In his influential book, *Linguistic Imperialism*, Phillipson (1992) claims that “urgent demand for more English teaching overseas” was the basis for the formation of this field in 1950s and 60s in the U.K. and the U.S. (179). He questions why the term “English” was omitted in naming the field, speculating that the name “applied linguistics” might reflect concerns for emphasizing theoretical approaches. In my view, this has caused confusion about what really defines the field and has generated diverse related labels, such as SLA (Second Language Acquisition), second language research, second language education, TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), or English education.

The scope of the field has clearly expanded beyond its traditional domain of ELT. The debate itself marked the social turn (Block, 2003) that the field was undergoing in the 1990s. What Phillipson outlined as unexplored yet vital dimensions of ELT (262), such as language planning and policy, and the role of international English in local context, has now been much explored. Critical approaches in applied linguistics pioneered by Phillipson (1992), Pennycook (1994), Peirce (1995), Canagarajah (1999), and Shohamy (2001) became a well-established approach by the 2000s. However, the central topic of the field remains as the technical question of figuring out the best way to teach/ learn *English*.

This technical, “asocial” characteristic of applied linguistics is particularly strong in South Korea. Critical approaches to English Education in South Korea have been a minor stream (e.g., Sung Ki-Wan, 2002, 2006; Shin Dong-II, 2011). Critical discussion about the place of English in South Korea in fact largely began with scholars from other fields (particularly English Literature and Sociology), or those from outside of South Korea, coming from Korean researchers based on institutions outside of South Korea (e.g., Jeon, M., 2012; Park & Lo, 2012; Park, J.S., 2009; Shin, 2010; Song, J.J., 2011). They examined the excessive pursuit of English in South Korea, and some of these studies discussed the social inequality linked to English. This has been called the “English Divide (영어격차)” in the public media since the late 2000s.

However, perhaps due to the physical distance, their work often relied on indirect observations (e.g. media data) or practices taking place outside South Korea. This led to the tendency of studying the South Korean elites who could afford to be in those places outside of South Korea or to appear on the media (Block, 2012). Critical ethnography taking place inside South Korea about the non-elites has been rather few (but see Abelmann, Park, & Kim, 2009; Park & Abelmann, 2004). In the Korean academia, socially-oriented, critical scholars are usually

conceived as insightful but not pragmatic (inducing the “so what?” response), not providing any solution nor alternative (Song, S.C., 2008). With such orientation, the field in South Korea has been mostly silent about the social meaning of its own ELT practices.

Phillipson (1992) provides a genealogy of the field’s social disconnectedness and narrow focus. It has historical roots because the initial British and American ELT work (British work overseas and American work with its immigrants) was outside state educational systems, and seen as “technical” training. This technical professionalism relies “heavily on linguistics and only lightly on education” (256) while giving superficial attention to the local educational system and its social, political, economic context. Educational imperialism was its symptom: worldwide exportation of U.K.- and U.S.- produced textbooks, methodology, and teacher certificate programs. The consequence was cultural insensitivity and limited utility of such work for local use.

The silence about the political aspect of English among the South Korean applied linguists, in my view, has to do with the strong legacy of Cold War in Korean context, and the structure of the academia (the way funding and faculty positions are distributed) constructed in Korean political context which does not easily yield to other perspectives. In the Korean context which still bears the tension of Cold War, critical social science has been politically repressed (Kim, D., 1997). Although the tension has weakened, the structure of academia still seems reluctant about critical studies, especially in the field of English Education. However, the changing conditions of South Korea are making it more and more difficult for the field to deal with what is happening with the existing framework.

I am an applied linguist, defined as someone dealing “practical problems of language and communication”, and I am highly interested in dealing with the problems of English in

South Korea, as it has serious consequences for many people. But because of this very definition, I wish to approach the problem as object of holistic observation and understand why it is happening the way it does. I must note that, as a student of University of Toronto, I was more protected and supported to do a critical study in South Korea.

### **3. Tensions**

I am now going back to the story of Mee-Soo and I to link it to some larger stories. In this story, I saw again the intersection of English, North Koreans, and Christianity in more complex ways. In this story alone, which took place over little more than four months, numerous threads were intertwined, such as migration, religion, language, and nationalism. Because my central focus was English, several issues regarding English in South Korea stood out from this story: i) the dominance of English, ii) the way English is learned/ taught/ evaluated, iii) social inequality linked to English (or the English Divide), and iv) the way people (especially Christians) intervene in trying to solve the problem of English Divide. These are questions that relate to public debates and theoretical discussions in our field, and they have built up toward the central thesis of this study. I will go through these issues, with findings of past research, as a way to describe Global English in South Korea. For each issue, I found it helpful to see them as tensions between competing interests.

#### **3.1 Korean vs. English**

The first issue is about why English is seen as so important in South Korea, why we see an English fever. For Mee-Soo to “survive” in South Korea, why was it English that she needed to learn (and a particular repertoire of English)? Why not some other language or something

other than *language*? She wanted to avoid English and avoid language in her effort to survive. She chose the field of accounting because she liked the clarity of *numbers*, and could avoid course textbooks with long texts, particularly English texts. What is it about the structure of South Korean society which makes English unavoidable?

What makes this issue difficult to grasp is the contradiction between the importance placed on English and the little use of English for actual communication in South Korea. The place of English in the linguistic landscape of Korea is not a simple domination. Korean is widely spoken for everyday communication. Koreans have strong pride in their national language and particularly its alphabet, called Hangul, which was invented by King Sejong in 1443 during the Chosun Dynasty (1392 – 1897). There was a heated social debate when English fever first emerged in late 1990s over whether to adopt English as *the* official language of South Korea (called the “Official Language Debate”, closely analyzed in Park, J.S., 2009). Korean has remained as the official language of South Korea, but the debate showed the tensions between the strong Korean pride versus the power of global language.

What is notable is the strong presence of English loan words in the South Korean language. It is, in fact, the experience of North Korean migrants that reminds the South Koreans of the extent of the English vocabulary in contemporary South Korean language. North Koreans share the Korean language with the South Koreans. The two Koreas each have their own standard varieties of Korean (the Seoul standard, and the Pyeongyang standard), which have diverged in many aspects (vocabulary, accent, intonation) through seven decades of division, but nevertheless remain mutually intelligible. However, North Korean migrants experience significant difficulty communicating with South Koreans when they come to South Korea, and one main reason is the English loan words. The quote below is an episode I heard during an

interview (my translation from Korean, discussed in more detail in methodology section) with one of the South Korean teachers who teach English to North Koreans, about North Koreans' difficulty with the loan words.

Excerpt 1.1 Interview with director of Daniel School (December, 2012)

Pastor Lee: They feel it very directly, the loan words. One of our students, she saw in university the name of a college circle in English initials. She looked it up in the dictionary and couldn't find it and she cried. When they go to cell phone store, there are so many words in English and Korean abbreviations. South Koreans use a lot of English, more than they realize. And I tell the students that even the South Koreans who use them don't really know what they mean for probably half of the loan words they use.

The divergence of language between the two Koreas reflects the language policies of each state. The North, driven by its political ideology of anti-imperialism and self-reliance, implemented policy of pure Korean. On the other hand, the South allowed the use of loan words, especially from English (Song, J.J., 2011). Other immigrant groups to South Korea would not be able to reveal this easily because they do not share the Korean language. The barrier from the loan words, however, is reported to be soon overcome by the North Koreans in a few years (Yoon, I. 2009) because they use the loan words in their everyday communication.

The presence of English in South Korea eventually emerges over time for the North Koreans not so much in the everyday communication but in the process of trying to gain social mobility. As we see in the story of Mee-Soo, the English barrier came, not at other points, but at the point when she wanted to get into a high-wage workforce in South Korea, in the form of a standardized English proficiency test. The website of Korean Institute of CPA posts the following chart as the English test regulation:

Table 1.1 English requirement for Certified Public Accountant

Type of English test	TOEFL			TOEIC	TEPS
	Paper-based	Computer-based	Internet-based		
score required for passing	More than 530	More than 197	More than 71	More than 700	More than 625

Source: Korean Institute of CPA homepage

TEPS is a standardized test developed by Seoul National University. The other tests are developed by Educational Testing Service (ETS), located in New Jersey, US. ETS owns and administers TOEIC, TOEFL, SAT, GRE (and many others), which constitute a large part, if not the majority, of the English testing system for social selection in South Korea.

So when was it that the CPA exam in South Korea began to adopt these standardized English test score as its requirement? A Google search easily shows newspaper articles which report that the government began this discussion in 2002 and the actual implementation of the regulation was in 2007. Before the change of the regulation, all test subjects (including English, economics, tax law, etc.) were developed by the Korean Institute of CPA. In 2007, the government announced that the English subject of CPA exam will be replaced with external standardized English tests. This change in the CPA regulation was part of a major shift in the social selection system of South Korea in which English tests emerged as a major gatekeeper. Many researchers agree that this shift in the status of English was part of South Korea's globalization endeavors and the state's neoliberalization since the 1990s (Park, J.K., 2009; Park & Lo, 2012; Piller & Cho, 2013). This was also not an isolated case but a part of a larger global process in which a new form of global economy was emerging, which we can call late capitalism (Heller & Duchêne, 2012).

Embedded in this material condition of globalizing economy, an ideological explanation of the English fever was provided by Joseph Sung-Yul Park (2009). He identified a complex of three language ideologies of English in South Korea, which makes English *unspeakable* for



Koreans: i) ideology of necessitation (belief about English as valuable and indispensable resource), ii) ideology of externalization (belief about English as the language of Other or non-Korean, *unspeakable* because of lack of ownership), and iii) ideology of self-deprecation (belief about Koreans' deficiency in English, *unspeakable* because lack of competence). Park shows that these three language ideologies are contradictory yet intricately interlocked in South Korea.

His study explains to a great extent the underlying mechanism of the English fever. It is a symptom of the working of this ideological complex, which traps Korean people (even those who are not genuinely interested in English) in a never-ending pursuit of English; never-ending because English is something that must be attained (ideology of necessity) but at the same it is ideologically something that can never be attained (due to the unspeakable-ness of English). Hence, "the promise of English" or the social mobility and visibility that people desire through English "is constantly deferred" (Park, J.S., 2011, 443), sustaining the English Fever. Mee-Soo's case is an example. She was caught between her belief in the necessity of English, and her belief about the "unspeakableness" of English. English was made unspeakable to her in many ways. English is not spoken in her community, TOEIC is made of listening and reading, and preparing for TOEIC was mostly silent activities. Attaining English (indicated by TOEIC score) seemed like a very distant possibility.

The rise of English also meant the rise of *language*. Survival in South Korea for Mee-Soo meant investing in language among many other things. In this study, I did not want to take for granted the importance of English or the importance of language in South Korea, but I wanted to examine "when and how language becomes prominent" (Heller & McElhinney, forthcoming) in the society examined. Researchers have argued that the conditions of globalization and globalizing economy put more and more importance on language and

communication (Fairclough, 2002), on communicative approaches to language teaching (Warschauer, 2000), and on the role of language to generate distinction and more importantly profit (Heller & Duchêne, 2012). The role of language as symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991) is becoming more and more central and salient in the globalizing, neoliberalizing nation-states, as we see in the case of English in South Korea.

As Blommaert (2003) notes, linguistic globalization does not mean the global spread of a language in its abstract form, but it involves the rise of specific genre for specific function in a specific context, in competing relation with the local languages. There was clearly neoliberalism's *de facto* language policy of "English for all" (Price, 2014), but not all Koreans learn English all the time. We see the specific function of English (social selection) in a specific genre (standardized test) in relation to Korean (not taking away Korean's communicative function), and this is what I explore in detail in this study.

### **3.2 Test-driven vs. communicative**

The second issue is about the way English is learned/ taught/ evaluated in South Korea. Many Koreans I meet want to find the effective way to learn English. It is the question I am asked often in personal conversations, usually in the form of: "How can I be good at English? (어떻게 하면 영어 잘해요?)" This question comes with Koreans' sense of deficiency about English (Park, J.S., 2009) found in the widely circulated expression: "how come we invest so much in English and yet we cannot speak even a single word in English?" South Korea is often singled out for its feverish learning of English and its mediocre outcome. This is often framed as the "inefficiency" of South Koreans' investment in English (Jeon & Choe, 2006; Kim, H.S., 2012). In these discussions, it is often asked "what is wrong with our way of learning English?",

but the question often turns to self-blame for individuals' insufficient effort and problematic learning/ teaching methods.

This is what Mee-Soo once said, with a sense of despair at the time, about her English learning: "Studying for TOEIC was all I did for learning English. So I can't write a sentence in English, I can't speak a word in English. It's incredible." She was learning English (through TOEIC preparation), but at the same time, she was not learning English, or at least, that was how she felt. For the time being, however, she could not change the way she was learning English. She was hard-working in Test English, but she kept failing the test.

As we see in Mee-Soo's story, there are dominant ways of learning/ teaching English in South Korea that are test-driven and in competing relationship with the "communicative" way, or often called the "American" way (미국식 영어). In this study, I see what is constructed as two opposing ways of learning English as two repertoires of English both circulating in South Korea, and I call them *Test English* versus *Communicative English*. They are ethnographic categories; they are not mutually-exclusive or have a clear boundary, but there are dominant practices associated with each repertoire. Test English is mainly about solving multiple choice test questions, and learning the test-taking tactics for guessing the right answers even without fully understanding the texts in the tests. Communicative English is mainly about oral English, or being able to understand and use English in everyday communication. It is most strongly associated with spontaneous conversations with English speakers.

The contradiction I see here is the tension between what is publicly discussed as the effective way of learning English and the *actual* way Koreans learn/ teach English. The Korean way is often criticized as the cause of Koreans' bad English, while there is more positive value placed on the communicative way. (I have made such value judgment myself when I tried to

persuade Mee-Soo.) The communicative way has been promoted since the 1990s through the popularity of CLT and the state policies of curriculum reform (Kwon, 2000). Studies, however, have shown that implementing CLT in the classrooms has been difficult. There was the lack of teacher training with foreign methodology, the pressure of the testing system, and student resistance against speaking English (Jeon, J., 2009; Li, 1998). Studies have shown the persistent gap between CLT policies and actual classroom practices, not only in South Korea but in other non-English-speaking states (Butler, 2011; Latif, & Mahmoud, 2012; Littlewood, 2014).

Here is another example of this tension. It was in a free online video of a hagwon instructor giving lessons about preparing for TOEIC. I came across this video in 2014 during fieldwork, when one of the focal participants in this study told me she was taking this online program<sup>2</sup>. In the middle of his lesson, the instructor asked the class:

Excerpt 1.2 Conversation in TOEIC listening sample video (March, 2014)

Instructor: Among those in class here, who came here for English tests, like TOEIC, TOEFL?

Students: (Many students raised their hands.)

Instructor: Then, who came here for improving English?

Students: (Few students raised hands.)

Instructor: As I had guessed, those who came here for English test are many more than those who came to improve English.

Excerpt 1.3 Conversation in TOEIC sample video (March, 2014)

Instructor: I hope those who are studying English for test change your motivation. If your goal is for the test, then your performance will stop with the test, and your performance will likely be lower than your aimed goal. After the test, even if you get hired, if you didn't really improve your English, you will keep worrying because of English. It will continue to be a cause of stress. However, if you aim for something beyond the test, for improving your English, you will get good score at the test as well, and it will be a cause of many opportunities in your future workplace.

The instructor made a distinction between “learning for test” and “learning for improving

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<sup>2</sup> This instructor appeared in a free video on EBS (Educational Broadcasting System, a public TV channel) website about teaching the method for English listening for a program entitled “TOEIC Goal Achievement (토목달)”.

English”. It was a socially shared frame of characterizing one’s goal of learning English and, importantly, understood as not the same. There was a more positive value placed on the latter, but also the perception that it was not the dominant practice among the students. How might the students in such a classroom respond to the instructor’s persuasion? I anticipate quiet resistance, as I had already had experienced with Mee-Soo.

In other words, the Korean way (which teachers and students acknowledge as not “real learning” or communicative) persists, but it is still seen as “learning English” in South Korea. “Learning English” in South Korea means something particular, usually preparing for standardized tests in particular ways, and there is a social structure which makes it difficult to do it otherwise. It is difficult to learn English in South Korea without an aim for a test, and it is difficult to prepare for an English test without using test-taking tactics.

That there is a persistent way how English is *actually* learned, taught, or evaluated in South Korea is one of the main claims of this study, but there are not yet much ethnographic studies on what people actually do. English-related practices taking place inside South Korea (which are inevitably related to English tests) have not been much documented as they are. The studies quoted above about implementation of CLT policies in actual classrooms are examples of studies which show the gap between what should be done and what is actually done, but these studies also drew their conclusions from one-time surveys rather than observations. Studies in the cognitive stream have focused more on how English is most effectively learned, taught, or evaluated in experimental setting, that is, how things *should* be done. They do not ask why people are insisting on what they are doing. Extensive observations on naturally-occurring data have been scarce.

Such prescriptive approach does not allow us to examine the conditions and

consequences of test-driven English practices or the actual function of English testing system in the society. The quote below is from a newspaper interview with one of the “millionaire TOEIC instructors” in South Korea about the TOEIC test:

Excerpt 1.3 Interview with a hagwon instructor from a newspaper article “South Korea’s millionaire tutors”

It’s not really an English test. It’s a way of identifying who has basic ability and who wants to learn in their new job. Companies choose TOEIC because it’s about following instructions.

The instructor in this article, while profiting from the testing system, is critical of the system. She sees the contradiction that the English test is not really about English, but about indirect evaluation of an ability to follow instructions. What might that signal? To the critical eyes, English tests measure something different than English, such as work ethic in the neoliberal economy (Kubota, 2011 in the Japanese context). Some see the system as a tool of social elimination for the interest of the social elites (Song, J.J., 2011). English testing, which profess to be about objective and democratic competition, is increasingly associated with reproducing and widening social inequality (e.g., Shohamy, 2001).

### **3.3 English test vs. English divide**

This takes us to the next issue about social inequality linked with English. The term “English divide (영어격차)” began to circulate in the South Korean public media since the late 2000s. It refers to the social phenomenon that the economic status of the parents influence the English ability of the children, and this further reproduces the parents’ economic status to the children. In other words, there is growing gap in English competence between the rich and the poor, and between the urban and the rural regions. Studies in the first decade or so of the 21st

century show that the wealth of the parents is one of the most significant predictor of one's English competence (Choi, 2003; Jeon, M.H., 2012; Kim, H.S., 2012; Song, J.J., 2011), and that English, more than other subject areas, is where the social gap is most directly reflected (Kim, H.S., 2012).

Mee-Soo was at the lower end of the English divide in South Korea. She could not overcome the divide with the way she was learning English and the amount of English capital that she had. The English divide between the two Koreas is even deeper than the divide within the South. The North Korean migrants mostly had little schooling, and the schooling in North Korea did not provide much English education. Mee-Soo was a North Korean with educated parents and with relatively more education than other North Korean migrants, but her English capital was significantly lower than most South Korean young adults. English test, which is supposedly a fair, objective tool for social selection, seemed to reinforce this social inequality. She was one of the disadvantaged non-elites in South Korea.

Like other immigrant groups, the North Korean migrants are at the margin of the society. However, unlike other immigrants, they share the Korean language and they share, more or less, a sense of belonging to one nation. Based on the national discourse of "Korean unification", they are given special attention and benefits by the state. South Korean state gives them South Korean citizenship upon arrival, and other significant forms of financial support. One of the state benefits for North Korean migrants for those under the age of 35 is easier admission to university and tuition support (100% for public universities and 50% for private universities). Considering the severe competition for university in South Korea, this is an incredible route for social mobility and one of the reasons many North Korean young adults turn to university preparation.

Citizenship in contemporary liberal democratic states and the national imagination of unity work to mask the internal differences and inequalities. As noted by critical sociolinguists (Bourdieu, 1991; Heller & Duchêne, 2012; Heller & McElhinney, forthcoming), language is intricately built into this work of *differential* citizenship. Bourdieu (1991) showed that a certain language variety (usually a “standard” language) becomes a form of *linguistic capital* when it is *uniformly* valued as legitimate and desirable by members of a society, although each member has *unequal* access to that language. Such linguistic unification historically served the interest of nation-states for nation-building, and the interest of industrial capitalism for constructing national markets in the nation-states (Heller & Duchêne, 2012). It has also served the interest of the elites to legitimize social selection based on such linguistic measures. Since acquisition of linguistic capital needs prolonged labor on the body from a young age, speakers of the *non-standard language* are seriously disadvantaged in competing with the native speakers of the *standard language* in linguistic mastery. However, ideas of national unity or national “pride” obscure people’s differential access to the standard language because, in principle, the standard language is accessible to all of its citizens through its educational system – although in fact it is more intricately linked to one’s possession of capital in all its different forms tied to varied social positions in the linguistic market.

Conceptualizing English as a form of linguistic capital has had explanatory power in the Korean context (e.g., Choi, 2003). Since English is not spoken and used in everyday communication, and the spaces where English is taught in South Korea are mostly test-driven which structurally demote the development of communicative ability, the acquisition of Communicative English is accessible through private means and by those who can afford them. The common perception is that if a Korean is fluent in English, unless exceptionally



linguistically talented, the person has had the opportunity to live/ study abroad or has the family background to have native speaking tutor from young age. For those who enter the competition in older age, they cannot afford to invest in Communicative English because the social selection tests are too close and they need to invest in Test English. However, regardless of their hard work, it is difficult competing with those who has had bodily training from young age. English is becoming more and more a mark of social class rather than individual merit, more than other subject areas, because it is a rare, expensive, and structurally age-sensitive commodity in Korean context.

The English Divide in South Korea also has to do with the globalized scale of this linguistic unification, and South Korea's peripheral position in this process of linguistic globalization. South Korea as a member of this unified market of English is located at lower end on the global strata, situated in the most outer circle of World English (Kachru, 1992). Because of its distance from the locus of definition of the dominant variety, it also has a wide range of linguistic stratification within its national boundary, from those who do not speak a word of English to the social elites with fluent English. However, regardless of their level of English, every *neoliberal person* in South Korea recognizes the specific English variety that is valued, while the majority of the non-elite South Koreans do not have access to that specific variety. Standardized English tests, with their image of objectivity (Shohamy, 2001), obscure the differential access of the neoliberal citizens to "standard" English.

In this study, I traced the trajectories of eight North Korean young adults who are right in the middle of this tension between having South Korean citizenship based on rhetoric of national unity and being in the process of social stratification which is linked to global processes. They are in the periphery in an already peripheral state in terms of Global English, and yet state

interventions work to obscure their actual places in the neoliberal competition. I tried to trace what they actually do in terms of English learning and where they actually end up in the English Divide. As an ethnography of non-elites in South Korea, the study shows how English works as a barrier but as an ethnography of North Koreans, it also shows how English works as alternative routes and alternative ways of being Korean. This has to do with how North Korean identity has special meaning to other social actors, most notably the South Korean evangelical Christians.

### **3.4 Helping vs. evangelizing**

This takes us to the fourth issue about the ways people try to help those disadvantaged in English learning, or how South Korean society deals with the English Divide. Social stratification in terms of English has been a growing social concern in South Korea, and there have been social movements in South Korea to decrease the gap. Educational NGOs have been emerging in South Korea to tackle the problems of educational divide and private education (e.g., a key NGO in this stream in South Korea is “A world with no worry about private education (사교육걱정없는세상”).

One major group seen as “disadvantaged” in terms of English in South Korea are the “North Korean” students. The evangelicals were not the only ones who provided free English to North Koreans. There was a range of social actors teaching English to North Koreans, such as the South Korean government, embassies of English-speaking countries (most notably the British Embassy through its support of the British Council), and various religious and non-religious NGOs (e.g., PSCORE in David-West & Suh, 2014). However, a large part of English teaching to North Koreans was done by Christians in evangelical institutions, such as churches

and “alternative schools” (discussed in more detail in methodology section) for North Koreans.

The strong link between Christians’ ELT and North Korean students was a pattern which I repeatedly observed since I met Han-Young in Toronto. I myself embody this link, and why I became so involved in teaching English to Mee-Soo and other North Korean students was part of my inquiry about this link in this study. What was clear was that I was not alone in undertaking such interventions for North Korean students.

One example of this pattern was Pagoda, the English hagwon from which Mee-Soo was receiving the discount for North Koreans and where we studied together. Pagoda not only had discount programs for North Korean students, it began to host English speech contests for North Korean young adults as a form of evaluating their discount program. This was done jointly with Wooyang Foundation, a foundation in Seoul providing aid to people in poverty. One of my focal participants, Ye-Young, participated in this contest during fieldwork and I attended the contest as an audience. After the contest, lunch was provided to all the participants and visitors. About twenty people joined this lunch. Ye-young was seated across from the program manager of Pagoda and the president of Wooyang. I sat next to Ye-Young, so I was seated close to them.

Before starting to eat, the president of Wooyang stood up and spoke, addressing the manager from Pagoda and the people present: “I am an elder at a church. Would you mind if I pray for the meal?” Then the manager responded, “I am a missionary myself. Please go ahead.” No one else objected, so the lunch then began with a prayer to the Christian God. Before this point, I had had no idea about the Christianity of these two hosting institutions. It did not surface in the hagwon’s English discount program, nor through the English speaking contest, until they gathered in this more private space. The pattern appeared again there, in that the key players in this English program for North Korean young adults were Christians and they were open about

it. They did not necessarily make it central nor demand the recipients to participate in any Christian activities, but they had religious background in what they were doing.

In my own teaching with Mee-Soo, when I used English Bible and English Christian songs justified by the principles of CLT, I had the intention that she would see the good in how I learned English through Christian practices. Using Christian content and activities for learning English was a practice I observed in many others as well through this research, and I call this repertoire *Christian English* in this study. In my reflection about my Christian English teaching, I see that I tried to help Mee-Soo but also make her see the good in being a Christian. The hagwon which gave free English classes to Mee-Soo but had her do Bible study/ volunteer activities was also doing both *helping* and *evangelizing*. Hearing Mee-Soo's response to this hagwon, however, was something I had not expected. She said, "if they are trying to help us, why don't they just help us? Why are they asking us to do these things? They were not even consistent. They stopped the free English program after a while. They hagwon only gained bad reputation." This was a legitimate complaint from the perspective of the students. From the perspective of the Christian teachers, they did not have to teach free English from the first place. They volunteered to do the work because they had Christian faith and had missionary intentions. All the other social actors providing free English to North Koreans would not do such work as well if they were not involved in some kind of projects of social change. The social efforts to deal with the English Divide could easily get caught up in this tension between the needs of the students and the agendas of the social workers.

This relates to what Varghese & Johnston (2007) noted for Christian teachers, that they have the tension between *helping* and *evangelizing* the students. After extensive interviews of pre-service teachers in a Christian college in the U.S., they found that the evangelical teachers

were not as dogmatic about their beliefs, struggling to make sense of what it means to “witness” as teachers, but that their ultimate aim was to convert non-Christians. They have both the capital (which helps the students’ difficulties) and the gospel (which motivates the encounter in the first place, which they believe to be the ultimate solution to the students’ problems), and they often have them together, which may obscure the motivations of the encounters on both ends.

This issue relates to a line of debate in the field of applied linguistics about the strong connection between Christian missionary work and ELT. The issue of Christian English teachers has been controversial in the field of applied linguistics, regarding how to understand the growing phenomena of Christian ELT and the unequal power relations in which the teachers are often linked with the larger power relations of race, class, and language (Edge, 2003; Pennycook & Coutand-Marin, 2003; Pennycook & Makoni, 2005; Varghese & Johnston, 2007). The field has been attempting to build up dialogues between the critical and the Christian researchers (e.g., Wong & Canagarajah, 2009), and Christian researchers have tried to respond to the critics with more academic rigor and self-reflection (Dormer, 2011; Wong, Kristjansson, & Dornyei, 2013). However, it has been often remarked (e.g., Johnston, 2009) that critics have tended to raise concerns with little empirical data and knowledge of Christianity, while the Christians have tried to come up with empirical studies but tended to try to prove the positive effect of Christianity and evade the issues of power. More recently, there have been critical ethnographic studies on the intersection of second language learning and Christianity (Chao & Kuntz, 2013; Han, H., 2009; 2011), which tried to examine the Christian English teaching sites without getting into bipolarization and yet with critical sensitivity. I join this body of literature with growing number of colleagues who voice the need to integrate critical inquiry and ethnographic approach in this area of research.

I join this line of research as an evangelical Christian and a critical researcher. The approach I take in this study is “critical”, not in the sense that I see the close association between Christianity and ELT as negative or positive. I take a critical approach in the sense that I ask *why* there is such close association, and I attempt to explain this in terms of *power*, as manifestations of the tensions entailing globalization, competing interests, and identity work. I tried so that my position as Christian *and* critical researcher brings out both the emic and etic perspective, and thus integrates rich data with critical insight.

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1 Critical ethnographic sociolinguistics**

In my academic journey, I have been particularly drawn to *critical ethnographic sociolinguistics* (Heller, 2011) as the *social* approach I can take. I explain here why through each term of the name.

I see this research as *critical* because I am putting *power* at the foreground in explaining my description. I have been particularly informed by the study of power in western social science. I was exposed to the concept of power in relation to language through sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology before I learned more about such approach within applied linguistics. I began to understand that power is an important concept for my inquiry, for explaining the English Problem; for example, for explaining the peculiarity of individuals’ demotivated learning despite their desire for English. I began to see that there were at work multiple forces from numerous social agents at various levels competing against each other; there were the forces from individual desires and interests, but often in different directions there were forces from (to only name a few) the interests of the social elite, the interests of corporations, the

interests of universities, the Korean national interest stemming from its own history and pride, the interests of different nations including the influential American interest, the interests of major religions, and somewhat abstract but ever-present interest of the Capital, to continue to generate profit and thus expand infinitely. English in South Korea was a site of intense competition for dominance, with stake-holders that range from a single child to global capitalism (and thus individuals often seem powerless compared to the scale of the other forces at stake). Interests of these diverse agents at different levels collided and competed at this battlefield mediated by English: for admission to university, for a job position, for social status, for dominance in the market, for dominance in public discourse and ideology.

Power, in my view, is about the ability to carry through one's interests, and interests here are those directly linked to *access to resource* or *profit*, both material and symbolic. My view is that resources are too limited and stake-holders involved are too numerous for any form of resource distribution to be incidental; it is the result of intense struggle among competing interests. This ontology assumes that I see social reality not as fixed but always in the process of being constructed and struggled through.

I began to see that the competition for dominance at the level of discourse, identity, and ideology is particularly intense because their influence can be immensely powerful and far-reaching. Discourses, or voices (Bakhtin, 1981), act almost like living organisms. As they circulate, they find their places in someone else's voices ("heteroglossia"), and either get taken up or marginalized as they get stratified along the hierarchy of discursive power. The power of these linguistic sets of thought organize fundamental structures of society and everyday lives as they shape what is normal, legitimate, desirable, or moral (Woolard, 1998).

Therefore, language ideology is a key battlefield for stake-holders and thus emerged as

a key research site for me, or at least one of the many threads that I needed to untangle. By taking a critical approach, I attempt to explain, for example, the question of learning efficiency less in terms of individual motivation and ability, but in terms of the struggle of competing ideologies. I am seeing that the process of globalization, which I understand to be the way capitalism works (Wallerstein, 1974), is one of the key process of power.

I take an *ethnographic* approach to be a hallmark of the social approach. I take the position that process of power struggle, however global or macro it is, is observable in what people do (social practice), in what people say (discourse), and in what people have conventionalized and institutionalized (social structure).

For such investigation, I needed a form of analysis that takes into account possibly all emerging actors and “variables” rather than eliciting the co-relation between preconceived variables. I am drawn to *qualitative* approach because of its ability to deal with complexity, inconsistencies, and contradictions, explaining them as intimately connected to temporal and spatial context and developing them to “compelling arguments about how things work in particular contexts” (Mason, 2002, 1). Indeed, it was the anomalies in my data (e.g., strong resistance by a single student) that were the most revealing about the social reality I was investigating. Furthermore, with my ontological perspective, I could not think of myself as an objective and transparent observer, but it only made sense to me to think that my research becomes a part of reality in the lives of the people whom I observe. Particularly considering the tremendous symbolic capital that I embodied (native-like English competence, doctoral student of university in Canada) which the participants of this research were struggling to attain, and considering my position as one of the stake-holders of the English Problem who are currently benefiting from the dominance of English and the social stratification it creates, I wanted to



adopt an approach which allowed the space for rich self-reflexivity for the researcher.

It was another conscious choice to label my research with certain methodology from an available pool of popular qualitative approaches: case study, conversation analysis, narrative inquiry, critical discourse analysis, action research, ethnography, and so on. Narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Duff & Bell, 2002) and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003) were methodologies I had explored for some time, but their data source seemed somewhat limited, because more focus seemed to be placed on what people say and what they have written and less on first-hand observation of what people do. When I was drawn to ethnography, there was certainly the influence of the teachers I was following (who are mostly in the fields of sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology), but I wanted a methodology which allowed multiple techniques and as many routes as possible to describe and explain the social reality in question (Heller, 2009, 255). With the kind of inquiry I was engaging with, I had to see for myself how power unfolds in real time in concrete places and track its consequences through following it over extended period of time – in addition to analysis of diverse collected and generated texts. Ethnography does seem to match who I am and how I know things – knowing through personal involvement and extensive time commitment – but I would like to think that these tendencies also come from my ontological and epistemological perspective as outlined above. And because of such intense involvement of the researcher in an ethnographic research, I do think that ethnography can produce very illuminating account about reality in ways that might be difficult with other methodologies.

This study follows the ethnographic approach taken by researchers examining globalization (Hannerz, 2003; Heller, 2011; Marcus, 1995; Park, J.S., 2009; Tsuda, Tapias, & Xavier, 2014). Fieldwork in multiple sites or following certain people, things, ideas, stories or

conflicts across different sites has been suggested as a way to “locate the global” (Tsuda, Tapias, & Xavier, 2014). Foregrounding the concepts of temporality and spatiality (Heller & Duchêne, 2012) has been a useful ethnographic technique in this regard. Tracing histories of social actors was an important technique, because *change*— shifts of practice and discourse, or of social structure – served as useful gaps through which competing interests were revealed. Visiting multiple spaces as I followed certain people was another important technique, because the repeated appearance of certain links served as evidence of certain forms of domination.

Lastly, *sociolinguistics* in the critical stream provided me a different ontology about language from the cognitive stream (e.g., Agha, 2007; Bakhtin, 1981; Blommaert, 2003; Bourdieu, 1991; Coupland, 2013; Duchêne & Heller, 2012; Heller, 2003, 2007, 2011; Woolard, 1998). As I have outlined my position already in the section about the “cognitive vs. social debate”, I am much more drawn to a different ontology of language. The cognitive side arguably marks a clear boundary around the entity called “language” as a cognitive system independent from society. Its structure and the principles of language learning are something to be discovered. I am less interested in linguistic structure itself but how it is a part of society, what its functions are, and the consequences it has on people’s lives.

I see language as one of the many social practices people do for their goals and for power (Agha, 2007). This, in fact, gives a dramatically new role to language for researchers. Theorizing about language can become theorizing about the society (Heller, 2007). Language can become privileged window into understanding our globalizing society and relations of power.

## **4.2 Why North Korean young adults**

All my focal participants were North Korean young adults in South Korea. There are many terms for these North Koreans outside of North Korea, including defectors and refugees. However, following Yoon, I. (2009), I use the term *migrant* to encompass the diverse motivations of the migrations that I observed in this study. Their motivations had a wide range, which can be characterized as political defectors in one end to voluntary economic migration in the other (discussed in more detail in Chapter 2). Their migration is part of the global flows of people and capital, but North Korean migrants have their unique trait in that they are ex-socialists, coming from one of the world's most isolated and totalitarian societies. This is particularly relevant to this study because their trajectories involve a socialization process from having little exposure to globalization to having to learn the political, economic, cultural, and linguistic complex of a globalizing society. Their case serves as a powerful illustration of the process of socialization into the capitalist and global economy.

One of the participants in this research (Chul-Kyoo) often remarked that it is the lowliest people in North Korea who are now in South Korea :

Excerpt 1.4 Interview with Chul-Kyoo (February, 2013)

Chul-Kyoo: I hope you don't misunderstand North Korea. The North Koreans who have come to South Korea, think of them as the lowest, the least smart people. The smart people all stay there.

Although I do not rely wholly on this statement, I do agree that the North Korean migrants in South Korea are a skewed sample of North Korea. They are disproportionately from the northern provinces of North Korea bordering China, and around half of the migrants were unemployed in North Korea (Ministry of Unification, 2016). Many of them come from the geographical and social periphery of North Korea. However, their positions in South Korea, in complex relationship to globalization, citizenship, and social hierarchy, make them a group

helpful for us to understand the power relations of South Korea.

I chose a particular age group among the North Korean migrants, the *young adults*.

Young adult generally refers to people in the age range of 20 to 40, and this group composes 40% of the total North Korean migrants in South Korea (Ministry of Unification, 2016). Studies on North Korean migrants according to *age groups* have mostly focused on either university students (ex., Chae & Kim, 2011; Cho & Jeon, 2004) or North Korean *youth* (청소년) who are in their teens and early twenties, an age for secondary or post-secondary schooling (ex., Cho, M.S., 2007; Han, M.K., 1999). This study uses the term *young adult* (청년) to exclude those in secondary schools and to include those who are not in universities. This term also stems from the grouping often used in church; for example, the community in Seoul Church in had three groups: Sunday School, the Young Adult Group, and the Adult Group.

I chose this age group because it was in them that I found the strongest link to English and church support. I found that this group's perception of English is much more profit-oriented than other age groups. They are at the age of having to make life-long career choices, and for them, English is directly linked to better job prospects in South Korea. On the other hand, for those who are younger and are mostly in secondary schools, the value of English was still limited to being simply one of many school subjects (as also reported in Cho & Jeon, 2004). For those who are older than the young adult group, often with greater responsibilities of providing for their families, investment in English or in any form of education was not often feasible because they could not delay working for income, and there was a sense that they were too old to start learning a new language (as also reported in Jung & Lim, 2007). Young adults were usually the ones who saw English as investment, and who could also afford to make the investment in English, and therefore actively sought free linguistic resources in the church.

These observations about how English is conceptualized by this age group were also confirmed when I spoke with a South Korean pastor who had worked at *Hanawon*. Hanawon is the government-run education facility at which all incoming North Koreans need to stay for several months (usually three) before entering South Korean society. Hanawon consists of children's class and adults' class (the category of young adult is not represented). English is one of the teaching subjects for the children's class but it is not a major teaching subject in adults' class (other than in classes about loan words). This is because there are not many among the North Korean adults at this very initial stage in South Korea who are interested in English; they are more interested in practical life-skills and job-related skills. There are few among the young adults who are interested in English but their proportion is small because even the young adults at this stage think they are too old to start learning English.

This age line, or their perceived maximum age to begin investment in English, seems to rise after they come out of Hanawon. Among the North Korean young adults, there was a vague boundary between those who go to work right away and those who invest in education before starting to work, which roughly corresponds to an even vaguer boundary between the *non-academic* young adults and the *academic* young adults. The academic young adults were those who wanted to go to university before entering South Korea, or who valued academic learning. It was also the ones in the latter type who were interested in investing in English learning and seeking support from church or other interested institutions. However, this boundary was frequently crossed, usually in the direction from the non-academic towards the academic, because the non-academics began to see the utility value of a university diploma and of English, as they worked and spent more time in South Korea. This research, therefore, took these academic North Korean young adults who are investing in English as the first point of entry.

### 4.3 Focal participants

What I did with Mee-Soo practically guided the methodology I used for this study. I basically extended what I did in the summer of 2011 over a longer period of time. I observed, interviewed, and did English tutoring with eight focal participants of North Korean young adults, including Han-Young and Mee-Soo.

I followed the eight focal participants over a period of two years (August 2012 – July 2014). I recruited them with three criteria: 1) having been born in North Korea, 2) young adults in age range from 20 to 40, and 3) willingness to share their experience regarding English. The third criteria included observing their current English learning process and conducting English tutoring.

Table 1.2 Focal participant profiles (in 2014)

Name (gender)	Age	Leaving NK (age)	Years in China	Finishing Hanawon	University Status	Current status
Han-Young (M)	31	2001 (18)	5	2006	Graduated	Doing Start-up business
Mee-Soo (F)	28	2007 (21)	0	2008	Graduated	Preparing for CPA exam
Bee-Eun (F)	24	2003 (13) 2006 (16)	0	2006	Attending	Preparing for police officer exam
Ye-Young (F)	26	1998 (10) 2001 (13) 2004 (16)	10	2007	Dropped out	Working in airline company
Wha-Hong (F)	24	2004 (14)	5	2009	Dropped out	N/A
Hae-Mee (F)	28	2007 (21)	4	2011	Attending	Majoring Business

Sung-Chul (M)	25	N/A	N/A	2009	Attending	Majoring Business
Chul-Kyoo (M)	30	N/A	N/A	2011	Did not apply	Preparing for civil officer exam

Although some of the participants were cautious about revealing their personal history and annoyed about being researched (Chul-Kyoo saying “I am not a monkey at a zoo!” or something of a spectacle), they felt more at ease that it was about English. English represented, more than anything, something of practical value and this made it easier to talk about English than talking about politics or religion. Sung-Chul who did not like to be “researched” about his North Korean past said, “I participate in this research because it is about English.” As seen in participant profiles (Table 1.2), some details about Sung-Chul and Chul-Kyoo were not available. Others were more casual about their personal information or enjoyed participating in the research. The difference seemed to be about not only whether they had family in North Korea but also about their personality and past experiences with personal information. Nevertheless, I decided to minimize exposure of their personal information in this study.

The ordering of the participants in Table 1.2 is in the order of my first meeting them personally. The first three participants – Han-Young (male), Mee-Soo (female), and Bee-Eun (female) – were members of the small group in Seoul Church in which I participated since 2011. Through our time in the small group before this research, they knew me quite well and I knew that they had strong interest in English. The next two participants – Ye-Young (female) and Wha-Hong (female) – were members of Seoul Church to whom I was introduced through other members when they learned about this research. I did not personally know them before that point, but they were willing to participate in the research and had strong motivations to improve their English at the time. The last three participants – Hae-Mee (female), Sung-Chul (male), and

Chul-Kyoo (male) were students of Ezra School, the first institutions I researched in this study (discussed in the next section). I met them for the first time when I visited the school. These students were among the older ones at the school, and who had stronger interest in English than other younger students. Hae-Mee was very active in approaching me and trying to learn English from me. Sung-Chul and Chul-Kyoo were shier and they only approached me with questions they had about English, and it took some time for them to agree to participate in this research. The participants I recruited included both the “academic” type (Han-Young, Mee-Soo, Bee-Eun, Ye-Young, Hae-Mee, Chul-Kyoo) and the non-academic type who became interested in English while working in South Korea (Wha-Hong, Sung-Chul).

All these participants were in their twenties in 2012, and by the end of the fieldwork, some of them entered their thirties. They were in or pursuing higher education or pursuing employment. They were all from the northern part of North Korea, and all of them were members of Seoul Church. Most of them left North Korea in their teens, but some left after their twenties (more typical among the more recent migrants). Some of them lived several years in China (ranging from four to ten years), and the others stayed in China and other third countries only as a way to come directly to South Korea. Their time of arrival in South Korea (indicated by when they finished their education in Hanawon) therefore does not correlate with their time of leaving North Korea. Ye-Young left North Korea the earliest but she was not the one who arrived in South Korea the earliest.

Some parts of their life-histories, particularly the process of their migration from North Korea to South Korea, were heart-breaking. As shown in the chart above, multiple attempts to leave North Korea means they were caught in the process and were sent back to North Korea. In this process, they spent time in North Korean prisons. Even if they did not go through this



process of deportation to North Korea, entering South Korea involved long waiting time in prisons in the Third Countries (Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam for some of these participants), in the facilities of National Intelligence Service of South Korea, and another three-months of isolation in Hanawon. For those who spent quite extensive period of time in China (Han-Young, Ye-Young, Wha-Hong, and Hae-Mee), they spent years of their childhood and teens hiding their identity. These young people had experienced things that were quite beyond my imagination already in their young age. I discuss some of these migration stories in Chapters 2 and 3 to both introduce the participants and to discuss the threads of nationalism (Chapter 2) and Christianity (Chapter 3).

One thing to note here is that the participants I met earlier relatively spent more time in South Korea, while the latter participants, particularly the students of Ezra School, were relatively recent arrivers to South Korea. The earlier participants all had graduated already from alternative schools, and were in universities or had dropped out of universities. Hae-Mee and Sung-Chul graduated Ezra School during this research period, and Chul-Kyoo did not finish Ezra School and eventually did not apply to university. In 2014, Han-Young and Mee-Soo graduated from their universities. Each of the participants had various career goals and were hard-working to achieve their goals. Among the participants, Ye-Young was the only one employed, and Han-Young was starting a small business in livestock industry with the help of the church.

My guiding question during the fieldwork was why English was salient to them. I focused on the place of English in their life trajectories, and examined when and how they invested in English learning. My interaction with the focal participants consisted of largely three types of research methods: 1) observation of their English learning trajectory over two years, 2)

one to two interviews regarding their English learning experience, and 3) one-on-one English tutoring. With each participant, I initiated one-on-one meetings for explaining the research, for getting consent, and for conducting a life-history interview. I talked and listened as in a conversation, but the difference with everyday conversations was that I took notes and audio-recorded the dialogue (except for those who felt uncomfortable with audio-recording: Han-Young, Sung-Chul, Chul-Kyoo). After that initial meeting, the subsequent interactions varied with each participant and thus the depth of our interaction varied also. During the two years of fieldwork, I could observe them on Sunday Services of Seoul Church, but many of them eventually stopped coming to church. I developed closer relationship with those who initiated more meetings with me; often they contacted me when they needed help with English, which eventually constituted our English tutoring sessions and sometimes additional interviews. I took fieldnotes whenever possible about each participant, and particularly after significant conversations and the tutoring sessions.

The Ethics Board of University of Toronto raised issue about the free English tutoring, that it could have too much financial value and could influence the research findings. I saw the tutoring as an important source of data and compromised with the Board that I will limit the number of tutoring to four times. For most of the participants this agreement was kept. The way it was kept however, was not always by initial agreement but by the difficulty of continuing the weekly session for more than four times. I see this linked to the profitability of English impacting both me and the participants; it would get difficult for me to continue the tutoring over a month without compensation other than collecting data once I began to feel that I got a grasp of how the student was studying English. Also, although I tried to cater to the needs of the students, the students also could not continue the tutoring because of more immediate problems

in their lives (family issues, health issues). Their resource for when to invest in English was competing with many other needs they had for settling in South Korea, and it was difficult for many of them to continue to invest in English just for the sake of learning English. The tutoring worked best when there was an upcoming high-stake evaluation (e.g., English interview for Mee-Soo, English job interview and English speaking contest for Ye-Young, application paper for an exchange student program for Hae-Mee). Tutoring with Hae-Mee ended in July, 2014 when she left as an exchange student to a Christian college in UK with the support of Seoul Church. This marked the official termination of my fieldwork.

#### 4.4 Institutions

The research site soon began to expand as I followed the people (the participants), the resource (English), and the religion (Christianity). Following some of the focal participants and my Christian network led me to several sites of educational outreach to North Korean young adults. Some of the focal participants invited me to these sites, or sometimes I invited myself, to visit those sites with them when I heard about them frequently from them. In other cases, I was introduced to sites of by other Christian friends.

Table 1.3 List of research sites

<b>Type</b>	<b>Name of institution</b>
Alternative school for North Korean youth (pseudonyms)	Ezra School
	Andrew Center
	Vision School
	Daniel School
	Mission School
Other institution	Wooyang Foundation
	North Korean Christian young adult association
	Hanawon

Five of these institutions were “alternative schools for North Korean youths (탈북 청소년 대안학교)”. They were called *alternative* schools because these schools are for the North Korean students who cannot go to regular schools in South Korea. As far as I could trace, most of these alternative schools were all established by Christians. One major exception was the school affiliated with Hanawon (called Samjuk Elementary School and Hankyeore High school).

These schools began with “youths” in their teens who had dropped out of South Korean schools but the age range has gone up well into the twenties who come to these schools to prepare for university. These schools were run by either individuals (usually missionaries) or churches. They were grass-root, small-scaled educational programs with number of students ranging from tens to thirties (e.g., Ezra School had fourteen students). I used pseudonyms for these alternative schools. I did not use pseudonyms for the other institutions because they were already well-known or did not seem to reveal the personal information of the participants.

I observed these sites with varying length. I spent the longest time in Ezra School and Andrew Center. In most of these sites, I could conduct certain length of observation, and interviews with the directors of the institutions. In Daniel School, I only conducted an interview without observation. Close analysis of these institutions will be done in Chapter 5. Because I had uneven data from these institutions, I limited my analysis to the place of English in each of these institutions, to a level where I could fairly compare the institutions.

There were other interviews I conducted outside the sites listed above, which I listed in the appendix. One of the key interviews among them was an interview with a Catholic North Korean female young adult who had worked as an English teacher in North Korea (whom I call Bom-Joo), and an interview with an American male working at a non-religious NGO for North Korean young adults, both of whom I met through an English Education conference in South

Korea.

#### **4.5 Data analysis**

The whole corpus of data collected between August 2012 and August 2014 consisted of i) fieldnotes from observations of focal participants and the institutions, ii) transcripts of 25 first-hand interviews (usually lasting one to two hours, including one to two interviews with focal participants, and with institution directors), and iii) a collection of photos and documents collected or generated in this process (tutoring hand-outs, hand-outs made in Ezra School, church flyers, hagwon flyers).

Most of the interviews in this study were done in Korean unless the interviewee was an English-speaker. One interview with a focal participant, Bee-Eun, was done in English, as she wanted to practice English. For some interviews which I did not audio-record with some of the participants, I took notes as soon as possible after the interviews. I transcribed relevant parts of recorded interviews. Then, I translated the transcripts from Korean to English. I focused on what they said over how they said it, which means I often did not mark interviewees' pauses, hedges, or fillers. For Romanization of Korean language in this thesis, I used Revised Romanization of Korean system (국어의 로마자 표기법). I retained the Korean orthography when I needed to show the Korean word, but I romanized some of the frequently used words. Some of the names (especially of the focal participants) follow the style which has been commonly used in Romanized names, such as "young" instead of "yeong".

The process of analysis of ethnographic data involves repeated review of the whole corpus of data to find recurrent patterns, discrepancies, and change of researcher's perspective

(Erickson, 2005). I tried to find the central unit(s) of analysis: the themes or sub-questions which analyze or explain the majority of data and which, when synthesized into a coherent report, generate a new story that answers the overall research questions. This came after going through multiple readings of the whole corpus of data and multiple re-writings of parts of data and writing drafts until they began to emerge. This process was the most productive when I began to write a meta-analysis paper in mid-2014.

This study was accompanied by my personal reflection about what it means to be an evangelical Christian and about the moral sense of superiority which often causes repulsions to outsiders. This process affected the initial phase of data analysis in a way that I became excessively negative to the Christian institutions and teachers whom I observed. This did not work with the general approach I was taking in this study, which was not about judging what is right or wrong, but about why things were happening the way they were. I decided to show the draft of Chapter 5 about the different institutions to the church so that I can receive feedback and figure out how to work out the thesis. The response of the church was not positive as they saw some of my claims as unfairly negative toward Christianity. The conflict lasted for about eight months, through several meetings, revision, and a re-reading process, until the school and I reached a compromise. I promised the school that the Christian institutions in my study would not be identifiable, and I would write my general observations about the institutions in making my claims. The conflicts were not easy but they helped me focus on the point I wanted to make in this study and re-examine the data, which helped me make a crucial progress of making sense of the whole data. With the re-written draft, I received feedback from some readers that my discussion about missionary ELT in Chapter 5 is not sufficiently critical. Researching Christian institutions as a Christian might come across as too critical to the Christians and not sufficiently

critical to the critics. However, I see my final analysis as how I intended it to be “critical”; in the sense that I explained what is happening in terms of power, in terms of how tensions between competing interests were manifested and managed.

In this research, I examined the observable sites to see: whose interests or goals are being achieved to the extent that they seem natural and obvious; and whose interests are not being achieved, and are undergoing repeated failures. I focused on moments of tension or resistance as evidence of clash of competing interests. In other words, I traced for whom access to profit is made easier and for whom it is structurally blocked, and I see these as evidence of power struggle.

## **5. Structure of thesis**

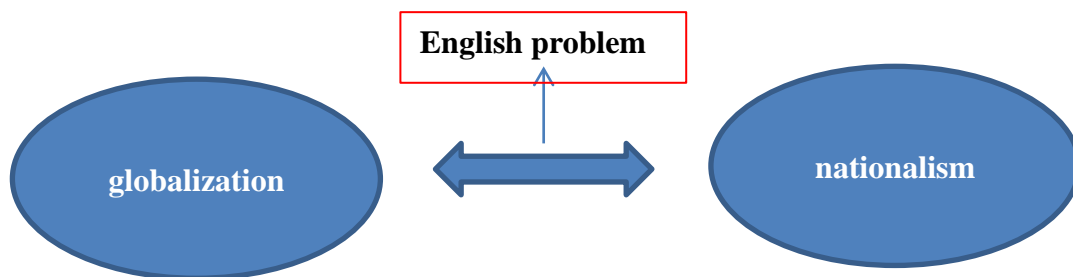
Tensions or *frictions* of globalization (Tsing, 2005) emerged as unit of critical analysis in this study. I attempted to explain various social phenomena and contradictions of English in South Korea as the manifestations of the tensions between competing interests or ideologies, such as the tension between the interests for globalization and for nation-building, and between elite interests and democratic ideals. I acknowledge that there is the danger of dichotomizing in this discussion, for instance between what is “the global” and “the national”, but it was a useful framework to explain what is happening. I have tried to show, for instance, how “the national” is a strong, deep-rooted social constructs which exerts significant power in Korean context in Chapter 2. I asked what the tensions were for whom and how they were mediated.

I used the term “mediating” in two different, but inter-related, ways: as the medium of tensions, and as the means of managing or easing the tensions. That is, English was the medium through which the tensions of globalization and elite interests were manifested or expressed. At

the same time, what the social actors were doing with English, the seemingly contradictory practices or the persistence of their practices, were how the different social actors were dealing with the tension of competing interests. I do not mean that the social actors were able to completely resolve the tensions through English, but their practices were just sufficient enough to hold together, negotiate, or compromise the competing interests.

The main thesis of this study is that English in South Korea is both i) a terrain where the tensions in/ of the globalizing (divided) nation-state played out, and ii) a means of mediating those tensions. English was not something just about “the global”, but where we see the manifested tensions between the global and the national, between the elite interests and the call for equal opportunity.

Figure 1.1 English problem as tension-mediation



English, in another sense, served as a lens through which I could understand these social actors. English was a lens through which the tensions could be observed and a way for the social actors to manage the tensions.

The thesis loosely consists of three parts. Chapters 2 and 3 introduce the main ideologies in tension (or in alliance) in this thesis (e.g., nationalism, globalization, elitism, evangelicalism) and the migration stories of focal participants. Chapters 4 and 5 show how the



tensions are mediated by English through specific stories of the participants. Chapter 6 shows how the participants mediate the tensions using language and religion.

Chapter 2, “Crossing state boundaries”, examines the formation of North Korean migrants. It discusses the history of the conditions which led them to leave North Korea and come to South Korea. This includes accounts of some of the research participants about how they crossed political boundaries. The chapter discusses Korean nationalism through the account of the history of Korea’s division through Japanese colonial rule and Cold War. It then describes the process of globalization in post-Cold War Korea through the account of economic crises of the two Koreas and the rise of economic refugees. The South Korean state’s changing policies and changing definitions toward the North Koreans show the conflicting identities of North Koreans in South Korea. On one hand, they are treated as defectors of North Korea and citizens of South Korea, but on the other hand, they are also seen as one of the foreign migrant groups. The chapter shows how the state and the migrants mobilize the social construct of North Korean migrants.

Chapter 3, “Encountering evangelical outreach”, examines the strong link between North Korean migrants and South Korean evangelicals. It asks why many of the North Korean migrants become Christians (or not). The chapter shows that the evangelical institutions served as mediating spaces between the central tensions of this thesis: the tensions between the two Koreas, the neoliberal state’s tensions between globalization and nationalism and between social stratification and social inclusion. The chapter discusses evangelical Christianity in South Korea and the evangelicals’ visionary worldview. Their sense of mission of the Korean nation and “all nations” explains their both national and global outlook and their enthusiastic outreach for the North Korean migrants. The chapter shows more of the boundary-crossing accounts of some of

the research participants, which also involved encounters and conversions into Christianity.

Chapter 4, “Learning (how) to learn English”, shows the structure of English in South Korea in comparison with that of North Korea. It asks why English becomes a salient thing to many North Korean young adults and why many have difficulties with English in South Korea. It gives a linguistic perspective on the state tensions through the lens of English, particularly through the repertoire of what I call Test English. I describe the experience of the North Korean young adults as they move from isolated North Korea to globalizing South Korea through the lens of English. I first describe English policies of the two Koreas, particularly the change of English policies of South Korea after its neoliberal turn. I then show how the participants were socialized into the social selection system of South Korea increasingly mediated by standardized English tests. The chapter shows how they were *not* learners in North Korea, and how they learned in South Korea to become learners, to become learners of English, and to become learners of English in a particularly dominant way (as test-takers) who resist other ways of learning. The chapter shows the ideological nature of the regime of Test English and how it functions as a social barrier for many North Korean young adults.

Chapter 5, “Negotiating missionary English teaching”, shows how the South Korean evangelicals support North Korean young adults’ struggle through their ELT. It asks why ELT is often the central way South Korean evangelicals work with North Korean migrants. The chapter surveys the place of English in each of the institutions observed/ interviewed and the specific choices they made regarding English. I show that ELT was a way to resolve the tension between *helping* and *evangelizing*. The three repertoires of English taught in these institutions – Test English, Christian English, and Communicative English – showed the different ways the tensions played out: whether they focused on the helping, the evangelizing, or an alternative way.

The alternative spaces of Communicative English were created by the evangelicals' linguistic resources and relational practices coming from their experiences of global missions. It further shows the diverse responses of the participants, which included ambivalent and resistant responses to the church.

Chapter 6, "Ways with identities", examines how individual North Korean young adults actually constructed their identities. It shows how the individual students navigated the ideological terrains of globalization, nationalism, and evangelicalism through the lens of English. It discusses how they dealt with their central contradiction that they are South Koreans (by citizenship) but they are not South Koreans (by cultural habitus). It shows three cases of participants who used different social categories for their identities: i) a case of trying to assimilate to South Korea as test-taker, ii) a case of relying on North Korean identity and the Christian support, and iii) a case of a 'third place' identity between the North and South, which was becoming an English speaker. The North Korean young adults who were less socialized into the Korean ideology of *unspeakable* English (Park, J.S., 2009) quickly acquired English speaking ability with the support of the evangelicals, and could create an alternative way of being Korean.

Chapter 7 concludes the study by re-presenting the central thesis about "tension-mediation"; that English in South Korea was not just about globalization, but a terrain where competing ideologies played out. It then lays out what the study tells us about globalization, about why religion emerges as an area of inquiry, and what it means to do applied linguistics. It discusses how globalization is linked to elite interests and how it looks like in the periphery. It also discusses what religion can tell us which other domains cannot, and the close relationship between evangelicalism and neoliberal capitalism. Lastly, I question the boundary between

applied linguistics and sociolinguistics, calling for a critical sociolinguistic ethnographic approach in applied linguistics.

## Chapter 2

### Crossing state boundaries

This chapter and the next examine why some of the North Koreans left North Korea and came to South Korea. This chapter deals with the role of the South Korean state in the trajectories of the North Koreans, and the next chapter deals with that of South Korean evangelical Christians.

This chapter has to do with the question of how the North Koreans are defined and labeled. The most common term used in South Korea is *talbuk-min* (탈북민), which is a short term of *bukhan-ital-jumin* (북한이탈주민), which is directly translated as “escapees from North Korea”. The common English translation of this term is “North Korean defector”, and I will use this translation instead of “escapees”. Another term used for the North Koreans in South Korea, often in the academic literature (e.g., Yoon, I., 2009), is “migrant” (이주민). For those in China or in third countries, the term “refugee” (난민) is also used often by human rights groups.

These three terms characterize the North Koreans in different ways. *Refugee* highlights the forced nature of the migration, in which a person is involuntarily displaced by devastatingly problematic circumstances. *Defector* highlights the person’s deliberate choice to live in South Korea instead of North Korea. As we will see in this chapter, this is a political term in Korean context where Cold-War rivalry between the two Koreas is still a grave matter for the states. *Migrant* is a relatively more neutral term which can cover any form of migration across the border motivated by various reasons, which is why it is preferred by the researchers. Compared to the other terms, it implies people moving for economic reasons, such as better access to resource and prosperity. I mostly use the term “North Korean migrant” in this study for its

relatively neutral sense, but I recognize that this label itself is also a social construct.

This issue of how to characterize the North Koreans is in fact a contentious issue. In 2005, the South Korean government proposed, based on a survey of the North Koreans living there, a new term instead of “defectors” for the North Koreans – *saeteomin* (new settlers). This was to move away from the Cold War traces, to avoid the negative image, and to emphasize a positive and productive image of settlement. However, some of the associations of North Korean migrants officially requested the government to stop using the new term and to continue to use the term *defector*. To some of the North Koreans, the new term neutralizes their political stance that opposed the North Korean regime, and reduces them merely to economic migrants (Yoon, I., 2009). They want to be identified as defectors, which makes them politically significant in South Korea, rather than merely one of many migrant groups increasing in South Korea.

Here, we see the tension between the on-going process of globalization and the effect of the discourse of Korean nationalism which singles out the North Koreans among other groups. North Koreans’ migration is a part of the increasing transnational movements, the global (un-) flows of people, information, capital, and ideologies (Appadurai, 1990). More specifically, it is a direct impact of the economic crisis of North Korea in mid-1990s, closely intertwined with the process of globalizing world economy. On the other hand, North Koreans’ migration is imbued with special meaning by the state and other social actors (including evangelical Christianity) based on nationalistic and anti-communist discourses of Korean unification. North Koreans are given special treatment different from any migrant groups, both ethnic and non-ethnic Koreans, not only in the extent of the aid and support they receive, but more importantly in that they immediately become South Korean citizens on their arrival. Other ethnic Koreans (e.g.,

Chinese-Koreans, Russian-Koreans) and other immigrant groups are not given as much attention. This political and economic resource to which North Koreans in South Korea are entitled is mobilized by many social actors, including the North Koreans themselves. This chapter examines why this is happening by tracing the politic of Korean nationalism and its division.

In this chapter, I elaborate on this tension between what I see as the national and the global as it relates to North Korean migrants, and examine some of the border-crossing narratives of the focal participants. In the first section, I will give an account of the process of division of the Korean “nation” into two states, during Japanese colonial rule and the Cold War. In the second section, I will discuss the economic crises of both the North and the South that were intertwined with the dissolution of Cold War and the globalizing world economy. Third, I give an account of the first North Korean defectors, who were more or less refugees from the devastating economic crisis of North Korea. Fourth, I describe the South Korean state policies regarding the North Korean border-crossers.

In the last section, I show how individuals actually navigated these terrains. The stories of some of my focal participants, Ye-Young, Wha-Hong, and Bee-Eun, are told here, in the order of their moves out of North Korea. They represent the wave of North Korean migration in family units. They left North Korea as young people, in their childhood or in their teens, following their family. The journeys of the migrants examined here were not always straightforward, and were not always destined for South Korea. The conditions and the motivations of the journeys have been changing over the years.

I have varying degree of details about the North Korean background of each participant. My entry into their lives as a researcher was the topic of English, and I did not entitle myself into knowing all their past in North Korea if they did not want to share. Most of them were open

to my question “so why did you leave North Korea?” With some others, like Sung-Chul and Chul-Kyoo who did not want to reveal too much other than things related to English or did not like the idea of being researched (although having agreed to participate), I asked less and have less details. With what I had, I was nonetheless able to explain their later trajectories in South Korea.

### **1. Division of the “Korean nation”**

For Koreans, the division of Korea is an anomaly because it has long been, arguably, a united nation. The earliest monarchy in Korea’s nationalist imagination dates back to 2000 BC when Koreans believe there was a unified Kingdom of *ancient Chosun*. A series of royal dynasties have since occupied the Korean Peninsula: the Three Ancient Kingdoms in the first half of the first millennium, unified *Shilla* (668-935), *Koryeo* (918-1392, from which the name *Korea* is derived), and *Chosun* (1392-1910). Although numerous conquests were attempted by neighboring powers throughout its history (e.g., the Chinese, the Mongolians, the Japanese, and numerous others), the Korean monarchies succeeded in keeping their relative political independence.

At the same time, Chinese empires had a stronger cultural influence on Korea than other surrounding countries. Korea accepted Buddhism through China (3-6th century) and developed it as its national religion during the Shilla and Koryeo Dynasties. Then Chosun accepted Chinese-originated Confucianism as its central political ideology – the teachings of Confucius (551 – 479 B.C.) on social harmony, self-cultivation, and filial piety towards the elder, particularly for one’s King, parents, and teachers. Chosun adhered to Confucianism more strictly than in its originating China, developing an indigenous neo-Confucian society with collectivist



moral order and strict social hierarchy. In Chosun, “learning” meant delving into ancient classic texts in the Confucian tradition, and state officials were selected based on testing the level of literacy in these Chinese texts. This social selection system based on Chinese literacy can be understood as forming the historical backdrop of the current English testing system.

Figure 2.1 Map of East Asia



Source: free image from Globalcitymap.com

The relative independence of Korea, however, could not be kept long against expanding world powers around the turn of the twentieth century. Since the imperial age of late nineteenth century, Korea began to be driven by external powers, because the Korean Peninsula became a site of intense struggle for political interests among the Western and Eastern powers (Cumings, 2005). In the aftermath of the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), Japan won colonial dominion over Korea.

Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945) was harsh, exploitative, and assimilatory, although it had an intervening period of relatively lenient rule (1919 – 1935) before the Second World War. Oppressive military rule and exploitation of material and human resources were accompanied by

imposition of the logic of imperial loyal subjects: Koreans were forced to think of themselves as citizens of Japanese Empire, to speak Japanese, and to have Japanese names. For Koreans, who had long regarded Japan as inferior (and China as superior), such colonial rule was unacceptable and humiliating for their national pride. Colonial experience bred stronger Korean nationalism linked to its territory, history, and its Korean language. Compared to Taiwan (where Japan began its colonial rule in 1875), which was much more docile towards Japanese rule, Colonial Korea was rebellious, relentlessly engaging in resistance movements (Cumings, 2005, 155). Confucian aristocrats and peasants joined forces against the discrimination by the Japanese regime, breeding a strong social desire for social equality and a fair social selection system (Seth, 2002). Consequently, this period was the breeding ground of Korean nationalism (against the common foreign enemy) and socialism (against the common capitalist enemy). Socialism was actively received in the 1920s, leading to the foundation of the Korean Communist Party (KCP) in Korea in 1925.

The colonial period was also the breeding ground of Korea's ideological division, in a form of right-left political struggle – namely between the so-called “Nationalists” and the “Socialists”. The independence movement was divided about how to operate the independence movement. While the Nationalists (who were often intellectuals) tended to opt for a “gradual” independence process or diplomatic solutions, Socialists (who tended to be people of lower social class) opted for aggressive military resistance. The sacrifices of the militant socialists had stronger appeal to the general Korean public than “occasional bomb-throwing exercises” by the Nationalists (Cumings, 2005, 159). Under harsh persecution of the Japanese, some of these elites later became pro-Japanese collaborators, as their “gradual” method tended to embrace the dominant regime. Kim Il-Sung, the first leader of North Korea, is a social figure who emerged

in this process, as one of the popular leaders of the militant guerilla resistance groups that operated on the Sino-Korean border.

August 15, 1945 is a historic date for Koreans, marking the Japanese surrender to Second World War Allies and Korea's Independence Day from Japanese rule. It also marked the beginning of an intense power struggle between Cold War interests in the Korean Peninsula.

Historians agree that the U.S., in fear of the spread of communism, played the major role in Korea's division process (Cummings, 2005; Oberdorfer & Carlin, 2014). American interest in "containing communism" divided several Asian countries along the Iron Curtain: China, Vietnam, and Korea. On that Independence Day, the U.S. announced an arbitrary line (along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel) which divided the Peninsula about in half to mark the boundary between Soviet and U.S. occupation of the Peninsula, before eventually establishing a united government of Korea (to which the Soviets agreed).

For the Korean masses, another foreign occupation with an internal division line was unacceptable, generating mass resistance and some violent rebellions. The U.S. interim military regime interpreted any violent uprising as pro-Soviet, and quickly chose the social elites and rich landlords as their alliance group in southern Korea. They largely overlapped with those with a history of pro-Japanese collaboration (which granted them wealth and social positions during the colonial rule) lacking resistance experience and political legitimacy.

But the U.S. Command could not find other options when the general public seemed to be inclined towards communism. Acceding to requests of the landowners, who sought for a more legitimate social figure, the U.S. invited a Princeton Ph.D. and a devoted Protestant Christian, Syngman Rhee, to assume the leadership of the alliance group; he later became the first president of South Korea in 1948 – 1960; the USSR chose Kim Il-Sung as the Korean

representative of their socialist interests. Two political figures at opposing ideological ends further reinforced the already intense right-left divide among the Koreans.

The minor efforts for unity by a few Korean leaders could not overcome this ideological divide encroaching into the people and feeding on Cold War interests. Through two separate elections in 1948, two separate governments were established; Republic of Korea (ROK) in the south, and Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in the north, each government aiming to unify the whole Peninsula under their respective ideologies.

Up to this point, the division line (the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel) could be crossed. The North, with Soviet and later Chinese support, attacked the South with full force to unify the whole peninsula under communism, starting the Korean War (1950-1953). The American army desperately defended the capitalist bloc in the Korean Peninsula which would serve as the buffer zone between communist China and its capitalist ally, Japan. Consequently, rather than attaining unification into either one of the political systems, the war pressed this divide even deeper into the Peninsula. Any border crossing between the two Koreas was forbidden from that point on. The war ended in 1953 with a truce agreement in effect to the present date and generated the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), a band of land with width of 2 km on each side of the truce line with ironically the highest rate of militarization in the world, along a similar line with the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel which the U.S. had drawn in 1945.

The tragic proxy war between Cold War powers on Korean territory, which claimed over 2.5 million casualties, left indelible hostility between the two Koreas. South Koreans who experienced the war came out with a strong anti-communist mentality. North Koreans reinforced their anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist ideology, which led to extreme anti-Americanism and the framing of South Korea as a puppet of American imperialism. The two Koreas have since

strived to prove their superiority over the other, which constituted both an inter-Korean rivalry and a Cold War rivalry backed up by the two powers of Cold War.

Each state developed their unique capitalist and communist systems following their shared Confucian monarchic tradition. This partly explains North Korea's succession of power of the Kim family and its promotion of educated elites, distinct from other communist regimes. Both Koreas ran their states with strong elite government offices centrally driving their respective economies. In step with the government-driven economic plans, the well-educated and disciplined Korean workers on both sides "worked their fingers to the bone" (Cummings, 2005, 341), and succeeded in raising strong economies from the total ruins of the war.

## **2. Post-Cold War economic crises**

Severe economic crises hit the two Koreas in the 1990s. The "Arduous March" (1994 – 1997) of North Korea and the "IMF crisis" of South Korea (1997) were, in my view, not separate events; they were both linked to the expansion of capital (the fall of Communist Bloc, the globally integrating economy). The two Koreas showed contrasting stances towards the newly emerging global economy. While North Korea isolated itself, South Korea opened itself, which all led to the crises. The crisis in the North was more devastating, and generated the first economic refugees; the relative prosperity of the South attracted migrants from surrounding Asian countries, including the North Koreans.

One way to characterize the DPRK is its *isolation* in many senses. The Soviet Union and other communist states like China and Albania adopted measures of isolationist policies against western capitalism and imperialism. The North Korean government wrote its unique socialist ideology after its establishment in 1948; it is entitled *Juche* Ideology, or Self-Reliance

Ideology. It professes its independence from all imperial and foreign forces, stating its anti-US and anti-Japan stance, and also implying a certain distance even from its communist allies.

Cummings (2005) characterizes North Korea as a Confucian/ communist monarchy.

The strength and stability of the system has rested on marrying traditional forms of legitimacy to modern bureaucratic structures, with the peculiar charisma of Kim Il Sung. This regime draws deeply from the well of Korean tradition and anticolonial nationalism, and will therefore have staying power in the post-Cold War world. (Cumming, 2005, 447)

Its extreme isolation policies and its reliance on the tradition of nationalism and Confucianism was a way of building the stability of its system. It was a state of corporatism, an antithesis to liberalism. All people were intricately tied to corporate bodies (e.g., corporate farms, a distribution system made up of some twelve hundred cooperatives, schools, the army, the party), constituting one big socio-political organism, with Kim Il-Sung as the “fatherly leader” (아버이 수령), as North Koreans call him. It is a state where the masses are not allowed access to the World Wide Web, and the people are heavily restricted in travelling and communication not only across its border but also within the country (Demick, 2010).

Initially, North Korea fared better than the South; South Korea was not always the winner in the rivalry. Based on strict land reforms and fast establishment of corporate farms and heavy industry, North Korea showed significant economic growth in the 1950s through the 1960s. However, the closed system hit its limit, soon stagnating in the 70s and 80s. Then, with the fall of the Communist Bloc in late 80s and early 90s, North Korea faced a devastating economic crisis in the mid-1990s, showing that its economy was significantly relying on the economic aid of its allies (Cumings, 2005; Demick, 2010). When numerous communist states re-entered the capitalistic world economy with the fall of Communist Bloc, North Korea insisted

in staying outside the system, cut off from its external source of resources. The isolated regime quickly withered into poverty; with famine, devastating floods and bad governance, the economy crashed and underwent a period of people's extreme starvation and deaths (1994 – 1997).

South Korea, from its inception, heavily relied on the political and economic aid of the U.S.. Its economic development took off about a decade later than North Korea, but when it did, it attained an almost miraculous level, often referred to as “the miracle of the Han river” (the river that runs through Seoul). With its economy advantageously sheltered and integrated into the U.S. economy, and driven by the military dictatorship of president Park Chung-Hee (1962 – 1979), South Korea underwent one of the fastest economic growths in the world in the past half-century (along with the other “four tigers of Asia” – Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore – all bordering the Iron Curtain). Government-driven economic plans succeeded in transitioning its production focus from light industry in the 60s to heavy industry in the 70s to electronics and communication in the 90s.

With the fall of the Communist Bloc, the U.S. began to dissolve its economic aid and protection for its Asian allies. South Korea had to enter the global world without American protection and leave its neo-colonial status. President Kim Young-Sam (1993 – 1998), the first civilian president after three decades of military dictatorships, initiated a full-fledged globalization process. During his presidency, South Korea acceded to the World Trade Organization, and joined the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Kim Young-Sam formed the Globalization Committee in 1995, announcing globalization policy as the top priority of his administration (Yim, 2007). Economically, this meant shifting from a centralized, protectionist economy to a liberal economy open to foreign investments. Foreign

debts quickly encroached on a significant portion of the South Korean economy, making it susceptible to outside risks.

The unprotected economy at the peak of its prosperity was struck by the Asian Economic Crisis of 1997. It began when foreign investors made unexpected mass withdrawals of their short-term hedge funds from several Asian countries which were going through unprepared liberalization. The solution to the crisis was stricter liberalization through the intervention of international financial institutions such as the IMF (Kang, S. 2008).

Beginning with a run on Thailand's currency in the early summer, the contagion spread through one Asian economy after another, until it struck Korea like a force-10 typhoon in November. With the economy essentially bankrupt by early December, the IMF stepped in with a \$57 billion bailout – but unlike earlier ones at a high price: a thorough restructuring of Korea's political economy. (Cumings, 2005, 331)

The IMF demanded a harsh re-structuring of South Korean society, which involved privatization or sell-off to foreign investors of corporations and public services, financial deregulation and minimization of public spending, and massive lay-offs. The 1990s marked the beginning of intensified globalization and shift to neoliberalism in South Korea.

### **3. The first North Korean refugees**

The rise of North Korean migrants began in that inter-crisis period in mid-1990s, when North Korea's economy was crashing and South Korea was enjoying its most prosperous economy. This was when the capitalist/ socialist boundary contrasted fuel-short, darkened North Korea and brightly lit South Korea.

This was a period of extreme hunger for the North Korean people, the period known as the “Arduous March” (1994 – 1997) in North Korea. The North Korean people who had relied



on socialist centrally-planned distribution system for most of their needs, could not find other means to provide for themselves when that system suddenly collapsed.

People did not go passively to their deaths. When the public distribution system was cut off, they were forced to tap their deepest wells of creativity to feed themselves. All ingenuity was devoted to the gathering and production of food. Ultimately it was not enough. (Demick, 2010, 133)

The once thriving economy with population of 25 million saw the death of almost a tenth of its population from starvation and hunger-related illness during this period (estimates range from 600,000 to 2 million; Demick, 2010).

The intensity of the crisis left an indelible mark on North Korea. In this isolated communist state, any form of capitalistic practice was banned as illegal, imperial, and contagious. North Korean propaganda promoted their country as the best paradise in the world; “We have nothing to envy in the world” is the title of a popular North Korean children’s song (and the title of Barbara Demick’s 2010 monograph on North Korean defectors).

However, the extreme conditions fundamentally undermined the regime’s legitimacy and cracked long-held beliefs of the North Korean people sustained through education, surveillance, and punishment. It swayed the people to leave the socialist way of life towards that of capitalism, and pushed some of the people to even leave the communist state itself. People living in the area bordering China, desperate for food, began to risk crossing the heavily armed border to China, and they also began to learn that producing and selling commodities actually solved their urgent needs for necessities. The black market expanded, smuggling boomed between North Korea and China, and more and more North Koreans fled to China. People who had crossed the border once began to cross more frequently for food, cash and trade. The Du-Man River, which separates North Korea and China in the northeast, is narrow and shallow,

frozen in the long winters. The military watch was scarce in the worst times and the officials could easily be bribed.

Figure 2.2 Satellite photo of the Korean Peninsula in 2014



Note. “This January 30, 2014 photo from NASA shows North Korea, darker area at center, between South Korea, right, and China, left.” (AP Photo)

These early economic refugees did not have the intention to go to South Korea nor did they have much information about South Korea. However, their lives in China often pushed them to South Korea. As a close ally of North Korea, China has not been granting the North Koreans with refugee status, despite criticisms from human rights groups. The communist allies of North Korea such as Vietnam and Laos also do not consider the North Koreans in their lands as refugees. If the North Koreans are caught by the authorities in these states, they are deported to North Korea, and are sent to prison for varying periods of time. They are seen as “traitors” in North Korea. Even if they are not caught, their illegal status makes them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. As a result, South Korea often became the destination for the North

Koreans in China and the third countries.

Figure 2.3 North Korean defectors' travel routes to South Korea



Note. Solid arrow: travel to third countries. Dotted arrow: travel to South Korea.

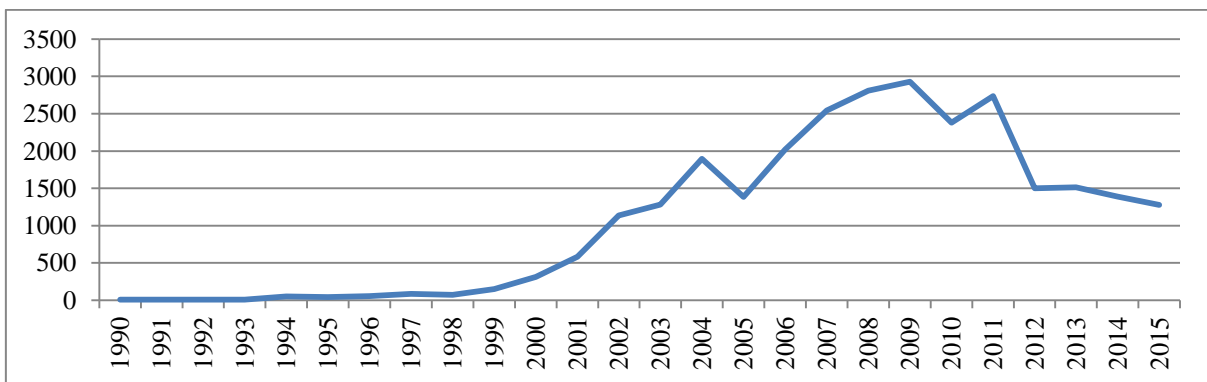
South Korea's constitution holds the whole Korean Peninsula as its rightful territory, granting the North Koreans with South Korean citizenship upon their arrival. However, the North Koreans had to reach the South Korean consulates with their own means. With increasing North Koreans in illegal status, many NGOs and missionary groups flocked to China to shelter and support their travel to South Korea. The usual strategy was to take the northern route through Mongolia. Later, with enforced security policies in Mongolia, more people took the

southern route, usually via Thailand, where the government is more accepting of the North Koreans (Chung, 2008). Once in the consulates, the refugees often have to wait in detention facilities for months until they can fly to Seoul.

The number of North Koreans hiding in China has never been clear, but it is estimated that there are around thirty to fifty thousand North Koreans hiding in China, and around a thousand in South East Asia. Only a small proportion have actually reached South Korea, as they are vulnerable to numerous risks in the process, such as arrest, human-trafficking, detention, or many forms of accidents. However, the number has been rapidly rising.

Before the Arduous March, the numbers of defectors from both sides of the two Koreas were few, rarely exceeding ten defectors per year. However, the figure of North Korean defectors to South Korea leaped to over 50 in 1995. With the 1997 legislation which made the migrants entitled to a large sum of government aid, the number of migrants leaped to hundreds in 1999 and to thousands in 2002. Since then, anywhere from 1000 to 3000 have been arriving steadily each year.

Figure 2.4 Number of North Korean migrant arrivals into South Korea



Note. Adapted from Ministry of Unification (2016)

The total number of North Korean migrants that have entered South Korea as of December, 2015 is 28,795 (Ministry of Unification, 2016). They are mostly from the northern region of North Korea near the border with China, and from the lower class of North Korea, with small proportion of members of the North Korean elite. The majority of this population was either workers (38%) or without jobs (48%) in North Korea, and their migration process made schooling inaccessible for many of them. The overall arrivals of North Korean migrants to South Korea began to decrease when Kim Jeong Eun (the third leader after Kim Il Sung and Kim Jung Il) came to power in 2012, and enforced stronger border security. My fieldwork (2012 – 2014) began when the inflow of North Koreans was at its peak, and underwent the period when the inflow was decreasing.

#### **4. South Korean state policies**

How the South Korean government characterized the North Koreans had high stakes for both the state and the migrants. For the state, it had to do with the legitimacy of the state. For the migrants, it had to do with the legality of their status, the symbolic significance of their role in the nationalistic imagination of unification, and the amount of resources they were entitled to.

During the Cold War, the significance of the North Korea defectors was extremely high for the South Korean state because they could be seen as direct proof of the superiority of the South (Chung, 2008). The few defectors before the Arduous March coming to the military regimes of South Korea were welcomed as national *heroes* and were given spectacular compensation. They were mostly from the high class with valuable information from North Korea.

The defectors in the aftermath of the Arduous March were too many to be afforded material rewards for their role in helping the South Korean side of the Cold War rivalry. To deal with the suddenly increasing numbers of North Korean migrants, in the newly legislated *Act to Protect North Korean brethren who returned to the state* (귀순북한동포 보호법) of 1993, the Kim Young-Sam administration made drastic cuts to the support package for North Koreans (Chung, 2008). They received 7 million won (about \$7000) of resettlement money and 850 million won for housing. They were called “North Korean brethren” and they were given citizenship but also considered as one of the global inflows of burdensome *economic migrant* groups into South Korea. During this interim period of North Korean migrant policy, South Korea had to deal with the new conditions of globalization.

However, the state soon shifted its stance for the North Koreans based on nationalistic framing. The first migrants under the 1993 legislation were reported to suffer high rates of unemployment, poverty, and maladjustment (Chung, 2008); as a result in 1997, despite the IMF crisis, legislation was passed for a much improved support package. By the new *Act on the protection and resettlement support for the residents who escaped from North Korea* (북한이탈주민의 보호 및 정착 지원에 관한 법률), each adult North Korean receives about 30 million won (\$30000) of resettlement money and 7.5 million won (\$7500) for housing support. The package includes other types of support, including employment training, social services, and insurance. Especially important for the North Korean young adults was special university admission regulations which grants to North Koreans under 35 much easier entry into universities than South Koreans and the provision of university tuition support (100% for public universities and 50% for private universities). Though smaller than the reward given to the

defecting heroes, the new legislation provides “resettlement support at levels unprecedented for any refugee group in the world” (Chung, 2008, 10).

Along with this 1997 legislation, the government opened a settlement center for all incoming North Koreans in 1999, called *hanawon* (*hana* means one, *won* means institution, and the term means an institution for the *oneness* of the nation). It is located at An-Seong, a mid-size city fifty miles south of Seoul. When the migrants arrive in South Korea, all of them go through around a month-long inspection period in National Intelligence Service (NIS). Then they are sent to Hanawon for about three months for resettlement education. The program in Hanawon consists of basic job training, lessons on capitalism and democracy, providing information about government support, and improving physical and psychological health.

For the South Korean state, unified nation-building has been the core of its *raison d'être* from its inception in 1948. Each administration has had varying political attitudes towards the North, from moderate to conservative, but all elected governments have put “unification” as central task of the government.

The Ministry of Unification described the significance of the [North Korean migrant support] project in 2002: “We provide protection and support for the resettlement of the ‘Residents Who Escaped from North Korea’ in the belief that they represent a “a test case for our will and ability to unify”. (Chung, 2008, 10)

After the end of the Cold War and the downfall of North Korea’s economy, even though the rivalry between the two Koreas now seems clearly dominated by the South, any ideological allegiance to the North is still not tolerated in the South. In 2014, South Korean government dissolved a minority leftist political party (Unified Progressive Party, 통일당) in the constitutional court on the basis of its pro-North Korean ideology. Extreme ideological freedom in South Korea undermines its very constitution. In the same vein, it serves the interest of the

state to imbue the North Korean migrants with special meaning and treatment than other migrant groups.

The South Korean society's view of North Korean migrants is less politically charged than that of the government. The dominant discourse gaining more attention in recent years in the academia and the public media is the discourse of "multiculturalism (다문화주의)" (Yoon, I., 2009). This perspective views the diverse groups of migrants as part of the growing multiculturalism of South Korea (e.g., through interethnic marriages, the arrival of foreign migrant workers and foreign language teachers) and attempts to defy the deep-rooted ideology of monolithic Korean nationalism. It examines the level of multicultural tolerance and intercultural competence of the society. The growing number of North Korean migrants is seen as part of the growing "multiculturalism" of South Korea, along with other ethnic Korean groups and non-Korean groups. They are seen as one of the immigrant groups. This shows that the Cold-War-marked nationalism and the rhetoric of unification has high stakes for the state, and not necessarily for other social actors.

Compared with the view of the state (and of the evangelicals, as we will see in the next chapter), we can see that the North Korean migrants are somewhat downplayed in the public, secular discourse. What is emphasized is the critical questioning of Korean nationalism. It contradicts with the state ideology which grants South Korean citizenship to North Korean migrants upon entry unlike other multicultural groups, and frames them as belonging to *one nation*. Locating them as one of the multicultural groups is awkward and disconcerting particularly to the migrants themselves. Hae-Mee once said she could not understand how the North Korean migrants are seen as part of *multiculturalism* when they are supposedly of the same culture as South Koreans.



A significant portion of the North Koreans themselves often reframe themselves as politically significant to the South Korean state. The majority of North Korean migrants in South Korea are known to be politically right, in support of the conservative South Korean government and against the North Korean government. They were one of the most active groups in supporting the dissolution of the pro-North Korean party in 2014. Of course, not all of the North Koreans are politically active. For example, Sung-Chul was not much interested in the politics of labeling North Korean migrants, and did not necessarily want to be identified as North Korean unless really necessary (he was one of the participants who did not like the idea of being researched as a North Korean). However, given what he was provided by the government, he was thankful and supportive of the government.

Excerpt 2.2 Interview with Sung-Chul (February, 2013)

Sung-Chul: Settling in South Korea was not difficult. Government support for settlement, monthly aid ... The system provides very well. I gained confidence. I am thankful to the government. However, about the [political] right and left issues, since I have benefitted so much, for example about half price tuition [of universities, a controversial issue at the time], I can't really say anything [against the government].

For the state, having the political support of the North Koreans relates to the core of its political legitimacy. Whatever the motivations of the North Koreans, their inflow serves as evidence of the superiority of the South and thus is significant in the politics of national division (Chung, 2008).

## **5. The stories: Between defectors and migrants**

Chung Byung-Ho (2008), in his account of the North Koreans in South Korea, shows that they often find themselves caught between the identity of refugees (or defectors) entitled to special support and that of *migrants* like all other immigrant groups who have to work their way

up from the bottom of the society. He tells a tragic story of a North Korean boy, one of the earliest defectors to South Korea, who committed suicide in South Korea. He expected a middle-class life when he was welcomed by the state, but soon found himself lonely, discriminated against, and humiliated in the society.

The stories here show a gradual shift among the North Koreans from being refugees to migrants. North Korea's economic crisis first pushed some of the North Koreans across the border. Then the threat to their security in China has pushed them further. The system of arrest, deportation and punishment, and different forms of abuse due to the illegal status of North Koreans in China play a major role in displacing the North Koreans. In the process of these transnational movements, year after year, information about the outside world is increasingly circulated to the North Koreans inside North Korea. The North Koreans look for better lives as they gain more knowledge about the outside world and, importantly, about what the South Korean state can offer them, and about living in South Korea.

The three stories of border crossing presented here are all about the participants who were the children of adult defectors. They followed their family (mostly their mothers) to leave North Korea. Ye-Young was the child of one of the first North Korean defectors, an economic refugee whose goal was to survive, without any knowledge about South Korea. Her family lived in China for a long time before coming to South Korea. Wha-Hong and Bee-Eun were children of later North Korean defectors with more knowledge about South Korea. Wha-Hong found out about South Korea while working in China. Bee-Eun knew about South Korea when she was in North Korea through her mother who left had left for China, then for South Korea. She could come almost straight to South Korea with the resources her mother received from the government. A non-profit system made up of missionaries for helping North Koreans migrate

had already developed, but a system that does it for profit (made up of brokers, discussed in detail with Bee-Eun's story) developed later with the access to resources that North Koreans have through the South Korean government. As we look into the specific accounts, we see that the motivations of the migration shift as families attempt to leave North Korea multiple times, as they spend more time in China, and as the later migrants gain more information about the outside world which the North Korean state is increasingly unable to regulate without harsh punishment.

### **5.1 Ye-Young**

Ye-Young was one of the earliest defectors in late 1990s, and the earliest defector among the research participants. Her father was studying to become a doctor and her mother graduated high school. Her family was educated but was very poor. She said they had nothing to eat, and the whole family left North Korea in 1998, when she was 9 years old. They were economic refugees according to her account. Ye-Young attended up to the second year of elementary school in North Korea<sup>3</sup>.

Ye-Young left North Korea with other family members three times over eight years (in 1998, 2001, and 2004). The first time, she left North Korea with her mother and sister, and lived in Hun Chun, China near the border with North Korea for three years. Then she got arrested alone in 2001. She was not sent to prison, but was sent back to her hometown to her grandmother's place because she was too little. Then she escaped again, this time with her grandmother, aunt and cousins, and went back to Hun Chun. She walked with eight other people

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<sup>3</sup> At this time, North Korea provided compulsory education of 11 years: 1 year of kindergarten, 4 years of elementary school, and 6 years of high school. Now it is 12 years: 1 year of kindergarten, 5 years of elementary school, 3 years of middle school, and 3 years of high school (Ministry of Unification, 2016).

for two days to get there. In the same year, the family moved to Harbin, a bigger city in Northeastern China, farther away from the border where it was safer. In Harbin, Ye-Young, entering her teenage years, worked in restaurants and in South Korean companies as an assistant. The family lived there for three years. Then the family got arrested in 2004 when they attempted to enter the South Korean embassy in Beijing. They were sent to labor camp in North Korea, staying there for three months. Her mother was supposed to be in prison for three more years, but her other aunts bribed the guards and she was released as well. Then the family escaped North Korea again in 2004 to Harbin. The second and the third attempts to leave North Korea were done with more knowledge about the outside world.

Her mother was the first to go to South Korea, in 2006. Ye-Young soon followed. She went to Inner Mongolia (a district of China) in September 2006, then to Mongolia. She had to wait for five months in Mongolia. Then she entered South Korea in February 2007 at the age of 19. Since then, she has been living with her mother in the west of Seoul, near Kimpo airport.

Compared to the other participants, she was relatively more passive in leaving North Korea and coming to South Korea. However, she was perhaps the most active in re-inventing herself in South Korea, perhaps in her effort to compensate for the lost years of education. She had little schooling, but she had a strong drive for learning. She said she loves stories. When she was alone in the house in Hun Chun as a child, she read lots of books that were available. She would read the same book many times because there were not many books. As I saw with other research participants, whether they have an interest in learning or education was important in their trajectories, and this seemed to be often related to what their parents do. In Ye-Young's case, her father was a medical student.

An important point about Ye-Young's trajectory which relates to the rest of the study is

that she is the participant who was the least socialized into the ideology of Korean nationalism. By the time I first met her in 2012, she had lived 9 years in North Korea, 8 years in China, and 5 years in South Korea. Her formative years were mostly spent outside of schooling in China. In our interviews, she often had an outsider's perspective on social practices in South Korea, particularly about English-related social practices. She was unapologetically defying the norms in many instances I saw her, and this particularly applied to her English.

A lady at Seoul Church introduced her to me after hearing about my research topic, saying Ye-Young is one of the best English speakers among the North Koreans she saw. We had our first interview in English. It was also rare for me to have such extensive English conversation with another Korean, either because they could not speak to such an extent or they felt uncomfortable to speak in English when we had our common language. English was ideologically an unspeakable language for many Koreans (Park, J.S., 2009), but that was not the case her.

She later became a flight attendant at an international airline company. In an essay she wrote soon after her employment, she said:

Excerpt 2.3 Essay by Ye-Young (December, 2012)

I am the first person with North Korean background to become a flight attendant at a foreign airline. ... I give my special thanks to the alternative school which helped me prepare for college admission, the university which had special admission for North Korean students, the government which provided me with scholarship, English education support, and the scholarship foundation who selected me based on the potential that they saw in me, and South Korea who will put the Taegeuk mark (the symbol at the center of South Korean flag) on my name tag. I am a flight attendant who will travel around the world as a civil diplomat representing Korea in the air.

She was one of the first refugees of North Korea's economic crisis and state punishment. After three escapes from North Korea, after the time of anxious hiding in China, she used the political

security and material and symbolic capital which South Korea provided to defectors to achieve her dream. She acknowledged the role of South Korea and its numerous institutions in that process. She accepted and utilized the special place she occupied in South Korea as a North Korean defector.

## **5.2 Wha-Hong**

Wha-Hong left North Korea in 2004, several years after the worst times. However, the economic condition of her family has not much improved.

Excerpt 2.4 Interview with Wha-Hong (September, 2012)

Wha-Hong: I only lived with my Mom when I was in North Korea. We were economically very badly off. But we didn't skip meals. Mom worked really hard. There is a lot of stigma where a woman lives alone. Not only economically but socially, it was very difficult. Things were not getting better even though mother tried a lot. She left to China, leaving me alone. She was arrested and came back. She told me to leave together to China. I thought I would die anyway, either way, so before I die, let's have a decent meal.

The economic crisis generated fragmented families, often women or children left to themselves. Living by themselves as women was difficult. Wha-Hong's mother escaped the negative social gaze, and Wha-Hong escaped a hopeless future. She was 14, in Grade 6, or second year of high school.

Excerpt 2.5 Interview with Wha-Hong (September, 2012)

Wha-Hong: I think I was not a person to live in North Korea. Even when I was in North Korea, I didn't like the ideology. Kim Il Sung died when I was there. But I had no tears. I didn't understand why I have to cry for someone I haven't even met. I just didn't show it. But I did rebel a lot. But I didn't show it too much because I had to, and I didn't want to get hit.

According to the reports of most North Korean migrants (e.g., Demick, 2010), the death of Kim

Il Sung, the first leader, came as a genuine shock and sadness to many North Koreans. He died in 1994, just before the economic crisis hit North Korea, and he is more or less credited for the good times of North Korea. With the death of the second leader, Kim Jung Eun, in 2011, faked mourning became more prevalent. Wha-Hong, living in the periphery of North Korea, was already a skeptic against the regime, at a time when people would only secretly harbor the thought to themselves.

Excerpt 2.6 Interview with Wha-Hong (September, 2012)

Wha-Hong: When North Koreans go to China, first they are all sold out. The Chinese man was a bit retarded. We were always watched and didn't have freedom. So we ran away. We went back to the man my mom was married to before this man.

Many North Koreans in China are known to be vulnerable to human trafficking. Wha-Hong followed her mother who was sold out to a forced marriage. They then ran away to the man the mother married the first time she escaped to China.

Excerpt 2.7 Interview with Wha-Hong (September, 2012)

Wha-Hong: I really wanted to study at this time. But the dad in China was also really poor. We were just a bit better than skipping meals. With such condition, I couldn't think of studying at all. Studying, I couldn't do it at all.

They spent four years with the man she called dad. While her mother lived with the man, Wha-Hong went to another city in China, Chingdao, to work.

Wha-Hong wanted to make her living in China. What pushed her out of China to South Korea was the disadvantage she experienced without a legal status.

Excerpt 2.8 Interview with Wha-Hong (September, 2012)

Wha-Hong: When North Korean defectors work in China, they don't receive their wages well. If I was just paid appropriately, I would have stayed in China. I spoke Chinese well, so people really didn't know the difference. I did translation work. I worked really hard. In one hour, I did almost three to four times of what other people

did. But they didn't pay me as much as I worked. I couldn't really say anything because the Korean-Chinese knew I was a North Korean.

The company took advantage of her illegal status. Wha-Hong did not intend to go to South Korea when she first escaped North Korea. However, the insecure status and the unfair treatment pushed her to search for better options in life.

Excerpt 2.9 Interview with Wha-Hong (September, 2012)

Wha-Hong: It was when I was in Chingdao that I heard of “*Dae-Han-Min-Kuk*” (the official Korean name of South Korea, often abbreviated as “Han-Kuk”) for the first time. Before that I only knew it as “*Nam Chosun*” (the name for South Korea used in North Korea). I only heard really bad things about South Korea, but all the clients of the company were South Koreans, and they were all kind. Their talk was really soft and nice. I found out for the first time that South Korea was wealthy. I heard lots of North Koreans go to South Korea, so I was going to get citizenship and come back to China.

South Korea was depicted negatively when she was in North Korea and she did not have access to other information. Later defectors had more access to the outside world. Her goal when she was leaving China was not to live in South Korea but to gain a secure status to work in China, which the South Korean state was providing.

She came to South Korea in 2008, after four years in China. Once in South Korea, she was settling in South Korea. She wanted to earn money to bring her mother to South Korea.

Excerpt 2.10 Interview with Wha-Hong (September, 2012)

Wha-Hong: I had to lie about my age. If I were filed as a junior, I wouldn't have received the house. I would have to be in an organization. Then I can't bring my mother quickly.

By 1997 legislation, housing was provided to each household, through allocation lottery in Hanawon.

Unaccompanied minors under twenty years old were treated as independent households



and assigned an entire apartment unit for each one. The concerned teachers of Hanadul school brought attention to the isolation and psychological problems that this arrangement could cause. ... At the end of 2002, the government stopped providing apartments for minors but did not develop any formal collective custodial arrangements for them until a government-sponsored boarding school for the arriving North Korean youths was built in 2007. Until then, unaccompanied minors were handled by a few voluntary NGOs. (Chung, 2008, 17).

Wha-Hong completed Hanawon in 2009, at age 18. She did not want to live in a boarding school, but rather wanted an apartment for her mother who would soon come. Isolation and loneliness was less of a problem than her family needs. She brought her mother in 2010 and they have been living in South Korea since.

When I met her in 2012, she was a 23-year-old woman of small height, suffering from severe back pain, with a strong sense of survival.

Excerpt 2.11 Interview with Wha-Hong (September, 2012)

Eun-Yong: How was your impression of South Korea?

Wha-Hong: It was really nice. I heard in Hanawon that there can be lots of swindlers, multi-level salesman, and bad people. But I think God led me to only good people. I was given more money than I worked. They were so kind to me, and since I didn't know English, they would write the sounds in Korean for me to read. I didn't have repulsion towards capitalism. I already experienced it in China. Those who went straight to South Korea have a hard time, I heard.

She was thankful for the resources she received as a North Korean in South Korea.

However, at the time of my interview with her, she was somewhat struggling with some of the state support such as the special university admission regulation. She entered university easily but she had to drop out of university (which will be more discussed in detail in Chapter 4). She found an intern job at a government institution based on a quota for North Korean defectors. It was a benefit she could get as a North Korean, but she was disappointed by the excessive benefit.

Excerpt 2.12 Interview with Wha-Hong (September, 2012)

Eun-Yong: How do you feel about South Korea now?

Wha-Hong: I don't feel good now. You know I am working in the government office. After I began working there, I think I don't want to live in South Korea. I want to leave South Korea. I am not sure of the reason. So tired.

Eun-Yong: What work do you do?

Wha-Hong: There is not much work. It's office assistant, and they have to hire a North Korean, without any work. I do coffee, wiping tables, and do some word work. The contract is from April to end of this year. I want to stop. After one year, the contract can turn to a permanent contract. It's people's number one hope to get this job. I too was hooked into that fantasy. But it's all appearance. It's my first time to hate work. I feel like I am wasting time.

She said that she felt best when she was in the factory in China, when she had to work hard and was paid for her work. She was not an academic type and she had hated studying English in South Korea (which will also be discussed in Chapter 4). However, at the time of our interview, she was interested in meeting me because she wanted to learn English and leave South Korea. The state policies which single out the North Koreans for special support, once hooked, could create “fantasy” which was not compatible with the reality of the South Korean society.

### **5.3 Bee-Eun**

Bee-Eun’s family did not leave North Korea particularly for economic reasons. Like Wha-Hong’s mother, Bee-Eun’s mother had issues about being a woman in North Korea, although in a different circumstance. Bee-Eun’s father was a security guard at a farm. At the corporate farms in North Korea after the Arduous March, they needed security guards to protect the crops from being stolen. Her mother was an “in-min pan-jang”, or a president of neighborhood association. North Korea organized every 20 to 40 families into a corporate association (“in-min pan”), and appointed a president over them. These presidents exercised significant control over the people, and acted as the channel of state control and surveillance.

She was hard-working so her family did not have problem with food shortage.

Excerpt 2.13 Interview with Bee-Eun (September, 2012)

Bee-Eun: With 20 to 30 families under her control, she got a lot of jealousy from men. She wanted to go to China where she could live boldly as a woman. She wanted to make lots of money, and not envy anyone, but when she went to China, she found about the option of going to South Korea.

The mother left Bee-Eun, her husband and her son in 2000, when Bee-Eun was nine years old. She reached South Korea in 2002. Bee-Eun said she fought a lot with other kids who teased her and talked badly about her mother.

Bee-Eun decided to go directly to South Korea by the southern route to reunite with her mother. She made her first attempt to leave North Korea in 2003 with her brother. They reached Vietnam but were caught there. They were imprisoned for two months in Vietnam, then deported to Do-Moon prison camp in the city of Do-Moon, China, located by the border of North Korea. They were imprisoned there for six months. Then she was sent to Kyo-Wha-So, the prison in North Korea with the least level of punishment. She was imprisoned there for a month, then sent back home.

Excerpt 2.14 Interview with Bee-Eun (September, 2012)

Bee-Eun: Old people were hit so much. Some people died because they were hit so much. I saw people die for the first time. It was very dirty, and there was only one bathroom in one aisle. To go to the washroom, you have to wait a lot. Women were not inside the cells. Men were inside and we were just outside the cell and sit in a row. When we sleep, we put down our head on the belly of the person behind, and the woman in front would put her head on my belly. My knee ached a lot. And we couldn't see sunlight.

I heard these stories in our first interview in 2012. I had known her for a year at Seoul Church. She was a bright, happy and outgoing 23-year old university student. She was not self-pitying or trying to make herself out to be a victim.

Excerpt 2.15 Interview with Bee-Eun (September, 2012)

Eun-Yong: What about the prison in China?

Bee-Eun: Many snacks, and handsome guys. I was very happy. I learned Chinese from the handsome officers. We talked while they were giving out snacks. He said that he has a little sister like me. There are really many handsome guys. It is border area, so they don't select just anyone.

The next time, the siblings made it safely to South Korea with the help of her mother in South Korea. Her brother left in 2005 and Bee-Eun left in 2006, when she was sixteen.

Excerpt 2.16 Interview with Bee-Eun (September, 2012)

Bee-Eun: As soon as I crossed the river, there was a broker waiting for me. I was picked up by a car. We stayed in Shen Yang for seven days. Then I took a plane at Shen Yang airport to Incheon.

Eun-Yong: That took less than two weeks.

Bee-Eun: Yes, that cost 10 million won (approx. \$10000).

The migrations of the North Koreans to South Korea were becoming, by the late 2000s, easier and more expensive through the work of the brokers.

These brokers specialize in helping North Koreans reach South Korea for profit. Many of them are North Koreans with South Korean citizenship or are Korean-Chinese. Anonymous contacts equipped with global positioning devices operating in North Korea, China, and South-East Asia make up their network. Their fees were reported to range from 2 million to 20 million Korean won (approx. \$2,000 to \$20,000). They often target the financial aid which the North Korean migrants receive from South Korean government once they arrive in South Korea (after finishing their Hanawon education). Many of the migrants use this chunk of cash to pay off brokers who brought them to South Korea or to bring their families from North Korea. As a result, the majority of North Korean coming into South Korea became women, children, and families since the mid-2000s (Chung, 2008).

Bee-Eun wanted to become a police officer. The mother was a big and strong figure in her life, the lifeline of the family, but Bee-Eun also saw the absence of her father.

Excerpt 2.17 Interview with Bee-Eun (September, 2012)

Eun-Yong: Do you keep in contact with your father in North Korea?

Bee-Eun: Since security was enforced after the Yeonpyeong Island attack (South-North military conflict in 2010), I lost contact with him. I tried several times, but I couldn't find him. I am continuing the search.

She remembers her father as thin, tall, and strong.

Excerpt 2.18 Interview with Bee-Eun (September, 2012)

Eun-Yong: What was the very first motivation to become a police?

Bee-Eun: There was a man who was like an uncle to me. He was a police officer in North Korea, and he was a really good man. He came with other police officers to our house often. I had a good image of the police.

Her father's job as a guard, her acquaintance with the prison guards in China, and the police officers she liked in North Korea, might have to do with her goal to become a police officer. In my first interview with her in 2012, she was in her second year in police training at her university. She was almost always working at a part-time job, to be less dependent on her mother and make her own living. As we will see in later chapters, she was struggling with the exam she needed to take to become a police officer in South Korea.

In these stories, there were conditions for which the North Korean had to seek refuge in South Korea. At the same time, there were also elements that would be common to all other migrant groups –movements for better access to resource, for better standard of living, or for family reunion.

## 6. Conclusion

Defining who the North Korean migrants are was a contentious issue because for the South Korean state, it was linked to its legitimacy, and for the North Koreans, it was linked to access to resources. Not everyone performed their North Korean identity in South Korea because it could be emotionally damaging to some people, like the interviewee in this excerpt of a press interview below:

Excerpt 2.19 Interview with a North Korean young adult from newspaper article, “Real independence of North Korean defectors, we will strongly help.”  
As a young adult in my twenties, it did not look so difficult to settle in the South. It's the same culture, same language, so what could be so difficult? But there was an unexpected ambush – South Korea's gaze towards the North Korean migrants. How hungry I was, how poor I was, how I crossed the border, whether I had near-death experience... wherever I went, questions were poured on me about the most terrible moments of the 23 years of my life. Those pitying eyes, looking at me as a "poor guy" was uncomfortable. So I only hung out with international students. With them, they did not see me as a North Korean defector but as just me.

In other words, the boundary of “North Korean migrant” was a social formation. It was not as clear as I thought it to be. The typical markers of North Korean people, such as typical physical appearance (e.g., shorter height often from malnutrition, darker skin, stronger facial features), North Korean accent, and less “fashionable” style were either not always clear cut, or quickly assimilated, or deliberately hidden. Their legal definition is the “people who have their address, family, spouse, or workplace in area north of the military line (hereafter North Korea) and who have not acquired foreign citizenship after leaving North Korea”. Their legal status is certified by a legal document, namely the registration certificate of North Korean migrants (북한이탈주민 등록확인서).

Such a social boundary is not identifiable in personal interaction until it is revealed by

someone. When I participated in the church community, I could not identify who was South Korean and who was North Korean until I asked the person in question, or until I asked other people about the person. I was also struck with the range of diversity within that social group in terms of their length of stay in South Korea and the diverse ways of identifying oneself (how much someone identified oneself as either a North Korean, a South Korean, a Korean, or as something different altogether), and thus the amount of work by the individual and the institution to identify someone as “North Korean migrant.”

For example, I met a North Korean young adult who told me he came to South Korea when he was in elementary school. For him, the years he lived in South Korea were longer than the years he lived in North Korea. However, he was legally a North Korean migrant and he participated in the community *as the North Korean member*, which legitimized his position as a beneficiary of government and church aid. It was this socially constructed boundary that I relied for this research. This very study, in a way, contributes to constructing the label of “North Koreans” in South Korea.

The number of North Korean migrants who came at one point or another into South Korea, 28,795 (Ministry of Unification, 2016), is not the number of North Koreans currently living in South Korea. A significant portion of them have crossed state boundaries again. Many have gone to Europe and Canada, which are less politically charged states than the U.S.. Canada has been one of the favorite destinations for the North Koreans for its expansive territory and generous support for the refugees.

There was a North Korean young man I was introduced by church members at a cafe near the church. He recently arrived, and we had a brief conversation about English at the café. Then after a while, when I was back in University of Toronto and walking down the Bloor Street,

I ran into that same man. He was attending Toronto Church, and he was in the process of acquiring refugee status in Canada. I was asked to help him as the translator in this application process, and I agreed to help. It was generally known among the inner church members that these North Koreans were actually not qualified to acquire refugee status, because most of them did not come directly from North Korea but had settled in South Korea for some time before arriving in Canada. Hiding parts of their past trajectories enabled them to receive government aid from both South Korean and Canadian government. The church could not ignore their calls for help in their settlement process, and could not easily pass judgment on their dishonest acts to the government. Neither did I. The Canadian government has been reinforcing the inspection of these “fraud” refugees.

I once asked, after much deliberation, whether he did not feel any ethical problem with what he was doing. He responded, “My problem is that I was born in North Korea. If I was born in another country, I would not have to do this. For the hardships I went through just because I was born in North Korea, I don’t feel guilty about being compensated this way.” These “individual strategies for survival” found their way around the unequal realities between nation-states. These migrants mobilized their “North Korean” label in different settings; e.g., defector status in South Korean state, refugee status in Canada, and, as we will see more in detail in the next chapter, “North Korean member” in evangelical spaces. These different terms for the North Koreans were, therefore, social formations, with which many people were navigating several state boundaries to carve out better lives for themselves.



## **Chapter 3**

### **Encountering evangelical outreach**

This chapter examines why many North Korean migrants become Protestant Christians (or not), and why they stay in or leave the church. Evangelical Christianity has had the strongest presence for the North Korean migrants among the other major religions in South Korea (i.e., Buddhism, Catholic, atheism). Most North Koreans in North Korea are atheists, but many North Korean migrants become Christians after they meet Christians in China, on their way to South Korea, or in South Korea (Chung, 2008, Jeon et al., 2009; Jung, J.H., 2011). Then, there is a decrease in the number of Christians among the North Korean migrants as they spend more time in South Korea. There also has been an overall decrease of Christians among the *incoming* North Korean migrants as evangelical Christianity has been in decline in South Korea since the mid-1990s.

This chapter will show that the strong link between North Korean migrants and South Korean evangelicals works in the context of the central tensions discussed in this thesis. The South Korean evangelicals worked to mediate the tensions by being an encompassing space of both the global and the national, and of both social differentiation and social inclusion. The North Korean migrants came to these spaces to manage these tensions, by being both differentiated (as North Korean) and included (as fellow Koreans), and by being given a special identity of being global/ national leader for world evangelism and Korean unification, which transcends the tension between the labels of migrant vs. defector. The North Korean migrants who left Christianity distanced themselves from engaging in these politics of meaning as they became less reliant on the help of the Christians.

In this chapter, I first survey evangelical Christianity in Korea. Then, I look more closely into evangelicals' worldview and their visionary discourses about the place of Korea and the North Korean migrants in what they believe to be their mission of world evangelism and “gospel-based unification” (복음적 통일). Thirdly, I present here the border-crossing stories of three more research participants (Han-Young, Hae-Mee, and Mee-Soo) and their conversion experiences. They left North Korea by themselves, literally leaving behind their families and homes, in search of something they could not get in North Korea. In their lonely journey, Christianity figured importantly in their trajectories. Fourthly, I discuss the decline of evangelical Christianity in South Korea and its influence on North Korean ministry. Lastly, I discuss how North Korean migrants decide to stay or leave the church, centrally around the focal participants.

## **1. Evangelical Christianity in Korea**

Evangelical Christianity is characterized by religious conservatism and globally mobile Christian missionaries, which are in fact inter-related. The driving force of the evangelicals' active outreach is essentially their doctrine. They emphasize two commands of God in the Bible: the Cultural Mandate to “fill the *earth* and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28), and the Great Commission to “disciple *all* nations” (Matthew 28: 19). Evangelicals take seriously this biblical mandate of global evangelism (Stott, 1975). Historically, global missionization stemmed from the revival movements of Protestant Christianity, or the Great Awakening movements, in late 18<sup>th</sup> century to 19<sup>th</sup> century in Northern Europe and North America (Keanne, 2007). As the birth of Protestantism through the Reformation in sixteenth century Europe is arguably closely linked with the emergence of modern capitalism (Weber, 1904/1992), the rise of evangelicalism is

closely linked with the expansion of colonialism, or what I see as the form of capitalist expansion at the time. Missionaries and colonialists, although with different agendas and attitudes, have often depended on each other in entering new frontiers and accomplishing their tasks.

Evangelical Christianity constitutes both the historical root and the current majority of Protestant Christianity of South Korea (Han, J., 2005; Harkness, 2014; Lee, 2006). Protestant Christianity was introduced to Korea (then Chosun Dynasty) in the late 1800s, accompanied by Western colonial powers interested in the Korean Peninsula, about a century after the introduction of Catholicism. The first Protestant missionaries to enter Korea in 1885 were American Presbyterians and Methodists (these became the major denominations in South Korea). Evangelical Christians now constitute the majority of Christianity in Korea. The term *Christianity* in Korean (기독교) refers to Protestant Christianity (and does not include the Catholics), and the vast majority of Protestant Christians are the conservative evangelicals (Lee, 2006). They are contrasted with liberalist/ progressive Protestants who orient to social justice and who have engaged in social movements.

Christians in Korea have been contrasted with Korean socialists/ communists (e.g., Jung, J.H., 2011). During Japanese colonial rule (1910 – 1945), the Christians and the socialists were key players of the resistance movements. They were small minorities in Korea at the time, but had strong presence as independent activists. However, the Japanese regime harshly persecuted them, and the Christians were forced to concede to Japanese Emperor worship (신사참배), which was betraying their faith in monotheism. In the process of the division of Korea after the colonial rule, there was significant migration of evangelicals moving southward and socialists moving northward. The communist regime in the North was hostile to Christians, and its

persecution against the Christians is notorious to this day. There was significant violence between the communists and the Christians during and in the aftermath of the Korean War (1950 – 1953). The war solidified South Korea as the hub of evangelicals who believed the North Korean regime is satanic, and believed themselves to be endowed with the divine mission of guarding the capitalist bloc against the communist bloc at the frontline (Kang, I., 2005).

In modern South Korea, evangelicals are seen as politically conservative, anti-communist, pro-state, and in close affinity with the U.S., perceived as the messenger of the gospel and liberal democratic capitalism. Christians were key players in building the South Korean government, which had to do with their affinity with Americans and their English-speaking ability. The first president of South Korean government, Syngman Rhee, was an active figure in resistance movement and a devoted Christian. He was supported by American missionaries to flee the Japanese persecution of the resistance movement to the U.S. during the colonial rule, and did his master and doctoral studies in Harvard and Princeton. One of the key reasons that the interim US regime chose Syngman Rhee as their representative in the South was that he could speak English and could represent American interest. Since the establishment of the South Korean government in 1948 to this day, many Christians found their place in high political office, and evangelicals comprise a significant majority of South Korea's upper class (Lee, 2006).

It was the conservative evangelical denominations that showed remarkable growth in South Korea. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Christians formed less than one percent of the Korean population. By the end of the century, the number of Protestants in South Korea (which allows religious freedom) reached 10 million, or almost 20% of the 45 million population (of which 6% were Catholic, 23% Buddhist, 1% other religions, and 50% non-

religious; Lee, 2006). Ten of the twenty largest Christian congregations in the world are known to be evangelical churches in South Korea (Han, J., 2005; Harkness, 2014).

Pastor Kim at Seoul Church once remarked about the place of English and the U.S. in South Korean evangelical Christianity.

Excerpt 3.1 Interview with lead pastor in Seoul Church (February, 2013)

Pastor Kim: The Christianity of South Korea has been heavily influenced by the U.S. And that is an English-speaking region. South Korea's theologians, almost ninety percent, or eighty percent, have studied in American theology schools, maybe 70% U.S. And there's some from South Africa. Anyways, they are all English-speaking countries. So, as a theologian, if he hasn't studied in the U.S., it's hard to be established in South Korea. Oh, there is also Netherlands too. It's Dutch there but studies there are mostly done in English. So, in South Korean Protestant Christianity's world, English is so comfortable. The mega-churches' worldwide success, it was possible because the pastor could speak his message in English. If you look, the major pastors in South Korea have studied in the U.S., except for some.

As we can see, the U.S. and English language have important presence for South Korean evangelicals in many ways, from its doctrine, its historical trajectory, and its political position, all of which are inter-related.

It is important to note that evangelical Christianity in South Korea has both a *global* and a *nationalistic* outlook. South Korean evangelicals have been passionate in their global outreach and in sending missionaries abroad. This made South Korea the second largest missionary-sending country in the world after the U.S. (Jung, S.H., 2003; Han, J., 2005). Consequently, evangelical institutions have a strong global network. At the same time, South Korean evangelical Christianity has a particular passion for Korean nation-building and Korean unification (Jung, S.H., 2003; Jung, J.H., 2011).

The stunning growth of evangelical Christianity in post-war South Korea was partly due to its strong public legitimacy (Choi, 2002). It is a modern, legitimate and prosperous religion.

Being an evangelical Christian has been one way to be a legitimate South Korean, in clear opposition with North Korean communism. At the same time, evangelical institutions constitute the main space within South Korea, together with governmental institutions, where the discourse of “Korean unification” – which is gradually losing currency in broader South Korean society – still holds value.

## **2. Visions of North Korea**

From what I observed during the fieldwork, and as I grew up in church, evangelicals, among the diverse type of Christians, are communicative, relational, and visionary. They reach out to people face to face. They enjoy direct access to God, pray spontaneously (not relying on standard prayers), and allow personal interpretations of the Word. They have the written revelation from God (the Bible) but they also receive more personal, oral revelations from God through prayers, which often take the form of visual images of the future. Lepp-Kaethler & Dorneyei (2013) in their study of Christian English learners, described these personal revelations as “a vivid sense of themselves moving toward a hoped-for vision in a future world within an imagined community” (p. 177). An East-Asian theology student in their study described his call from God the following way:

When I was a young boy I was convinced that God called me into ... the ministry of sharing and preaching the gospel to all nations ... that calling was very strong. (Lepp-Kaethler & Dorneyei, 2013, p. 177)

Some of these visions received by spiritual leaders are more widely circulated than others. In their evangelical worldview, North Korea is notoriously “unreached” and they see North Korea as (one of) the “ends of the earth.” Reaching into North Korea with the gospel is seen as an

important mission.

I identified another visionary discourse about the spiritual meaning of North Korea. One of the missionary organizations where I had been trained was “InterCP”, based in South Korea (an organization also examined in Han, J., 2005). It was founded by one of South Korea’s leading evangelists, Missionary Paul Choi (최마울), who also wrote extensively about his spiritual views of the world. He sees the history of Christianity as the “western march of the gospel”: the gospel began from Israel and progressed through Europe and North America, and has now reached Eastern Asia. For him, the spread of the gospel to the “ends of the earth” means the gospel making a full circle around the globe and going “Back to Jerusalem” (often referred to as BTJ), where it originated. Designating Jerusalem as the final destination of gospel is not fully agreed upon by other evangelists, but the “western” movement of the gospel is a widely shared discourse among evangelicals.

In this version of evangelical worldview, the position of North Korea has another sense of spiritual importance. Korea is seen as a bridge or the passage of the gospel and as a gate into Asia. With remarkable economic growth and church growth, South Korean evangelicals saw it as God’s blessing for Korea to serve other nations. Such a role for Korea is only fully feasible within a Unified Korea, and so in their view the strong barrier set by the communist regime must collapse and open way.

In this vein, the South Korean evangelicals have spiritual explanations of Korea’s painful history. In one of the prayer meetings I attended in my fieldwork, a North Korean who became a pastor in South Korea gave a message. He interpreted the division of Korea not as a political outcome of Cold War, but as a spiritual outcome of the sin of Korean Christians. The evidence was that the influence of Cold War, such as the division of Germany, ended with the

end of the Cold War, but the fact that the division of Korea has not ended shows that it is not the influence of Cold War. Unification of Korea was therefore something that needs to be resolved ultimately on the spiritual level, and hence the need for prayers for that spiritual battle.

The sin of Korean Christians which resulted in the tragic division of the Korean peninsula was often traced back to the sin of idolatry during the Japanese colonial rule (Jung, S.H., 2003). The South Korean Christian leaders even to this day confess as sin the decision to follow Japan's religion of worshipping the Japanese Emperor during the colonial rule. Under harsh persecution, the Protestant denominations officially announced their acceptance of Emperor worship in 1938, after heated debate over whether it was betraying their Christian faith or it was a national and patriotic ritual, strategically needed to sustain the church.

Although the denominations revoked their decision in the late 1940s, after Korea's independence in 1945, many pastors seem to think that there have been serious spiritual consequences to this immense sin of idolatry, one of which is Pyongyang's degenerating from what was once called the Jerusalem of the East to the capital city of state-wide idol worship of Kim Il Sung. The tragic famine in the mid-1990s are also seen as the spiritual consequence of the idolatry (Kim, G., 2012)

“Unified Korea, Missionary Korea (통일한국, 선교한국)” was a catch-phrase I often heard in evangelical meetings, which summarizes how evangelicals envision the future of Korea and its role for world mission. National unification and global evangelism are both important missions for evangelicals, and the two missions go hand in hand.

In this spiritual framing of North Korea, the rise of North Korean migrants is seen as a special “gift” from God. The Biblical command to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39) partly explains the tremendous amount of help the Christians provide to North Korean



migrants. For the “evangelical” Christians, however, their love for the neighbor takes particular forms. It involves providing for both the physical and the spiritual well-being of migrants. For them, spiritual well-being means to meet Jesus, to grow in His Word, to become evangelizers themselves, and ultimately to become influential “Christian leaders” in the society.

To them, North Korean migrants have an important role that no other group can play. South Korean evangelicals envision the North Korean migrants going back to North Korea, bringing the good news they heard in the South back to their families in the North, and taking “leadership” in the future process of Korean unification. “Christian national/ global leader” or “the bridge between the North and the South” were expressions I heard frequently. Such framing gives the North Korean migrants another layer of label, a more positive one, different from being state-defined defectors, and also different from being part of South Korea’s growing multiculturalism.

The particular enthusiasm of the South Korean evangelicals for the North Korean migrants, and the anxieties and difficulties on the part of the North Korean migrants in moving to and settling in a capitalist society have formed a uniquely strong connection between the North Korean migrants and the South Korean evangelicals, more than any other religious groups (Han, J., 2013; Jeon & Cho, 2003; Jeon et al., 2009; Jung, J.H., 2011). To me, these visionary discourses are the inner driving force for the evangelicals to work with North Korean migrants. It distinguishes them from the general public who are more or less uninterested in the issues of unification, and makes them one of the main social actors, with the South Korean state, in supporting the North Korean migrants. They have been responsive, resourceful, and willing to provide for what they perceive to be the needs of North Korean migrants.

South Korean evangelicals’ work of what is called “North Korean missions (북한선교)”

or “North Korean ministry (북한사역)” has taken place broadly in three areas: the inland of North Korea, in China, and in South Korea. It started with food and financial aid to North Korea. Then, they began to support the works of missionaries working in China. The grass-roots Chinese-Korean home churches in the Sino-Korean border area are usually run by Chinese-Korean Christians and/or South Korean Christians, and largely supported by the funding of Christians in South Korea. They provide immediate shelter and food for the refugees, and support their travel to South Korea through underground routes developed by these missionaries (Jung, J.H., 2011). These shelters protected the migrants from human trafficking, arrests and deportation back to North Korea (Han, J., 2013). Subsequently, they have been active in providing the migrants who have arrived in South Korea with initial settlement support in addition to government aid. They actively embraced the North Korean migrants into the church, beginning to form North Korean communities within the church, and providing settlement and relief services.

As a result, until the mid-2000s, the majority of North Korean migrants living in South Korea were reported to be Protestant Christians (Jeon, et al., 2009). According to a survey which tracked the religious choices of North Korean migrants (Jeon, et al., 2009), the following were the reasons the migrants chose Protestant Christianity: the Protestant Christians were i) the most active in helping them in the process of reaching South Korea, ii) the most active in social work and volunteer work for them, and iii) the most active in responding to their emotional needs related to dealing with anxieties and trauma. I turn to some of their specific experiences of South Korean evangelical Christianity.

### **3. Stories: Encounters and conversions**

The North Korean migrants come from one of the most “evangelically unreached” places on earth. The North Korean regime is highly sensitive when it comes to Christianity. The socialist states of North Korea and China do acknowledge religion in their rhetoric and there are state-controlled churches, mostly for international display, but evangelizing activity is harshly forbidden. Missionaries rarely enter North Korea, and those in China work in secrecy under other professional identities. In North Korea, any Christians outside state regulations are immediately wiped out of the social scene through imprisonment and execution (Kim, G., 2012). When defectors are deported back to North Korea, whether from China or other third countries before reaching South Korea, one of the first things they are interrogated is whether they have had contact with missionaries, which is on discovery severely punished (Choi, G., 2006). For most North Korean migrants, therefore, Christianity did not have strong presence in their lives in North Korea.

Hae-Mee once told me that when she was living in North Korea, she was not aware of Christianity at all. She did sometimes hear of Christians who got caught and were executed publicly, but she did not think much about Christians. When she did, she vaguely thought they must be bad people. She only found out there were underground churches in North Korea after she came to South Korea.

Through my fieldwork, I learned a great deal about the underground churches in North Korea. I often heard that Kim Il Sung, whose mother was a devoted Christian, utilized many aspects of Christianity in constructing a semi-religious structure around himself. Evangelicals think that this is one of the reasons why the North Korean regime brutally persecutes Christians, in order to hide that the North Korean system is merely a fake imitation. Despite the severe

persecutions, missionaries who have visited North Korea through diverse means have found surprisingly flourishing underground churches. They are known to be the descendants of the Christian churches already in place before the establishment of the communist regime in 1948. Their meetings are held in strict secrecy, but media coverage of these meetings has been reported to the outside world and circulates on Youtube. One of the most famous videos shows an old lady praying quietly under her blanket, surprisingly praying not for her own safety but for the Christians in South Korea.

The writings of an underground Christian in North Korea were recently published (Kim, G., 2012), and the editor of the book once came to a prayer meeting as an invited speaker. The editor had received the manuscript from the author in China, but by the time the book was published, the author had been executed. The book contains stories of the Christians in the underground churches. There are not many Bibles circulating in the North, so they cut one Bible into many pieces and share them among themselves. The author had the book of the Levites, so he had to repeatedly read the same book. The Christians there were thinking that Christianity was the hope for their country. These stories of Christians in North Korea were recounted during in meetings as an inspiration to South Korean Christians. These underground Christians were seen as future partners of “gospel-based unification (복음적 통일)”.

For many North Korean migrants, Christianity is one of the first things they encounter as soon as they cross the border to China. This was true of all of the research participants in this study. I now turn to their specific stories. I tell the stories of the participants who encountered and converted to Christianity after they left North Korea: Han-Young, Hae-Mee, and briefly about Mee-Soo. I tell their border-crossing stories, in which Christianity played an important role. Unlike the three participants introduced in the previous chapter, they left North Korea by

themselves as young adults, and are living alone in South Korea, with all of their family in North Korea. Christianity has a role in all of the eight research participants of this study but figures importantly particularly for these young adults' stories of coming and settling in South Korea. Han-Young met a South Korean missionary in China. Hae-Mee met a Chinese Christian family in China. Mee-Soo met Christians in her neighborhood in South Korea.

### **3.1 Han-Young**

Han-Young left North Korea in 2001 when he was 18.

Excerpt 3.2 Interview with Han-Young (November, 2012)

Han-Young: In our area, the Arduous March began around 1996, around two years later than other regions, because we were a coal mining town, and things were distributed better. I didn't really see people dying of starvation. When there is starvation, people die not directly from starving, but from other illness.

Han-Young's hometown was, like those of all the other participants, in the far north-eastern area near the border to China, but his hometown was better off economically than others. He was born into a relatively rich family.

Excerpt 3.3 Interview with Han-Young (November, 2012)

Han-Young: My home situation was better. My mother graduated professional college, and my father graduated university too. Both had high level of education, and they were people who study. With Math, my father taught me up to grade 9, like functions.

His parents were both university educated and emphasized studying to him. His father seemed to have a certain social status. His reason for leaving North Korea was not economic difficulty. He finished all the compulsory education in North Korea, and graduated in 2001.

Excerpt 3.4 Interview with Han-Young (November, 2012)

Eun-Yong: What was the reason for leaving North Korea?

Han-Young: I didn't want to go to military. I saw seniors going to military and suffering from malnutrition. I heard that the boys who did not go through hardship are more likely to suffer from malnutrition, and since I didn't go through that much hardship, I was scared. My father could not get me out of military, and he agreed on the idea of me going to China. There were many people who have been to China those days, and I had a sense of what is going to be like in China.

Military service is mandatory for all North Korean males for ten years after graduating high school. He decided to get around this state regulation, which reflects the people's quiet yet growing suspicion and hostility against the regime, and the weakening of state control over the people at the time.

Excerpt 3.5 Interview with Han-Young (November, 2012)

Han-Young: I first found about South Korea in Grade 9. I saw a Korean movie. What we learned in school was that South Korea was an extremely poor country, and it was a colony of the U.S. But I realized it was a lie.

He had better access to information about South Korea at the time than other North Koreans.

South Korean CDs and DVDs are now known to be widely circulating in North Korea particularly in the border regions. They are the target of harsh state punishment, but the underground circulation is reported to be significant. As in the other accounts of North Koreans first finding out about South Korea (e.g., Demick, 2010), they characterize what they had been taught by the state as "lies". These discoveries began as individual shock and secret anger, and have been becoming more widely shared knowledge in North Korea through these underground routes of information. What is notable here is that he did not have the intention to go to South Korea at this time, and, as we will see, for several years more.

Excerpt 3.6 Interview with Han-Young (November, 2012)

Han-Young: There were some relatives in China. I was going to go to them, but I lost my way and found a pastor instead. I went to a Korean-Chinese church. Pastors from South Korea came once in three months. I did Bible Study. This pastor (who used to

come to China regularly) then came to live in China. And I began to live with him. I lived with the pastor for about three years.

Han-Young never had exposure to Christianity before going to China. At the point when he lost his family support and state-sanctioned status, Christianity came to him as a crucial help. There was emerging a strong network of Korean-Chinese Christians and South Korean Christians in China with the goal of helping and evangelizing the North Koreans. To the defectors who had just crossed the river, evangelical Christianity was a generous provider and supporter. As the Christian help became more known among those who are getting ready to defect, it is reported that there is a saying among them that after crossing the river, they need to find the red light of the cross placed at the top of church buildings and they will live (Choi, G., 2006).

Excerpt 3.7 Interview with Han-Young (November, 2012)

Eun-Yong: Didn't you feel uncomfortable when you first heard about Christianity?

Han-Young: It was not discomfort, but I was not sure whether I was being used or not. They did not really tell me about what it is, but they just told me to read the Bible. So reading the Bible was my work. I was reading, and I attended a revival meeting, and that was when I received Jesus. I didn't doubt since then. The pastor was a good person too.

Han-Young accepted the Christian faith. This also meant he could enter an alternative (and perhaps the only) community where he could stay as a legitimate member. He said his daily schedule was to go to the Bible Reading Class, hosted by Korean-Chinese for North Koreans, and had dinners with the boys there. Gender segregation in these shelters was one way to regulate any potential sexual intercourse. He also had Chinese tutoring twice a week. He said he was luckier than other defectors in getting a lot of help. He could pass as a Korean-Chinese, and there were many South Koreans where he was living, so had a fairly secure status.

Excerpt 3.8 Interview with Han-Young (November, 2012)

Han-Young: I was not teased for not being good at Chinese, and I was not suspected of being illegal. I was living quite comfortably.

Eun-Yong: When did you begin to have those thoughts of coming to South Korea?

Han-Young: It was almost towards the end of the three years. It was a long time, but I did a lot of things. I went on business trips with the pastor, and when the pastor goes to South Korea, I lived alone there. That town in China, it is now my second home.

Han-Young was thinking that staying inside the Christian community in China could be a sustainable home for him. He was planning his future there, even though he knew about South Korea. As we have seen with other cases, the early defectors did not immediately think about going to South Korea. This was the case with Wha-Hong in the previous chapter who came to South Korea to get a legal status to work in China. And we will see that this was also the case with Hae-Mee in the next section. Contrary to his expectations, the South Korean missionary was planning a very different future for Han-Young.

Excerpt 3.9 Interview with Han-Young (November, 2012)

Han-Young: I was sort of expecting that the pastor would send me to university. But the pastor's goal was to send me to North Korea (as a missionary). I began to realize, during the period of three years, that my expectation and the pastor's expectation were very different. And since I was making Chinese friends, I was thinking of having China as my home. But I realized that it wasn't possible, because of my status problem. As I realized that it was not possible for me to go to university in China, I began to think of the option of going to South Korea.

Han-Young did not follow the expectation of the pastor, but I later read of stories of other North Korean defectors who chose to follow such expectations. I was introduced to a book during my fieldwork written by a South Korean missionary working in China (Choi, 2006), entitled *naerae jookeodo joseupneda* (내래 죽어도 좋습네다) or “It is okay even if I die” in North Korean dialect. It described the missionary's work from late 1990s to early 2000s in the secret shelters for North Korean defectors in China. This particular missionary ran nearly 90 shelters across China, and he found Bible study to be an effective means to evangelize them and regulate what seemed to



him to be their often violent and high-tempered characters.

According to the book, although Bible reading was a forced thing at first, many of the North Korean defectors began to see the value and “life” in the Word, and began to voluntarily study the Bible. Many became believers and some of them could preach the teachings of the Bible to the group in the shelter. Then the missionary began to envision sending them to North Korea. Not everyone accepted this, but many did accept this vision as their own. “It was okay even if they died”, because they wanted to take this life-giving Word to their families in North Korea. The stories of these “North Korean missionaries” to North Korea mostly ended with their imprisonment, execution, or unconfirmed information about their life or death in North Korea. These were shocking stories to me, inspiring in one sense, uneasy and unsettling in another.

Han-Young seemed to have arrived in one of these shelters, when Bible reading spread to become a prevalent practice (Jung, J.H., 2011). The defectors’ insecure social status in China makes them dependent on the Christians, and the missionaries had the North Korean migrants do what they believe to be the most “life-giving” for humans. As J. Jung, J.H. (2011) shows in his ethnography in one of these shelters in China, some of the migrants would be paid to write their assigned Bible chapters for the day. Reading and writing the Bible itself was seen as spiritual training beneficial for them.

Excerpt 3.10 Interview with Han-Young (November, 2012)

Han-Young: It was the internet that helped me a lot. I began to exchange emails with missionaries in South Korea, and it was a lot of fun. I once watched a South Korean TV program through internet and saw a North Korean migrant who became a university student and MCing the program with Shin Dong Yup (a South Korean comedian). I began to be curious about how the North Korean migrants lived in South Korea, and then I found about the special university admission regulation for the North Korean migrants.

Eun-Yong: Why did you want to go to university?

Han-Young: Since I left North Korea, I was thinking about going to university in China. I did not like studying, but I thought I was smart, and if I just begin studying, I would

do well in studying. Of course, now, I don't think I am that smart.

With his elite family background, he wanted to pursue the academic route. After five years in China, including the three years he lived with the pastor, he came to South Korea in 2006, when he was 23. Through the internet access and his Christian network, he found what the South Korean state provides in this respect and could plan his travel to South Korea.

Excerpt 3.11 Interview with Han-Young (November, 2012)

Han-Young: We chose the route to Myanmar instead of Mongolia, because Myanmar does not have a North Korean embassy, so even if we get caught we thought we would not be sent back to North Korea. However, we could not find the South Korean embassy and we were caught instead by Myanmar police and imprisoned. They did not listen to us to send us to the South Korean embassy. When there were outside guests to the prison, I ran to the front and yelled (in English) "I am a South Korean! Send me to South Korean embassy!" I was beaten, but soon they called for me and had me talk to the embassy by phone. The next week, people came to take me. This kind of thing had never happened before, the embassy office coming to prison to take a North Korean. It was always brokers taking North Koreans to the embassy. It was a dangerous plan, but it worked. I saw an old North Korean man in that Myanmar prison, who had been waiting there for two years. I was scared I could become like him.

Unlike China, Myanmar state acknowledges the North Korean citizenship of the defectors, but unless they get to the South Korean embassy, imprisons them and deports them back to China. In this critical moment in his life, Han-Young was picked out. He was continually receiving the incredible help available to him. I first met him in Toronto Church in 2011, as a university student from South Korea majoring in Business. He was there with the help of Seoul Church and Toronto Church to have him learn English, and he introduced me to his community in Seoul Church.

### **3.2 Hae-Mee**

Hae-Mee was also from a relatively wealthy city in North Korea, from an educated,

affluent family. Her father was an accountant, and her mother was a doctor. Hae-Mee went to a three-year vocational college after graduating high school.

Excerpt 3.12 Interview with Hae-Mee (September, 2012)

Hae-Mee: The college program was too long and so I dropped out in 5 months. I worked at the company where my father worked as supervisor. Then I did a 1-year accounting program at the executive school of finance. Then I was recommended to another company. There was a 55-year-old woman who was doing the accounting job. She had to retire, but she would not let go of her job. So I had to do simple chores even though I graduated the school. My parents often had fights because of that. I worked there for about six months.

Her parents seem to have a strong drive to educate and secure social status for their children.

Hae-Mee leaving North Korea had to do with what seemed to be unfair treatment and relegation to inferior status.

Her hometown was one of the cities in North Korea closest to China. She could see the people and houses on the other side of the border. According to a media report on this city, there is a saying that people in this city all dream about defecting from North Korea.

Excerpt 3.13 Interview with Hae-Mee (September, 2012)

Hae-Mee: My hometown was right next to China. I thought I would like to go to China too. In the hotel in my town, the owner would travel to China often and would take the accountant. They needed lots of people fluent in Chinese. A Chinese company came to the town too. I thought, "Maybe I will go to China and learn Chinese." I didn't tell my parents. They sponsored my education but I was in such workplace (that was unfair to her). My older sister had to study for six years in medical school, and my little brother was attending high school. [It wasn't easy financially.] So I decided to learn Chinese and come back.

Transnational trade was the context where the value of language skill emerged most clearly in North Korea. Chinese was emerging as a valued form of symbolic capital. Hae-Mee's motivation to leave North Korea was to learn Chinese in China. Having Chinese proficiency

seemed to promise a better life in North Korea. So she decided to leave secretly, like many other North Korean defectors (Demick, 2010). Sharing such information might just cause unnecessary dangers to the ones who know. Her plan was to come back to her hometown.

Excerpt 3.14 Interview with Hae-Mee (September, 2012)

Eun-Yong: Did you have any discontent with the North Korean system?

Hae-Mee: Frankly, in my young age, to my eyes, China looked so nice. China was a colored capitalism, colored socialism. I wanted to visit such a country someday. I wanted to know about the life there. When I asked my sister if she wanted to go to China, she said no.

The color of socialism was red. China had a *reddish* capitalism, and perhaps a *bluish* socialism. Life bordering a semi-capitalist state bred immense curiosity for her. She crossed that ideological border in 2007, when she was 21.

Excerpt 3.15 Interview with Hae-Mee (September, 2012)

Hae-Mee: I left North Korea with my aunt. She did merchant work across the border. We went with the Chinese people. In March, the river doesn't melt yet. It doesn't even take five minutes [to cross the border]. I would not be able to do it now. I was young and brave.

Her aunt connected her to a Chinese family in a rural area. She lived with the family for four years and helped with their work in the farm.

Excerpt 3.16 Interview with Hae-Mee (September, 2012)

Hae-Mee: They were the Chinese Han people, so at first, I didn't know any of their language and our food was different too. I think the most difficult thing at first was the food. There was no kimchi, they didn't have hot pepper, they had lots of oil, lots of meat. For the first two years, I think I mostly ate *rameon*. They had *Shin Rameon*. There were not many North Koreans in my area. I was young so nobody really cared. I got an ID too. With my ID, I could travel around as well.

Her desire for Chinese proficiency was strong enough to make her endure the hard manual labor

on the farm, different food and culture, and loneliness. She did not have too many security problems.

Excerpt 3.17 Interview with Hae-Mee (September, 2012)

Hae-Mee: I always had the idea that I will learn Chinese and go back home. I thought I needed to learn to speak Chinese but also learn the letters. The daughter in the house was a professor in nursing. She would bring test papers, and brought me a dictionary too. The son was also a university student. In the villages, people don't study much, but that family was a studious family. I could study the letters occasionally, write on the back of the test papers, and watch TV. After about two years, I could do basic conversation. I worked in the field, also in restaurants, and also did house chores. What I liked the most was that I didn't have to speak Korean for the four years. I met my parents in two years, and at first, I couldn't remember Korean.

She eventually made contact with her parents in North Korea. North Koreans in the border area are known to use phones using the network of China (illegal in North Korean terms) which makes it possible to talk to people outside. Not even talking to her parents for years, Hae-Mee had isolated herself to practice Chinese. She engaged herself in a form of study-abroad for language learning, and a form of full “Chinese immersion.” The Chinese family was literate and educated, which helped her acquire both oral and written Chinese. The family were also Christians. It was an underground home church on Sundays, a thriving form of evangelical Christianity in China.

Excerpt 3.18 Interview with Hae-Mee (September, 2012)

Eun-Yong: How often did the home church meet?

Hae-Mee: On Sundays. Many houses took turns holding the meeting.

Eun-Yong: Were there many houses like that?

Hae-Mee: Yes, there were many. Now that I think about it, there were many home churches. At the home church I heard things and prayed a lot.

Hae-Mee's situation led her to accept the Christian faith.

Excerpt 3.19 Interview with Hae-Mee (September, 2012)

Hae-Mee: The mom in China was so nice to me, even though I was young and complaining a lot. I felt love. I wanted to make money, so I wanted to work in a watermelon vinyl greenhouse. It is really hot in there. And she said don't do that, you are too young, I will do it, and send the money to your mom in North Korea. I once took lunch to her, and she was sweating so hard. I was touched. What is the most difficult at first is loneliness. So that is why I depended more on God. When I am sick, I can't tell even my parents. They can't come. So what I can't say to my parents and friends, I prayed.

In her struggle with loneliness, and through the sacrificial help of the Christian family, she gradually became a Christian. She said had her mom in North Korea, and another mom in China. She later found a relative living in South Korea.

Excerpt 3.20 Interview with Hae-Mee (September, 2012)

Hae-Mee: There was a distant relative, an uncle in South Korea. And by chance, we got in contact. We talked on the phone and he told me to come, that I was young, and I didn't really have anybody in China. At first I thought how I could I live in South Korea. And my uncle sent a missionary. I met him in Shimyang, and so that's how I came here.

Her initial plan had been to go back to North Korea with Chinese proficiency, but after her investment in Chinese, she could not go back.

Excerpt 3.21 Interview with Hae-Mee (September, 2012)

Hae-Mee: At first, my parents told me to come back. And then, my mom said she thought about it, and she told me not to come back to North Korea. She said I have already lived in China and in a capitalist society, and I won't be able to live in a socialist society. So they told me just to go to South Korea. My uncle got in touch with my parents too. Uncle told me to come to South Korea and study. I didn't know how to apply or how to study in South Korea, but I heard about it from the missionary on my way to South Korea, and in Hanawon. I do like studying, and I have worked hard in China, and what I can do is studying first. I can work for money as much as I want later in the future. So I decided to study first.

Having crossed the socialist/ capitalist border once, going back to North Korea did not make sense to her and her parents. She needed to continue to make the linguistic and educational investment. She left for South Korea in 2011 when she was 25, leaving behind her Chinese

family. Christianity figured importantly in this emotional process.

Excerpt 3.22 Interview with Hae-Mee (September, 2012)

Hae-Mee: When I was going to South Korea, I said I will make money, learn skills, and come back. They let me go. They prayed for me when I was leaving. When I think about it now, I am so thankful. And I really came here safely. When I was leaving, my mom in China told me to study, to read, and to write. She told me to recite the Lord's Prayers and to pray. Then I won't have bad people around. I was really scared when I was passing through Thailand and Laos, so I prayed. In Hanawon, I prayed everyday.

The Protestant church in Hanawon is called “*Hana kyo-hoe*”, or the Hana Church. The church had daily early morning prayer meetings (새벽기도, a long tradition and prevalent practice of Korean Christianity).

Excerpt 3.23 Interview with Hae-Mee (September, 2012)

Hae-Mee: When I got to South Korea, I was totally on my own. So when I was in Hanawon, I went to the morning prayer meeting every day. I really went diligently to the meetings on 5 AM. I volunteered to manage the machines. The pastor at Hanawon really liked it.

From Hanawon, she was introduced to Ezra School. When I first met Hae-Mee in 2012 preparing to go to university in Ezra School, it had been only a year since she had arrived in South Korea. She was the most recent migrant to South Korea among the research participants. During the period of my fieldwork, she studied in Ezra School, went to a top university in Seoul, and is continuing to participate in her church.

### **3.3 Mee-Soo**

Mee-Soo's first encounter with Christianity was in South Korea. She also left North Korea by herself, leaving behind her family. She had problems in her workplace, and the only way out for her was to leave North Korea. She left in 2007 when she was 21. People knew much

more about South Korea, and from the beginning, she headed straight for South Korea. Below is the text she wrote in one of our tutoring sessions.

Excerpt 3.24 Essay by Mee-Soo during tutoring (November, 2012)

I left my hometown in April of 2007 and crossed the Tumen River to enter China. The first city I went to was Yanji in China and then I arrived at Beijing through Shim Yang. After staying there for a day I left for Thailand and I was immediately caught by police which was one of the steps to be connected to Korean embassy. This travel from Yanji to Thailand took ten days in total. I was put in a prison in Bangkok and I stayed there for almost six months. Finally, I obtained an entry permit and I entered South Korea in September of 2007.

Thailand is where the majority of North Korean defectors choose to pass through in their journey. China, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Laos have stricter border patrol, and once they arrest them, hand the defectors to North Korean authorities. The Thai government, on other hand, allows the defectors illegally entering the country to resettle in South Korea. This follows South Korean law recognizing North Koreans as citizens of South Korea, but the details of this sensitive issue are not made clear by the governments. The defectors are put in an immigration detention center in Bangkok.

Excerpt 3.25 Interview with Mee-Soo (November, 2012)

Eun-Yong: Was Hanawon some help to you?

Mee-Soo: Hanawon was not so much of help for me. Rather Thailand was helpful for me. The time I spent there. I could cry out as much as I could there. After crying and mourning for so long, then finally the thoughts of what I should be doing began to emerge. The helpers did not help a lot. They just came and talked a lot.

The defection was particularly painful for Mee-Soo. She needed to deal with her feelings of uprootedness. She also expressed anger why she was the one who had to go through this painful process.

Excerpt 3.26 Interview with Mee-Soo (November, 2012)



Mee-Soo: It was very difficult to maintain a positive mind. I was too young for that maybe. I was twenty-one. I saw everything only in a negative light. I thought I was the only unfortunate one, and I thought everybody should have the experience of being separated from their parents. There were some people I had to meet. It was through this one person, with whom I could build trust that my heart began to open up.

Eun-Yong: Where did you meet this person?

Mee-Soo: In church.

Eun-Yong: How did that happen?

Mee-Soo: She was my math teacher, same age as me. She did not have the same experience as me, but her pain was greater than mine, so she could understand me, I could be understood, embraced by her. And she actually felt the pain of others as if it was her own pain.

Christianity was not in her interest at first, but she got the help she needed from the people she met at church.

Excerpt 3.27 Interview with Mee-Soo (November, 2012)

Eun-Yong: How did you come to church after coming out of Hanawon?

Mee-Soo: A lady living in the same apartment building district told me about alternative school. She was a member of a new settler organization. I was not interested in faith at all. I was only looking for a school.

She first began going to an alternative school, then she attended Seoul Church. By the time I met her, she had been attending church for four years.

Excerpt 3.28 Interview with Mee-Soo (November, 2012)

Eun-Yong: And now you have faith?

Mee-Soo: It happened like light rain slowly wetting my clothes (happening slowly and almost unconsciously, but substantially). At first, I had all the negative emotions you could think of: anger, fear, helplessness. And I did not have the power to control them, to push them down. They took me over. But now ... those emotions are almost non-existent. I have the mental strength to push them down, and also other people are pushing them down with me.

She made deep friendships in church in which she felt her pain was understood. I heard the metaphor of light rain from another student at Ezra School, who said, “You know the saying that you don’t realize you were getting wet by the drizzles. (가랑비에 옷 젖는 줄 모른다.) It was like

that to me, because I heard [of Christianity] so continuously.” How this student explained his conversion was very similar to how Mee-Soo described her conversion. Mee-Soo later expressed the difficulty of finally accepting Christian faith, as she was telling me about a non-believing friend.

Excerpt 3.29 Interview with Mee-Soo (November, 2012)

Mee-Soo: I can be patient until this friend becomes a believer, because I know for myself how difficult it was to believe.

She said it took years of inner struggles until Christianity began to make sense to her.

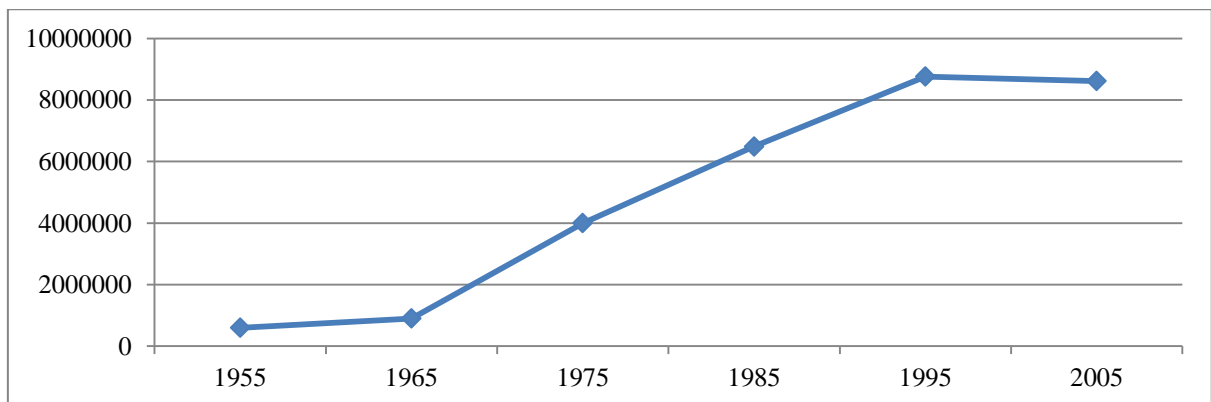
For the three North Korean young adults presented here (Han-Young, Hae-Mee, and Mee-Soo), evangelical Christianity provided crucial support especially because they were alone. Han-Young found a community to be legitimately a part of; Hae-Mee found a family and a school; and Mee-Soo found a friend whom she could trust. Evangelical Christianity also provided an identity that was more empowering than being one of the migrants or refugees. To me, this relates to the way religion alleviate the tensions of neoliberal states. These young adults, coming from a corporate culture of North Korea, found their social enclaves in which they could find solidarity and meaning in the increasingly globalizing societies outside North Korea.

#### **4. Declining evangelicals**

Protestant Christianity in South Korea, which is mainly, as we have seen, evangelical (Lee, 2006) reached its peak in the 1990s, and since has started to decline (Figure 3.1). It still has a major presence in South Korea and in the world, but the rate of growth turned negative in the 1990s. Whereas there is growth of fundamental Christianity elsewhere in the neoliberalizing world, such as the U.S., Africa, and South America (Castells, 2010; Han, H., 2016), South Korea

is following the western European trend, in which religion is losing its influence in the society. The positive reputation and social legitimacy of Protestant Christianity, which was one important aspect of its growth (Choi, 2002), have been falling. In my view, this has to do with the demise of the Cold-War tension, which weakened the link between being a conservative evangelical Christian and being a legitimate South Korean (opposed to communist North Korea). Moreover, particularly into the 2010s, there has been numerous scandals regarding criminal acts and excessive pursuit of wealth and power by some high profile evangelicals (Lee, 2006; Han et al., 2014).

Figure 3.1 Population of Protestant Christians in South Korea



Sources: Statistics of Korea for figures from 1985. Choi (2002) for figures before 1985.

Critics of Korean Christianity claim that there is an influence of the evangelical-capitalist affinity on both the growth and the decline of the Protestants (Han, Han, & Kim, 2014). Evangelical churches in South Korea have grown based on logic similar to that of liberal market ideology. While the Catholic Church in South Korea is subsumed under a system of the wider Catholic Church, the Protestant churches in South Korea mainly operate as self-reliant, independent churches (Han et al., 2014). The minister of each Protestant church must

demonstrate a high level of “entrepreneurship” (Han et al., 2014, 1358), with strong will to start up an institution on their own and with strategic thinking in its competitive relations with other churches.

This strong “church individualism” resulted in the spectacular growth of some individual churches. However, it also resulted in excessive competition among the churches, and excessive accommodation to church members. “Gospel of Prosperity” (Pennycook & Coutand-Marin, 2003; Han et al., 2014; Han, J., 2010) which promises material wealth and physical health to the believers, has been perhaps a key marketing strategy of the churches to appeal to their religious consumers. Pre-occupation with the consumers, inward-looking tendencies, and neglect of social issues resulted in development of resentment among church-goers and decline of their church association. Much like the neoliberal economy of South Korea, there has been strong stratification among the churches (from small churches to mega-churches), and saturation of the religious market (where it is hard to find new Christian converts).

The falling reputation and social legitimacy of Christianity is influencing how the North Koreans are receiving Christianity. Hanawon, the state-run educational facility for all incoming North Korean migrants, has religious worship services on Sundays. The North Korean migrants can choose which religious service to go each Sunday: either the Protestant service, the Catholic mass, or the Buddhist service, or not going anywhere at all. In my interview with Pastor Kim in Seoul Church, I asked him about the proportion of Christians among North Koreans in Hanawon.

Excerpt 3.34 Interview with lead pastor in Seoul Church (February, 2013)

Eun-Yong: In Hanawon, they go to religious meetings on Sundays. I heard that the majority comes to the Protestant Christian service.

Pastor Kim: That is changing these days. The current of South Korea is directly reflected in Hanawon, as a small version of the society. There are more negative views about Christianity these days. So I heard more people are going to Buddhism.

Pastor Kim introduced me to a pastor who had been working in the Protestant church in Hanawon for several years. In my interview with him, I also asked him about the proportion of Christians among the North Korean migrants in Hanawon.

Excerpt 3.35 Interview with lead pastor of Hana Church (February, 2013)

Eun-Yong: What is the percentage of those going to Christianity in Hanawon?

Pastor Lee: I would say Protestant Christianity is about 60 to 65%. Buddhism about 15%, and Catholic about 10%. There are others or no religion. Those who have been to church at least once are about 80%. There's been a decline. The missionaries who do saving work in China have been declining. The number of defectors themselves is decreasing. The influence of South Korean church itself is declining... so even the people in Hanawon are not strongly recommended with religions activity.

In the 2010s, the Chinese government has been severely cracking down on missionaries as much as they do with illegal North Koreans in China, and many of the missionaries have been deported back to South Korea. The Kim Jeong Eun regime, which came to power in 2012, has also been severely policing its border, and the number of defectors has significantly decreased.

Jeon, Yoo, Eom, & Kim (2009) conducted a comprehensive survey which tracked the choice of religion of North Korean migrants in South Korea in 2001, 2004, and 2007. In 2001 and 2004, around 70% of North Korean migrants responded that they had religious affiliations, and almost all of those who were religious went to Protestant Christian churches (100% in 2001, 98.7% in 2004). This means that around 70% of North Korean migrants in South Korea were affiliated with evangelical Christianity in 2001 and 2004. However, in 2007, this figure drops to 53%.

Another survey by the North Korean Human Rights Information Center was conducted about the religious choices of North Korean migrants living in South Korea since the mid-2000s. According to their report, the number of Protestant Christians among the North Korean migrants in South Korea dropped from 55% in 2006 to 35% in 2011. The North Korean migrants with

“no religion” showed the most significant increase from 30% in 2006 to 45% in 2011, outnumbering the Protestant Christians for the first time in 2011.

Table 3.1 North Korean migrants’ religious affiliation in percentage

Religion	Year		
	2006	2009	2011
Protestant	55	40	35
No religion	30	35	45
Catholic	5	15	15
Buddhism	5	7	3

Note. Adapted from North Korean Human Rights Information Center

The decline of South Korean evangelical Christianity and of missionary work in China is a major backdrop to the dropping number of Christians among the North Korean migrants. With the falling reputation of Christianity, in 2010s, the Chinese government has been severely cracking down on missionaries as much as they do with North Korean migrants in China, and many of the missionaries have been evicted. As Pastor Lee has mentioned, this also has to do with the recent tendencies that the underground migration to South Korea is becoming less dependent on missionaries. Instead, there is increasing reliance on brokers, who support the refugees’ travel to South Korea for profit. They are usually hired by the North Koreans already settled in South Korea and who want to bring their family members to South Korea. As the number of missionaries decreased, and as the risk for North Korean migrants rose, the expertise of the brokers, who are also operating secretly, has become crucial. It has become practically impossible for a North Korean refugee in China to make it to South Korea without a broker. The role of Christianity was stronger for the earlier North Korean refugees. As a result, the recent North Korean migrants have had less personal experience with evangelical Christians in their

journeys to South Korea.

Apart from the overall decline of evangelical Christianity, the influence of Christianity decreases also as the North Korean migrants settle in South Korea. They become less vulnerable and less dependent on the church. Jeon, Yoo, Eom, & Kim (2009) asked those North Korean migrants who once participated in Protestant Christianity then left the church their reasons of leaving the church. There were largely two reasons: disappointment with the Christians, and their living conditions improved and they became busier. The social factors in South Korea influenced their choices the most: when they have jobs, when they have more income, and when their educational levels were lower, they were more likely to leave the church.

Chung (2008) points out that there is also the realization on the part of the North Korean migrants that Christianity is not the absolute norm in South Korea.

For many North Korean refugees, it is through the Christian missionaries that they experience South Korean culture for the first time. Christianity and the Christian churches are often seen as the South's ideological power structure, an analogue to *Juche* ideology (the state ideology of self-reliance) and the communist Labor Party in the North. It is interpreted as the path to social success in South Korea, the way that party loyalty was in North Korea. The missionaries, both consciously and unconsciously, project Christianity as the cultural identity of South Korea itself. The message is conveyed that to be a Christian is to be a cultural member of South Korea. The problem emerges when the North Korean border-crossers realize that Christianity in the South is not an absolute ideology the way that *Juche* is in the North. (Chung, 2008, 21 - 22)

Many of the North Korean migrants, in fact, point out the similarities between North Korean communism and Christianity (Demick, 2010), such as the regularly repeated reflections on self and others in communal meetings in North Korea, and the repeated repentance prayer rituals in church services. Many also note the similar tone of the ten principles of North Korean ideology and the Ten Commandments in the Bible. Officially called "the ten principles for

establishment of a monolithic ideological system”, they include:

1. We must give our all in the struggle to unify the entire society with the revolutionary ideology of the Great Leader Kim Il-Sung.
2. We must honor the Great Leader comrade Kim Il-Sung with all our loyalty.
3. We must make absolute the authority of the Great Leader comrade Kim Il-Sung.
4. We must make the Great Leader Kim Il-Sung’s revolutionary ideology our faith and make his instructions our creed.
5. We must adhere strictly to the principle of unconditional obedience in carrying out the Great Leader comrade Kim Il-Sung’s instructions. ...

There are also similar mechanisms of religious hypocrisy; when they were in North Korea they had to constantly prove their firm belief and love for their leader and in its ideology as much as the Christians do among themselves. North Koreans did not like having to repeat what they had disliked so much and left behind. Some of the North Koreans do get inspired by the Bible, but some do not.

By the end of my fieldwork in 2014, many of the participants had left Seoul Church for different reasons. Chul-Kyoo left the church, clearly saying he did not like Christianity. Those who were still at Seoul Church at that point were Hae-Mee and Sung-Chul. Han-Young and Mee-Soo were still in Christian institutions, although outside of Seoul Church. The commonality of these four young adults who stayed in church was that they were alone in South Korea. Continued participation in Christianity took place among those who were most in need of support.

## **5. Conclusion**

As much as the North Korean migrants were significant to the South Korean state, they were significant to the South Korean evangelicals. For the state, the migrants proved its legitimacy. For the evangelicals, the migrants were important part of their mission for the



Korean nation and “all nations”. Although relying on different bases, the state and the evangelicals shared a sense of mission for Korean nation-building and unification, and thus a particular interest in North Korean migrants which is distinguished from the interest in other migrant groups in need of social service. The evangelicals played a crucial role in supporting the North Korean migrants and in filling the gaps of state support for the North Korean migrants, in China, in the third countries, and in South Korea. The church provided the space for the North Korean migrants caught between the nationalist discourse of unification and the globalizing state with inflows of migrant groups. It was the mediating space of the tensions between state policies for the North Korean migrants, which professed to be democratic to its citizens, and the unequal realities in which the migrants could not be South Korean citizens without the intervening support of the church.

Although in decline, evangelical Christianity still represents the strongest religion among North Korean migrants. The legacy of the strong affinity between the North Korean migrants and the church was still present when I first visited Seoul Church in 2011. It was a vibrant community of North Koreans where I met all of the eight focal participants. By participating in Christian communities, the North Korean young adults had access to community, support, and resources. It was a gateway into the South Korean society, and an intra-ethnic zone (Jung, J.H., 2011) between the North and South Koreans. It also provided them with social legitimacy. They could imagine themselves as a bridge between the two Koreas and leaders of the society. The church highlighted their uniqueness, their strengths, and their special roles in the coming unification age. The evangelicals, while providing resource to the North Korean migrants, taught and disciplined them, trying to have them personally meet their God through the Bible, with whom they enjoy personal revelations and intimate relationship. The South

Korean evangelicals had intimate ties to the North Korean migrants, which were increasingly in tension with the interests of the North Korean migrants as they settled in South Korea.

A major part of North Korean ministry is the educational ministry for North Korean young adults. North Korean young adults, who had taken massive risks in order to re-invent their lives in South Korea, strongly desired to acquire social mobility. English, as we will see in the next chapter, became key venue through which social stratification is being (re)produced in neoliberal South Korea, thus, a key area which the North Korean young adults had to tackle in order to gain social mobility. However, their low educational background in North Korea, and particularly their low exposure to English, made the evangelicals' educational support crucial help.

Many of the young adults who decided to take the *academic* route to social mobility, come to church for the extensive help it provides. Education, and particularly English education, became the key nexus between the South Korean evangelicals and the North Korean migrants. The next chapter, Chapter 4, discusses how North Korean young adults often become academic, or learners, in South Korea, and particularly learners of English, and the difficulty they had with English. Chapter 5 discusses English teaching provided by the evangelicals for the North Koreans. The diversities, struggles, and tensions in these next discussions, in my view, explain the competing interests of the different social actors from a linguistic perspective.

## Chapter 4

### Learning (how) to learn English

This chapter examines when and how English becomes salient to the North Korean young adults settling in South Korea. This is the central chapter of this thesis where I have tried to tackle the question of “why” the mechanism of English works the way it does in South Korea. I had the privilege of pursuing this inquiry through the experiences of North Korean young adults. Their socialization process, I believe, is helpful in understand the regime of English of South Korea, in a way not possible if the same research was done with South Korean young adults because the existing structure is already naturalized to them. The North Korean young adults’ struggle in learning the new structure and having to survive in it as ex-socialists and newcomers to a neoliberal society is a privileged window into understanding South Korea’s English Problem, as well as the issue of Global English in the new economy. I have attempted to show the *de facto* policies (Shohamy, 2001) of English, that is, what people actually do regarding English and the actual consequences of the English policies.

What emerged in this process is what I call *Test English*. It is a dominant social practice, a particular way of “learning” English, among the young adults in South Korea who are engaged in the neoliberal competition for social mobility. It involves particular form of texts: i) lists of vocabulary in vocabulary books, and ii) grammatical explanations and passages (written and sometimes oral) of academic/ business English mostly found in “test prep books (문제집)” (and sometimes in university English course material). It involves particular activities: vocabulary and rule memorization, and silent, speedy test-taking of comprehension questions. This particular social practice of Test English was different from another form of learning English

emerging with globalization, which I call *Communicative English*, which involves oral and spontaneous conversations. It was also different from the traditional way of English learning, the Grammar-Translation (GT) method, which is intensive reading and translation of classic texts. It was different from *dictation method* which I found used among some of the Korean English learners. It was a form of practice in the particular context of South Korea, which the North Korean young adults were socialized into with often negative emotions of confusion, frustration, and helplessness.

This chapter will mainly describe Test English in the context of the “educational fever”, “test fever”, and “English fever” of South Korea. It will show that learning, and particularly English learning, is centrally about social mobility and status in Korean context. This explains why North Korean young adults did not study in North Korea and why they are studying in South Korea. It will also show that Test English works in a way that reinforces the English Divide, or the existing social status of the non-elites. This had to do with how Test English does not allow “learning” or the development of English ability, and the conditions of the non-elite young adults which make them resist against other ways of English learning. The North Korean young adults at the bottom end of the divide were highly vulnerable to this dynamic of reproduction of inequality.

I will first discuss the long Korean tradition of testing system for social selection in the *unspoken* powerful language of the society (from Chinese to English). Then I will explain the social structure of English in the two Koreas (briefly regarding North Korea and more extensively regarding South Korea), particularly about the shift in the status of English in the post-Cold War era of globalization. For South Korea, I will discuss the English policies of the state, top employers, universities, and schools, and the growth of the English private market,

which all have contributed to the construction of the regime of Test English. Then I will describe the experiences of North Korean young adults regarding English first in North Korea and then in South Korea. I use the stories of Wha-Hong, Hae-Mee, Bee-Eun, and Chul-Kyoo as illustrations of the power of English language, and the power of Test English. Many of them, when they were in North Korea, did not have an interest in learning English or in learning in general, and they had not thought they would be learning a new language in South Korea. However, they gradually learned to become “learners”, learners of English and particularly learners of *Test English*.

### **1. Testing in the unspoken language**

Testing system has a long tradition in Korea and other Chinese-influenced East Asian countries (Piller & Cho, 2013). Scholars agree that the concept of meritocracy originated from the theses of Ancient China’s philosopher Confucius in 6<sup>th</sup> century BC (Price, 2014). Qin and Han Dynasties of Ancient China developed a system of national examination for selecting its civil officers. In emulation of China, Koryeo (918 – 1392) – then royal dynasty of Korea – set up its system of civil officer examination in 958 AD (Seth, 2002). This tradition has continued through Koryeo and Chosun dynasties (1392 – 1910) for almost a millennium, until it was abolished in 1894 as part of Chosun’s modernizing reformation policies. This traditional civil officer exam system was, however, not a complete meritocracy. Only the sons of aristocrats could take the exam.

Knowledge in traditional Korea came from the classic texts of Chinese philosophy, written in Chinese characters. Korean people did not have its own writing system for its oral language. The common people were mostly illiterate, and the aristocrats used Chinese characters,

called *hanja* (한자), to write its language. It was King Sejong of Chosun Dynasty who invented a Korean writing system called *hangeul* (한글) in 1443. *Hangeul* was easier to learn even for the common people<sup>4</sup>, but the aristocrats insisted on using *hanja* long after *hangeul* was created.

Education in traditional Korea was valued as both a means of self-cultivation and a way of achieving status and power. Koreans highly esteemed the written word and the prodigious efforts to master the accumulated body of literary and scholarly works. The examination system, based on the mastery of Chinese classics and literary skill, played a central role in allocating bureaucratic positions and the social status and privileges that were attached to them. (Seth, 2002, 9)

Such practice of extensive studying was not feasible for the common people. One could endure exercising such “prodigious efforts” because it was means of self-cultivation and also, for many people, the state exam was “virtually the only route to high government office”. Literacy in *hanja* and in Chinese literature has been mark of learning and scholarship well into modern South Korea.

During the Japanese colonial rule, all Koreans, both the aristocrats and the peasants, were denied access to education and social mobility in relation to the Japanese. Once the colonial experience and egalitarian ideas pulled down the traditional distinction between aristocrats and common people, the desire for learning which translates to desire for status and power, exploded among the general population into what Seth (2002) calls Korea’s *educational fever*. The educational fever in modern Korea is, at least in part, a reaction to this long closure to

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<sup>4</sup> Chinese letters are difficult to learn all the more because they are ideograms not phonograms. For example, English and Korean letters are phonograms. With twenty or more letters, they can represent the sound of infinite number of words. With Chinese, each word is a new shape representing arbitrary sound and meaning. That is, there is infinite number of letters to learn, although there is limited number of frequently used letters. To read Chinese letters, one needs to memorize the shape of each letter in connection with both its sound and meaning.

learning for the non-elites during its long history of the monarchic dynasties and recent Japanese colonial rule (Seth, 2002).

Korea after its independence has emphasized equal opportunity in education, using its national language. With the Confucius tradition, education in Korea is strongly linked to social mobility, both in the North and the South. We will see below, through the experience of North Korean young adults, that in North Korea, the link between education and status has significantly weakened during North Korea's economic crises. In the South, Koreans' educational fever has translated into *testing* fever.

The entire educational system, from elementary school through high school, has focused on entrance examinations into higher levels of schooling. Both the public and officials have widely criticized examination preparation as the center of learning, which has deep roots in Korean history. Yet a half century of reform efforts has resulted in only an intensification of this phenomenon. Perhaps the most interesting is the degree to which "examination mania" has come to embrace virtually the entire populace; families from all social or regional grouping make enormous sacrifices and go to great lengths to aid their children in the entrance exams. It could be argued that South Korea has become the most exam-obsessed culture in the world. (Seth, 2002, 4)

Testing is the mechanism which transforms education into social status, rooted in Korea's Confucius tradition, and it is also the mechanism for democratic social selection which South Koreans believe gives fair opportunity to all citizens.

However, as we will see in this chapter, English has gradually risen as a major component of South Korea's social selection system. As we will also see in this chapter, English does not take up the entirety of the social selection system, but its pressure is stronger to the test-takers than other components. Here, we see a continuity of test-based social stratification using unspoken language from traditional Korea to modern South Korea. That is, the 'unspoken language of status' has shifted from Chinese to English. The function of Chinese of stratifying

the society is now assumed by English through the mechanism of testing system. Linguistic mastery of unspoken language has had certain social meaning in Korean context. It indexes one's hard work for self-discipline and self-development, all the more because the language is not widely spoken. The language tests seem fair and objective tool of social selection because they seem to rely on individual merits and efforts. However, I make the case in this chapter that linguistic mastery in the unspoken language has played the role of (re)producing a barrier to the non-elites, which is another continuity from traditional to modern Korea.

## **2. English in North Korea**

Language policies of North Korea have been driven by its political ideology of anti-imperialism and social revolution intertwined with nationalism. *Juche* or Self-Reliance Ideology served as the basis for actively removing Japanese colonial legacies and resisting western capitalist influence in its social structure. This is also reflected in its language policies. North Korea implemented a policy of pure Korean and deliberately translated all foreign terminology to Korean. As for language education, Russian was taught as the first foreign language, as the language of the leader of the Communist Bloc. These language policies minimized any exposure to English on the part of the North Korean people.

North Korea, however, was not an exception to the global spread of English. The case of North Korea is powerful evidence of the global spread of English, because as one of the few remaining communist regimes in the world, it is notorious for its totalitarianism and isolation policies particularly as regards western cultures. There have been continuing scholarly reports (Han, Yoon, & Lee, 2001; Lee, Yang & Kwon, 2005) and media reports (e.g., TV Chosun, 2013) that attest to the English boom in North Korea in recent years. The North Korean state shifted its



primary foreign language in public education from Russian to English in early 1990s. North Korea is also actively recruiting native-speaker English teachers from the *Inner Circle* (Kachru, 1992) of English (i.e., UK's British Council, NGOs from Canada and US).

The tension between globalization and anti-Americanism was mediated with non-political discourses and the logic of national defense. English has been traditionally framed as the language of the U.K. in North Korea, which is a way to avoid reference to the United States (as many of my participants mentioned). To explain the sudden rise of English in North Korea, the government adopted the rationale of self-defense. English was needed to learn advanced science and technology from abroad, and to understand the enemies of North Korea, particularly the "imperial U.S." and other western powers (Lee, Yang & Kwon, 2005; also see Pavlenko, 2003).

What the research participants said about their perception of English in North Korea reflects this globalizing change. The research participants who left North Korea in the early 2000s tend to perceive that English was not important at all in North Korea. The more recent migrants say that English was important in North Korea. However, English was rarely used in North Korea for all of them, unlike how English is used for numerous functions, in South Korea.

### **3. English in South Korea**

The language policy of South Korea was tolerant to colonial legacies and foreign influences, compared to that of North Korea. This was also tied with the American influence in South Korea following the Japanese colonial rule, in which more emphasis was placed on the establishment of stable government and development of the economy than on making a clear political disconnection from Japanese colonialism. This resulted in the continuation of power of

pro-Japanese elites well into the newly established capitalist regime of Republic of Korea (Cummings, 2005). The South Korean government did implement purification policies of its national language, which resulted in reduced use of Chinese characters, but did not particularly put an effort into translating foreign terminology into Korean. Thus, the language policies of South Korea allowed a high percentage of loan words from Japanese, English and other languages (Song, J.J., 2011). In this period, English was one of the *foreign* languages taught in secondary schools (e.g., Japanese, French, German), although it had high status as the language of the U.S. English education in South Korea centered on public schools, which mainly consisted of grammar instruction and translation exercises, often called Grammar Translation (GT) methods. Test English was the main repertoire and the common practice of English among South Korean people.

### **3.1 State policies**

With South Korea's turn towards globalization and neoliberal capitalism in the 1990s, English began to shift from being understood as the *American* language to being understood as the *Global* language. Communicative English began to be emphasized in South Korea. This began with the concerns of the state and top corporations.

Self-evaluated low competence in English has become a concern for government and industry, which feared a linguistic handicap that would hurt the international competitiveness of Korean firms. (Seth, 2002:190)

The need to increase competent speakers of the global language seemed urgent in order to increase their competitiveness in the global market. In their perspective, South Korea seemed to be behind in this respect compared to its Asian neighbors that were former British and American

colonies, such as Hong Kong, Singapore, and the Philippines.

The South Korean state's English policies since the 1990s have strongly emphasized English over other foreign languages and over its other agendas. In 1991, the government decided to include an English listening section into the national college entrance examinations, or College Scholarly Aptitude Test (CSAT). The same year, the government announced a plan to teach English in all elementary school grades by 1995. The starting grade was later adjusted to the third grade, but the news swept the whole country into a boom of English education.

President Kim Young-Sam (1993 – 1998), who initiated full-fledged globalization, conducted a major reform of English education: importing of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach into the national curriculum, lowering the starting grade of English education from seventh grade to third grade, and a full-scale recruitment of “native speaker” teachers to be placed in all public schools. Scholars agree that these are fundamental changes to English education in South Korea, or “a revolution in the history of English in Korea, for they adopted a completely new approach to English teaching” (Kwon, 2000, 60).

Despite these government initiatives, the gap between the emphasis on English and the lack of actual use of English has persisted. A controversial proposal by a Korean literary critic to adopt English as the official language of South Korea for its global competitiveness sparked heated debate over national identity, economic benefits, and the perceived English competence of Koreans (Park, J.S., 2009). The following presidents (Kim Dae-Jung in 1998 – 2003, Roh Moo-Hyun in 2003 – 2008) promoted English as an official language in special economic zones of South Korea, and began to build government-funded “English Villages” or English-only speaking park areas for children, but they have not turned out to be successful in the long run in drawing people's participation (Song, J.J., 2011). President Lee Myung-Bak (2008 – 2013)'s

presidential transition committee announced plans for English immersion education in all public schools, but after facing huge national opposition, withdrew the plan. (However, English immersion policy has been taken up by private schools; Jeon, M.H., 2012).

We can see, however, that the state policies themselves, although resisted, show a process of increasing communicative practice of English (from curriculum change to English villages to immersion education) – hence, a growing co-existence and tension between Test English and Communicative English.

### **3.2 Employers**

The corporate world also worried about its global competitiveness, as South Korea's economy was opening to the global market. The use of TOEIC emerged for the corporations as a way to evaluate and develop English competence of their employees. The rhetorical purpose of TOEIC, when it was commissioned by the Japanese government to ETS (the company which owns TOEFL, SAT, GRE, etc.), was to evaluate “international communication” (Kubota, 2011). TOEIC was developed in 1979 in Japan, but South Korea soon became the top client of TOEIC.

Samsung was the first corporation in South Korea to use TOEIC in 1982. Then the number and the range of employers to use TOEIC for screening purposes expanded during the 1990s and the 2000s (Kye & Lee, 2014). Different professional organizations began to announce the use of TOEIC as replacement of the English section of their licensing exams. For example, the English section of the Certificate of Public Accountant (CPA) exam was announced in early 2000s to be replaced by private English standardized exams, which includes TOEIC, TOEFL, and TEPS TOEIC. The government also used the same policy for the recruitment of civil service for rank 5 (rank 1 is the highest, rank 9 is the lowest) since early 2000s. The applicants to these

jobs had to bring English test scores from one of these tests before they could take the actual exam. (TOEIC is chosen the most by applicants because it is seen as the easiest and the most widely used). For Mee-Soo to take the CPA exam and Bee-Eun to take police officer exam, they first had to take TOEIC and pass the required score. Chul-Kyoo was preparing for the “rank 9” civil service exam in which the English section is still developed by the government.

What is notable is that these English tests used in the 1990s and early 2000s do not measure output functions of communication, i.e., speaking and writing. TOEIC measures listening/ reading comprehension and grammar. The English section of the civil service exam only has reading comprehension and does not have a listening section.

This began to change since the mid-2000s when corporations began to express their distrust in TOEIC for the reason that it does not exactly measure the “international communication abilities” it was intended to measure. Park, J.S. (2011) records some of the quotes from the managers of major corporations:

Unlike 5, 6 years ago when there were only a few candidates with scores of 900 and above, nowadays there are so many high scores so that TOEIC scores are becoming meaningless. Getting a perfect score on TOEIC does not mean one can speak English well. We cannot trust that a candidate with a high score in TOEIC will have the ability to use English effectively, so we are testing their skills in speaking and listening (Gwon and Heo 2005, cited in Park, J.S, 2011, 449).

Corporations thus began to use English tests which evaluate language production (speaking and writing), instead of traditional English tests which evaluated only the language comprehension (listening and reading). “TOEIC Speaking & Writing” began to be administered in 2006. The computer version of Oral Proficiency Interview (OPIc) was adopted in South Korea in 2009. Top corporations began to replace TOEIC with these oral tests. For example, application

requirements of Samsung include: 1) GPA over 3.0, 2) completion of military service, which only applies to men, and 3) English qualification in the form of OPIc and TOEIC Speaking. This change, however, has been gradual as well. TOEIC is still the dominantly used test for social selection by mid-sized corporations and other employers.

The English testing system mediated the tensions between i) globalization and Korean nationalism, and ii) social stratification and democracy by achieving to a certain extent the competing interests on both sides the tensions. The introduction of TOEIC itself served the interests of the corporations for globalization. At the same time, it retained the testing tradition of Korea by introducing a standardized exam in the unspoken language. The listening/ reading test format was enough for its purpose of globalization and stratifying the applicants in an “objective” way. The change in the 2000s towards speaking test reflects the process of globalization taking place in South Korea, and the search for new ways to make distinctions among the applicants.

### **3.3 Educational institutions**

Elementary, secondary, and tertiary educational institutions were highly influenced by the policies of the state the employers. Universities shared the concerns of the government and the corporations that their students were not good enough in English. They were also facing the demands of domestic and global competition; they needed to show their domestic and global ranking, the quality of their faculty, their students’ rate of employment, and the degree of “internationalization” (Cho & Palmer, 2012) in order to attract students and funding.

South Korean universities began to adopt internationalization policies in the mid-1990s. These included recruiting international faculty and students, establishing graduate schools of

international studies, and importantly, demanding a certain level of English proficiency of all its faculty and students (Cho & Palmer, 2012). English education became a university-wide agenda since the 1990s (Kwon, 2000). Universities began to require proof of English proficiency as a condition of graduation, to develop university-wide English teaching curricula, to administer placement tests to all of their incoming students, and to expand the use of English as medium of instruction across all majors. TOEIC was often used as graduation requirement or the placement tests, while some universities began to develop their own means of assessment. The traditional “liberal arts” English courses, which focused on reading classic texts, began to shift towards “practical” English courses focusing on listening, reading, and conversations, or English test-preparatory courses.

Schools, located in the lower rung of social hierarchy regarding language policies, had to face the rising English fever and take in all its contradictions. The curriculum and the textbooks are organized around the rhetoric of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) according to state policies, but Korean teachers and students were unable to realize a communicative use of English in the classrooms (Li, 1998; Butler, 2011). They did not have the oral ability in the first place, in the linguistic environment of South Korea. More importantly, students faced the immense pressure of the social competition mediated by English test – in school exams, in university entrance exam, and in job application requirements – and it worked against making CLT-driven classrooms.

### **3.4 The private market**

Since the 1990s, the intensity of the people’s desire and monetary investment to acquire English began to grow across all age groups: from school students and their parents, to job

seekers and company employees. This social phenomenon of “national obsession” to acquire English is found in many parts of East and South East Asia (Butler, 2011; Krashen, 2003; Nunan, 2003; Tsui & Tollefson, 2007), but international media reports testify to the unique intensity in South Korea.

The 1990s’s saw the rise of English education in the private sector which quickly adapted to the public demands. The number of English *hagwons* began to grow into a massive English industry in the 1990s. They provide customized services such as one-on-one tutoring, test-preparation class, and study abroad programs.

While test production is mostly located in the Inner Circle of English, the private sector in South Korea has found a massive market of other English test-related commodities customized for the needs of Koreans. In this English industry, various components related to English Tests are commodified for the market: the teachers, the studying materials, ways of studying, the most effective tips for acquiring better scores, spaces for studying, support to discipline the students to study, support in connecting students to form study groups, etc. People even pay for illegal commodities, such as technological support to cheat during the test (using secret cameras or communication devices) or the proof of English proficiency itself (by paying another person to take the test). The growing industry has produced millionaire English instructors in the private sector.

The demand for Test English and Communicative English co-exist in the market. There is tendency to resist Communicative English increases with student age or with the degree of proximity to test preparation. Students in elementary schools are relatively more relaxed because they have more time to allow investment in more communicative teaching. This tendency reaches its peak with job-seeking young adults, or the “employment preparation



students”, and then begins to decrease after this age-group. The adults in established job positions or away from life urgencies who want to learn English for business meetings or other communicative purposes again look for communicative classes. The structure of English industry in South Korea described in chart below from a research report of a private research institute reflects such age-related difference.

Table 4.1 “Private English education market by age group”

Age group	Main English commodity
Pre-school students, Elementary school students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Native speaker basic conversation</li> </ul>
Secondary school students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grammar, School grades</li> <li>• University admission English</li> </ul>
College students, young adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English test (TOEIC, TOEFL, etc.)</li> </ul>
Adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practical conversation</li> <li>• Business conversation</li> </ul>

Note. Adapted from report of KB research

This tendency to resist communicative English seems to increase with people in lower socioeconomic class. They are even less protected from the pressure to achieve high English test scores.

Recently, there is a growing niche market for Communicative English for adults. Siwon School, for example, is a hagwon that teaches adults the basic simple sentence structures for everyday conversations. It emphasizes that Korean learners have been overlooking the most basic principles of how English words are connected in real time, so that Koreans cannot express spontaneously what they are thinking. It advertises the responses of its students, such as the following, on its website:

Excerpt 4.1 Advertisement of Siwon School (website of Siwon school, 2010)

“Easy conversation became possible in one second!”

“I used to understand English vaguely but now I have clear structure.”

“Ah! I realized English can be fun.”

“It’s different from ordinary internet lecture. You don’t just watch but you get to speak.”

“I immigrated to Canada a year ago. I had thought I could start speaking fluently after arriving in Pearson airport. But I could never open my mouth. Siwon school became my life line.”

The growing market of English speaking hagwons reflects, in my view, the growing demand for Communicative English. The traditional Test English is still dominant in South Korea but the process of globalization is changing the Korean tradition of *testing in the unspoken language*, as English is becoming more and more a spoken language.

#### **4. When I was in North Korea: “Why study?”**

In the beginning of this research, I was not sure why North Korean young adults’ level of English was so low, when the North Korean curriculum has English as one of its subjects (as the first foreign language in education instead of Russian from the early 90s). The North Korean textbooks which I could view in national libraries had low-quality paper, and the content was filled with praise for its leader, but did provide ample input of English. The methodology used in North Korean English classrooms can be seen as traditional, in that they are based on Grammar-Translation method (Lee et al, 2005), but South Korean schools are not much different (Jung & Lim, 2007).

The low educational background of North Korean migrants was not only due to their lack of schooling during their migration process, as many studies about North Korean migrants assume. Most of the focal participants in this research finished schooling in North Korea. Ye-Young and Wha-Hong were the only ones who did not have much schooling as a result of hiding and working in China. Bee-Eun went to middle school in South Korea. All the other participants

finished school in North Korea (five years of elementary school and six years of high school). Hae-Mee finished a one-year program in college. However, there was somehow a vacuous part in their education.

When I asked the participants about how they studied English in North Korea, what I noticed was that many of them suddenly became embarrassed about how they were not studying in North Korea.

Excerpt 4.2 Interview with Han-Young (November, 2012)

Han-Young: I didn't like studying. And coincidentally, the teachers were not enthusiastic either. There, only the students who study (the academic students) would study, and they were only about 20% of the class. My parents forced me to study, but they got tired and gave up.

Han-Young resisted his parent's pressure to study. Mee-Soo was one of the more studious students, one of "the students who study" in class.

Excerpt 4.3 Interview with Mee-Soo (November, 2012)

Eun-Yong: Didn't you study English in North Korea?

Mee-Soo: We probably did! I just didn't know it. What can a person who didn't study remember? There is nothing I remember about English studying [in North Korea]. Except that we memorized English vocabulary which was tested over and over.

The teachers did teach English, but even Mee-Soo did not seem to have learned much.

I found that the economic crisis in the 1990s was behind this phenomena. After undergoing the devastating economic downfall (during the "Arduous March" of 1994-1997), the collapse of the socialist distribution system of resources, to this day, has not been fully restored. So it is with its educational system (Han, M.K., 1999). Schools were no exception to the social phenomenon of the increase of people doing "business" (장사), which means securing goods, selling them on the black market, and buying what they needed. Teachers began to drop classes

and instead went to do business.

Excerpt 4.4 Interview with Han-Young (November, 2012)

Han-Young: The reason why the teachers were not enthusiastic, the economic reason is the biggest. The physics teacher was nice, but his family was poor. Later, he couldn't come to class often.

Many students also had to help their parents make their living and could not come to school.

Even when students came to school, the students were often called out for labor work. And since their teachers often did not come to class, the students wandered inside schools or in the streets.

However, there was a more important reason that students in North Korea did not study. For them, there was no need to do so. The students saw that there was no benefit of studying for their future. Becoming member of a high class<sup>5</sup> or getting the jobs that would be considered as prestigious in South Korea were not desired anymore, because these jobs were not being paid anymore.

Excerpt 4.5 Interview with Hae-Mee (September, 2012)

Hae-Mee: My mother was a doctor, and my father did accountant work. My mom stopped her work during the Arduous March, when it was the most difficult. She didn't go back to the job. In South Korea, people like doctors and teachers. But there, the government doesn't pay for the work, so they give up that workplace and go to business. In North Korea, our future path is almost fixed. I do what my parents do. It is only the really outstanding students, or the really poor kids who study. Even if you study and you become a doctor or a teacher, you don't get paid.

Excerpt 4.6 Interview with Sung-Chul (February, 2013)

Sung-Chul: At that time [in North Korea], I didn't have a goal about what to be in the future. I wasn't mature. I thought of doing business. There were a lot of people around

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<sup>5</sup> Socialist North Korea is not a classless society. One way the legitimacy of the regime has been sustained was through building a strict system of social class, categorizing the people according to their loyalty and devotion to the communist beliefs. The society consists of fifty-one categories of people that are lumped into three broad classes – the loyal “core class”, the suspect “wavering class” and the politically unreliable “hostile class”. Bom-Joo (former English teacher in North Korea) added that the party members, the ruling class, and the workers are considered as the core class. The farmers are considered as wavering class because they own their land.

me who made lots of money through business.

There was not much that they could do to improve their future. “*Why study?*” was a common saying I could hear from the students or from others who knew about the educational reality in North Korea.

Excerpt 4.7 Interview with director of Daniel School (February, 2013)

Pastor Han: There are students who didn’t go to school (in North Korea), or went to school but didn’t really learn anything. They didn’t study hard or the teachers didn’t really teach. There are students who at least know the alphabet but they are few.

I had the chance to interview a former English teacher in North Korea, Bom-Joo. She left North Korea in mid 2000s. She was an enthusiastic teacher, but the students were not as enthusiastic as she was. What she says confirms what we have discussed so far.

Excerpt 4.8 Interview with a former English teacher in North Korea (July, 2013)

Bom-Joo: After the famine (the Arduous March), the passion (for studying) did decrease significantly. Students could not come to school often. The overall atmosphere of the school was more focused on how to eat and survive. The teachers also had to work to eat and survive. They often skipped classes.

Eun-Yong: Wasn’t the economy better in the 2000s?

Bom-Joo: Well, going up the social ladder did not have any benefit anymore. There was less desire for acceding to the higher class. Money was the priority. Becoming higher class did not guarantee a better living or more money. That was because the government did not have the resources anymore to support high class members. The people working in military administration committees, they were living just like us. So it was better, more profitable to go into business. Probably there was still much more benefit to those in top class in Pyeongyang, but other than those elite few, lives all became difficult.

Eun-yong: So, how were the students you taught? Were they studying hard?

Bom-Joo: The students were not motivated to study. Out of the students who came to the school, many gave in to peer pressure of not studying. About 10 percent did not come to school at all. Those who did study were mostly from a family which could financially support them. Typically, in one class, in lower grades, there would be around five to seven who studied. The others were doing nothing, just looking out the window, or reading cartoons. They were like, the teachers are speaking in alien words. In upper classes, it would be only one to two students per class.

Eun-yong: How did you feel?

Bom-Joo: Well, I felt pity, but I couldn't do anything.

The influence of Arduous March seems long lasting, even after the economy recovered from its worst phase.

In the same vein, the students did not have an interest in studying English either. In the isolated society, outside the system of global economy, English was not emphasized in North Korea. Some of the parents tried to make their children see the growing importance of English, but they could not understand it at the time.

Excerpt 4.9 Interview with Han-Young (November, 2012)

Han-Young: My father emphasized English. Other students had old textbooks passed down from seniors, but my parents bought new ones for me.

Excerpt 4.10 Interview with Sung-Chul (February, 2013)

Sung-Chul: My parents were telling me, "Memorize at least the English words." At that time, I couldn't understand that.

Excerpt 4.11 Interview with Ye-Young (November, 2012)

Ye-Young: In North Korea, I knew nothing about the value of English.

Excerpt 4.12 Interview with Chul-Kyoo (February, 2013)

Chul-Kyoo: English was important in North Korea, too. But the students didn't study.

By the late 2000s, there was growing sense of the importance of English, as I could hear from the North Korean young adults who left North Korea from mid to late 2000s. According to a South Korean TV report about the status of English in North Korea, English does not yet have much use in North Korea because it is not yet used for employment purpose through test such as TOEIC or TOEFL (as described in report of TV Chosun). Such conditions were did not give enough motivation to the students to study English.

In my view, Bee-Eun who liked English was an exception. She had interest in language

when she was in North Korea and she was also seeing the new importance of English as the global language.

Excerpt 4.13 Interview with Bee-Eun (September, 2012)

Eun-Yong: Did you learn English in North Korea?

Bee-Eun: No, we learned French. I wanted to learn English even from that time. There were 11 classes, but the top class was learning French. I was so disappointed. I went to the teacher, and said that it's becoming a global generation, and the USA is rising, and there will be more use for English, so I must learn English. But the teacher wouldn't let me. I cried a lot.

Eun-Yong: When was that?

Bee-Eun: It was around 2004. English classes appeared a lot suddenly.

For some reason, her school taught French to the top class, but we see the increase of English classes in North Korea in mid 2000s. Bee-Eun learned her first English alphabet when she went to school in South Korea, and this was the case for many other North Korean young adults, who learned it for the first time after they arrived in South Korea.

### **5. In South Korea: “I didn’t think I would need English that much!”**

The North Korean young adults encountered a very different society in South Korea where making money was linked to the job prestige. Their future prospects in the neoliberal economy of South Korea directly depended on how hard they engaged in self-development. Self-development often meant acquiring a university diploma and studying English. As I discussed in Chapter 1, among the North Korean young adults, I saw a vague boundary between those who were working right away (the non-academic type) and those who were investing in education before start working (the academic type). However, this boundary was frequently crossed, usually in the direction from the non-academic towards the academic. The non-academics began to see the utility value of university diploma and English as they worked and

spent more time in South Korea.

Excerpt 4.14 Interview with Wha-Hong (September, 2012)

Wha-Hong: Originally, I didn't have any thought for studying. I am not that smart. But I thought I needed some skill license. Everyone was talking about schools, and 80-90% of South Koreans graduated university. I am a high school dropout. So I thought I should go to university.

Excerpt 4.15 Interview with Sung-Chul (February, 2013)

Sung-Chul: At that time (in Hanawon), I was going to get a job and earn money, so I didn't have many thoughts about studying. But, here, it is a culture of studying, if you have a dream.

Excerpt 4.16 Interview with director of Daniel School (February, 2013)

Pastor Han: They (students) went to factories to earn money, and all the buttons are in English. They came to this school to learn English, and they are learning the alphabet for the first time in their twenties.

Since I was inquiring when English became important to them, I repeatedly heard from them that English was not that important for just living their everyday lives in South Korea. They gradually came to the realization that English is so emphasized but English is not really used in South Korea.

Excerpt 4.17 Interview with Han-Young (November, 2012)

Han-Young: When I was thinking of coming to South Korea, I thought South Korean people were all good at English. I thought they could communicate 90% in English. [But they could not.]

Excerpt 4.18 Interview with Han-Young (November, 2012)

Eun-Yong: What do you think is the proportion you invested into English for settling in South Korea?

Han-Young: Investment in English?

Eun-Yong: This kind of skill was important, that kind of skill was important. What about English skill?

Han-Young: About 30%... for English.

Eun-Yong: Than what were other skills that were important to you?

Han-Young: What was more important than English was understanding the flow and the system of the society. About the politics, economy, the society, and the culture. So I invested in books, media, and university courses.



Excerpt 4.19 Interview with Sung-Chul (February, 2013)

Sung-Chul: I don't think English is that important. About 30%? We have to know the loan words, but we can live without English. But in terms of academics, there is difficulty.

Excerpt 4.20 Interview with Chul-Kyoo (February, 2013)

Chul-Kyoo: We can live without English [in South Korea]. The use of English is a stepping stone to achieve my goal [to become a civil servant].

English became important only if they wanted to go to university and get better jobs. This realization hit me hard when I was talking with a South Korean young adult who had just got a job. I asked him if he had to study English to get the job. He said, “Oh, no, I don’t work for the government or the corporations. It’s just a small company.” From this short conversation, it became clearer to me where English stood in South Korea. English was needed in South Korea when one wants to reach the “better” jobs, to be hired by the top employers. If one does not want to get such jobs, English was not needed for living in South Korea. This was also the case when I talked to a North Korean young adult who was working in South Korea. This conversation came up incidentally in our interview about the Wooyang Foundation. He was a staff member of the Wooyang Foundation whom I interviewed, and I found during the interview that he was from the North.

Excerpt 4.21 Interview with a director at the Wooyang Foundation (February, 2013)

Eun-Yong: So you are a North Korean successfully employed. Did you feel the difficulty of English in your career?

Director Park: Oh, I just couldn’t get English, and it didn't really hinder my career.

Eun-Yong: So you didn't need English when you graduate university, or when you applied for jobs?

Director Park: I went to a minor bank, and they don't require English. This foundation didn't require English. It's the major corporations that require English.

The North Korean young adults participating in this study, however, aimed for those better jobs. And this was the English barrier they often could not overcome, and they found that this

structure of English was much stronger than they had thought.

The trajectory of Wha-Hong is illustrative of this point. Wha-Hong tried to pursue her goals without having to deal with the English regulations. She said that from her time in North Korea, she refused to study English. She said she is not smart, and she had little schooling. She had spent much of her teenage years working in China. She came to South Korea because she felt that treatment towards illegal immigrants in China was unfair despite her competence in her work. She thought that she would obtain South Korean citizenship and go back to China.

Once in South Korea, she settled at a workplace. However, she saw that for better work, she needed some professional certificate and university diploma. She obtained a middle school diploma easily (through a state certificate exam), but she kept refusing to study English. Passing criteria for the certificate exam was a passing score for certain number of subjects, so she could do without English and study only other subjects.

Excerpt 4.22 Interview with Wha-Hong (September, 2012)

Wha-Hong: I had given up on English for the diploma exam. I didn't have any basic knowledge in English. I couldn't spend so much time on English when there are other subjects. Out of six subjects for the middle school diploma exam, I didn't take English and Korean history at all. I took Korean, Math, Social Science and Ethics. My Math score covered other subject scores.

Also for high school diploma, she didn't study English. Then she went to Ezra School for university admission. The vice principal said that she rebelled when she tried to connect her to an English tutor. She did not want to invest in what she perceived to be unnecessary.

Excerpt 4.23 Interview with Wha-Hong (September, 2012)

Wha-Hong: I didn't take English at all for the high school diploma exam. There are eight subjects. For English, even if I just guessed, I could get at least 20%. And then I went right into university preparation. So I couldn't do English. I had to write a personal statement, and my environment wasn't good.

She applied to a university's Social Work program which she heard did not require much English. She could pass the admission exam without English through the special admission for North Korean migrants. She was not entirely comfortable with the short-cuts she was taking towards university.

Excerpt 4.24 Interview with Wha-Hong (September, 2012)

Wha-Hong: Somehow, I applied to universities. It wasn't that I really wanted it. Everyone at Ezra School all prepare for university, and I just followed it.

Eun-Yong: How was it when you went to university?

Wha-Hong: I thought it was absurd! It was absurd to know that I passed the entrance exam. I know that I am not a studying type.

The English barrier, however, appeared at a point she had not expected. Her university of choice had been newly developing particularly strict regulations for English. It was pushing hard for the "internationalization" of the university (Piller & Cho, 2013). It was calling itself a "global campus" and was recruiting many English-speaking professors. Every student had to take an English placement test each semester regardless of their major and was placed in streamed classes (A, B, C, D classes) for English instruction.

Excerpt 4.25 Interview with Wha-Hong (September, 2012)

Wha-Hong: I had chosen Social Work because I thought I wouldn't need English that much. But our school has the TOEIC exam twice a semester. That score is then reflected in the GPA. I had two English courses a week and assignments. Our campus was more intense on this than other campuses. Our campus is the global campus. All students in every major have to do English like this. And my English vocabulary level is elementary school.

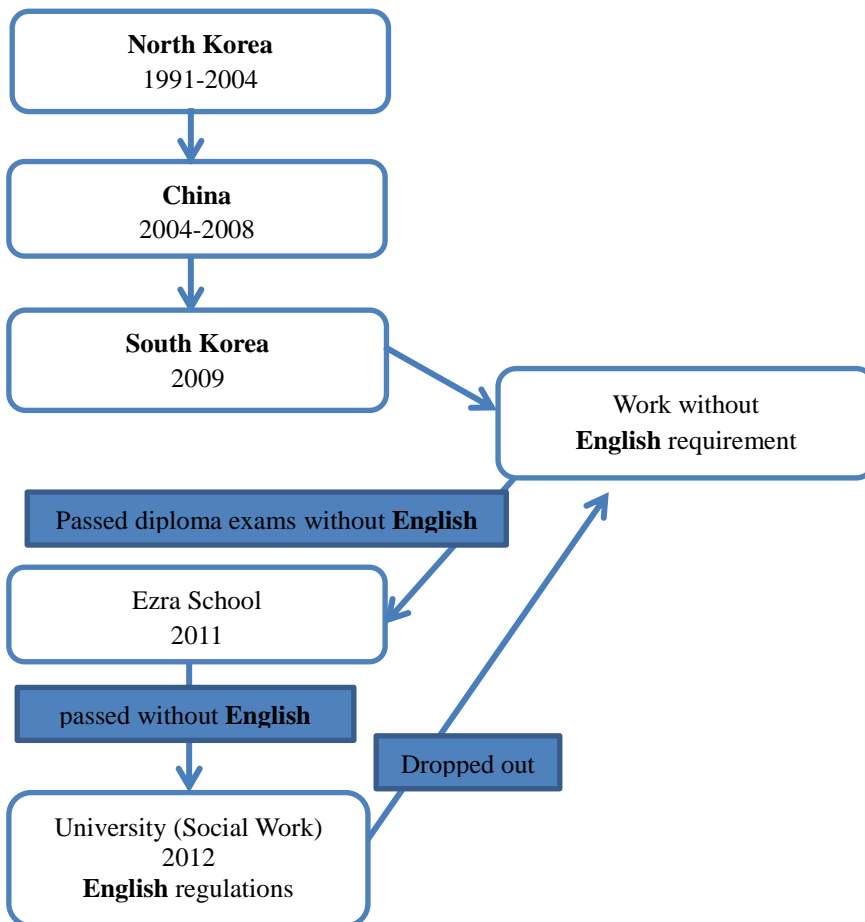
The website of the university lists requirements for graduation which are: a certain number of courses, a graduation thesis, and an English ability certification. This last requirement applies to those entering university from 2009 on.

Excerpt 4.26 Graduation requirement (from the university website)

After entering the university, in order to obtain Bachelor's degree, in addition to completing the curriculum and the graduation thesis specified by each program (major), students must be qualified for English ability graduation certification.

She could not cope with such university regulations. She dropped out after a month. She had been trying to better her social status, but this meant she had to “study English”. She could not take that role and she went back to a workplace which did not require English.

Figure 4.1 Trajectory of Wha-Hong



Many North Korean young adults tried to find ways to avoid learning English while pursuing their goals because their English capital was too low. However, they encountered the

English regulations – demands for proof of English proficiency – at different stages of their journey which they could not avoid if they were to pursue their goals. It was often the requirement for progressing to the next stage (e.g., for university admission and graduation, to apply for certain jobs). And this grip of English was tenacious.

## **6. A case of short resistance: “Is grammar that important?”**

In case of Hae-Mee, she had to learn to focus on English and not other languages. She had strong pride in her achievement of learning Chinese while living in China. She thought her Chinese ability would help get her into a high-ranking university’s Chinese Literature Program. When she first came to Ezra School, she devoted herself to studying HSK (Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi; Chinese Proficiency Test) and attended a Chinese hagwon. The Chinese class was aimed at developing a higher level of literacy for a language she had learned in everyday life in China. It was attainable, a lot of fun, and a form of acknowledgement of her achievement in China.

At this point, she did not yet understand the dominance of English in South Korea. However, she began to encounter the discourse of having to orient to and learn English. She got frustrated with the repeated advice of well-meaning Christian teachers at Ezra School about the importance of English.

Excerpt 4.27 Interview with director of Ezra School (April, 2013)

Vice-Principal Song: At first, she did not invest much time in English. She liked Chinese very much, and the HSK studying. While she was here, about two thirds of her time and effort was on Chinese.

Excerpt 4.28 Interview with Teacher Jin of Ezra School (March, 2013)

Teacher Jin: At first, she said she will take HSK, and so she thought of English as something trivial.

Excerpt 4.29 Interview with Hae-Mee (September, 2012)

Hae-Mee: At first I thought do I have to do English? Is it that important? I took a Chinese class in hagwon, three hours a day from 7:30AM to 11:00AM. The more I studied it, the more fun it was. But with English, I had to start with grammar, and it was so irritating. I could do Chinese without studying the grammar. So I thought do I have to do English? Is it really that important? Is grammar that important?

Hae-Mee began to slowly accept the dominance of English, but she complained about the specific way of learning English that is dominant in South Korea which focuses on grammar instead of speaking. She could not understand the odd form of Korean-English bilingualism in which the target language (English) was not widely used in everyday communication. She could not understand all the more because of her experience in China where Chinese was both the target of her language learning and the means of everyday communication.

Excerpt 4.30 Interview with Hae-Mee (September, 2012)

Hae-Mee: Frankly, when people around me tell me that if you want to go to university, you should do English, it was really irritating. Adjective function, do, does ... these things I will know at some point naturally. With Chinese, even though I don't learn all the rules, I could read and write. So at first I had no motivation and felt no interest.

She could learn Chinese “naturally” in China without explicitly studying the grammar rules.

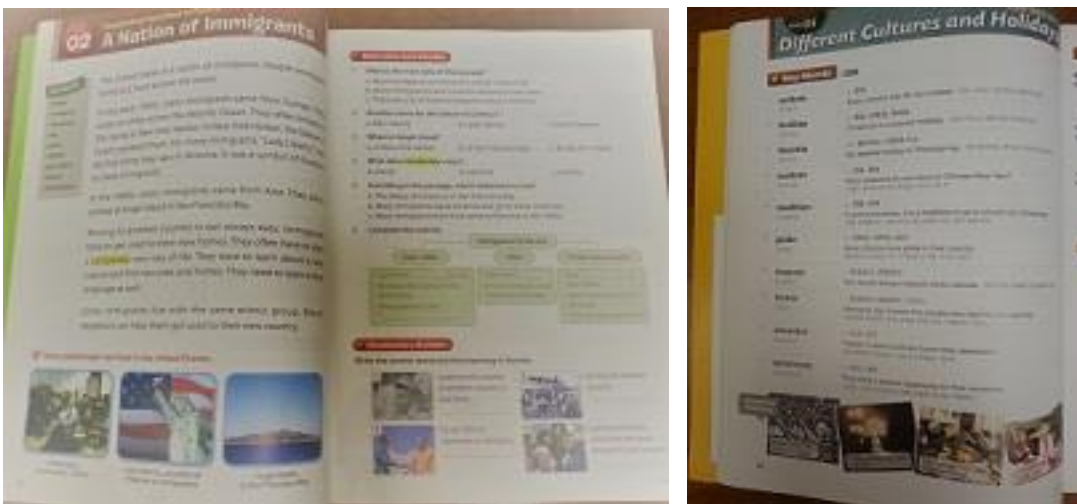
As she began to feel pressured to study English, she had several English volunteer teachers at Ezra School. Many of them stopped the tutoring in a few months due to personal schedules. She studied the longest with Teacher Jin, a South Korean volunteer who was a university professor in Childhood Education. Teacher Jin showed me the teaching material she used with Hae-Mee.

Figure 4.2 Hae-Mee’s English test-prep books



They were two workbooks on reading comprehension and vocabulary. The marketing strategy of these workbooks was that they used “American school textbook” (미국 교과서), as written on the book covers. This seems to mean that they used texts from American textbooks and the content was organized more thematically rather than randomly. The comprehension questions were in English rather than Korean.

Figure 4.3 Inside of Hae-Mee’s English test-prep books



These features might make them look more “American” but the basic format of these workbooks was the same as any typical test prep books, or *moonjejip* (문제집), used by Korean

test-takers. Reading comprehension books are made up of reading passages and passage-accompanying comprehension questions. Vocabulary books are made up of list of English words each followed by Korean translations and example sentences. Reading/ listening and vocabulary, accompanied by grammatical explanations, are the major components of Test English in South Korea. Learning English in South Korea typically means working on the practice questions in reading/ listening test prep books and memorizing the list of vocabulary. This way of learning English was frustrating to Hae-Mee who had experienced communicative way of language learning in China.

Teacher Jin and Teacher Hong had both taught English to Hae-Mee for some time at Ezra School. In my interview with them, they seem to feel disconcerted by Hae-Mee's unusual resistance to English.

Excerpt 4.31 Interview with Teacher Jin of Ezra School (March, 2013)

Teacher Jin: Her basic was so low. Even the simplest, she didn't know. And she had strong resistance about spending that much time on English studying. Her position was that 1) it is difficult and hard and boring, although I do have to, and 2) she complained about the way of teaching. As she lived in China, her Chinese got very good. She didn't learn the characters. And she is now learning the letters here so it's so fun for her. She says nobody taught her Chinese like this there. She just lived and learned it. But here she has to study the grammar so it's so hard for her. She says, "Can I not learn Chinese like I learned English? There is so much English around." So she wasn't willing to work hard. So it was very hard for me to teach her.

Excerpt 4.32 Interview with Teacher Hong of Ezra School (March, 2013)

Teacher Hong: What was difficult for me with her was that she said she wanted to learn English as she had learned Chinese. She told me to let her learn English in everyday life. She thought she could acquire English naturally. But I told her you should study it yourself. If you don't practice and repeat, you will not improve. She thinks she did not really put effort to language learning when she was in China, but she must have concentrated greatly to survive in China. I told her that if you want to learn English that way, you need another four years. If you want to learn English in South Korea in everyday life through experience, it will take too much time.

They felt that she was stubborn and naïve about South Korean society.



However, her attitude was gradually changing. Seeing for herself how South Korean young adults study English in hagwons seemed to be a strong influence, which she could not see when she was staying inside Ezra School interacting only with North Korean students and South Korean Christian teachers.

Also she saw that the effect of the Chinese exam was not as powerful as she had expected. She wanted to go to one of the top-ranking universities using the HSK exam. By the time I met her, she had applied to several universities, and had even received admission from one of them in the business administration program. She was getting ready to apply for her top-choice university as a Chinese literature major. She seemed to be relying on her high HSK score. Her application, however, was rejected. What seemed to surprise her was that another North Korean student who had lower score in HSK but who had a good TOEIC score received admission. She attributed the reason of her failure to the fact that she did not have a TOEIC score to submit (which was not a requirement of admission application). She had hard time accepting the fact that she could not go to this university. She began her business administration major in what she thought was a mediocre university, but thought of re-applying to the higher-ranking university after her first year in university. She eventually gave up on that option and decided to stay in her current university. This failure seemed to have influenced her view of English tests.

This is how she later rationalized her decision to stay:

Excerpt 4.33 Interview with Hae-Mee (September, 2012)

Hae-Mee: I can graduate easily if I go to Chinese major (Many other North Korean young adults who had lived in China choose to major in Chinese because of that reason). But I heard with only one language, you can be acknowledged only if I have a graduate degree (not just undergraduate degree). So I thought I will do Business Administration (in which she has to study English, and thus gives her two languages not just one), and get a job.

Eun-Yong: Your mother advised so?

Hae-Mee: And my father too. I did apply for a Chinese program. But I will work myself harder (to learn English). If I want to learn English better, I said to myself, let's go to business administration. And these days, I tell myself, "Hae-Mee, let's do English. To live in South Korea, I think I should do English."

She framed business administration major as a strategically useful position because it will eventually make her a trilingual (in Korean, Chinese, and English). She came to agree that Chinese was not enough and English had a powerful place in South Korea.

As she began to accept the 'reality', she was getting anxious about English. Her English competency was very low because she was just beginning to learn English in her late twenties. She kept expressing her concerns for English.

Excerpt 4.34 Interview with Hae-Mee (September, 2012)

Hae-Mee: I can't sleep at night these days because of English. In my dreams, I see myself struggling in university because of English. People ask me 'why are you so bad in English?'

After this shift, she became one of the most enthusiastic students of English among the participants.

## **7. Test English as barrier: "It's disgusting!"**

The dominant practice associated with Test English was illustrated in my interview with Han-Young:

Excerpt 4.35 Interview with Han-Young (November, 2012)

Eun-Yong: Why did you think your English was not good? It is not like people speak in English in TOEIC class, right? How do you know other people's English ability?

Han-Young: I could not follow the instructor. He was too fast. And I could not follow the listening passage either. And when I solve the test questions, all my answers were wrong. Other people seemed to follow the class.

Eun-Yong: What about reading comprehension? Wasn't it better to follow?

Han-Young: If it was done slowly, I could have understood the passage. But it was like, we are given say ten minutes, and then after ten minutes, the instructor says, "okay, time's up. Let's go over it. This is why this is the answer." something like this. And most of my answers were wrong.

The general practice of Test English constitutes the following: 1) listening/ reading a passage, 2) solving the attached multiple-choice questions, 3) checking the answer, and 4) studying the explanation. Test English is a timed practice. The following is translation of what is written on a public blog when I searched for TOEIC studying tip.

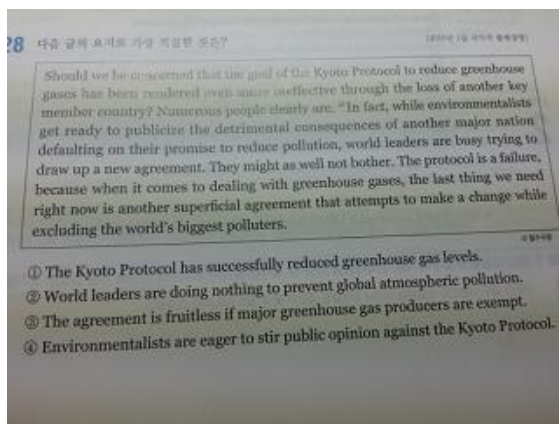
TOEIC is a battle against time. Do not stick to the questions you cannot solve, but check what you think has the highest possibility to be the answer and just go on. Clinging to it will not solve anything. For the later parts in reading, you get wrong not because you didn't know but because you didn't have time.

Test English is battle against the few seconds and minutes allotted for solving each question. The time is too short for most Korean students to fully understand the passages. They want to complete the test and make the most with what they have by guessing as methodically and strategically as possible within the time allowed for each test question. Hagwon instructors teach the patterns of correct answer in the test so that the students can increase the probability of choosing the right answer without having to understand the full passage, such as the tip above. This practice did not allow the time for language learning to take place. It was a practice to become familiar with the test format and raise the score for those who already have English comprehension ability. It was a silent practice which required significant self-discipline because students had to continue to read a series of disconnected passages.

I witnessed the habit of rushing through English sentences among the South Korean young adults. I had the chance to give a quick English tutor to a South Korean young adult who was about to take civil service exam. He was a graduate of a Christian college in South Korea

where English was highly emphasized. We read a passage from the English section of civil service practice test. He was also rushing through sentences and guessing the answers. He showed quite good understanding of the texts stemming, in my view, from his exposure to English particularly in college. However, he often could not understand certain sentences or the key theme of certain paragraphs. When we slowly read through the sentences together one at a time, he was often surprised to find out what they meant. For example, he did not know that the word “struggle” could mean something other than “fighting” – in the text we were reading it meant great effort despite difficulty. He had memorized it as “fighting” which made him misunderstand the whole passage, and guessed the wrong answer. With the way he was studying, however, he did not have the chance to know how the word is frequently used. His exposure to English was not enough to understand the test passages. This was reflected in this test result. He could not pass the exam.

Figure 4.4 A question from a page of civil service test prep book



Note. The question asks: Which one is most appropriate as the main theme of the passage?

North Korean young adults engaged in this practice could not improve their English ability, and their English test scores did not improve either. They were imitating what the South

Korean young adults were doing with even less exposure to English, but could not achieve the same things as them.

Excerpt 4.36 Interview with Sung-Chul (February, 2013)

Sung-Chul: Many North Koreans students are going to good universities, so they sometimes think in similar ways as South Korean students. For example, for the South Korean students, if they prepare one to two months, they can get good score in TOEIC or TOEFL. I think the North Korean students are also thinking that they will do the same thing. The reason North Korean students feel English is difficult I think is because they should learn from the basic but I know many of them are going to TOEIC hagwon without the basic. And the TOEIC score does not improve in short time so they feel it to be even more difficult. I do not recommend to my friends to go to TOEIC hagwon. I think they should first have an understanding of English reading.

The North Korean young adults were trying to tackle texts they did not yet have the ability to understand, and were relying on a method which was not helpful in raising their test score.

This was also the case with Bee-Eun, who had the dream of becoming a police officer in South Korea. Bee-Eun was one participant who had been interested in English since she lived in North Korea. I had heard her, during church small group meeting in 2011, say that she loves English. She was sharing with the group about taking an English course at her university, and this had left a strong impression on me.

When I met her again as a research participant in 2012, she confirmed what she had said. She had liked English since she was in North Korea (as discussed above). But because her school in North Korea taught French, she never had the chance to learn English until she came to South Korea. She arrived in South Korea at age 16, started learning English then, and had been working quite hard at learning English. She received lots of free English tutoring from her alternative school, from church, and from other NGOs.

I met Bee-Eun again for an interview in 2013. She showed me her textbook for an English Reading course, which was an ESL textbook of a major British publisher, a typical

course book used in South Korean universities' English curricula. I knew she had worked quite hard studying English and she could manage English conversations. However, in this textbook, she could not understand even a single sentence.

Excerpt 4.37 Interview with Bee-Eun (April, 2013)

Bee-Eun: I have to summarize each paragraph into two lines. There are about six paragraphs and I'm going crazy. One sentence is so long. I have to do this after each class every week. I skipped the assignments for the first two weeks, and I tried working on the third week's assignment yesterday, and I gave up.

Eun-Yong: But what if you don't do your assignments?

Bee-Eun: My grades will go down. I thought of dropping this course, but if I do that, I have to take it next year.

The final assignment of the course was to read one of two books (one a novel, and the other a philosophy book) and to write a response paper. It was impossible for her, and she eventually dropped the course. This was only a portion of the "English requirement" for graduating university.

Excerpt 4.38 Interview with Bee-Eun (April, 2013)

Eun-Yong: Do you need an English test score for graduation?

Bee-Eun: Yes. TOEIC 760. And I have to take five English courses. And two more English courses offered by my program [Police Administration]. Honestly I can't even understand it in Korean, but we have to listen to it in English.

TOEIC was also the requirement for taking the police officer exam.

Having lived in South Korea for over six years, I asked her the proportion of the importance of English for settling in South Korea.

Excerpt 4.39 Interview with Bee-Eun (April, 2013)

Bee-Eun: Police exam has five six subjects. There is also the performance test. But I have to spend 50% of my time on English, for a single subject of the written exam! I thought there is so much English. Honestly, I don't need that much English in my life. I need it for the police exam. But even while I work as a police, I won't be using it that much.

Eun-Yong: Not for your goal of police, but for your everyday life, what would be the proportion of English, for settling in South Korea? Is it different?

Bee-Eun: In that case, it would be less than 10%. If I meet a foreigner while I do my part-time job, then maybe, but I just need it to communicate, that's all. But for this course, I have to do something I am not interested at all. I used to like English. But now, I really hate it. It makes me nervous.

Eun-Yong: What is English to you?

Bee-Eun: It's a headache [애물단지]. Chicken rib [계륵] (something that seems too valuable to throw away but not so valuable to keep). It's not much use, but I can't throw it away. It's so disgusting.

I could hear her frustration at having to study a language in a way constructed to be difficult for her and that is not actually of much use.

In 2014, she was taking classes at a TOEIC hagwon. She could not achieve the TOEIC score that would give her the English qualification to take the exam to obtain a police officer license. This was, to me, strikingly similar to what was happening to Mee-Soo, who could not take the Certificate of Public Accountant exam because of TOEIC, while her South Korean colleagues passed the required score in a year or two. English was a barrier to them, but English was not much used in the workplaces of police officer or accountant, nor in the everyday lives in South Korea.

Even though Bee-Eun had loved English and had worked hard learning English for several years, the genre of English she encountered in college textbooks and in TOEIC was beyond her ability. This demotivated her significantly, but it was a gatekeeper she had to go through in order to achieve her goal. Test English was a barrier against learning and barrier against her goal. It worked to reproduce the existing English Divide.

### **8. Insistence on Test English: “The exam does not have listening.”**

Then, I came across an English learning method which seemed to me at the time like an

alternative method: the dictation method. I learned it from Teacher Hong at Ezra School who had benefitted from the method in improving his English ability. For him, the dominant practice of Test English was not helpful for really improving English ability.

Excerpt 4.40 Interview with Teacher Hong of Ezra School (March, 2013)

Teacher Hong: I once taught a student from another alternative school. I tutored him several times, and his English was so low so I asked him to bring the textbooks he used there. And the textbooks were so old-style. The sentences were those written forms, like the way we were taught before. If he is taught that way, ten years of English will still bore him.

Eun-Yong: What is the old style of teaching English?

Teacher Hong: Teachers give a sentence and translate it and explain the grammar.

Eun-Yong: Then what is the new style?

Teacher Hong: You listen to utterance actually produced in an authentic way, like in Sitcoms, and learn the pronunciation, how to pronounce like how it is pronounced.

He had learned this method from an American teacher at a hagwon. He knew of several other hagwons that were using this method. He was willing to teach his simple techniques to anyone willing to learn. After the interview, I learned this method for about an hour from him. This was his way of doing dictation with students.

Excerpt 4.41 Handout made by Eun-Yong (June, 2013)

### **Dictation method**

1) Choose a short English audio/video file. (song, sitcom, TED, textbook CD)

2) With AB repeat function of the media player, repeat a single sentence of the audio.

3) Give blanks for each word in the sentence.

(For example, for a sentence like “Where are you going?” you give four blanks to the students: \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_?)

4) Repeat the sentence until the student can fill in all the blanks.

(If the students find it too difficult, he gives the first alphabet of each blank like: w\_\_\_\_ a\_\_\_\_ y\_\_\_\_ g\_\_\_\_?)

5) Have the students pronounce the sentence, imitating the audio.

The characteristics of this method were intensive listening to rapid utterances, intensive comprehension exercises for each sentence, and an intensive pronunciation exercise. The



strength of this method was that it gave access to spoken English in a way that learners can manage. The weakness was perhaps that doing dictation for each single sentence could be grueling. The main logic of the dictation method was that listening has to come first; the undistinguished foreign utterances should “come through” your ears as meaningful segments before you can speak, read, and write them.

According to him, this method was applicable to any texts with an audio file, which are widely available these days, and it helped with improving the test scores as well.

Excerpt 4.42 Interview with Teacher Hong of Ezra School (March, 2013)

Teacher Hong: I am teaching a South Korean young adult who is doing a doctorate. I am teaching with TOEIC sentences, in this same way. And in this way, his competence improved really quickly.

To me at the time, this method stood as an alternative method between Test English and Communicative English, a way of developing English ability with effect of improving test score. It gave access to long complicated texts and was cheap and feasible in EFL context without the need of interacting with native speakers. It seemed like a way which made the genre of Test English accessible even to the non-elites.

Then I heard from Mee-Soo that she was taking an English course in her university where the instructor was using the dictation method. I visited her class in January of 2014, and interviewed the instructor. She expressed the difficulty of persuading university students of the benefits of the dictation method.

Excerpt 4.43 Interview with Mee-Soo’s university instructor (January, 2014)

University instructor: They are so used to test materials. It is a very passive way of learning. All the texts are on the page and all you need to do is choose from a multiple choice and listen to the instructor’s explanation why that is the answer. When you do dictation, you have to write the text and you have to really concentrate while listening. It’s burdensome. And they don’t see the immediate use of such an exercise for the test

they need to take. This tendency is stronger for the first and second year students. For the third and fourth year students, or those who are really serious about learning language, they can trust and follow my dictation method.

For the South Korean young adults who need to get jobs, the immediate use for the test was more important than really learning the language. For them, there was a resistance against practices other than Test English.

I experienced a similar incident with a South Korean young adult when I tried to persuade him. I was having coffee with several South Korean friends in Seoul in 2014, and one of them was Hong-Jin, who works at a major South Korean construction company. The company was requiring all its employees to take OPIc (an English speaking test). He expressed his worries about the test and his low English ability. I began to explain the dictation method which I thought at the time was a good method for learning English. He responded, “As I was listening to you talk about dictation, I could see that it’s a good way to build up the base and work your way up to good English. But if I were to study English, I would just get some OPIc test-prep book and just memorize the expected answers.” What he needed was the score to secure his position in the company. With test-preparation commodities such as the test-prep books, he did not need to go through the process of working his way up to good English.

Chul-Kyoo, who was studying for civil service exam, was another case of insisting on Test English. He had arrived in South Korea in 2011, just the year before I first met him at Ezra School. When he came to Ezra School, he came with the highest goal of learning and status. His goal was to enter the top university, and then study for the top-ranking civil servant exam. When he was in Ezra School, he spent most of his time studying English. After having spent some time in South Korea, he lowered his goal to a lower-ranking civil service exam. He went through some failures toward his goal and he soon made a more realistic assessment about

himself.

In our tutoring sessions, I tried to persuade Chul-Kyoo to try the *dictation method*. At a tutoring session with Chul-Kyoo, I taught him to do dictation with TOEIC listening material, having him write the script. I had to teach him punctuation, capitalization, and indenting and changing lines for paragraphs. He did not know these rules because he never had to write in paragraphs. At the end of that session, he said, “This is helpful. Thank you.” When I suggested studying English through dictation, he responded, “But the civil service exam does not have listening.” He did not have time to spend on things other than his goal. He began his studies in late twenties and he said that this was the last chance that he was giving to himself.

Test English is “battle against time” in another sense for the job-seeking young adults. It was battle against the several months and several years the students can allow themselves for the preparation. I heard that two to three years is common for these young adults to spend on studying exams for employment. They want to get the score and get the job as soon as they can before they get any older. In this battle against time, Test English was the most feasible way to cope with the contradictory situation, in which English is not used in everyday communication but English texts not accessible in their everyday lives are increasingly used for social selection. It was difficult to battle against the time of the elite young adults who had had much more access to English, who underwent longer labor on the body from young age in English-speaking environment. This might be a “disgusting” situation for some (as in the words of Bee-Eun), but there was a social structure which made the young adults in South Korea insist on Test English.

## **9. Conclusion**

Contemporary South Korea is caught between the strong tradition of its internal system of social selection and the newly emerging conditions of globalization which the state has to cope with and according to which the state must drive its people. Linguistically, it is caught between the rise of the English testing system for social selection and the repressed use of English for everyday communication.

Linguistic globalization in the South Korean context meant the rise of a specific practice and repertoire of English for specific function for specific people (Blommaert, 2005). English could not take up the function of communication in South Korea. The Korean language backed up by Korean nationalism was too strong to be replaced by English; but English took up another powerful function in South Korea, as that of a gate-keeper to the circle of the socioeconomic elite. English tests in South Korea become important for those people who wanted to compete for social status. However, since the genre is not used in everyday communication, it was advantageous for those with the right cultural and social capital often from their family heritage and education. The practice of Test English is how the non-elite young adults were coping with the contradiction between the dominance of English testing system and the inaccessibility to the repertoire of English used in the tests. They wanted to gain social status with Test English, but the very practice of Test English often reinforced the status quo.

The social construction and reproduction of Test English, therefore, has to do with the tensions traversing neoliberal South Korea; which includes the tension between nation-building (related to the persistent use of Korean in everyday communication) and globalization (related to the state emphasis on communicative English); and the tension between social stratification

(related to the inaccessibility to test repertoire for most non-elites) and the ideal of democracy (related to the persistence of standardized test which appear to be fair and objective). English testing system achieves these different interests to a certain extent; promoting global habitus among the people while retaining the Korean tradition of social selection, and reproducing hierarchical status market within Korea while appearing to be a democratic method of social selection. It is where the tensions of globalization are manifested, but also where they are socially resolved.

North Korean young adults were directly influenced by these power relations between the global and the national, between the social elites and the non-elites. The regime of English was tremendously effective in socializing them, despite all their antipathy, into neoliberal habitus of competition, self-development, and investment in English. Based on the national discourse of Korean unification, even though they were new migrants to the society, they were given special educational support. Many of the North Korean young adults managed to progress through entering and graduating university, with the special admission regulations for North Koreans. They also seemed to be given some leeway regarding the graduation requirements. However, they were often halted at the point when they wanted to enter stable, high-wage jobs, where elite interests were at stake. They could not become part of South Korea through Test English, and state and church interventions often worked to obscure their perceptions of how unprepared they were for the neoliberal competition.

The educational reality of North Korea shows that such a system of social selection and competition is socially constructed. It is only sustained by the investment of social actors who have interests in sustaining such system of social stratification. In post-“Arduous March” North Korea, the state and the elites could no longer make the investment to reproduce the system. The

link between social status (e.g., job prestige, university ranking) and economic capital was weakened, and the system of social competition for status was no longer needed. Without such system of social selection, neither English nor education had much use. Students did not feel the need to study for their future. This shows, in my view, that the current system of social selection in South Korea, mediated by Test English, is sustained by those whose interests are served by the system, which include the state and the global/ national social elites. This may explain one of the reasons why English testing system is sustained and thriving in South Korea even though it is criticized for its pedagogical ineffectiveness.

It seems that the tensions of globalization will only be increasing, as the process of globalization continues to take place in South Korea. The contradictory social practices related to English, or the co-presence of the fever for Test English *and* for Communicative English, in my view, are the very manifestation of these tensions. The place of Communicative English has been increasing, in the national curriculum, within the English tests themselves, among the younger generation, and in the demands of the people reflected in the growing market. The South Korean students are caught between these tensions, following the dominant practice of Test English but also trying to figure out how to profit from the new conditions which is increasingly demanding Communicative English.

The next chapter will examine the role of the evangelical institutions in dealing with all these tensions discussed so far. Their religious, political, and linguistic ideologies worked to create diverse forms of tension-alleviating spaces for the state. They took significant responsibilities in supporting the studies of North Korean young adults, particularly their English learning. They had their own tensions to deal with between helping and evangelizing, and this tension produced diverse forms of English teaching programs. In some cases, the

evangelicals' communicative, relational, and spontaneous linguistic practices, and their global orientation produced some rare spaces of Communicative English in which the North Korean young adults learned different ways of learning English and being Korean.

## Chapter 5

### Negotiating missionary English teaching

This chapter examines why English Language Teaching (ELT) often takes place between North Korean migrants and South Korean evangelicals. Critical applied linguists have viewed increasing missionary ELT activity around the world as problematic; it is often the powerful language, the powerful religion, and the powerful race that come together in Christian English teachers encountering students who have much weaker power status. Critiques find this highly unethical, especially if these teachers are not transparent with their intent to evangelize. The evangelical institutions examined here did not hide their missionary intent, but there was nevertheless tension between *helping* and *evangelizing* (Varghese & Johnston, 2007), that is, between their intention to help the North Korean students and their intention to change and convert the students under the unequal power relation. As already outlined in the introduction of this thesis, I approach this issue as both an evangelical and a critical researcher. As an evangelical who has had personal vision for missionary ELT to North Korean students, this inquiry has also been about why I am so interested in such missionary activity.

I hope to conduct a critical analysis of what is happening, but I do not wish to judge some practices as positive or negative. I want to focus on the question of why missionary ELT so often takes place in certain contexts, what is actually happening there, what the consequences are, and how we can make sense of them.

In this chapter, I am comparing the place of ELT and the different ways ELT is taught in the different institutions, which is the extent to which I can make a case based on the different amount of data I have from each institution. I have tried to take out the data which can make



each institution identifiable, but I have kept the data which I need to make my claim. This was not always clear-cut, and some of the data presented here may still be revealing of the institutions' identities for some readers. What I can say is that the claims I am making here, in my view, are based on analysis of power but are not unfairly negative or accusatory of any particular institution.

The central claim of this chapter is that missionary ELT often takes place between South Korean evangelicals and North Korean young adults because English constitutes both students' goals and evangelicals' goals. In other words, English is both a form of capital and a form of Christian activity. From the perspective of the Christians, ELT constitutes both *helping* and *evangelizing*. Because English can be both at the same time, ELT can relieve the tension between helping and evangelizing. The evangelicals can evangelize with less tension when mediated by ELT, and the students can tolerate some evangelical activity in order to learn English.

This did not mean that the interaction between the evangelicals and the students in this study were without tension, especially because the North Korean students had different positions regarding Christianity. Rather, ELT was a site of negotiation between the teachers' agenda and the students' interests. There was often a push by the evangelicals for Christian activities. On the other hand, the various responses of students often included trying to avoid or participate minimally in Christian activities while maximizing the amount of resources they received. Missionary ELT was a frequent contact point between Christians and non-Christians, but very often it implied a gap between the teachers' motivations and the students' motivations in coming together.

Between the students' demands and the teachers' goals, the institutions I observed/ interviewed varied on how they addressed the tension. Some institutions were more driven by student demands, while others pushed for the teachers' goal, which was what they saw as helpful for the students. The three repertoires of English discussed throughout this thesis (Test English, Communicative English, and Christian English) which took place in different forms in each institutions, show the different ways the tension was played out and, in some cases, mediated. Teaching *Test English* shows the effort to help with the students' demands to go to university, and teaching *Christian English* the effort to evangelize the students. Teaching *Communicative English* represents a way this tension was mediated by aiming for a third place, that of becoming an English speaker. Becoming an English speaker was an alternative way of social mobility for the North Korean students, and also aligned with the active, relational, and communicative practices of the evangelicals' missionary outreach.

In this chapter, I first trace the history of educational outreach in the Korean context, and specifically of educational outreach through ELT, which shows the social conditions in which ELT became an important contact point between evangelicals and non-believers. Then, through the cases of Andrew Center, Wooyang Foundation, and Daniel School, I show how evangelical institutions serving North Korean migrants began to engage in ELT.

Then I describe the tensions of the Christians in working with North Korean students between through three major ways ELT was done in the institutions I observed. Most of the alternative schools ran a curriculum which mainly focused on Test English while integrating some sessions of Communicative English and Christian English. There were some cases where one type of ELT was particularly salient. I describe these different ways with the following cases:

Table 5.1 Institutions discussed according to type of missionary ELT

<b>Type of ELT</b>	<b>Institutions discussed</b>
Test English	Vision School
Christian English	North Korean Christian young adult association
Communicative English	Daniel School

In these educational programs, I saw schools struggling with Test English as much as the students struggle with Test English. I saw negotiations taking place with Christian English. I also saw that evangelical institutions with global connections can create a rare space within South Korea where English is spoken and has strong communicative use (c.f., Han, H., 2011). Lastly, I describe the students' tensions in the church between getting the resources they need and the pressure of becoming Christians. Lastly, I show the tensions of the students in negotiating with the Christian teachers, their diverse positions regarding the helping and the evangelizing of Christians.

### **1. Educational outreach**

South Korean evangelicals are keen on educational outreach for missionary purposes. This has to do with at least two traditions in Korea: i) the long tradition of placing great social value on education (discussed in Chapter 4), and ii) the work of the first Protestant missionaries in late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century Korea. Many of these first western Protestant missionaries in Korea built schools and hospitals as part of their missionary work in response to the impoverished conditions of the Korean peasants. Some of these missionary schools developed to become some of the most prestigious (and now mostly non-religious) universities in contemporary South Korea (e.g., Yonsei University which first started as a medical school founded in 1885 by Horace Underwood, an American Protestant missionary, and Eawha

Women's University founded in 1886 by Mary Scranton, another American Protestant missionary).

Contemporary South Korean missionaries often trace the genealogy of their work to this tradition of educational outreach by the first western missionaries, to whom they feel grateful and indebted. Following this tradition, many South Korean missionaries in their mission fields in Asia and Africa have built schools and universities. In 2014, I attended a conference of these Christian universities built by South Korean evangelicals, called PAUA (Pan Asia & Africa Universities Association). The officially affiliated universities were in Mongolia, Cambodia, Indonesia, and Uganda. Many more universities in other third world countries were semi-affiliated. The mission statements of these universities often included the discourse of "raising global Christian leaders".

The semi-affiliated universities included Yanbian University of Science and Technology (YUST) in China and Pyeongyang University of Science and Technology (PUST) in North Korea. These two universities are well-known among the evangelicals as one of the key projects of North Korean missions. I had personally learned about YUST and PUST in several churches I attended, and I worked in YUST as a volunteer in 2002<sup>6</sup>. It is common knowledge among the circle of South Korean evangelicals that it was the North Korean state that asked the South Korean evangelicals to build a university in Pyeongyang. The state saw the success of YUST built in Northeastern China near the border with North Korea in 1992. YUST consisted of international faculty (the majority South Korean) and student body of Chinese, Korean-Chinese, and South Koreans. Within a decade, its graduates gained good reputation and the university

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<sup>6</sup> I was a volunteer of YUST for a semester in 2002, and my job was to teach English to a Korean-Chinese elementary school in a village near YUST. I stayed at the school on weekdays and went to the university in downtown Yanbian in the weekend to attend Sunday services.

contributed to the local economy. After seeing this, the North Korean government requested the university leadership to build the same type of university in Pyongyang. PUST opened in 2010. Both the Chinese and North Korean states knew of the missionary intent of these university boards but allowed their establishment with the condition of forbidding open evangelism. When I was working at YUST in 2002, the faculty and staff was permitted to have Sunday services, but not any missionary activity to the students. We were told to be careful not to mention Christianity in our phone calls and e-mails.

As for North Korean missions within South Korea following this evangelical tradition, South Korean evangelicals have also been developing their educational outreach in the form of ‘alternative schools for North Korean youth (탈북청소년 대안학교)’. These alternative schools for North Korean students began to be established in early 2000s in response to North Korean students’ struggle with academics in South Korea, as seen in the previous chapter. We need to note that the government has tried to respond to the educational issues of North Korean migrants. When incoming North Korean migrants are housed in Hanawon, school-aged migrants are assigned to an elementary school or secondary school exclusively for the North Korean migrants: Samjuk Elementary School and Hankyore (meaning one nation) Middle & High School. After finishing the program in Hanawon, the elementary students are expected to enroll in regular South Korean schools (usually downgrading 2 to 3 years, Cho, J., 2011), although those in Hankyore high school can finish their education there. However, increasing numbers of North Korean students have been showing high rates of maladaptation and drop-out in the regular schools.

The alternative schools for North Korean youth constitute alternative spaces for these North Korean students who cannot adapt to existing South Korean institutions, including the

regular schools and the private hagwons. These schools are grass-root institutions in diverse sizes and forms established and run by individuals or organizations, the majority of which are evangelical Christians. There are about a dozen alternative schools in South Korea, mostly located in Seoul and the Greater Seoul Area. Many of them are funded by the government (through *Korean Hana Foundation*), but many of them also remain uncertified so as to stay independent from government regulations over their curricula and school management. Recent surveys (Cho, J., 2011; Cho, M., 2007) show that the estimated numbers of North Korean students in these institutions ranges from 320 to 380, and the number of students in each school ranges from 10 to 50. I have worked in one of these alternative schools as a participant ethnographer, and have interviewed stakeholders in several other alternative schools.

## **2. Conditions of missionary ELT**

Christianity does not surface frequently in relation to English teaching in Korea. It only appears when historians trace the genealogy of English Education in Korea, when they briefly mention the role of English-speaking missionaries as some of the first English teachers on Korean soil in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Kang, N., 2007; Sung, K., 2006). At the turn of 20<sup>th</sup> century, English was already constructed as a powerful language in Korea (at the time, the language of the British Empire and the emerging US) and it is recorded that the Korean people were at the time already eager to learn English (Kang, N., 2007). Kang, N. (2007) writes that in these missionary schools, English was one of the many subjects taught to raise Christians and Christian leaders. Usually, it was the English Bible and hymns that were used to teach English. In other words, English was used as a tool for evangelizing. He also notes that, on the part of the Korean students, English was seen as a tool for social success, or to “get a rank”

(Kang, N. 2007, 51). English was used as a tool by both the missionaries and the students, and there was a significant gap between them about how they understood the purpose of English learning. As a result, some of the missionaries withdrew from English teaching as they saw that it often did not serve their goals of evangelizing.

After this period of first missionary ELT in Korea, there is not much mentioning of missionary ELT in the literature. English was being taught in public education, and even more customized private market also developed. Korean students did not have to go to Christians for English. There was no more overlap between student interest and Christian interest. A century later, however, at the turn of the 21st century, missionary ELT emerged again in the encounters between South Korean evangelicals and the “unreached nations”. In most of the missionary universities founded by South Koreans in Asia and Africa (some of which I saw in the conference of missionary universities), English was a central component of their curriculum. We also see increasing ELT activities between South Korean missionaries and North Koreans. The North Korean state is increasingly inviting Christian English teachers. The state knows that the English teachers are mostly recruited by missionary agencies. The English teachers are strictly forbidden to evangelize in North Korea by the state. The Christian teachers are still willing to go to North Korea despite the restricting conditions because teaching English at least gives them the contact points they want.

Toronto Church (the Korean church I attended in Toronto) was also sending their young adults to North Korea as English teachers in the summers on short-term mission trips. I once had a short conversation with one of the young adults who had been to North Korea. She told me that when the missionary trips focused on delivering food aid, the missionary team had only superficial interaction with the people there. However, after the focus shifted to English

teaching, the North Koreans had to engage in conversation with them to learn English, and this enabled much more intimate interaction with the North Koreans. The North Korean state was willing to take these risks for the perceived profitability of Global English. For the evangelicals, such communicative interactions were much in line with their goals.

PUST is another example of missionary ELT. PUST also has a strong English teaching component. Suki Kim, a Korean-American writer, recently published a book on her English teaching experience at PUST (Kim, S., 2014). She taught elite North Korean students in the last months before Kim Jong-Il (son of Kim Il Sung, second leader of North Korea)'s death in 2011 and recorded what she observed as a non-Christian. The evangelical faculty was allowed to have their Christian service by themselves but were under heavy surveillance. They had to intensely negotiate with the authorities what they could teach to the North Korean students. For their part the teachers could not explicitly express Christianity but were trying to incorporate Christian values as much as possible in their classes and in their personal conversations with the students. According to her book, although it is a "science and technology" university, its main curriculum was English. All faculty members were English speakers, the elite students could speak varying degrees of English, and the medium of all instruction and conversation had to be in English. The North Korean regime allowed these missionaries to be in close contact with their elite students to teach them more sophisticated English ability. The missionaries were willing to live and teach in the heavily restricted environment of North Korea with no monetary compensation.

We see that there is a specific context where missionary English teaching can emerge:

- English is constructed as highly valued in the society
- There is a group of people desiring to learn English, but without easy access



- The evangelicals have voluntary English teaching resource and emerge as competitive providers of English to the group (compared to the accessibility of public or private providers)

We see that missionary ELT emerge when there is an overlap between the interests of the non-Christian students and the Christian teachers, and this happens for students in the periphery of the regime of English. We also see that in this context of missionary ELT, there is not only an overlapping part, but also the parts that are not overlapping. There is the gap between the goals of the non-Christian students and the Christian teachers. ELT stands as the mediating point in this tension between the students and the teachers. We will also see that ELT mediates the evangelicals' own tension between their missionary interests and elite interests.

### **3. English as language of “Christian leader”**

ELT was not the original focus of South Korean evangelicals helping North Korean migrants in South Korea. However, among the institutions which had not originally set out to do ELT, I saw there was often a shift in the emphasis of their primary form of outreach to North Korean migrants: a shift from *non-educational* to *educational* resource, and particularly to *English* educational resource.

An example was Andrew Center, a center for supporting North Korean migrants run by a church in Seoul. The center's main projects included providing *group homes* (그룹홈) for North Korean youth. This is one of the main areas of government funding for North Korean migrants, that is, to provide living spaces for North Korean youth. In my interview with the director of the center, I asked why they were running a group home project.

Excerpt 5.2 Interview with director of Andrew Center (February, 2013)

Pastor Nam: About thirty students come here. We have three apartments. One pastor lives with the male students in one of them. The others are for female students.

Eun-Yong: So the kids here don't have their own house? They don't have their parents?

Pastor Nam: There is almost none who don't have their parents. But mostly they have single parent and the leased apartment is very small. And often strange men live with their moms and have intercourse in one room, and these young adults can't really go to their homes. So they wander outside. So we live with them.

Providing group homes was deemed a priority to meet the urgent need of these wandering North Korean youth.

Recently, however, the Center's main focus had shifted to academic support to youth and young adults.

Excerpt 5.2 Interview with director of Andrew Center (February, 2013)

Pastor Nam: The number of kids coming here began to grow and there were stronger demands for studying, so recently we set up these study desks.

More and more North Korean students who came to this institution did not need living space but needed help with their studies. While running group homes in leased apartments, the institution re-furnished its space in response to these demands. When I visited the center, I saw that it had furnished the main hall with twenty or so individual studying desks with partitions on three sides of the desk – the kind of desks usually seen in Korean libraries which provide a semi-enclosed space for the user. The bookshelves on the walls were filled with test prep books. On one side of the main hall were three small rooms, each with a big table and chairs, where students had tutoring sessions with volunteer teachers. Andrew Center was at the time looking for more volunteer teachers who could teach the students for free. When they found out that my major was English, one of the teachers there said they needed more English tutors.

Many North Korean students were coming to this study center: those who were attending regular South Korean school, those who had dropped out of regular school, those who were going to private hagwons, and even those attending university. They came for the free study space, free meals, and free tutoring – the additional academic support they needed which they could not get elsewhere for free. The age range of the North Korean students coming to the center included students in their late teens to those in their late twenties and early thirties. The academic support was not limited to English, but the Center had undergone a shift toward increasing academic support for North Korean students.

Wooyang Foundation was a case which shifted its service to *English* education. Wooyang, founded in the 1980s by a Christian businessman, was a Non-Profit Organization (NPO) focusing on financial aid to the poor, and whose service many of my research participants used. Wooyang's English support for North Korean students was a joint project with Pagoda Hagwon (as mentioned, one of the top English hagwons in South Korea). Through this program North Korean students could take classes at Pagoda at a 70% discount. Wooyang recruits North Korean students, checks their North Korean identity (through government-issued certificates), and funds 70% of their class fees at Pagoda. Many North Korean young adults applied to this program because it attached no (Christian) conditions for the benefit.

In my interview with the North Korean discount program director, I found that North Korean young adults came to the attention of the Foundation in the mid 2000s; their interest in English support came later, in late 2000s.

Excerpt 5.5 Interview with a director in Wooyang Foundation (February, 2013)  
Director Park: We were not supporting English from the beginning. We began a scholarship program for financially struggling students (elementary to university) in 2004. We have had our areas of interests; poor farm and fishery areas, financially dependent churches, and financially struggling young adults. Then North Korean young

adults came to our attention. As we were interacting with them, we began to understand what they need the most. In the early phase, we financially supported initial settlement: single young adults without family, and single moms. Then, there are North Korean student circles in each major university, and the representatives of each circle organized their own meetings. Our foundation president met with the representatives twice a year. We found that their difficulties were first, English, second, computer, and third marriage. We thought we can't cover all three, but began to search ways to support English.

Here we see the shift from *financial* support to *English* support for the North Korean young adults in response to the meetings with North Korean students. We also see that they chose *English* over other “needs” of the North Korean young adults (i.e., computer literacy and difficulty in finding spouses). Andrew Center tried to cater to the demands of the students by providing the environment in which students can live and do what they want to do. Wooyang, on the other hand, made a choice based on their ideas about what would best help the students, and hence made the choice to focus on English over other options.

Daniel School was another case which shifted its service to English support. Daniel School was an alternative school for North Korean migrants housed in a church in Seoul. In the interview with the school directors, Pastor Han and Pastor Lee, they explained that English was not their focus from the beginning. When the church first began a program to help the North Korean migrants, they had thought a vocational training program would be helpful for the migrants to settle in South Korea. However, they found a stronger demand from the North Korean young adults.

Excerpt 5.32 Interview with directors of Daniel School (February, 2013)

Pastor Han: At first, the school was envisioned as helping employment. But the North Korean migrants in their twenties and thirties had a strong desire for education, and we thought let's not just make them recipients of benefits but raise them as global leaders. We did a small study of needs analysis, reading through newspapers and theses, and meeting North Korean students. We found out that their biggest need was English. More than half of their difficulty was English. When we inquired into why they

dropped out of university, English emerged. So we decided that the students who come to our school will study English.

The church found out that English was the strongest demand they could address with the North Korean migrants. One thing to note is that with emphasis on English, the church shifted its goal for North Korean migrants from supporting employment to raising “global leaders”. My question remained, nevertheless, why English was so emphasized in this school.

Excerpt 5.38 Interview with directors of Daniel School (February, 2013)

Eun-Yong: I am wondering why you made this school to focus on English.

Pastor Lee: For them to have a role in the unification process, they need to be leaders in South Korea.

Pastor Han: There were discussions among the church elders of raising the North Korean kids into more competent individuals. My goal for them personally is for them to be happy. There is Jesus’ Great Commission (to witness to others), but what I think more is that the students will become happier when they meet Jesus. Situations will not change easily, that they are from the North, that their family is in the North, that there is prejudice and discrimination, and that there are difficulties in life. But, if you meet Jesus, even if the situation does not change, the strength to overcome the difficulty seems to come from him. I want my students to be happy, and I think meeting Jesus, having Jesus as their center, will give them perhaps an uncomfortable life but a happy life. But also, we want to raise them as important, influential leaders in the unification age, as Christian global leaders.

In this interview, I saw an interesting *heteroglossia*, or a fusion of Pastor Han’s personal voice and the dominant voice of the wider South Korean evangelicals. The pastor’s voice spoke of her wish for the students – focused on their personal encounters with Jesus. However, there was another voice coming from a wider evangelical discourse – about raising the North Korean students as competent, influential “leaders in South Korea” (in the words of Pastor Lee) and “Christian global leaders” (in the words of Pastor Han) for the envisioned future when Korea will undergo a process of unification (“unification age,” 통일시대).

We see a continuity of the gap between the students’ goals and the Christian teachers’

goals in learning/ teaching English, which we saw in the first missionary encounters in Korea a century before. I saw that not all of the North Korean students want to become Christian or have something to do with the grand narrative of Korean unification. They are more interested in immediate needs of survival, going to university and getting a good job. However, English again lies between the demands of the North Korean students and the vision of the evangelicals.

These three cases of Andrew Center, Wooyang Foundation, and Daniel School, show at least three things related to how ELT for North Korean migrants began. First, we see that education, particularly English learning, was a strong demand from the North Korean migrants. It became a stronger demand than housing, financial support, or vocational training, as more North Korean migrants became settled in South Korea. The struggles of North Korean young adults with English as they entered the competition structured by the state, top employers, and the market, were brought to the Christians. As the evangelicals found about these demands of the students, which were neoliberal demands to develop global habitus, the Christians responded and tried to help.

Secondly, we see that these neoliberal demands were accepted the evangelicals. In fact, as we saw in Chapter 4, the evangelical institutions were spaces where even the resistant North Korean migrants were persuaded and socialized to learn English, to become national/ global citizens of South Korea. Evangelicals are in alliance with the state in disciplining the North Koreans into neoliberal subjects. Thirdly, the evangelicals' own goals are interwoven with the provision of ELT, as they chose English over other option, and to do that in order to make them "Christian leaders". ELT is used as a medium through which the evangelicals' goals for the North Korean young adults can be achieved. Education is linked to social status, both in traditional and contemporary Korea; their educational outreach shows that they want the North

Korean young adults to become social elites. In combining English and Christianity, they aim to raise North Koreans to become elites for divine mission (of serving the nation, to become mediators of Korean unification).

The term "(national/ global) Christian leader" which are widely circulated in the field of South Koreans' educational outreach reveals the tension of the Christians between their missionary interest and elite interest. They want to serve God but they also want to become elites. This relates to the tension of Christians of serving God and Mammon (material wealth personified as deity), who are trying to follow the teaching of Jesus that "you cannot serve both God and Mammon" (Matthew 6:24). Gospel of Prosperity mediates this tension by framing socioeconomic gains as divine favor. The term "Christian leader", and missionary ELT which is used to achieve that goal, mediates this tension by the fusing the two: becoming an elite and serving God. English serves both the neoliberal interest for social mobility and the evangelical interest of missions. The overlap between the North Korean students and the Christian teachers is that they all pursue neoliberal interests through learning/ teaching English.

#### **4. Teachers' tension: Between helping and evangelizing**

##### **4.1 Struggling with *Test English***

The case of *Vision School* shows how South Korean program organizers struggled with what kind of ELT to provide to the students as the school encountered the North Korean students' difficulties with Test English. Vision School was founded in early 2000s by a missionary, and developed into a full-scale school. It used an entire floor of a building, which had classrooms, staff room, and cafeteria area. It also had a dormitory for the students in a separate space. I met a volunteer teacher from the school at a conference, and hearing about the research I was doing

about ELT at Christian institutions, the teacher invited me to the school. The school was seeking advice about their English curriculum. I met with the Vice-Principal for an interview and consultation, and he told me of their struggle with English.

Excerpt 5.7 Interview with director of Vision School (June, 2013)

Vice Principal Do: Basically everyone here wants to go to university. With other subjects, they can get the score they want, but they get terrible scores in English, like 20–30%. They are bad with vocabulary, with idioms. And their comprehension ability is bad too.

This school focused on the demands of the students to go to university, and on teaching Test English. The school was seeking advice because the students were particularly struggling with English. Like my participants discussed in Chapter 4, Test English was something more difficult and frustrating than other subject areas. The Vice-Principal told me that because of the low results in English compared to other subjects, there was a shared belief that North Koreans are bad in English. He showed me the teaching materials they were using.

Excerpt 5.8 Interview with director of Vision School (June, 2013)

Vice Principal Do: We use these textbooks. We do vocabulary with these textbooks of vocabulary lists. And we test them the next day. They don't know the right way to study English. They study English for four hours at night everyday. It's boring and seems endless. But the words they memorized don't last a week. It's not left in their heads.

One dominant practice of Test English is to memorize list of English words in arbitrary order. There is vast amount of vocabulary to be acquired to take the English proficiency tests like TOEIC. However, the school saw that it did not work with the North Korean students who had low English habitus and that their outcome in the competition was “terrible”. The school was trying different methods to help the students. The school also had native-speaker teachers



coming to the school. However, their role was not very helpful for the students. The school tried shifting to Christian English.

Excerpt 5.9 Interview with director of Vision School (June, 2013)

Vice-Principal Do: Jung Chul [another top-brand English hagwon in South Korea] has textbooks called *Who made the world*. I went to their workshop. They say to keep playing audio materials, and have them repeat. They emphasize chunks, listening in chunks. The content is very biblical.

Jung Chul developed a program of English learning with Christian content. The school purchased the materials from Jung Chul. However, he told me that it somehow did not work very well for the students. It only widened the gap between the school and the students whose goals were about taking tests and going to university

For the North Korean non-elites who had not had access to English for most of their time in North Korea or during their migration process, they could not overcome the barrier of English tests set up by the elites. The school which was following the dominant practice of South Korea was also struggling to find out ways of ELT which could work better with North Korean students. The school was seeing that following student demands or the conventional ways for South Korean students might not work with the North Korean students who were at the lower end of the English Divide.

#### **4.2 Negotiating *Christian English***

Christian English was a mode of ELT where the evangelical goal was more pursued than student demands. Most educational institutions I observed/ interviewed had at least a portion of Christian English in their curriculum, in the form of English Bible reading or English services.

Dormer (2011), a Christian applied linguist, made the distinction between *evangelism* and *discipleship* as the purposes of Christian English ministries:

I use *evangelism* in the broadest sense. However, we embody the gospel, working for the redemption of relationships and societies through the power of Jesus Christ. *Discipleship* involves working with those who are already believers, helping them grow in their faith (Dormer, 2011, 26)

Evangelism is done to the non-believers and discipleship is the training of the believers. This is an important distinction to make considering the North Korean students. The attitude of the students about Christian English or other Christian activities at the schools differed significantly depending on whether they were believers or not.

However, many institutions I observed did not separate evangelism and discipleship. Christian English was usually taught to all students regardless of whether they had faith or not. Through having students participate in Christian activities, the evangelicals expected that faith would come sometime in the process. As Bible reading was a key activity in the shelters in China, English Bible reading was also favored by the evangelicals as a way of both learning English and evangelizing the students. However, Christian English was not as accommodating to the non-believing students, and therefore, I observed that the evangelicals needed to engage in some kind of negotiation to have the North Korean students engage in Christian English.

One such example was North Korean Christian Young Adult Association (NKCYYA). It was an association organized by a Christian North Korean, and it had weekly meetings. Many of my participants and members of Seoul Church were going to the meeting of the association on Saturdays (including Hae-Mee, Sung-Chul, and Chul-Kyoo). I could visit and observe a session through my participants.

The Elder was teaching English Bible to a group of North Korean young adults. When I

observed the session, which lasted for about two hours, there were about 20 North Korean young adults. The Elder first asked the students to memorize the English Bible verse that had been given as homework the week before. A few of them had memorized it fully. Then he began the English Bible session. Students each had a Korean QT book (Quiet Time book). QT is a small booklet with daily Bible passages used for meditation and to facilitate a personal quiet time with God. Doing QT is a prevalent practice among the evangelicals to personally read and interpret the Bible, and there are many publishers of QT books in South Korea. At the meeting, students were given a one-page hand-out with the same passage from the QT book in English version. The students were to have read the passage in Korean in the QT book, and during the session, they read the same passage in English on the hand-out. The class translated each English sentence in the hand-out into Korean. Students took turns in translating the sentences. Not many students could translate fluently. After each student's turn, the elder explained the sentence. This format (student translation – teacher explanation) was repeated for almost every sentence on the hand-out. It was a typical Grammar-Translation method, considered the most traditional method in second language teaching methodology.

At the end of the session, the elder stressed attendance and homework. Then he mentioned *scholarships*. He said that the association was thinking of giving scholarship to students not only with full attendance but who had also done all their homework (verse memorization). Those who could not attend the session for a good reason (e.g., a medical problem) should bring a document of proof.

After the session, I had the chance to interview the Elder. He explained where the scholarship was coming from and why this association was giving them out.

Excerpt 5.27 Interview with director of NKCYAA (November, 2012)

Elder: We have been giving scholarships from the beginning of this association. From this year, we are checking the students' attendance more carefully and cutting down the scholarship if they don't memorize the assigned Bible verse.

Eun-Yong: Where does the fund come from?

Elder: We get donations from few individuals and churches. The staff also pays fees, even myself, and it all goes to the students.

Eun-Yong: What if the students are coming just for the money?

Elder: The North Korean young adults are pragmatic. The scholarship must be one of their reasons of coming here. If there was no scholarship, would they come here? I know the issue, and I talk about that in the class occasionally, honestly. However, the text messages that some of the former students send me on Teachers' Day resolved such worries. If there is even one person who stands right on the Word and agrees to the intention of the meeting, that would be the purpose of my ministry. I will work for that one person. I do tell them sometimes that I hope people who are coming here just for the scholarship won't come here. I hope that only the people who come for the Word and think of the scholarship as an additional reward will come here.

The churches were a major source of funding, and the Elder himself was paying association fees in addition to the volunteer teaching he was doing. He was aware that some the North Korean young adults (if not most of them) were coming for the scholarship. He was willing to pay the price for that one person who would be inspired by the exposure to the Bible.

The sensitivity of the association to attendance and homework was a form of negotiation with the North Korean young adults. The association was trying to encourage attendance and homework through scholarship and the North Korean members were more interested in the scholarship than the attendance or homework. Having stricter criteria for scholarship was a way for the association to be less naïve in dealing with the North Korean young adults – “less naïve” in the sense that the association had to acknowledge and deal with the students who were coming there for the scholarship, and not just for the English Bible reading. For the evangelicals, having the students exposed to the Word was seen as very valuable despite the costs.

The elder explained why he was using English Bible.

Excerpt 5.26 Interview with director of NKCYAA (November, 2012)

Elder: If we study with English Bible, we can talk about both the grammar and the Bible stories. Two benefits at the same time. I make them memorize the verses because I myself have memorized about 350 ~ 400 verses in English. The Bible says that the word of God is alive and active [Hebrews 4:12]. When I read the Bible in Korean, the words are alive, but I could really feel that the Bible is alive and active as I memorized the verses in English. You don't have to memorize just the Korean version. If you memorize in English, you can memorize more widely.

He was fluent in English without having lived in English-speaking country. He credited his English ability to the English Bible memorization method which he had been practicing for several years.

For those with Christian beliefs, reading the Bible through two languages can be very motivating. Lepp-Kaethler & Dornyei (2013) investigated how Christian vision and the use of sacred text enhanced language-learning motivation. One of the participants in their study expressed a similar approach:

I used the Bible as my textbook ... For me learning the truth from the Bible and learning English in my own way are inseparable. ... It served two purposes together, two in one. (Lepp-Kaethler & Dornyei, 2013, p. 180)

The benefits of English Bible, however, seem to work best in the discipleship context, not in evangelism context. For North Korean students, the general pattern was that they did not find Christian English to be motivating. Teacher Hong at Ezra School once remarked, “Christian content is not fun for the students.” Also, the text in the Bible was not an easy text for North Koreans students.

Excerpt 5.30 Interview with Ye-Young (November, 2012)

Ye-Young: I was exposed to English mostly through missionaries. What they were saying was all Bible stuff. But I didn't study English through the Bible. The words are too difficult.

Ye-Young learned to speak English mostly through Christians, but that did not mean she was engaged with Christian English. For the South Korean evangelicals to teach Christian English to North Korean students, they had to negotiate it with additional resources.

### **4.3. Creating spaces of *Communicative English***

North Korean students' attitudes about Communicative English varied. Students with clear goals which needed an English test score had less interest in Communicative English because it did not seem immediately needed. As we have seen, they resisted ways of learning other than Test English. On the other hand, North Korean students with interest in really learning English were highly interested in Communicative English. They went to institutions that freely provided the resource of Communicative English, which was not easily available elsewhere in South Korea.

In institutions like Vision School, although they had the resources for Communicative English, it was a small and secondary part of the program. Students in these institutions were focused on university admission. Some other institutions provided Communicative English as a major program focus. North Korean students with interest in Communicative English came to these institutions to practice speaking English. In my view, these institutions were fewer in number. Also, importantly, there was less participation by "South Korean" players socialized in Test English. Instead, there was a greater presence of non-South Korean players (e.g., North Koreans, Korean-Americans) who could drive a Communicative English program.

In this stream of Communicative English teaching, I identified a range of social actors working with North Korean students. There was the British Council and other embassies of

English-speaking countries in South Korea, and various religious and non-religious NGOs. They were ideologically-driven institutions (political or religious) which had motivations other than monetary profit underlying the provision of free English to North Korean students. There were also many individuals who were willing to provide free English tutoring if the recipient was a “North Korean student.”

One such institution was an NGO called PSCORE (성통만사). It was a non-religious organization led by North Korean young adults. It connected English-speaking tutors and North Korean tutees both offline and online. According to a study on this organization (David-West & Suh, 2014), the North Korean tutees expressed strong demand for spontaneous English conversation opportunities. What I note here is that this space of Communicative English was created by North Korean students and English-speaking teachers.

Figure 5.1 English class at PSCORE



Note. Public image from PSCORE website

Another example was Daniel School. It was the alternative school which had shifted its focus from vocational training to English teaching with the vision of raising Christian global

leaders. The school was run by two directors, Pastor Han who was a Korean and Pastor Lee who was a Korean-American. Daniel School had some distinctive characteristics. It was different from other alternative schools for North Korean youths in at least four ways: i) the school focused heavily on English, ii) it focused exclusively on Communicative English and not Test English nor Christian English, and iii) the school's students were not limited to students preparing for university but included university students and other young adults who wanted to improve their English communicative ability.

Daniel School focused on English and it was small-scale compared to other schools. Other alternative schools focused on university preparation, had long school hours during the day, and tried to support many other things students needed for university preparation, such as teachers for all the different subjects needed, individual study-spaces, dormitories, etc. (e.g., Vision School). On the other hand, Daniel School had classes only in the evenings (Mon–Fri, 7–10 PM). Classes and the meals were provided free of charge before class; students were just asked to purchase the learning materials.

Excerpt 5.33 Interview with directors of Daniel School (February, 2013)

Pastor Lee: During the day they do what they need to do – go to college, vocational school, part-time job, or hagwon. For those who come to this school, for them English test is important but what is more important is pronunciation and conversation in English. We have lots of native-speaker teachers. Half of them are U.S. citizens. Studying for tests, they can do it alone. For the time they are here, they want to talk in English.

The school distanced itself from university admission or test preparation. All classes were taught by English-speaking teachers – either Korean-English bilingual teachers or English monolingual teachers.

Pastor Lee was in charge of the English curriculum of the school, and she herself was a



Korean-English bilingual speaker. The focus on Communicative English, and the distinctive way the school was run, in my view, came with Pastor Lee who had spent more time living in U.S. than in South Korea. She was new to the field of North Korean missions and to South Korea, which allowed her to design the school in a different way.

Excerpt 5.34 Interview with directors of Daniel School (February, 2013)

Eun-Yong: Have you been interested in North Korean mission originally?

Pastor Lee: It's been 3–4 years, when I met our senior pastor. We had to prepare a North Korea related camp and we met then for the first time. I was in charge of the English-related work of the missionary division of our church. And this school started, and the main thing is English here. The school needed someone in charge of English education, so I came here. I didn't have an interest in North Korea. I have no link, maybe except that my father-in-law is originally from North Korea. But as I spend time with the students, I find many commonalities. They and I are all living as aliens here. So I thought maybe this is my calling.

She had extensive teaching experience and expertise in English education. She designed the curriculum so that English curriculum was organized along specific domains of English: phonics, grammar, and the four language skills of listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Phonics and grammar were required courses for all students. The rest were electives. Each of the four language skills were organized into six levels: Beginning 1, 2, Intermediate 1, 2, and Advanced 1, 2. All incoming students were to take placement tests, after which they were placed into their levels.

The school had made affiliations with several Christian programs and institutions in English-speaking countries: a college in the U.K., a volunteer program in the Philippines, and Korean churches in Australia. Based on those affiliations, they invited English-speaking teachers, and the institutions also invited the North Korean students there for English speaking opportunities. The school created a space where there was ample English capital and was not directly restricted by regulations of testing. It constructed an environment like the ESL classes in

the core countries where principles of CLT were first developed (Holliday, 1994).

North Korean students learning Communicative English showed a pattern of fast acquisition of spoken English. Ye-Young, who was one of the best English speakers among my participants, was one such example. She came to South Korea at age 19 with almost no prior English learning experience, and through her Christian network, she learned to speak fluent English in a few years. The cases of these North Korean English speakers will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. It was, in my view, their relatively non-“Korean-ness”, due to less schooling in their migration process, which made English “speakable”. In other words, the Communicative classrooms were often the meeting place of non- Korean teachers and students, who were less socialized into Koreans’ unspeakable English (Park, J.S., 2009) and could create alternative ways of being Korean. Being evangelical was itself an alternative way of being Korean, because speaking English is important for evangelical mission in many ways (for communicating with “unreached nations”, for having the social status to be influential). In this way, Communicative English was an important contact point between the North Korean students and evangelicals who were seeking for alternative ways of being Korean.

## **5. Students’ tension: “I don’t think North Korean students go to church just for English.”**

### **5.1 Calculating the cost and benefit**

As one of the South Korean interviewees mentioned above, North Korean young adults were pragmatic. Considering the pain of leaving behind their hometown and in some cases even their families for good, they were careful how to spend their limited resources and how to be efficient in acquiring resources. For this, they had to decide, in one way or another, how to position themselves vis-à-vis Christianity and the help they were offering. Once they decide to

participate in Christian community, they also had to decide their positioning towards the Biblical teachings, which they knew the Christians wanted them to accept together with the free resource. In another sense, they had to make sense of why they were turning to Christians; whether it was for faith or for the free resources.

Ye-Young first encountered Christianity during her eight-year stay in China as an illegal migrant, a stay which was fraught with the fear of getting caught. She learned about Christianity from a missionary living next door in China. She did not accept it at the time, but since that time, whenever she had difficulty she started to pray to God. She says that she felt comforted when she prayed, and there were a few times when she was amazed by how her prayer seemed to be actually answered. However, she said she was not so committed to Christianity as to live her whole life by the Bible. She was more concerned about having better life and better job, simply a successful life. She was honest in her desires with Christianity, desires compatible with the “gospel of prosperity”.

Excerpt 5.35 Interview with Ye-Young (July, 2014)

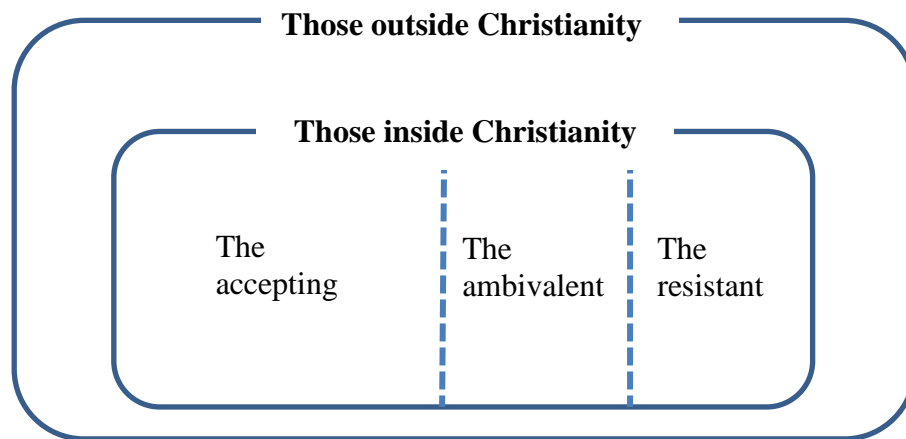
Ye-Young: What Christianity means to North Korean defectors? I think we can't ignore the material support. There are lots of churches which give money to North Koreans. With this information, everybody was coming to church. I didn't choose to go to church because of the money. As I attended church, I met many warm-hearted people and I liked their care for me. But I did receive a scholarship of hundred thousand won [approx. \$100] each month.

Ye-Young said she was not going to church just for the money, but she did acknowledge that receiving money may have influence on her choice to come, and to continue to come, to church. For the North Korean migrants receiving free resources from Christians, they were experiencing certain tension in how they made sense of their positions.

Among the North Korean young adults, I could identify at least four types of positions

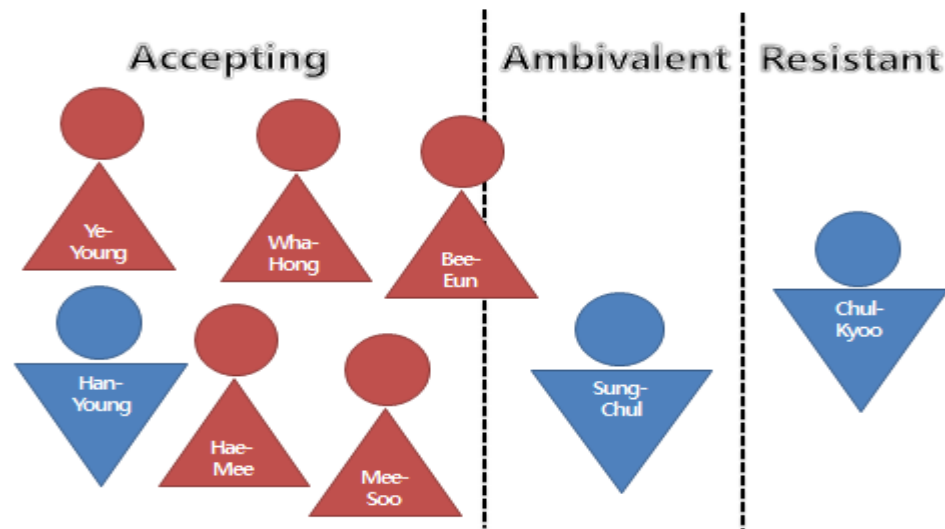
in relation to Christianity: i) accepting, ii) ambivalent, iii) resistant, and iv) those who were outside of the spheres of Christianity (e.g., church, Christian schools) altogether.

Figure 5.2 North Korean migrants' relations to Christianity



All of the eight focal participants were inside the Christian sphere. Educational outreach of evangelicals was a key venue for them to participate in church. All of them were students or had graduated from one of the alternative schools for North Korean youths run by evangelicals. The participants whose stories have been told in Chapter 2 (Ye-Young, Hwa-Hong, and Bee-Eun) and Chapter 3 (Han-Young, Hae-Mee, and Mee-Soo) fall under the category of the accepting. Among the participants, Sung-Chul was the ambivalent one, and Chul-Kyoo the resistant.

Figure 5.3 Participants' relations to church



With the Christian network that I had, it was difficult for me to track those outside of Christian institutions. North Korean migrants rarely performed their North Korean identity outside the Christian context. Being a North Korean in South Korea often generated either excessive sympathy or hostile discrimination. Especially, the pitying or condescending gaze of South Koreans, the boundary-marking itself, could be emotionally damaging to North Korean migrants. The emotional damage did not come with any tangible benefits. In such context, there was no need to perform the North Korean identity. They would not identify themselves as North Korean unless it gave them clear benefits, and church was one such setting.

I frequently asked the participants about the North Korean young adults outside of church. Chul-Kyoo once gave me a surprising figure:

Excerpt 5.36 Interview with Chul-Kyoo (February, 2013)

Chul-Kyoo: Out of those who are studying, there is almost none who don't come to church. You can say that almost 97% of the North Korean young adults here are non-believers. Students who are here, do you think they are here because they really have

faith? Those students are almost non-existent.

He was claiming that most of the North Korean young adults who are “studying,” the academic type who are aspiring higher social status in South Korea, are inside the sphere of Christianity. Thus, most of them were not there out of faith but to get the academic resource they needed. Chul-Kyoo himself was coming to church for practical purpose, and he saw many others like him. However, his perception might have been too extreme. Bee-Eun had a different perspective.

Excerpt 5.37 Interview with Bee-Eun (September, 2012)

Bee-Eun: I wouldn't say that North Korean students who want to study come to church just to get help. English tutoring, if you ask, you can get it for free anywhere. I don't think they go to church just for English. Mostly, it is because they like the people there, or need some healing. People in church are not bad people. We feel security and peace when we go to church. If they don't like the church, even if the church gives out money, they wouldn't go.

Bee-Eun also identified the group of North Korean students “who want to study.” From her perspective, the church was *not* the sole provider of the resources for the academic North Koreans. For her and many others, coming to church meant more than just “English” and “money.” Such discussion about the boundary between those inside the church and outside the church highlighted what Christianity meant for the North Korean migrants. Although Chul-Kyoo and Bee-Eun had different perspectives, to a significant extent, Christianity meant a place where they can get resources. “English and money” was not the only thing that church represented to them, but it was an important one.

North Korean young adults' decisions of “whether to go to church or not” often involved personal calculation of cost and benefit of going to church.

Excerpt 5.38 Interview with Sung-Chul (February, 2013)

Eun-Yong: Do you know North Korean young adults who are not in the church?

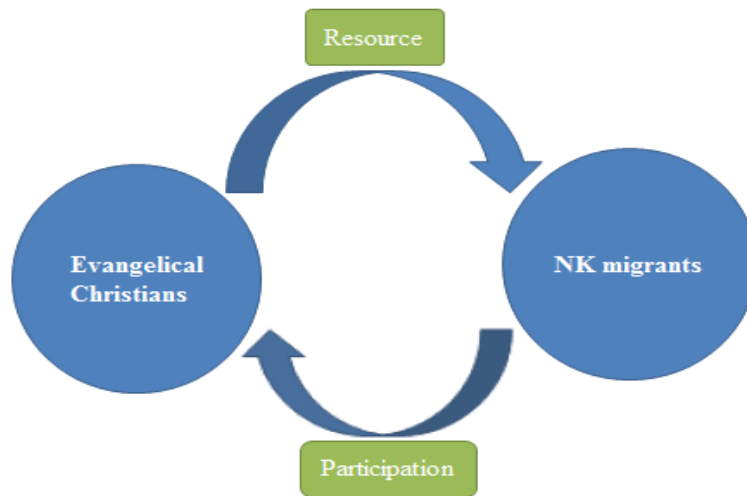
Sung-Chul: They don't like Christian culture, and they don't have faith. They think participating in church is wasting a day per week. Even the students in my school are poor kids. They know they have to give up certain things in order to get what they need. They accept the regulation of participating in worship service.

According to Sung-Chul, for those who decided not to go to church, the cost of going to church was greater than the benefit they can get. The time commitment was too great for them. If they decided to come, it meant that they calculated that the benefit was greater than the "cost" they needed to pay, such as "the regulation of participating in worship service." Doing what the Christians wanted them to do was the cost for getting what they needed from the Christians.

For the students in his alternative school, the condition of being admitted to the school was to attend Sunday services and its summer and winter retreats. The students were also asked to participate in the worship service each morning from 9:00 to 9:40 AM, and a weekly Bible reading class. As an all-day school, running from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM, the students were amply provided: free housing, free meals, individual study spaces, and additional scholarships. They knew they "have to give up certain things in order to get what they need." Whatever the evangelicals intended, many North Korean migrants understood their interaction with the Christians as a form of trade. For Sung-Chul, seeing North Korean migrants in such fate (including himself), he seemed to feel a degree of resentment towards the church and a degree of self-pity.

As what Bee-Eun said, such pragmatic calculation of cost and benefit might not constitute the responses of all the North Korean migrants to the church. However, the interactions between the evangelical Christians and North Korean migrants did involve a movement of resource to the North Korean migrants who participate in Christianity.

Figure 5.4 Interaction between evangelical Christians and North Korean migrants



The trade might have been clearer if it was a market exchange. The students could just pay for what was on the price tag. It would not involve emotional hurts from disappointments and unclear boundaries. No one would need appreciations. However, for the trade taking place in the church, the students themselves had to negotiate what they were giving back to the church. Sung-Chul was trying to negotiate between what to take from and what to give to the church.

Excerpt 5.39 Interview with Sung-Chul (February, 2013)

Sung-Chul: I am receiving what the church gives me without too much sense of burden. I think the benefits are not just on us. They are also using us. We are helping each other. I am doing it with thankfulness. However, I don't allow the church to force me to do anything. I do believe that there is a God. But I don't do some volunteer work in the Bible study group. I have to settle in the society. I can't do everything. I can be disliked for it, but I have no choice.

Sung-Chul saw North Korean missions as mutually beneficial to both South Korean Christians and North Korean migrants. The South Koreans could be seen as “using” the North Koreans for creating work and meaning for themselves. Sung-Chul was thankful that they initiated the help, but he did not let the church impose more than what he wanted to do. He was not fully



comfortable in refusing the pressures from church, but he asserted his boundary against the church. His resources were too limited to be wasted.

The ambivalent or resistant type tended to be recent migrants to South Korea while the accepting type tend to be the earlier migrants. Those I met in Ezra School in 2012 (Chul-Kyoo, Sung-Chul, and Hae-Mee) had left North Korea in more recent years. They were just beginning their academic trajectory at the school. Those I met in the wider community of Seoul Church (the rest of the participants) had left North Korea much earlier from late 1990s to mid-2000's, and by the time I met them, had graduated from alternative schools, and were in universities or in their workplaces. These earlier North Korean migrants have had much more intimate relationships with Christians in their migration and settlement process.

Particularly, the later migrants tend to have relied less on missionaries in their dangerous journeys to South Korea. Sung-Chul himself came to South Korea with the help of a broker, not a missionary. Sung-Chul explained why more North Korean migrants choose to depend on brokers instead of missionaries.

Excerpt 5.40 Interview with Sung-Chul (February, 2013)

Sung-Chul: Usually, the brokers who work more professionally are better knowledgeable about the safer defection routes. So, it is more expensive to use the brokers but the richer people use the brokers. Of course, there are those who come through missionaries, but the missionaries in China can only pay small amount of money to the brokers, so these brokers [who are paid small amount] rarely work with full responsibility. There was once an incident when six North Korean kids were deported back to North Korea. I heard that the missionaries tried to send them to South Korea with lower fee, and because of that the kids were caught. But I heard that the missionaries these days try to bring the migrants safely. And if you want to come with a broker, it costs about ten million won (approx. ten thousand dollars). So the poor people come through missionaries.

Broker fees is known to be about 10 times more expensive than paying missionaries or NGOs, but from what Sung-Chul said, even the missionaries need the help of the brokers to help the

North Korean migrants. This underground market of North Korean migration to South Korea has been a booming business.

This comparison between what is provided through Christians and what is provided through the market shows both the strength and the weakness of market exchange. Work based on the logic of capital maximized benefit and efficiency than work based on religious ideals (which is why more people rely on the efficiency of brokers). It also prevented unnecessary negotiations and calculation. However, I also saw unequal distribution of resource and materialism. The brokers do not have positive reputations. They are in one sense indispensable agents of North Korean human rights, but they are also known as profiteering people-smugglers who easily take advantage of the vulnerability of the migrants. Some brokers in China neglect North Korean children who do not have families in South Korea because they are not profitable for the brokers (government financial aid is given to migrants over the age of 21 and there is no one else to pay their fees). During the months-long covert migration projects, some of the migrants are raped, robbed, or even abandoned by the brokers. As the number of North Korean migrants began to decrease since 2012, there is more fierce competition among the brokers. According to media reports, some of the brokers go to an North Korean person living in North Korea and persuade the unwilling person to defect to South Korea. In response to this excessive pursuit of profit, some of these brokers organized an association to regulate unnecessary competition, unethical conducts, and to collaborate for finding safer migration routes. In any case, the role of Christianity was stronger for the earlier North Korean migrants. With the amateurism of missionaries coupled with other political conditions, the role of service provider has been shifting from religion to the market.

## 5.2 A case of resistance against Christian participation

North Korean young adults were often not comfortable with the conditions that followed the resources (such as Bible study) and often the amateurism of the service. These characteristics of some of the Christian volunteerism did not seem to be helpful to the evangelical aims. It gave negative impressions about the provider while resources were provided.

Chul-Kyoo was the harshest critique of the church. He was openly angry about the increasing requirements of his alternative school. At first, the condition of entering the school was just attendance of Sunday services and annual retreats. It was after some time that students were asked to attend morning services. During the semester that I was working at the school (fall of 2012), the school was enthusiastically developing more regulations which were to foster their faith and academics. During this semester, the Friday morning services became a Bible study session. Then, the students were asked to participate in weekly Bible reading classes either in Korean class or English class.

Chul-Kyoo resisted against these new regulations. He did not participate in other Christian requirements. He showed up in the morning services but, during the service when the teachers and students sat around a big table, he put his head into his arms on the table and did not lift up his head during the service.

Figure 5.5 A form of resistance against Christians



Source: Public image from google

When I repeatedly saw this scene during the morning services, I felt very uncomfortable. To my “moral” sense, it seemed very rude to the vice-principal who was leading the service. The vice-principal did not say anything to him. I asked him why he was doing it. He said that the morning service was not part of the deal. The school was to help him with his studies [by provision of the free study-space, the free meals, the free housing, and the scholarships]. He agreed to attend the Sunday services when he entered the school. He did want to learn more about Christianity, but he came to school to mainly study for his future. With too many new requirements, it interrupted his studies too much.

Excerpt 5.41 Fieldnote (November, 2012)

Chul-Kyoo: I don't know whether this is a place of studying or a church. A student's most important duty is to study. Should not the school help the students concentrate on his studies? Are they trying to make a stupid Christian?

For him, it was like he was attending church everyday instead on just the Sundays. Given the power relation between the school and the students, the school was trying to provide what they believed to be beneficial to the students but had to negotiate with the resistant student. He could not totally refuse the requirements, but he made his own boundary by separating himself from the group during the service. Eventually, the school exempted him from coming to the morning services.

There was a sense that the South Korean teachers were seeing the North Korean students as children who could not judge for themselves what is good for them. The students felt the subtle condescending attitudes of the South Korean teachers but it was another type of cost they had to pay to get what they needed. Chul-Kyoo, who was 28 years old when I first met him, told me of his anger in this respect.

Excerpt 5.42 Interview with Chul-Kyoo (February, 2013)

Chul-Kyoo: If I was in North Korea, I would have been a father. I had worked in the military for seven years and I would have been a high-ranking official. But here, they treat me like a kid.

He was studying Test English, and what he wanted the most was the time and space to study on his own. After some time, he moved to another school where there was not much Christian requirement to the students. Eventually, he left that school as well. He was living with his family, and by that time, he learned to study on his own. He relied on self-study and hagwon to prepare for his civil officer exam. He was shifting from church to market to get the resources he needed.

### **5.3 Accepting to become a “bridge”**

The length of time North Korean young adults spent in Christian communities, for whatever reason that it was sustained by, seemed to play a major role in their “acceptance” of Christianity. The research participants who were “accepting” of Christianity had been interacting with Christians over several years. Han-Young and Hae-Mee met Christians in China and had lived in China with Christians for four to five years before coming to Seoul Church in South Korea. In case of Bee-Eun and Mee-Soo, they came to South Korea through brokers and first met Christians in South Korea, but by the time I met them, they had had years of participating in Christian community. In other words, it took a long time before they could accept Christianity. For Bee-Eun, by the time I interviewed her in 2012, she had attended her alternative school for four years, and had been participating in Seoul Church for two years. She told me she began to “have faith” since 2011, after five years in Christian institutions.

Excerpt 5.43 Interview with Bee-Eun (September, 2012)

Eun-Yong: Since when did you have faith?

Bee-Eun: Maybe from last year [2011]? After the summer retreat. After coming back from the retreat, and as I met my small group leader, I was given the heart to pray.

Whenever I prayed, there was nothing that was not achieved. I feel like God keeps telling me to pray. When I pray hard, I also see visions.

What she saw in one of her visions, even before she had faith (in 2008), was quite astonishing to me.

Excerpt 5.44 Interview with Bee-Eun (September, 2012)

Bee-Eun: During a revival camp in 2008, when we were praying, I saw a vision. There was a net over us. Whenever I prayed hard, it made holes in the net. When I prayed less the holes got closed. But when I looked around, there were many people praying, but there was actually no sound of prayer. The people who actually prayed became three people, and then to five people ... the number of holes in the net kept increasing and decreasing.

The “net” was some kind of spiritual blockage between God and human. Sincere prayers enabled breaking through that blockage, forming spiritual connection between God and human. She had surprisingly visionary qualities which I saw in evangelicals. However, she seemed to be less appreciative than me of what I thought to be a special “spiritual gift.” A few months after the first interview, she said that when she prayed, somehow she would cry too much and her eyes would get extremely swollen that she could not go out for several days. She said she was therefore trying not to pray too much. From my evangelical background, I often found myself telling her to pray more. She did not seem to listen to my advice, and in 2014, she eventually left church. She was too busy with her part-time jobs and her studies.

Nevertheless, she was clearly favorable towards Christianity throughout the time I met her. What I also found surprising was that her personal goal also had qualities which South Korean evangelicals would like to hear. She wanted to be police officer and she wanted to be a “bridge” between North Koreans and South Koreans.

Excerpt 5.45 Interview with Bee-Eun (September, 2012)

Bee-Eun: I want to be a bridge. I go to police stations often. And I often see North Korean migrants fighting with the officers. I saw the difference between North Korean and South Korean people. South Koreans are very rational. When they go to police station, they know what is more advantageous to them. North Koreans are more emotional. They would beg that they are innocent, crying. I understand them, but the South Korea officers don't understand that. I feel really sad. The officers obviously listen to the person who speaks more clearly and rationally. A person who whines like a child, I wouldn't want to listen to that person either. In this kind of situation, I want to be a bridge who communicates clearly what the matter is. There is not a North Korean police officer yet. The exam is very difficult. But someone has to go through that.

Compared to those who did not want to reveal their North Korean identity, this was a very different way of identity. To assume such role of “bridge” between the two Koreas meant actively mobilizing their North Korean-ness. Chul-Koo, for instance, did not want to be such bridge, and he wanted to live quietly in South Korea with a secure job. From an evangelical perspective, Bee-Eun’s goal would be seen as much more positive than that of Chul-Kyoo. Bee-Eun had a vision of her future that was “outreaching,” offering oneself for the role of national reconciliation. It was not clear whether she formed such ideas from participating in church. It could possibly be a strategic way of highlighting her strength. However, I repeatedly found similar visionary discourses among the believing North Korean young adults.

Mee-Soo was another example. I once helped her prepare for her English interview for US internship program. We worked together to think of the answers to possible interview questions. I knew she wanted to become a public accountant, but when she was trying to talk about what her long-term goal was, she also mentioned about working for “Unified Korea.” I recognize that I might have contributed to this idea as I was working together with her. My fieldnote states:

Excerpt 5.46 Fieldnote (September, 2012)

For her goal to work as accountant for Unified Korea, she wanted to work as a civil officer in South Korea, and also work in a foreign country, and then back to Unified Korea. She said that there is not a tax system in North Korea, no concept of tax, because all things are the property of the State. For unification, there will need a major discussion about building a tax system for the Unified Korea.

For her, the reason why she needed to work as an intern in US was because it would be helpful for her goal to work for Unified Korea:

Excerpt 5.47 Fieldnote (September, 2012)

Mee-Soo (her written response to a possible interview question): I have the dream of working for the accounting system of Unified Korea. I have working experience in North Korea. I have studied Accounting in South Korea, and if I have the opportunity to learn and experience the accounting system of the US, all of these together will be very important stepping stone for achieving my dream.

Another example was from the North Korean young adult English speech contest I attended in 2012. There were five contestants including Ye-Young, who were the top five out of all the North Korean young adults who had applied. Four out of the five contestants openly expressed their Christian faith in their speeches. One of the contestants spoke of his motivation to work as a volunteer teacher at a Christian school for North Korean students:

Excerpt 5.48 Fieldnote of the response of a contestant (2012 North Korean young adult English speaking contest, December, 2012)

Contestant: I had the chance to go to America. A missionary organization invited me to study. Lots of people who I didn't know supported me. I don't know their names. I thought wow, they are helping me without knowing me. Maybe I should give back to society. I teach younger North Korean students at a North Korean School. These young refugees have lots of experience. They have experienced both North Korea and South Korea. They know two Koreas and they understand the culture and politics, so it's better for them to reach to North Koreans to communicate with them rather than South Koreans. I mean South Koreans can do well, but we have understanding. Many of the North Korean students are losing purpose of their lives. They just try to work and get money, but I would say we should have bigger dream.

This contestant was also seeing the role of North Korean migrants as a bridge between the two



Koreas because the migrants knew both societies. His “bigger dream” clearly came from his Christian experience.

## **6. Conclusion**

In the context of the tensions of globalization, discussed throughout this study, missionary ELT has its appeal to both the North Korean migrants and South Korean evangelicals. North Korean missions work is increasingly focusing on the young adults because they are one of the most vulnerable groups impacted by the state tensions (trying to win the neoliberal competition often without realizing how unprepared they are) and thus directly experience the English Divide. North Korean mission is increasingly focusing on education, and particularly on English education, which reflects the changing meaning of language as resource and capital, and the increasing importance placed on language for profit and social mobility in the globalizing South Korean society. In these social conditions, the evangelical institutions have become a space where the North Korean students can find support, a space that functions as a buffering zone to mediate state tensions.

We have seen that when missionary encounters are mediated by resource provision such as education, the missionaries and the recipients often show diverging interests in their interaction. Particularly when mediated by *cultural capital* such as ELT, we see the tension between the teachers' goal of evangelizing, and the students' goal of social mobility. This tension between evangelizing and fulfilling student demands has existed since the first missionary ELT in Korea between western missionaries and Korean students for whom education has long been about exam and social status. This tension is particularly strong in contemporary missionary ELT, existing between South Korean evangelicals and North Koreans, for whom English is

about surviving the new social phenomena – globalization.

What this suggests is that the power relations between teachers and students are complex. Students are not the absolute weak, always manipulated by the Christian teachers. I observed high degree of agency on the part of the students who could negotiate, resist, or leave the Christian community. However, their degree of agency was much more constrained in restricted setting, for example when they were in China as illegal refugees under the custody of missionaries. In South Korea, however, we can see both the Christians' push and the students' push in driving the form of ELT, and that elite/ neoliberal interests were pursued by both the Christians and the students.

The different ways of teaching ELT examined in this chapter show different ways the tension – between evangelizing and helping – is played out. What I find to be problematic at this point is that Christian English could be an imposition of Christian teachers' interest if it is insensitively pressed on to non-believers, or if evangelism and discipleship is not distinguished. Also, Christian material was usually too difficult and not interesting for the North Korean students for their English learning.

Communicative English represented a third way between Test English and Christian English. It was helpful for the North Korean students because becoming English speakers opened an alternative route to compete both domestically and globally. It also aligned with evangelical values of communicative, spontaneous, and direct relationship with people and God. Being an English speaker was an alternative way of being Korean, for whom the dominant ideology is that English is *unspeakable* (Park, J.S., 2009). How North Korean students so quickly learned Communicative English in these spaces was one of the most surprising outcomes I observed in this study. I discuss this in more detail in the next chapter.

This tension between *helping* and *evangelizing* was received differently by each North Korean migrant. We see panoply of different responses, which range from disinterestedness, resistance, negotiated participation, to full embracing of the evangelical outlook towards the nation. This shows their almost zero habitus in Christianity before encountering the South Koreans, and their diverse and changing circumstances and needs. This also shows the changing power relations between the North Korean migrants and the South Korean evangelicals, as the site of contact moves from China to South Korea, as the need for resource and meaning of North Korean migrants decrease, and the social influence of South Korean evangelicals has changed over the years.

What this study also shows is the linguistic effects of religion, in this case, how religion can create space of alternative language ideology. In the linguistic field of South Korea, it is difficult to become English speakers. It is ideologically, politically, and economically constrained. However, evangelicalism produced the rare space in Korean context where English has strong communicative use through its global outlook for world evangelism, its global network through which English speakers circulate, its affinity with neoliberal values of linguistic self-development, and its direct, relational, and spontaneous style of communication with God and others. This especially worked well with the North Korean migrants who are less constrained ideologically with their migration background and who seek legitimate, significant identities in South Korea.

The next chapter, the final analysis chapter, deals with how the individual North Korean young adults actually navigated the state tensions and the evangelical support in their identity politics. It shows how the categories of nationality, religion, and language are mobilized in various ways by different individuals, and converge in their becoming neoliberal citizens. It also

demonstrates how ways of identity construction are linked with the extent to which English is “speakable” or not. The discussion continues to show the common thread in this study: how English in South Korea is terrain where state tensions are played out, and where those tensions are mediated.

## Chapter 6

### Ways with identities

This chapter examines the ways the North Korean young adults constructed their identities, and how their identities shaped their English learning and their social trajectories. Studies on the issue of second language learning and identity (e.g., Norton, 2000; Block, 2007) have been a hallmark of *social approach* in applied linguistics. They showed that individual, cognitive factors were often limiting in explaining the diverse language trajectories and outcomes, and that power struggle in how the learner defines oneself, or is defined by the dominant discourse, crucially shape or restrict their learning process. As I have examined the participants' English learning experiences, the way they engaged in this politic of identity is the final topic of analysis in this study.

As we have seen so far, there are important social categories we are dealing with in this study. They include the categories of nationality (Korean nationalism) and religion (evangelical Christianity). Globalization made the meaning of these identity resources important. The ideological backdrop of i) strong Korean nationalism, ii) globalization in tension with the Korean nationalism, and iii) evangelical Christianity where these tensions were mediated was the terrain on which North Korean young adults were navigating to construct their identities.

The central contradiction regarding the politic of identity for the North Korean young adults, I argue, is that they are South Koreans (by citizenship) but cannot become South Koreans (by their cultural habitus) (also discussed in Chung, 2008). A quote by Pastor Lee at Daniel School, who was working with North Korean young adults, addresses this contradiction.

Excerpt 6.1 Interview with directors of Daniel School (February, 2013)

Pastor Lee: I think for them, they are neither North Korean nor South Korean. They can never become a South Korean even if they live for long time.

Looking at oneself through the gaze of South Koreans, wanting to become a South Korean (and the state telling them that they are South Korean), but realizing as they live in South Korea that they cannot become a South Korean, is what many North Korean migrants undergo.

Many North Korean refugees, unlike other migrant groups of different ethnicities, are reluctant to take the lower-class positions usually prescribed for new migrants in South Korea. They expect and feel that they are entitled to more. The North Koreans arrive empty-handed, and yet they are officially welcomed and told that they are South Korean citizens, just like their brethren in their new nation. ... Then, the capitalist class system works against those without capital. Would they accept their position at the bottom of South Korean society? The answer is no. Many of them try to assume middle-class status by utilizing their symbolic capital, as politically significant beings. This leaves many North Koreans unwilling to accept the job that they feel will marginalize them into the lower class. (Chung, 2008, 19)

In this chapter, I examine how the focal participants responded to this contradiction.

The participants tried to find which social category works best to define them. Most of the participants invested in English as a way to show who they are. Some considered their religious identity as important in projecting who they are to the society. In any case, the category of North Korean-ness was central. All of the North Korean young adults I observed have mobilized their North Korean identity to some degree. Some used it just to get South Korean citizenship. Some performed their North Korean identities in settings that gave them resources and significance – in governmental/ non-governmental organizations, in churches, in universities, and sometimes in the media. Some later drifted away from these South Korean nationalistic institutions and did not show their North Korean identity. Some of them found new nation-states to perform their North Korean identities (like Canada where they could be given refugee status).

I present in this chapter three distinctive ways of constructing identities I observed

among the participants: i) did they try to desert the North Korean identity because it does not seem to be valued by the society? ii) did they try to mobilize it because that was what made them significant?, or iii) did they try to make a new category, a third place, between being North Korean and South Korean? I describe the stories of Chul-Kyoo, Han-Young, and Ye-Young as central examples of each case, with English as the window.

With my lens of language, the question of linguistic identity – how they define their positions regarding languages, particularly the global language – was a window into their positions regarding nationalism and globalization. Some chose not to bother with the global altogether (like Wha-Hong, who avoided and dropped out of things of English). Many of them had to confront the issue of who to be regarding English because their goals (e.g., entering university, becoming police officer, or becoming significant) demanded them to confront the issue.

Different ways of constructing linguistic identities had to do with whether English was *speakable* to them. I refer to Park (2009)'s study about the “*speakableness*” of English for Korean; he has documented the language ideologies in South Korea which makes English unspeakable, because English is non-Korean (externalization ideology) and Koreans are bad at English (self-deprecation ideology), while there is strong belief in the utility value of English (necessitation ideology). Korean nationalism conflicts with the practice of speaking English when English is considered as the language of non-Korean nationality. The repertoire of Test English in the early phase of South Korea's globalization, which only asked for comprehension skills (listening, reading and grammar) was a product, or a compromise, of the tensions between globalization and nationalism. It was a compromise because it did not ask for speaking, which is a more embodied form of linguistic practice. English was speakable for those who did not feel

conflict between their nationality and English, that is, for whom English was not about national identity but something else (e.g., their resource).

### **1. Chul-Kyoo, a civil servant-to-be**

I have claimed that the North Korean young adults face the contradiction that they are South Koreans, but at the same time, they cannot be South Koreans. For Chul-Kyoo, another contradiction seemed to apply at the same time. He was North Korean (more than anyone among the participants, considering his age and work experience) but he did not want to be North Korean. He seemed almost trapped between the North Korean-ness which he wanted to leave behind, and the South Korean-ness which he could not become.

He was the oldest student at Ezra School, with a strong North Korean accent. I sometimes had difficulty understanding him because of his strong accent. I felt bad when I had to keep asking him to repeat. His way of speaking was often violent, to the point that it would sometimes be difficult for me just to listen. This could have come from his work experience as a North Korean soldier. I expressed to him my feeling of discomfort and he would feel bad about it, but he said that was the way he talked. He was critical, and sometimes harsh, and sometime perhaps biased, but he was insightful.

In a way, he was idealistic, perfectionist, and therefore prone to disappointments. He left North Korea in disappointment with Juche ideology and its social order. He left North Korea to live in South Korea with his mother and sister.

Excerpt 6.2 Interview with Chul-Kyoo (February, 2013)

Eun-Yong: Why did you come to South Korea?

Chul-Kyoo: My sister was already living in South Korea. And it is my country too. I didn't want to fight and die for a couple of army generals. I was in charge of the Political Division's ideology education, so my work was mostly reading and writing



reports in the office. I read a lot of books and fiction. I once read Juche Ideology, but I felt no inspiration. After that, I began to be rebellious. As I did police work, I thought this is not right, to talk good at front, and to talk bad at the back.

He was a reader, he had his set of moral principles, and he rebelled against what he saw as not right.

He was, with Hae-Mee, the most recent migrant to South Korea among the participants. Unlike Hae-Mee, though, he had not lived in China before coming to South Korea. His family brought him to South Korea through Thailand. He had worked for several years in North Korea as a soldier.

After he made the decision to leave behind North Korea in his mid-twenties, he worked hard to prepare his new future in South Korea. He valued learning, and English was an important part of his learning. From the time he was in North Korea, he tried to learn English. After his formal education and military service, he wanted to invest in more education and particularly English.

Excerpt 6.3 Interview with Chul-Kyoo (February, 2013)

Eun-Yong: Why did you go back to English after military service?

Chul-Kyoo: Even if I live the lowest life, even if I do the lowliest work, to do it well, I needed English. I did two years of vocational college. I studied explosives, did army for 7 to 8 years. After that, I asked a high school student to help me with English. But at that time, when I saw the textbook, I said, "Why is it so complicated?" But I thought, "Let's do English first." An old engineer gave me an English book. He said, "If a man wants to live, knowing is power."

When he came to South Korea, he came to Seoul Church and Ezra School. His plan was to first enter a top university, and then study for the top-ranking civil service exam. That was the route to access to one of the top social groups in South Korea. He said that once he decided to study at an old age, he wanted to aim for the best. Most of the universities with special

admission regulations for North Koreans did not require them to take CSAT, the nation-wide university entrance exam administered once every year. It was the very top universities which required CSAT, even of North Korean applicants. Chul-Kyoo wanted to enter university with minimal North Korean advantage. He wanted to compete on fair ground with South Korean test-takers. The place of English in South Korea, however, was something difficult to grasp.

In Ezra School, he was studying for the CSAT which was to be administered in November of that year, 2012. CSAT has four sections: verbal, numerical, social/ natural science, and English. The English section of CSAT had listening and reading parts. According to the teachers at Ezra School, he did well on reading, but his listening was bad.

Excerpt 6.6 Interview with director of Ezra School (April, 2013)

Director Song: He did only English. He had a plan of his own, but no coherence. He did TOEIC, TOFLE, CSAT. He does well on reading comprehension, With CSAT, his tutor was disappointed. He had too low ability for listening. He quickly gave up other subjects, like math. He seemed lost. He would follow what the teacher said, and then went back to his style.

For the teachers at Ezra School, he was not strategic enough as a test-taker.

Excerpt 6.8 Interview with director of Ezra School (April, 2013)

Director Song: He should do a bit of studying for the test, studying adjusted to the test, studying in CSAT style. If he was in college, he could do more studying in his style [but he is not in college].

Eun-Yong: What is Chul-Kyoo's style and what is CSAT style?

Vice-Principal Song: Chul-Kyoo's style is to look at every word, precisely. CSAT style is solving questions in time, and the skill of solving questions. However, studying this way, he feels intimidated. It hurts his pride.

The teachers tried to persuade him to follow the dominant social practices of Test English, but this did not align with his views about English.

Excerpt 6.9 Interview with Chul-Kyoo (February, 2013)

Eun-Yong: What's your goal of studying English?

Chul-Kyoo: Civil service exam, university entrance exam. Reading original texts freely and understanding their culture. It's a global age. I should communicate with the world. In Thailand, I saw the use of English as the world language.

In this quote, we can see that English means two things at the same time. It is both a medium of global habitus and a medium of national competition.

If Chul-Kyoo was “lost”, to me, it was because of the contradictory nature of Test English in South Korea (which includes CSAT, TOEIC, and TOEFL). He said that English is a stepping-stone, but he also approached English as an end in itself. He had to be strategic if it was a stepping-stone for university and the civil service exam, but he also wanted to “look at every word, read a lot, read original texts freely, and communicate with the world”. He wanted to both acquire global habitus and win the domestic competition, but the way Test English worked in South Korea did not allow them to be accomplished together. As discussed before, Test English is about English but it is also not just about English; to critical eyes, Test English measures something different than English, such as work ethics in the neoliberal economy (Kubota, 2011), which results in social selection in the interest of social elites (Song, J.J., 2011). Despite his hard work, his CSAT result was a failure. His CSAT score was not enough for the top universities.

Through the CSAT experience, he accepted his lack of competitiveness compared to other South Koreans for the top universities. He lowered his goal. He gave up on entering university. He once said, “The government is making us into fools. Those who entered colleges too easily, they think they are something.” He was critical of the state regulation which was, in a way, deceiving to the North Koreans. He changed his goal to the lower level civil service exam, and started to study for this civil service exam.

The high-level exam, which he wanted to take later after he graduated university, required proof of English proficiency through external standardized tests like TOEIC or TOEFL. The lower-level exam administered its own English subject, which had only reading and grammar. Since late 2012, he has been studying for this exam with several subjects (including Korean history, English, and area-specific subject), without positive results as of yet.

As he had about Juche Ideology of North Korea, he felt disappointments towards Christians as well. He first came to church after he read a bestseller book written by a popular American pastor, Joel Osteen, entitled *Your Best Life Now*. The success of Joel Osteen is criticized by South Korean evangelicals because his messages omit the work of Jesus and emphasize the power of positive thinking. For Chul-Kyoo, however, the book seemed to have formed what he expected of a Christian. He was disappointed as he began to actually interact with Christians:

Excerpt 6.10 Fieldnotes during tutoring with Chul-Kyoo (February, 2013)

Chul-Kyoo: I thought all Christians were like what it said in the book. But when I came to South Korea, it was not like that. They say God pours down as much as I worked. The mind, if mind can be changed, the whole world changes.

He did not like the visionary discourses of the evangelicals, which, in his view, made unnecessarily enlarged, unrealistic images of the self.

Excerpt 5.31 Interview with Chul-Kyoo (February, 2013)

Chul-Kyoo: You know what I found? The pastors are the biggest thieves. They get paid for doing nothing. I am not that thankful. They are getting paid because I am here. They don't have to provide for me. The teachers here they don't study. They teach badly. And they still want appreciation. They are blocking our way. Please, update yourselves! Please don't lie!

For Chul-Kyoo, the Christians seemed like thieves and liars because they were not helpful, they

asked for more than what was agreed (e.g., appreciation), and they were not honest about their amateurism, insecurities, and the side-benefits they were getting. He had a somewhat idealistic expectation of the Christians. He expected perfectly undemanding provision, which he believed he was entitled to.

Compared to Chul-Kyoo, Han-Young had lower expectation for Christians and was therefore less disappointed.

Excerpt 6.11 Interview with Han-Young (November, 2012)

Han-Young: There are some North Korean migrants who think that South Koreans must be kind to them and provide for them. But everyone has some duality or hypocrisy. Some North Koreans don't understand that. So are the South Koreans. They just have different methodology. So I didn't expect too much from South Koreans. So I was hurt less than other people. Especially the people I meet in church, they have good intentions, not intentions to use me. I have never met such a person in church.

While he was receiving many free resources, Chul-Kyoo was hurt and angry. The Christians, and the North Korean regime, were thieves to him. About the teaching that he can be a bridge between North and South Korea, he said he just wants to earn his living in South Korea.

Excerpt 6.12 Interview with Sung-Chul (February, 2013)

Chul-Kyoo: You South Korean Christians say that you want to come to North Korea and build churches? When you come to North Korea, you will all be killed.

This was his view from his recent experience as soldier in North Korea. He eventually left Christianity. He first left Ezra School, then he stopped coming to Seoul Church.

Excerpt 6.13 Fieldnotes during tutoring (February, 2014)

Chul-Kyoo: I am not going to church anymore from this year. Why waste my time? I don't believe in ideology anymore, either state or religion.

This might have to do with the fact that Seoul Church gave scholarships to North Korean

university students. Since Chul-Kyoo was not going to be a university student, there were no more resources he could receive from the church.

Chul-Kyoo tried to become part of South Korean society without mobilizing too much of his North Korean identity. One way to do this was through competing in Test English. His first With his pride, he did not want to develop test-taking tricks, but be really good at English. However, with the contradiction of Test English, English was not speakable for him. He wanted to become a civil servant, and with the old-fashioned English tests of early globalization in South Korea, he did not have to speak English with the test. When he did speak, his pronunciation was so bad (made worse with his strong North Korean accent) that others could hardly understand him. This made him avoid speaking even more. English learning was a quiet activity for him throughout. The mastery of Test English was a long process, which many South Korean young adults struggle with as well. He could not become competitive in Test English in a few years. He refused the support of the state and the church. He was a secluded, individual neoliberal citizen, competing in the national market.

In “late modernity”, according to Giddens, “the self becomes a reflexive project,” but Castells (2010) writes that the conditions of globalization makes it difficult for most people to plan their own lives and build self-identity.

The network society is based on the systemic disjunction between the local and the global for most individuals and social groups. ... Therefore reflexive life-planning becomes impossible, except for the elite. ... Under such conditions, civil societies shrink because there is no longer continuity between the logic of power-making in the global network and the logic of association and representation in specific societies and cultures. ... Most of social action becomes organized in the opposition between unidentified flows and secluded identities. (p. 11)

Chul-Kyoo was far and disconnected from the locus of power-making. He tried to stand on his

own and find his own way, but his individual effort was not (yet) enough to succeed in current South Korean society.

## **2. Han-Young, the North Korean evangelical**

In contrast to Chul-Kyoo, Han-Young relied on his North Korean identity and his Christian community. Castell (2011) calls the resurgence of nationalism and religious fundamentalism as a form of constructing “resistant identity” against the uncertainties of globalization.

Resistant identity is usually constructed by using materials inherited from history (god, nation, ethnicity, locality). (p. xxvi)

For those social actors excluded from or resisting the individualization of identity attached to life in the global networks of power and wealth, cultural communes of religious, national, or territorial foundation seem to provide the main alternative for the construction of meaning in our society. (p. 69)

Han-Young was open about his past, saying that he left North Korea because he wanted to avoid military service. He had to confront an uncertain future when he crossed the border to China, then travelling on to South Korea by himself, without any family. He needed help and a foundation for certainty. His construction of identity on the basis of his North Korean past made him welcomed and supported in the Christian community. From the time he lived in China with a South Korean missionary for five years, he found his space in Christian communities. He left the missionary in China when he found that the missionary had a plan to send him to North Korea, but when he came to South Korea, he found the community of Seoul Church. He was one of the earliest members of the North Korean community and was trusted by the leadership.

For the evangelicals working for North Korea, Han-Young was a significant person,

because he was North Korean willing to accept Christianity. They provided him with a space of alternative belonging and protection.

Excerpt 6.14 Interview with Han-Young (November, 2012)

Han-Young: All my income has been scholarship. I can't live just on government support. This is what makes the North Korean young adults who are by themselves find it difficult to live. Those who are with their family have more income and more support. To work part-time and also study in university is really hard. Most of the reason for leave of absence is to work. Cases like me are really rare. People ask me where did you get the money to go study abroad? How did you get the scholarship? I never had to worry about the money. When one scholarship was about to end, I got calls from another source. When I was about to come back from study abroad, my supervisor called me and told me that he wants to recommend me for this scholarship. It was a great scholarship, and I got it. I didn't have any reason to work part-time.

Many people invested in him to become a “leader”, a North Korean elite who can serve other North Koreans.

Becoming a “leader” seems to align with his goal. From the time he left North Korea, he wanted to go to university. He had wanted to go to university in China, and when he found that that was not a feasible option for him, he changed his plan to go to university in South Korea. As was the case with Chul-Kyoo, English was an important part of his plan of going to South Korea and going to university.

He was much more prepared in terms of English than many other North Korean migrants because of his affluent family background in North Korea.

Excerpt 6.15 Interview with Han-Young (November, 2012)

Han-Young: My Father emphasized English. Other students had old textbooks passed down from seniors, but my parents bought new ones for me. The notebooks all had to be prepared by the students. The papers were all cheap imitation vellum. However, my father made a vocabulary notebook for me. The paper was good, and the teachers and students envied me for that notebook.

When, at the time, English was not yet considered as important as it is now in North Korea, his



elite father, who saw the rise of English earlier than others, emphasized and supported his English learning. He did not like studying, but compared to other North Korean students, he had more English base from his schooling in North Korea.

Excerpt 6.16 Interview with Han-Young (November, 2012)

Han-Young: I didn't study English in China, but when I had to use English in the Third Country, I could remember quite a lot of English words I used to memorize. I was probably in a better situation (in terms of English) than other defectors who had no base in English. I had grammar, word order of English as my base.

From the time he decided to come to South Korea, he began to invest in English by his own will. He worked hard to study English. He said he had a somewhat exaggerated perception about the place of English in South Korea. He had thought that everyone in South Korea would speak English.

Excerpt 6.17 Interview with Han-Young (November, 2012)

Han-Young: I began studying English a few months before coming to South Korea. When I was at the South Korean embassy in Myanmar for three months, I studied English intensively. The official there asked me what I wanted to do while waiting there. I said I wanted to study English. So there were some young adults from South Korea on KOICA<sup>7</sup>. So they gave us free English tutoring. Other students all gave up, but I was the only one remaining. There were three teachers. Each taught Grammar, Speaking, and Reading. It was very helpful. When I was in NIS (National Intelligence Service), I asked the official there for a middle-school level vocabulary book. And I totally memorized it.

When he came out of Hanawon into South Korean society, he saw that English was not spoken as much as he had worried. He studied in Ezra School for his preparation for university admission. In the alternative school, he found himself one of the top students in English.

Excerpt 6.18 Interview with Han-Young (November, 2012)

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<sup>7</sup> KOICA stands for Korea International Cooperation Agency. This state institution sends student volunteers to developing countries for voluntary service for 2-3 years.

Han-Young: So, when I went to alternative school after that, the level of English of the students there is really low.

In Seoul Church, he was one of the trusted disciples of Pastor Kim. Pastor Kim at Seoul Church and the pastor of Toronto Church agreed to sponsor his study abroad in Toronto in 2011. Pastor Kim knew from his own experience of studying in the U.S. that language learning is a long difficult process.

Excerpt 6.19 Interview with lead pastor of Seoul Church (February, 2013)

Eun-Yong: Since it is culture, it takes long time to acquire it.

Pastor Kim: That's why we are sending some students for study abroad. The girls, after coming back from Study Abroad, they think different things [not return to South Korea, or to church]. So we thought let's send North Koreans who we can trust. That's why we sent Han-Young. It was agreed with the pastor in Toronto. This kind of agreement is rare. Han-Young, he himself could have struggled. But if you are good in English, you can survive anywhere in the world.

Through this arrangement of Toronto Church and Seoul Church, I met Han-Young in Toronto. He stayed in Toronto for about half a year. He registered in the ESL program at University of Toronto. When I met him in Toronto at the time, he became a significant person to me as well. He introduced me to Seoul Church, and that was my entry point to this very research topic: the nexus of English, North Korean migrants, and Christianity.

As he was went into the regime of English in South Korea, however, he began to see his weak position relative to others in South Korea.

Excerpt 6.20 Interview with Han-Young (November, 2012)

Han-Young: So I had the illusion that I was good in English. It was when I registered at Pagoda that I saw my limitations in English. Even though I had memorized a lot of words, I saw that it was not enough.

With Test English, he saw his limitations compared to the South Korean young adults who had

been trained in the repertoire for years. Han-Young was not at all trained for such practice.

Excerpt 6.21 Interview with Han-Young (November, 2012)

Han-Young: There were some universities which required a TOEIC score for admission. That is why I went to TOEIC hagwon. But my score was too low. I overestimated myself. I thought I could raise my score in a few months.

He gave up on Test English. He chose to go to one of the high-ranking universities in Seoul which did not require CSAT or TOEIC. He was admitted through the special admission regulation for North Korean applicants.

He finally achieved his goal of going to university. His major was Business Administration and his minor was Chinese. In university, English was a major part of the curriculum.

Excerpt 6.22 Interview with Han-Young (November, 2012)

Eun-Yong: How have you been studying English while in university?

Han-Young: There are English language courses in the university, called University English 1 and 2. There are also easier English courses, called Basic English 1, 2, and 3. These are for any university students who lack English ability for University English. When I took the level test, there was oral test, and other students seemed so fluent in speaking. I was assigned to University English 1, but I got scared to go to that course, so I asked to be assigned to Basic English 3, which was of course possible. And in that course, there were a lot of engineering students, and I got A-. I gained confidence with that score.

The university had an English curriculum for all its students (through required courses called University English 1 and 2, and elective courses of Basic English 1, 2, and 3), regardless of their specific majors. It administered an English placement test for all its incoming students to place them at the right level. In order to graduate, students in each major also had to take English-mediated courses. In his first English language course, he received a grade which was better than what he had expected.

Here, we see a pattern in Han-Young's position to English. He goes back and forth between, on one hand, being overly anxious and on the other, overly relaxed or overestimating himself about English. He was anxious about English before going to South Korea. He relaxed after seeing other North Korean students in Ezra School. He became anxious again in the TOEIC class in the process of preparing for university. Then, he became relaxed again in the university.

The English repertoire taught in university, however, was difficult for him to master. We met for a tutoring session when he was taking University English 2. The instructor had recently finished his studies in Harvard. His writing assignment was to write a response paper about an article from Harvard Business Review. The article was about the changing identity of the Fuji company. Han-Young wanted help with organizing the paper. The instructor had given guiding questions for the assignment. I said answering each question in order would help him organize the text. I looked through the whole text, and read the sub-headings, some of the sentences, and key words. I tried to understand and deliver to him the main ideas of the text. We looked up some terminology on Wikipedia, and google image. The text, however, was very long and difficult for him. This was a similar situation to Bee-Eun having difficulty with English assignments from university English courses (discussed in Chapter 4). The English texts found in these English courses were, in my view, readable mostly by global elites. It was difficult for most North Korean students, and also for most South Korean non-elites.

He went to Canada for study-abroad in his third year of university. It was a different repertoire of English which he was to learn in Canada. It was an opportunity for him to learn Communicative English.

Excerpt 6.23 Interview with Han-Young (November, 2012)

Eun-Yong: How was the study abroad? Was it helpful?

Han-Young: No, not really. I spoke English, but it was only low level English with other students. I also made a wrong choice. The OISE ESL program had Comprehensive English and Academic English. I should have taken Academic English, but I took the intermediate level of Comprehensive English. I took that 6-week program, and another 6-week program. Then I stopped. OISE was too expensive. But I gained confidence.

Han-Young could not speak English the way he wanted in Canada. Norton (2000), in her study on immigrant women in Canada, found that even though they were living in an English-speaking environment, they were limited in their access to speaking opportunities, not because of their lack of motivation but because of power relations. Han-Young was also embedded in such a power relation in which English he could not easily find access to fluent English speakers even though he was in Canada.

Despite his strong base in English, the English support from Christians, and his own investment, he was not successful in either Test English or Communicative English.

Excerpt 6.24 Interview with Han-Young (November, 2012)

Han-Young: I got a lot of support in learning English. Pagoda provided a discount. I went to Toronto with the church's support. Despite that, I can't really speak English. My English does not improve. I should do it steadily. But there are always intervals. At the time, I could do some English, but then when I don't do it, my English shrinks.

English was not speakable to him. The unspeakableness of English to Han-Young reflects the contradiction of the ideologies of English in South Korea (Park, J.S., 2009). He desired the utility of English (necessitation ideology), but he could not own the language (externalization ideology) and thus felt deficient (self-deprecation ideology). The sense of deficiency sometimes changed quickly to sense of sufficiency, and this oscillation shows his insecurity and anxiety towards English.

In my view, this has to do with his strong national identity. That is, he had strong

externalization ideology which sees English as non-Korean. The church gave him resources to be both Korean and English-speaking/ learning, but to him, national identity seemed more important, either consciously or unconsciously, because it was what helped his survival and gave him significance.

He graduated university, but he could not achieve what South Koreans want to achieve through English: getting a good job in either domestic or global job market. However, his national identity provided him different resources. It was in tension with global habitus, but it gave him the resources to plan his future in Korea.

Excerpt 6.26 Interview with Han-Young (November, 2012)

Eun-Yong: What are your goals?

Han-Young: First is finishing university. Then, South Korea is a land of opportunities. Whatever I do, if I try hard enough, it will be good. I am thinking of livestock industry. And I think the next goal will emerge then. And I should always do self-development.

He was thinking of starting a business, instead of applying for jobs. Starting a business in livestock industry was a kind of work which did not need a university diploma or English ability.

Excerpt 6.27 Interview with Han-Young (November, 2012)

Eun-Yong: What is your reason for studying English, if your goal is to work in the livestock industry?

Han-Young: I don't have immediate need for English. But I don't think I will be in the livestock industry for the rest of my life. And, if I want to expand my business to countries abroad, I would need English.

I found that it was the church that was helping him to start a business after graduating university.

Excerpt 6.28 Interview with Han-Young (November, 2012)

Eun-Yong: I saw there was an employment and start-up support team in the church. Will you be using those services?

Han-Young: I am working as a staff member there. The start-up team actually was created for me. I said not only employment is important, but start-up is also important.

The Christian community continually provided Han-Young alternative belonging and protection to be a citizen in South Korea.

After this interview, later in 2013, he started the business. It was a business selling organic eggs and providing delivery services. He started the company with three other North Korean young adults. I made purchases from this company, and I knew several other members of the church who did the same, because we wanted to help this small company of North Korean young adults.

Han-Young's case shows that it is difficult for the North Korean young adults to enter the South Korean high-wage job market. Han-Young had better English ability than most other North Korean migrants, and he received support for Test and Communicative English, but the competition was not easy for North Koreans. Test English works as a barrier to those without enough (linguistic) capital, protecting the high-wage jobs for the South Korean elite. Communicative English did not work for whom English was not speakable. Being a national/global player through English was not feasible to him, at least during the research period. This reminded me of what a director of one of the alternative schools I visited said during our interview:

Excerpt 6.29 Interview with director of Mission School (September, 2012)  
Missionary Paul: The purpose of this school is to make it easier for the North Korean students in getting a job. I found that it is very hard for the North Korean students to be hired, so we send them to Engineering or Nursing. And we focus on English. We send them to the U.S., to Christian colleges and home-stays, have them study for a year there. Through living in the U.S., they acquire speaking ability, open-mindedness, and honesty.

The strategy of this school was to send the North Korean students to professional majors strategically advantageous for employment, and not be content with sending them to universities.

Communicative English was another alternative route this school was focusing on.

Even though Han-Young was not hired by top employers, he had a sense of mission about what to do in the future.

Excerpt 6.30 Interview with Han-Young (November, 2012)

Han-Young: I know I am much more than my own effort. I have been always a man of great debt, from the government, from the church. And I know they are not doing it for nothing. I know what they are expecting of me. I will be going back to North Korea to work there.

The pastor Han-Young lived with in China expected him to go to North Korea as a missionary.

The Christians who were helping him in South Korea, to Han-Young, were also expecting a similar mission: to go back to North Korea. He might have not been ready when he was in China, but he was then embracing it as his mission.

Excerpt 6.31 Interview with Han-Young (November, 2012)

Han-Young: I am a North Korean. But I am also South Korean. North Korea is my home. South Korea gave me the citizenship to live a secure life. But, until then (the unification), I think my identity is in the future. When Korea unifies, my identity will become clearer. It will be clearer to say who I am, that I am a Korean.

As a Christian fully embracing evangelical ideas, he had clear national identity and it was future-oriented. Castell (2011) describes the American Christian fundamentalists in the following way:

aiming to construct social and personal identity on the basis of images of the past and project them into a utopian future, to overcome unbearable present times

To me, Chul-Kyoo's identity was more about the future and Han-Young's identity about the past. Chul-Kyoo was working until he could realize his identity as a civil servant of South Korea, and was bearing the uncertainty of this future plan. Han-Young was relying on the past which had



more certainty: the unchanging fact that he was from North Korea and the several millennium-old texts with God's eternal truth. Rooting himself in this past enabled him to plan a future and make meaning of himself.

### **3. Ye-Young, the English speaker**

For Ye-Young, English was speakable. She was one of the most fluent speakers of English among the North and South Koreans I have met so far. We often had long conversations in English, which I could not do with most Koreans. Having conversations in English between Koreans was often not compatible with how we defined ourselves as Koreans. For Ye-Young, English was not in conflict with who she was. How Han-Young defined being Korean perhaps was monolingual and bounded. Ye-young's sense of being Korean allowed being bilingual.

I had two interviews with her in 2012. We had tutoring sessions to prepare for her English job interview in September 2012. After she was hired, she participated in an English speaking contest in December 2012, for which she wrote an essay. The transcripts, fieldnotes, and documents from these interviews and events are used here as data.

She was one of the early defectors of North Korea (in 1998), and did not have much schooling while she lived hiding in China. She started learning her first English alphabets after she arrived in South Korea (in 2007) when she was twenty years old. She said she first saw the power of English when she moved to a big city in China.

Excerpt 6.32 Interview with Ye-Young (August, 2012)

Ye-Young: Those who were good in English were in high class, looked different, worked in good workplaces, and dressed better.

She learned that English was the global lingua franca and being good at English was power at

that time.

Having been under heavy restrictions in China for many years, Ye-Young had a strong motivation to achieve her personal dreams.

Excerpt 6.33 Essay by Ye-Young (December, 2012)

Ye-Young: For 8 years before coming to South Korea, when I was living in China, I strongly desired to go to school but I could not. Then since I came to South Korea, I was devoted to studying to go to a university. As a result, I successfully entered the university I wanted and I began to have another dream of having my first job.

She went to an alternative school in 2007, and passed all the diploma exams for elementary, middle, and high school over two years. She prepared for fashion design major for a year at an art hagwon. She succeeded in entering university as a fashion design major. After a year, she changed her goal to become a flight attendant, and dropped out of the university. She instead enrolled in an on-line university. She focused on her goal, while ensuring she has a university diploma.

English was important for her dreams. She began to learn English at her alternative school. She had two American friends living in her room in the dorm. They were Christian young adults from America coming to serve the North Korean students. Ye-Young became good friends with them and they went to English worship services together. She made more foreign friends at the church. From her experience of learning Chinese, she knew that using the language for communication (written and oral) was important to acquire the language.

Excerpt 6.34 Interview with Ye-Young (November, 2012)

Ye-Young: When you have the experience of learning Chinese, it is easier to learn another language. I liked books but didn't have to spend too much money on books. Just everyday life was English. Radio, pop songs, books like Ugly Ducks, short stories. I love stories. I didn't go to hagwon. The classes were not that helpful. From classes, you just learn some core principles. More important is practicing – practicing with foreign friends, hanging out a lot with friends and enjoying American soap operas. I

never did English in ways that were not fun.

English, and language in general, was something fun and interesting for her.

Excerpt 6.35 Fieldnotes during tutoring with Ye-Young (September, 2012)

Ye-Young: English is fun. When I express what I think in English, it becomes richer. When I was reading Linguistics books, I thought which is first. Is thought first or words first? Same thoughts expressed in different language bring different results. When I fight with friends in Korean and in English, the result is different. Language is culture.

With her linguistic interest and multilingual experience, she could understand language as symbols. Thoughts did not always have to be expressed in Korean language, but could be expressed in different languages. For her, the Korean language was not essentially bound with Korean nationality.

She was the least affected by the ideology of English as something non-Korean. She came to South Korea as an adult without being affected by the South Korean ideology of English prior to her arrival. This generated resistance and sometimes hostility from other Koreans.

Excerpt 6.36 Interview with Ye-Young (November, 2012)

Eun-Yong: How does your national identity affect your English learning?

Ye-Young: When your accent is good, there are some people who don't like it. "Oh, so you're pretty good." They are those who are not good at English. North Korean kids don't like it when we twist our tongues [pronounce English like native speakers]. When I was really learning English, the teachers liked me. Other friends who were not good said behind my back that I am strange. They don't ask how you are good at English. They say you are only doing English. But I never stopped after hearing that. I don't care. American friends like me. Being Korean and being good at English was never a conflict for me.

She resisted to the nationalistic pressure and asserted her approach to English learning.

With her approach to English, and a weaker ideological barrier to English, English was

never something that was not accessible. She found sufficient resources to practice English without going abroad.

Excerpt 6.37 Interview with Ye-Young (November, 2012)

Ye-Young: There was never an instance when I couldn't study English because I didn't have enough money. I should purchase some textbooks, but that doesn't cost that much money. There are so many books, especially in South Korea. And I know the way of studying English. If you want to do listening, then you do listening. If you want to listen to a political speech, you can go to internet. It is a lie that you can't learn English because you don't have money.

To her, the English Divide between the rich and the poor did not make sense. This applied, however, only to Communicative English.

Test English was something that was not accessible for her.

Excerpt 6.38 Interview with Ye-Young (November, 2012)

Ye-Young: I started studying for TOEIC, because of my Korean Airlines employment preparation. I took TOEIC three times, and my score was very very low. So I gave up, because I felt like TOEIC was just TOEIC, not English. While you have to get a high grade, you have to learn the strategy... You don't need to study English. I saw people with high TOEIC score but could not speak English. I was very shocked. After studying for an hour, what remains is not English but test taking method. I got 100 % on diploma certificate exam's English. But I did not spend a single minute studying for the exam itself. I don't want to waste my life.

The need for TOEIC emerged when she wanted to apply for the domestic job market. For her, the practice of Test English was not her idea of English, that is, using English for communication. Diploma exams had much easier English texts, so she could get a good score with her English ability. TOEIC had much more difficult texts, for which she needed additional education. Hagwons did not provide that education, but rather test-taking strategies, which was the way Korean students coped with the circumstances. However, she did not want to spend time on test-taking skills just for the sake of English scores. It was a set of skills that would be

useless outside the test-taking context. She had wasted her time enough already in China. She wanted to invest her time in learning a skill which is useful for much wider, global context.

She was shocked at first to see the difference in the way of learning English between herself and other South Koreans. She did not have such habitus for test-taking.

Excerpt 6.39 Interview with Ye-Young (November, 2012)

Ye-Young: South Koreans study English not because they want to be good at it but because of exam scores. What is important is the test question, not English competence. Whichever hagwon I attend, it is all related to an exam. Learning English is for communication, not for exam scores. Jobs in South Korea don't use English but they ask for TOEIC score, so that's why they study. In the case of the international airline company where I got hired, they see for themselves one's English competence and evaluate.

With the barrier of TOEIC, she changed her goal which she could achieve with her Communicative English ability. This is how she decided to apply to an international airline company.

We decided to meet about four times to practice English for her coming job interview. She was doing several things to prepare for the test. On the day of the test, the applicants were to write English essays in the morning, then do group discussion and individual interview in the afternoon. She was first attending a hagwon for flight attendant applicants on Tuesdays and Thursdays. There she practiced group discussion. She went to Mission School once a week, one of the alternative schools for North Korean students, to practice speaking English with Missionary Paul. Lastly, she met with me once a week (for four times). She wanted to practice persuasive speaking and get feedback on her essays.

We can see here that her major access to Communicative English was through Christians who were interested in North Korea and willing to help her. She had said that she was exposed to English mostly through missionaries and Christians. She had more access to English

resources in South Korea without going abroad because of her Christian network. In the church, being Korean and speaking English did not conflict. They were resources for the national/global mission.

Christianity first emerged to Ye-Young during her stay in China. She was comfortable with the help she was getting from different social actors, including the Christians. She said herself that she was not fully committed to Christianity, but she was developing stronger Christian belief.

Excerpt 6.40 Interview with Ye-Young (November, 2012)

Eun-Yong: What were your strategies and resources in settling in South Korea?

Ye-Young: Being positive. Not having lived long in North Korea, I did not have fantasies (about South Korea). I had a dream of becoming a fashion designer, did not wander around, did not go to university. The government support. I could focus on studying. The special admission for North Koreans. Church not so much at first. Now church identity makes my life rich, peaceful, not lonely. Lot of help. Daughter of God, citizen of heaven, God loving me, God sending me to the new job.

With the help she was getting from church, Christian identity was becoming important to her. It provided the resources to build her identity as an English speaker, as a “daughter of God”, and to become a global player. She started from learning her first alphabet, and in five years, she became a fluent English speaker.

What was an interesting comparison here was the case of Bee-Eun who attended the same alternative school as Ye-Young. In her interview, she said she also had contacts with the American friends who came to the school, but she could not speak English with them.

Excerpt 6.41 Interview with Bee-Eun (September, 2012)

Bee-Eun: There were many foreign teachers. We had English camp. I know their facebook and emails, but because my English is bad, and the conversation doesn't last long.

Bee-Eun and Ye-Young were in a similar linguistic environment at the alternative school, and both of them began learning English when they came to South Korea (Bee-Eun at age 16 and Ye-Young at age 19) but what made the difference in their approach to English? One explanation I propose is that their migration trajectory affected their national identity. Ye-Young had very little schooling during her eight years in China. On the other hand, Bee-Eun went to schools in North Korea (although interrupted several times by her attempts to leave North Korea), she went to a regular school when she came to South Korea, and then she came to the alternative School. The amount of schooling, in my view, relates to how much they are socialized into Korean nationalism.

Eventually, Ye-Young passed the job interview and was hired by the company. On the Sunday service after Ye-Young found about her result, she came up to me and told me how happy she was. She said there were many other South Korean applicants, but she got the job. She could compete with other South Korean applicants and win an intense competition.

The kind of progress which Ye-Young made with Communicative English was not an isolated case. A currently popular North Korean English speaker is Lee Hyeon-Seo who succeeded in becoming a TED speaker within five years of English learning after her arrival in South Korea in 2008. In this program of giving short talks to a world-wide English speaking audience, she spoke of her North Korean migration experience in easy and intelligible English. This was something not many South Koreans could do.

In her interview, she said that learning English in the British Council's English program for North Korean students helped her improve her English. As a North Korean, she had direct access to Communicative English.

Figure 6.1 Photo of Lee Hyeon-Seo, a North Korean English speaker



Note. TED speech, “my escape from North Korea”

In 2012, Ye-Young participated in an English speech contest for North Korean young adults co-hosted by the Wooyang Foundation and Pagoda English Hagwon. There were five speakers at the contest, who were the writers of the top five essays submitted. In this contest, I saw four other North Korean young adults, some of whom were, in my view, excellent speakers of English. Wooyang’s president remarked in the end, “South Korean students should get nervous. The North Korean students are so good.”

Four out of the five contestants openly expressed their Christian faith in their speeches. They mentioned their alternative schools, and missionary trips and training in English-speaking countries. This showed that their ability in Communicative English had something to do with the access that was provided by the evangelicals. During the speech and the Q&A session after the speeches, the contestants often remarked on the role of the Christian institutions in their learning of spoken English. This is an example:

Excerpt 6.42 Fieldnotes of the response of a contestant (2012 North Korean young adult English speaking contest, December, 2012)

Contestant: I had the chance to go to the U.S. A missionary organization invited me to study. Lots of people who I didn’t know supported me. I don’t know their names. I thought wow, they are helping me without knowing me. Maybe I should give back to society.

This contestant said he was therefore teaching younger North Korean students in an alternative



school as a volunteer teacher.

Among the alternative schools for North Korean young adults, Daniel School was running a Communicative English curriculum (as discussed in previous chapter). All volunteer teachers there were either monolingual English speakers or Korean-English bilingual speakers. Pastor Lee, who organized the English curriculum of the school, frequently remarked how quickly the students developed speaking skills.

Excerpt 6.43 Interview with directors of Daniel School (February, 2013)

Eun-Yong: Do they really become that good in English after a year or two?

Pastor Lee: Yes, for those who really follow our curriculum. I have only used English, and those who used to speak a word or two are now fluent. The North Korean students are really hard-working. They spend a lot of time studying each day. Those who didn't know English are getting familiar with English, and those who did have some English are getting very fluent. They are so good at English – so good that I want to video tape them! Those who really worked hard for the whole year, we are repeatedly surprised by their progress. Most of the students in the first class are now at the advanced level.

One of the common traits of Ye-Young and Pastor Lee was that they did not live long in South Korea. They were less affected by the ideologies which made English unspeakable. The North Korean students seemed generally less affected with the ideologies. I had an interview with an American teacher of Mee-Soo, who had taught many South Korean and North Korean students.

Excerpt 6.44 Interview with instructor of Mee-Soo (September, 2012)

Eun-Yong: Is there any difference between North Korean and South Korean students?

Brian: North Korean students are much more out-going, able to, willing to take risks more than South Korean students. Much more mature.

North Korean students, if they are less socialized into the ideologies of South Korea, could build linguistic identities which make English more speakable than South Korean students.

Excerpt 6.45 Interview with directors of Daniel School (February, 2013)

Pastor Lee: I think for them, they are neither North Korean nor South Korean. They can

never become a South Korean even if they live long. But in English, they can compete with South Koreans. They start to see that South Koreans are not so great in English, and if they try hard enough in learning English, they can become better in English than South Koreans. It seems like they can attain a new identity through English. And if they learn the right way, I've seen many of my students who can speak like native speakers, who are much better than South Koreans.

From my observations, it is difficult for North Korean students to compete with South Koreans in Test English, but they can have competitive edge with Communicative English. They are ideologically freer to embody what is a non-Korean language, and thus within few years, they can speak better English than many South Koreans. They were less affected by the ideology of one nation – one language. This made them something different from being a North Korean and being a South Korean. It was a “new identity” through linguistic means, off the existing social category of nationality.

#### **4. Conclusion**

I presented here three ways of making identities I observed through the stories of Chul-Kyoo, Han-Young, and Ye-Young. We saw their different linguistic identities. We saw that English was *unspeakable* for Chul-Kyoo and Han-Young, but *speakable* for Ye-Young. Chul-Kyoo tried to master Test English with a secluded identity. Han-Young had a strong identity in his Christian community. He was provided with the resource of Test English and Communicative English from the church, but his main category of identity was religion. Ye-Young had strong identity as a speaker/ user of English and, with her Christian belief, actively mobilized the resource of Communicative English from evangelicals.

This reflected in how they made sense of their national identity. For Chul-Kyoo and Han-Young, their conception of Korean nationalism was in conflict with speaking English. For

Ye-Young, being a Korean was never in conflict with speaking English. With Chul-Kyoo's pride, he wanted to become like a South Korean with his own effort. Han-Young relied on his North Korean identity, which provided him meaning and profit. In case of Ye-Young, she used her North Korean identity and did not totally follow the South Korean norms. With less influence from Korean ideology of English (ideologies of externalization and self-deprecation) which made English unspeakable, she became something different from both being a North Korean and being a South Korean.

The different ways of making identities also had to do with how they conceptualized *language* itself. I could observe the two different approaches to language discussed in the literature about studies on language (e.g. Heller, 2007): language as a system vs. language as practice. Heller (2007) argued that seeing language as a part of society, as a social practice, rather than a bounded system separate from the society, explains more social phenomenon we are observing. It is not about which approach is right or wrong, but it is about the social context which makes a certain approach more useful or more salient. This seems to apply to the place of English in the globalizing Korean context. Before South Korea's neoliberal turn, with strong Korean nationalism, English stood as a separate linguistic system. It was one of the many subjects to study for the test, with defined boundary (determined by the state, educational institutions) to master.

The following conversation I once had with Chul-Kyoo and Sung-Chul at Ezra School reflected such an approach to English.

Excerpt 6.46 Fieldnote in Ezra School (October, 2012)

Chul-Kyoo and Sung-Chul asked me how long I've been studying English, and what my major was. Sung-Chul asked me my age. They were trying to figure out for how many years I've been studying English. Chul-Kyoo asked me if I knew everything about English. I said it is not that you know everything about English, but it's about

what you do with English, in which area you will focus, and whether you can do that fluently in English. Chul-Kyoo was trying to plan how many years he can wholly invest in English. He mentioned the seniors, other older North Korean students. When he talks with them, they say certain number of years from their experience.

His approach to Test English was closer to the traditional view on testing before any influence of globalization, in which the language of the test is unspoken, the written word is highly esteemed, and one needs to show mastery of the literary work. Koreans' insistence on Test English especially among the job seekers perhaps links back to the deep-rooted Korean tradition.

The process of globalization is making a context in Korea where English is increasingly seen as practice rather than system. Speaking English is becoming more and more common practice. Test English in South Korea is increasingly including English speaking as one of its components. The conception of nationalism is changing, or has to change, to deal with the changing face of Korea. The conception of nationalism is widening, increasingly allowing bilingualism. I suggest that being a Korean and speaking English will increasingly become less of a conflict.

In another sense, the participants were all involved with raising their social class, either in the domestic market or in the global market. I see neoliberal subjectivity as the legitimizing identity with which all the North Korean participants were involved. The evangelical subjectivity supported this habitus. Both the neoliberal and evangelical self, for either profit or salvation, puts a distance from itself in order to reflect, manage, and develop the self (Gershon, 2011). This conception of self as a "reflective project", in my view, explains the changes of feelings and self-evaluations which we saw in the participants: anxieties, shame, pride, confidence, overestimation, being scared, being conceited, etc.

I had to think through this issue in order to explain what I once observed with Ye-Young.

It was the day before the job interview, and after our fourth lesson. She expressed her high anxiety for English. I said that I thought she would not feel that much anxiety about English. She said there was always anxiety about English about whether she is good enough. This “turn to the self” (using Foucault’s expression), the separation between the ideal self and the current self, and the perpetual drive/ anxiety for self-development, was a central trait I observed in those with neoliberal/ evangelical identity.

## Chapter 7

### Conclusion

This study set out to understand the "English Problem" of South Korea. I focused on the experiences of North Korean young adults in South Korea in relation to evangelical Christians who often support them, and used their experiences of learning English to shed light on the place of English in South Korea. The English problem had serious consequences for this particular group of young adults in accessing resources and identities. Why were they struggling particularly with English, and with *language*? Why were they insisting on certain way of learning English? Why were they constantly failing in achieving their goals through English learning? And why were some more successful in English learning, and that in a different form of English? Why were some people actively helping them in English learning? Why does religion have a strong presence in this whole phenomenon? Why evangelical Christianity in particular?

Asking these questions was an attempt for an alternative approach to English education in South Korea – a social, critical, anthropological approach which is both repressed and emerging in Korean context. It was an attempt to move away from limiting the scope of research from asking the best technical way to learn/ teach English and to move toward asking what these problems are about, whether they are problem in the first place, why they are happening and what their consequences are.

For this project, I had to put together the difficult stories of migration, religion, and language, but that was what I had to work through when I met a North Korean young man who came to Toronto to learn English sponsored by churches in Seoul and Toronto. The different

strands came together through the central argument that English played the role of “tension-mediation” for different social actors, namely the South Korean state, the North Korean migrants, and the Christians. Evangelical Christianity also played such role in relation to the North Koreans. In the first section of this conclusion chapter, I will sum up these different strands that were discussed in the analysis chapters to show more clearly how they came together. I will discuss what the tensions were for whom and how they were mediated.

I will then explore some of the issues raised in this study, about what this study tells us about globalization and post-Cold War Korea, about the place of religion in academic inquiry, and finally about what it means to do linguistics in our time.

### **1. Tension-mediation**

In this study, I discussed the following tensions experienced by the state, by the migrants, and the Christians:

- tensions for South Korean state
  - a. in dealing with globalization
  - b. in dealing with North Korean migrants
- tensions for North Korean migrants
  - c. in the state
  - d. in the church
- tensions for Christians
  - e. in the state
  - f. in dealing with North Korean migrants

I discussed these tensions as mediated by English-related practices, and sometimes by Christianity in relation to North Korean migrants. I will briefly go through each point (from a to f).

*a. state tensions in dealing with globalization*

For the state, South Korea in its neoliberalization process had to deal with the competing interests between having to promote globalization and keeping its Korean identity. It also had to manage between pursuing liberal democracy and protecting the interests of its social elites to a certain extent. This was manifested by the introduction of major English policies since the 1990s and the increasing use of English as a major tool of social selection, but at the same time, limiting the scope of the use of English for social selection and not for communication, and limiting the scope of English tests, at least in the initial phase, to grammar, reading, and listening skills. Using standardized English proficiency tests met the social demand for objective, democratic social selection and followed the Korean tradition of test-based social selection, but the construct of the tests as requiring high level of literacy in the unspoken language worked in advantage for the social elites. The way English was used in the state-level served the multiple, competing interests of the neoliberal state to a certain extent, and thus used by the state to manage the tensions.

*b. state tensions in dealing with North Korean migrants*

The South Korean state had the tension, in dealing with North Korean migrants, between treating them as heroic defectors and treating them as one of the immigrant groups, especially since the number of incoming North Korean migrants dramatically increased in the 1990s. This was again a tension between globalizing process, in which South Korea faced increasing immigration, and national agenda of unification of Korean Peninsula, for which North Koreans had to be treated differently from other immigrant groups, even other ethnic Korean migrant groups. Also, it was a tension between protecting elite interests against immigrant groups and allowing the North Koreans some degree of access to higher social status. These tensions were



reflected in the changes of state policies toward the North Korean migrants. The spectacular compensations and entitlements which had been granted to the North Korean "defectors" before the 1990s were significantly decreased for some time, but soon adjusted to a certain level so that all North Korean migrants received a significant amount of financial aid and social benefits, which included South Korean citizenship. The young adults were given university advantage but entry into high-wage jobs were not easily allowed, which was mediated partly by English testing system.

*c. tensions for North Korean migrants in the state*

The North Koreans faced the contradiction between being welcomed as part of South Korea and the realities of low class immigrants and ex-socialists struggling to adapt to a globalizing society. This was manifested through their particular difficulties with English when they tried to assimilate to South Korea. For the North Koreans, particularly for those who were trying to raise their social status, they were struggling with the contradiction between the strong social emphasis on English and the low use of English in everyday communication. They also had tension between their hard work in English, which was mainly about investing in Test English, and the repeated failures in getting the English test score needed to apply to the jobs they desired. This is how they experienced the tension, expressed through English, between the process of globalization and linguistic nationalism, and between the social belief in equal opportunity through standardized tests and the working of elite interests in stratifying the society through English. These difficulties in adapting to neoliberal South Korea had the North Koreans turn to the evangelical Christians who would generously help them.

The state tensions experienced by the North Koreans were to an extent mediated by participating in the church. Becoming Christians for them meant becoming part of South Korea

and also mobilizing their North Korean identity (that is, that they are from the North, which they do not necessarily identify outside church). It also meant participating in the national narrative of Korean unification, playing the role of a “bridge” between the two Koreas, and also having access to rich resources, which included English teaching and global network. The Christian space allowed them to be both national and global, and to be socially included and differentiated.

*d. tensions for North Korean migrants in the church*

In the church, the North Koreans experienced another set of tension between getting the resources they needed, which was, in terms of English, mostly Test English, and the pressure to become Christians. They showed diverse responses, from acceptance, to ambivalence, resistance, and leaving the church. In the church, they were calculating the cost and benefit of participating in the church, and often negotiated between what they can get from the church and what they can give to the church.

*e. tensions for Christians in the state*

For the evangelical Christians, they had tension between their missionary interests and their elite interests. They had keen interest in reaching North Korea for evangelism and in national unification, and therefore saw the North Korean migrants as “gifts” from God who can play key roles in these missions. The evangelicals were also often the social elites of South Korea. Depending on which interest they prioritized, they could lean toward following “the gospel of prosperity”. Having both of these interests was why the North Koreans came to the evangelicals in the first place. Christians were willing to help them and had the (educational, linguistic) resource they wanted. One way for the Christians to dealing with the tension in working with North Koreans was by educational outreach, teaching English for university entrance for raising what they often called “Christian global leaders.” English was a core

missionary language for South Koreans and also an elite, neoliberal language.

*f. tensions for Christians in dealing with North Korean migrants*

Another set of tensions for the Christians, particularly in dealing with North Korean migrants, was the tension between giving the resource the North Koreans demanded, and training them to become and grow as Christians (or what I framed as the tension between helping and evangelizing). In terms of English, this tension is shown by how some of the institutions focused on Test English, which was the majority of the institutions I observed, while some others focused on Christian English. In other words, some institutions were more driven by student demands, while others were more driven by teacher agenda. A few institutions focused exclusively on Communicative English. This was a way to mediate this tension because it satisfied both the teacher and student interests. It gave a competitive edge to the North Koreans and also aligned with core evangelical practice of interpersonal, multilingual communication.

In the overall trajectories of North Korean participants, there were at least three ways the North Korean young adults mediated their tensions, using English and Christianity. One major way was to highly invest in Test English, which was a way to assimilate into South Korea and become part of a higher social class. Another major way was to focus on becoming active members of the church, which was a way to maximally mobilize their North Korean identity to have significance and legitimacy in South Korea. Another clear stream among the North Korean young adults was becoming English speakers, embodying a global/ Christian personhood beyond either the South or the North.

These were the ways the tensions of globalization experienced by particular social actors were mediated (or expressed, negotiated, and compromised) mainly through language and

religion.

## **2. Globalization in the periphery**

In discussing the English Problem of South Korea, I have put globalization as the main social backdrop to explain the phenomena. I discuss here what this thesis show us about what globalization is. This study suggests that, first of all, globalization is a gradual economic, political, social process taking place in Korea. Globalization was not a sudden monolithic change. When globalization began to be actively promoted in South Korea, it did bring about dramatic changes, for instance the introduction of communicative English into the national curriculum. However, also throughout the past two decades, globalization continued to change the place of English in South Korea. English is becoming more embodied in Koreans, more spoken by the Koreans, and its spoken form is increasingly used and evaluated for social selection. It is changing what it means to be Korean, from a monolingual Korean-speaking person to an increasingly multilingual subject. It is weakening the fixed connection between ethnicity – language – territory, a process discussed as a major part of globalization (Heller, 2011).

Globalization is bringing into contact what had been in distance and thus causing the tensions or frictions from the new encounters. One such encounter was that of English into Korean linguistic field in a way much stronger and perhaps threatening to the Korean pride. Another such encounter was between the North and South Koreans. Although there had been occasional meetings between the political elites, interaction between the common people from the two Koreas had been extremely rare. The North Koreans had more chance of meeting, for instance, Chinese people than the South Koreans. Even in the present, it is easier for citizens of

other countries, such as Americans or Canadians, to enter North Korea than those with South Korean passport. The Cold-War rivalry has put a stronger barrier between the two Koreas than on any other borders, but that has been changing through globalization process. Significant number of North Koreans has been in contact and interacting with South Koreans for the past two decades.

Such encounters, however, took place through economic crises in the two Koreas. Globalization in South Korea began in its full force since its IMF crisis in 1997. For the North, isolating from globalizing world economy resulted in the devastating crisis of Arduous March (1994 - 1997), which pushed the North Koreans out of its border. What these suggests is that globalization is tied up with the interests of global elites (Harvey, 2005), which works in a way against states/ individuals in the peripheries. The two Koreas in the periphery of the global economy (or South Korea in the semi-periphery) had to undergo harsh economic crises in working through the changing conditions of world economy. The non-elite Korean young adults, particularly the North Korean young adults, are another group of marginalized subjects who have to undergo the harsh competitive conditions of neoliberal South Korea. How globalization is experienced by other peripheral subjects may contribute in illuminating what globalization is about.

Linguistically, the two Koreas are again in the periphery in terms of Global English (the North in the most outer periphery), distanced or excluded from the core where "standard" English is defined, produced, and evaluated. It is therefore producing, in Korean context such practices as Test English, or the division between English for "real" communication and English for test score.

Table 7.1 Types of dominant practices of English observed

<b>type of English practice</b>	<b>Test English</b>	<b>Communicative English</b>	<b>Christian English</b>
<b>main activity</b>	solving practice tests	conversation reading/ listening for pleasure	English Bible English worship
<b>Character</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• means of social selection since SK's neoliberal turn</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• competing with Test English</li> <li>• desired by also resisted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• freely distributed in Christian setting</li> </ul>

Test English is one way how job-seekers in the peripheries strategically deal with globally standardized English tests. The three types of dominant practices of English observed (Table 7.1) show one way how Global English looks liked in the periphery, where English is promoted but not widely used, yet proficiency defined in the Core is used for social selection.

Globalization has widened the scope of competition for resource, mobility, and visibility, urging people even in the peripheries to participate in the competition which is structured advantageously for those in the core. This competition, however, does not totally exclude the non-elites, but provides alternative routes to some people in the periphery. This study suggests that some individuals with certain semiotic resources can work their way through the global competition, for instance, the North Korean English speakers.

People with “North Korean” background with some English communicative ability, often combined with the support of evangelicals, show high degree of global mobility, often speaking to national/ global audience through the media. For example, many of my participants, who mobilized the rare semiotic resource of North Korean-ness coupled with English ability, moved in and out of South Korea through diverse venues. Ye-Young worked for two years in an

international airline company. Hae-Mee attended a Christian English program in a university in UK with the support of her church. Sung-Chul went to US as an exchange student. Mee-Soo participated in an internship program in US for North Koreans. Bee-Eun went on trips to Japan and US as part of a program for North Korean university students. Many North Korean young adults (some of whom I know from Seoul church) appeared on Korean television, on TED, and numerous global newspapers. If they took advantage of the support available to North Koreans, they often had more global mobility and visibility than most South Korean young adults. The global mobility boosted their English speaking ability, which reinforced the possibility for more transnational movements.

Korean identity is certainly changing through globalization, but not without the tensions and struggles. The two Koreas in the post-Cold War late capitalist period are trying to deal with the tensions which the conditions of globalization have brought to them. North Korea is juggling between keeping its "self-reliant", isolationist policies and opening up to the global economy. The change of primary foreign language in its national curriculum from Russian to English and the rise of demand for English among its elites and common people show the inevitable influence of globalization. On the other hand, North Korea's isolation in the globalizing economy has recently been pushed to its extreme, by both the new leader Kim Jung-Eun and the international society trying to regulate the regime's nuclear project. North Korea's border control is tighter than ever. However, the statistics of number of North Korean migrants coming to South Korea shifted back to an increase for the first time in 2015 since it began to drop in 2012 when Kim Jung-Eun came to power. The new flows of defectors were the North Korean elites who were escaping Kim's reign of terror. He has been harshly purging the elites from the time of his father. His method of control, trying to isolate itself from the process of globalization, might

be undermining his regime, as the unrest of the system which began with the lower class in the periphery is encroaching on the upper class in its core.

South Korea is struggling between keeping its long alliance with the U.S. and becoming an independent global player. South Korea's national security is still currently under the combined command with the U.S., and heavily relies on American intelligence and the 30,000 American soldiers in South Korea. South Korea has recently joined America's missile defense cooperation project, with Japan as intermediary ally, against North Korea's nuclear project. It is juggling between the heavy American legacy and the increasing voice from the younger generation for independence from American influence. The two Koreas' rhetoric for capitalist (Christian)/ socialist Korean unification is thinning down as both the states and individuals struggle to find ways for surviving the global competition.

### **3. Why religion**

This study raises the question about why religion comes up as an important issue in a study about language and globalization. There is vast literature on Christianity, Protestantism, and evangelicalism in anthropology, religious studies, education, sociology, and so on. However, research on the place of religion in applied or sociolinguistics has been emerging in the past decade or two, and it seems to occupy more and more of our discussion as we are becoming more sensitive about our social context and self-reflexivity. We can then ask what religion shows us which other domains cannot. What does it show us about globalization, language, and power? Of what space is religion in our society?

Religion in this study, firstly, served as a linking, mediating space in many ways. It was a linking space between migrants and the host society, between ex-socialists and capitalism, and



between North Koreans and South Koreans. South Korean evangelicalism particularly had strong link to American evangelicalism and English language. Religion linked the North Koreans to something very foreign and what they once were taught to be their enemies. Such role of religion takes some burden off the state, constituting a buffering zone for the larger society in easing the tensions of accepting the very different, poor, yet politically-loaded migrants.

We also see the fusion of the pedagogic with religion (Mooney, 2013). Religion, with education, comes up in this study as a major venue of disciplining the selves, or developing global citizens. We saw how the regime of Test English in South Korea gradually but surely turned many North Korean young adults into learners, and into learners of English. The evangelical institutions were also spaces where the North Korean young adults were socialized into becoming learners, participants of social competition, and South Korean citizens aspiring national unification.

This study suggests that religion, as institutional and semiotic structure, can possibly exert powerful influence over those in the periphery in our globalizing time. The power of evangelicalism, for instance, stems from several elements: Bible as unifying, conservative text; active, mission-oriented relationship-building; provision of community, literacy, identity, and meaning; promise of prosperity, Americanism, elitism, and legitimacy; and its alignment with neoliberal subjectivity. In another sense, it can richly provide different forms of economic, cultural, and social capital.

This implies the complex relationship between religion and globalization. Religion is something opposing to, yet a vital complement to globalization. Castells (2010) in his influential book on globalization sets up religion as source of meaning, community, and solidarity, which

globalization deprives people of. He explains the rise of fundamentalism as marginalized people's struggle to find meaning and build identity resistant against globalization. However, because of such role of religion, it becomes an inevitable means for the elites to maintain their interests in the globalization process. Religion, particularly Christianity, has historically formed a close "unholy alliance" with capitalist globalization based on their complementary relations (Harvey, 2005).

Evangelicalism particularly shares converging values and similar mechanisms with neoliberal capitalism. Firstly, globalization is a common goal of evangelicalism and capitalism. The gospel and the capital have been two globally mobile agents in search for new mission field or new market. They have often depended on each other in accomplishing their tasks, often following the paths of colonialists or missionaries in entering new frontiers. Secondly, both the globalizing evangelicalism and neoliberalism puts the *self* in the center of their agendas. The key characteristic of the neoliberal self is that the self becomes a project (Gershon, 2011), and this is similar with the evangelical self. For either salvation or profit, the self puts a distance from itself in order to reflect, manage, and develop the self. It takes the responsibility for its own future and risks, held accountable directly to the global or universal entity (either the God or the market).

Thirdly, the role of language is important for their agendas. Their globalizing projects often used the power of language, since the issue of language has been important and useful in interacting with other nations (Errington, 2001). For the development of the self, the project often means acquiring a new language or a new voice. The neoliberal self is demanded to acquire the dominant language which counts as capital (Bourdieu, 1991) (unless a native-speaker of it) to add values on oneself. The evangelical self is demanded to acquire the Word

through listening, reading, and witnessing to foreign speakers. Self-development in the church and the world included to a significant extent second language acquisition.

The tension for the evangelical Christians between faith and prosperity is all the more intense because of such close affinity between evangelicalism and neoliberalism, what some call “evangelical – capitalist resonance machine” (Han, J., 2010). This study showed the role of language in easing this tension for some Christians. The capacity of language for mediation again plays the dual function. Language can possibly play the role of sharply revealing the contradictions of “serving both God and Mammon”, but it can also be a powerful means for justifying or rationalizing “Gospel of Prosperity”. Religion also has such dual capacity. It could create alternative spaces of community, solidarity, and new meaning, but it could also easily play the role of reproducing or legitimizing neoliberalism.

This study showed how evangelicalism played the role of making the space of alternative language ideology because how it aligns with globalization, neoliberalism, and communicative language learning. In the linguistic field of South Korea, where people are ideologically, politically, economically constrained to become English speakers, evangelicalism worked to produce the space of Communicative English. This worked well especially with the North Korean migrants, people in the margin, who are less constrained and in need of legitimate identity. The alternative meanings created by religion are perhaps often subsumed under neoliberal values. The linguistic effects of religion and its relation to power, I believe, will continue to grow as a rich area of sociolinguistic inquiry.

#### **4. Doing applied linguistics**

As I have attempted in this study to take a *social* approach in my inquiry, this study

raises the issue of what it means to do applied linguistics these days in our globalizing era. I set out to define applied linguistics as inquiry about “practical problems of language and communication”, and discussed how the field has been centrally about second language learning (particularly English learning). I focused on the field in South Korea, where cognitive approach still holds the mainstream over social, critical approach, and where topic of inquiry centers on the technical problem of how to best learn/ teach English. For the field in South Korea, English-related issues are not addressed as "social" issues as much as they are addressed as "cognitive" issues, while socially-oriented research about the place of English in South Korea are done more from outside of Korea.

I do not wish to dismiss the cognitive stream altogether, but what I hope this study showed is that English learning involves much more than cognitive processes of individual students and teachers, influenced by linguistic structure and teaching methodology. This study showed that language learning could possibly *not* take place despite students' high motivation, availability of “effective” methodology, and access to native speaker teachers; it could be an issue of much larger social, political, and economic structure. This study showed how access to English learning in the periphery could be ideologically constrained in the midst of English fever, particularly by the ideological complex of neoliberalism, nationalism, and elite interests in the Korean context.

What this study suggests is that second language learning in the periphery of linguistic globalization involves significant power struggles. Choosing to learn, choosing to learn a certain language, choosing to learn a language in a certain way, choosing a certain way of language evaluation, and figuring how to access the resource for language learning all involve ideological, political decisions, which could be about such things as resisting against social norms,

constructing alternative identity, and changing long-developed habitus. For example, Ye-Young said she chose not to study TOEIC because she believed it was not about English. She did not believe that TOEIC adequately measures her English ability. The Korea-American director of Daniel School said she decided that the school will be a space for learning to speak English and not about tests. These were voices not much heard in Korean context, which were against the dominant practices in South Korea. These people chose to do so, with their migration and linguistic background and with the resource provided by her Christian friends. These political decisions led to very different trajectories for Ye-Young and for the students in Daniel school. The power struggles on the individual level are tied up with power struggles on a much larger scale, which could mean that individuals' choices could be something against the interests of conventional practices, of state and corporation policies, and of global elites. As the Douglas Fir Group (2016) asserts, “ideologies permeate all levels of language learning” (p. 33), and the power struggle over which ideology dominates over states, institutions, and individuals are indeed intense and consequential.

To explain the problems of English, therefore, should involve looking into power relations, into their histories, and naturally-occurring data. I propose *critical ethnographic sociolinguistic* approach as a much needed approach for applied linguists, particularly in South Korea and other states in the periphery of Global English. The critical approach calls us to ask how things work out for whom in fields of relations of power. Concepts such as ideology, identity, and resources, which are process and products of power struggle, become important in our research. The ethnographic approach calls us to do first-hand observations of naturally-occurring data for extended period of time, and to describe, interpret, and explain the complexities of how power works as they unfold in real time. The sociolinguistic approach calls

us to see the larger, social context of language learning, into historical, political, and economic structure, and what role language plays in organizing social relations and the distribution of resource and power. This lets us question whether there is a clear boundary anymore between doing applied linguistics and doing sociolinguistics. I argue that critical, historical, and ethnographic approach can be a central methodology for applied linguists interested in researching “practical problems of language and communication”.

In the field of sociolinguistics, what language means in late capitalism has been discussed in many ways, centrally as capital, resource, commodity, or skill-set. Language learning is therefore seen as a social practice of accessing resource and as investment. This study strengthens the metaphor of language as the "site" or "terrain" of power struggle. In this study, the metaphor implies a dual sense: language serves as a *battle* site, where interests compete, and also as an *integrating* site, where competing interests can co-exist. Language seems like a very flexible thing, which can serve multiple interests simultaneously, making it both a battle field and an integrating field. English in South Korea was not just about globalization in Korean context. It could be a way to express nationalism. It was a way to achieve educational equality, but it could also be used in service of elite interest. English is perhaps *one* of the many social sites where the power struggle between these diverging interests, ideologies, and identities are played out in the society.

I argue that "second language learning" can be a major area of inquiry for sociolinguistics. "Ethnography of speaking" might not be applicable for those struggling to access the dominant language in the periphery. Ethnography of *language learning*, of language access, or of "un"-speaking could illuminate another powerful lens into relations of power tied up with language. As this study suggests the place of language as a lens into social theory, it

supports the place of language for other fields of social sciences, where the potential of language as research method is yet fully explored.

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## Appendix 1

### List of secondary participants and additional data sources

#### 1. Interviews at institutions

- Pastor Kim: pastor at Seoul Church
- Pastor Lim: pastor at Seoul Church
- Pastor Jin: pastor at Hanawon
- Pastor Nam: director of Andrew Center
- Vice Principal Do: director of Vision School
- Vice Principal Song: director at Ezra School
- Director Park: manager of North Korean English discount program in Wooyang Foundation
- Elder: English teacher at North Korean Christian Young Adult Association
- Pastor Han, Pastor Lee: co-directors of Daniel School
- Missionary Paul: director of Mission School
- Teacher Jin: English teacher of Hae-Mee at Ezra School
- Teacher Hong: English teacher of Hae-Mee at Ezra School

#### 2. Interviews with other individuals

- Brian (in English): American, English instructor of Mee-Soo at her internship program to US
- Bom-Joo (in English): Catholic North Korean young adult, former English Teacher in North Korea
- Adam (in English): American male working at non-religious NGO for teaching English to North Korean young adults

### 3. Observations:

- “탈북청년 영어 말하기 대회” North Korean young adult English speaking contest (hosted by Wooyang Foundation and Pagoda Hagwon, Seoul, South Korea, December, 11, 2012)
- “범아시아아프리카대학협의회 국제교육선교대회” International educational missions conference of PAUA (Pan Asia & Africa Universities Association) (Yeonsei University, Seoul, South Korea, January 24–25, 2014)

### 4. Media

- “토목달 LC 무료특강” (TOEIC Goal Achievement Listening Comprehension free special course, EBS website) [www.ebslang.co.kr](http://www.ebslang.co.kr)
- “한국공인회계사회” (Korean Institute of CPA) [www.kicpa.or.kr](http://www.kicpa.or.kr)
- “시원스쿨” (Siwon School) [www.siwonschool.com](http://www.siwonschool.com)
- Interview of Jo Soo-Ah, former medical doctor in North Korea (Nambook Chang TV interview, 2012)
- TED speech of Lee Hyeon-Seo, entitled “My escape from North Korea” (Feb, 2013)
- PSCORE or “성공적인 통일을 만들어가는 사람들” (People making successful unification). [pscore.org](http://pscore.org)
- “북한인권정보센터” (North Korean Human Rights Information Center) [nkdb.org](http://nkdb.org)
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## 5. Documents

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