



The Journal of Asia TEFL

<http://journal.asiatefl.org/>

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Negotiating Identity: An Asian Migrant Language Learner Imagining the Future

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Asian migrants¹ that settle in countries like NZ learn English in the hope of accessing mainstream society. However, this process presents many challenges to their identities and their sense of self worth. This paper explores one migrant's journey. The case study of "Jessica" used a narrative approach to investigate her identity construction in trying to get entry to a degree programme. The study focuses on significant events collected from eight in-depth interviews over a period of eleven months. In the process of being originally denied entry to university, then later accepted, Jessica negotiated the negative and limited identity imposed on her, re-constructing her identity as a university student and successful language learner with increased self-value. The findings indicate the significance of imposed identities on self-value, the importance of identity negotiation and the close link to a sense of belonging in mainstream society. Journeys such as Jessica's hopefully make policy makers and language education providers aware of the importance of the sense of self when supporting migrants who are language learners.

Keywords: migrant language learners, negotiating identities, access to higher education

Introduction

The world has entered *the age of migration* according to Castles, Miller and Ammendola (2005), one reason being the increased mobility of people. In New Zealand there has been a notable increase in the number of migrants who identify with at least one Asian ethnicity in the last 30 years (Statistics New Zealand, 2015a, 2015b). The increased mobility of Asians is also seen in other Asian countries in which English is a *de jure* or *de facto* language: A mainland Chinese moves to Hong Kong to work or a South Korean parent relocates to The Philippines for the education of their children. Their settlement requires a certain degree of English language learning, even if it is not extensive.

¹ We follow Australasian convention in our use of the term *migrant* to refer to those who immigrate and settle in new countries. Elsewhere they are generally referred to as *immigrants*. We draw on broad relevant international research in this article to discuss their lives.

This paper examines the process of identity negotiation of “Jessica”, an Asian migrant woman, in New Zealand (NZ). Jessica is an English language learner (ELL) hoping to enter her *imagined community* – a university degree programme. She was one of six participants in a Ph.D. study which investigated Asian migrant women’s identity negotiation as language learners in NZ. Her narrative is particularly focused on access to legitimate membership, and thus she has been selected as the focal participant in this special issue.

The literature on Asian migrant language learners (Butorac, 2011; Norton, 2000; Varghese & Kanno, 2010) often recognises their journeys as being structurally challenging, inhibiting their access to higher education. Jessica’s case illustrates the complexity of the experience of migrant women language learners forming their identities in a new setting. The aim of studying such experiences is to shed light on issues of access and belonging for Asian migrants, to better understand their situation as language learners.

The following discussion begins by examining identity as belonging through negotiation of membership, exploring how ascribed institutional identities challenge migrants’ negotiation processes and how emotion and motivation mediate ongoing negotiation. It continues with narrative inquiry as a methodological approach, and then describes the research methods used and introduces Jessica. The findings include significant events which Jessica identified, her assigned English language learner identity, how she contested the language learner identity, and her work to construct a “successful” English language learner identity. Jessica’s story affirms the struggle for migrant voices to be heard in the life of their new communities. It also shows the powerful role of reified gatekeeping agents in defining migrant identities. Language assessment schemes, language competence measurements and official course evaluations all serve to assign identities, categorise, include and exclude migrants from mainstream society. These forces evoke strong emotional responses that figure importantly as mediators and motivators in language learning. The article concludes by considering the implications of the study findings.

Theoretical Framework

Social Identity and Sense of Belonging

As migrants settle in new countries, they face considerable new challenges to their identities and sense of belonging. Block (2007) describes their identity as “fragmented and contested . . . [and] when individuals move across geographical and psychological borders, immersing themselves in new sociocultural environments, they find that their sense of identity is destabilised and that they enter a period of struggle to reach a balance” (p. 864). Much literature on migrants learning English (Kazmierska, 2003; Kim, 2011; Kinginger, 2003; Norton, 2000) illustrates the accounts of their lives which attest to fragmentation and struggle.

Theorists such as Wenger (1999) and Gee (1990) offer a lens through which to understand migrants’ identities as socially constructed, as belonging to a social group. For Wenger, it is belonging in communities of practice framed as a pathway from peripheral to full participation. For Gee, belonging to Discourses entails adopting an *identity kit* marked by particular ways of communicating, acting, affiliating and thinking. Migrants’ social practices and ways of being may not be recognised by those in the new country, resulting in the host culture labelling them as outsiders. Similarly, gatekeeping procedures (e.g., standardised assessments) serve as reifications of belonging or not belonging. Migrants are often viewed solely as migrants or language learners. In other words, their identities are constructed and assigned by others in limited and superficial ways.

For a migrant whose first language is not that of their host country, language learning is seen as a pathway to belonging (e.g., Hunter, 2004; Norton, 2000) by both migrants themselves and members of their new community. Many migrants actively seek opportunities to learn the language of a new host community. For instance, Eva, an English language learner in Norton’s (2000) study, was a Polish

migrant in Canada, whose skills in Italian secured her a job at an Italian store. However, to practice speaking English, she left the secure and pleasant job for a devalued “heavy job” at a fast-food restaurant because she hoped to go to university (Norton, 2000, p. 62). Hunter’s (2004) study of workers in a large urban hotel revealed competent migrant employees who felt they were held back and told they were being held back because of their English language competence. These judgments were not substantiated by workplace evidence. Such stories illustrate how language learning is perceived, and misperceived, in Hamberger’s (2009) view, as a *prerequisite* to belonging to mainstream society.

The process of learning the target language can be an ongoing struggle for migrants (Barnett & Antenucci, 2006; Han, 2012; Norton, 2000; Pio, 2005), beginning with the problem of gaining access to language learning. For instance, a migrant woman who has young children may not have resources to learn the language like time to attend a language course.

Imagined Identities and Legitimate Voice in Social Interactions

Language learning for migrants is linked to the construction of a new identity. The process of reconstructing identities is linked to imagined communities to which the migrants hope to belong. The notion of imagined communities (Anderson, 1983, 1997) has been adopted by a number of scholars in applied linguistics (Barkuizen & de Klerk, 2006; Kanno & Norton, 2012; Norton & Kamal, 2003; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007) to describe language learners’ mental images of their future desired lives in their new language.

To migrants, learning the language may help them access the new identities they hope to acquire in their imagined communities. Kanno and Norton (2003) examined how the imagined communities of language learners are closely related to their identity trajectories, noting that this process expands the range of possible selves. However, the complexity of English language learner (ELL) identity relates to the issue of the existence of limited possibilities to enter their imagined communities. As noted in the previous section, ELL identity is a limited identity—a prerequisite to belong to the mainstream society. ELLs struggle to learn the English language. As described above, Eva needed to learn the language to enter University in order to rid herself of her migrant status (Norton, 2000). Entry to a degree programme depended on her English proficiency and, for this reason, the ELL identity to her was a limited identity to become a legitimate member of the society—her imagined community.

Language learning, to a considerable extent, demands work on identity negotiation like that depicted in Eva’s story (Norton, 2000). Individuals invest in language learning while expecting to gain access to an increased number of possible and desirable identities in return either at home or in other communities. Similarly, Dörnyei’s (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009, 2010; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009) most recent motivational theory includes three components: the work of imagination of language learners (Ideal L2 self), the external and instrumental influences on language learners (Ought-to L2 self), and the learning environment and experience of language learners (L2 learning experience). Ideal and ought-to selves, in Dörnyei’s model, serve as motivational guides toward imagined communities, moderated by past and current experiences of language learning.

Negotiation indicates the work of individual agency in play like the story of Katrina. In a study of identity in second language acquisition, Block (2007) explains that second language identity is the result of the complicated connection between identities as an act of agency and identities as the result of environmental constraints. The construction of successful second language identity seems to require a great deal of negotiation when working through acts of personal agency in contexts where social structures exert a strong influence. Ahearn (2001) argues that individuals are neither free agents nor completely socially determined products, and furthermore that the important task is to look at how individuals negotiate the complex relationship between structure and agency in dynamic social settings.

Legitimate Membership and Reified Gatekeeping

Wenger (1999) refers to reification as “the process of giving form to our experience by producing objects that congeal this experience into ‘thingness’, and in reification we project ourselves onto the world” (p. 58). Reification through official documents, codified policy statements, and standardised testing regimes, for example, allows decision makers and others to distance themselves from interaction, negotiation and justification of ideologies. For instance, admission to a degree program, for migrants who use English as an additional language (EAL) in New Zealand, includes “proof” of English language proficiency via a particular IELTS score. The score then is normalised as an indicator of competent language learner identity and incontrovertibly serves to include or exclude migrant language learners in desired academic communities. The effects of these gatekeeping factors on migrants as ELLs have not been studied as extensively as their everyday negotiations to gain legitimate membership in communities, but they have significant exclusionary power.

Emotion and Identity Negotiation Processes

Assigned identities can make migrants feel uneasy about who they are, leading them to question their sense of belonging. In fact, the literature on migrant language learners’ identity negotiation journeys (Kim, 2011; Kinginger, 2003; Norton, 2000; Pio, 2005) provides rich insights into the emotional dimensions of these journeys even though the authors did not set out to use an emotional lens. For instance, Kim (2011), in an extended interview study of young East Asian women living in London, found a strong sense of disappointment in light of the women’s early media based expectations of life in the new environment. As one interviewee put it, “I will always be a foreigner. I feel so alone” (p. 287).

The role of emotion in migrants’ lives is associated with more than feelings of isolation though. The recent literature in applied linguistics (Bown & White, 2010; Imai, 2010; Miyahara, 2015; Pavlenko, 2005; Swain, 2013) focuses on emotion as a social phenomenon to understand language learners’ complicated identity negotiation and language learning processes. In contrast to earlier notions of emotion solely as individualised static psychological responses to external stimuli, recent theorists maintain that emotions are “socially constructed acts of communication that can mediate one’s thinking, behavior, and goals” (Imai, 2010, p. 279). Moreover, these writers stress that emotion is more importantly also a mediator of language learning and motivation. In this sense, it dovetails with Dörnyei and Ushioda’s (2009) discussions of motivation in terms of sense of self and approaches to experience in relational contexts.

From the discussion above, it is clear how language learning for migrants is closely related to access as legitimate members to the mainstream society. Entering their imagined community is often perceived to begin with language learning. However, successful entry to the community does not entail the legitimate membership, and language learners’ identities can constrain their sense of belonging. The work of such imagination and reification on migrant language learner identity has been identified as both a drive and a constraint. We have also identified the work of emotion in the process of migrant language learner’s identity negotiation process. The discussion above has thus established the case for the inclusion of the imagined identity of the language learner, the social structures the learner perceives and experiences, the work of personal agency to deal with challenges, and emotions that the learner faces throughout the process. The next section reviews narrative inquiry as a means of studying the journeys of language learners. In so doing, it outlines the methodology for this study.

Methods

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry offers rich data about what is important to narrators. Narrators are able to recount what is meaningful and significant to them that links their past to the present and future (Bell 2002; Connelly & Clandinin 1990; Labov 1997, 2006; Moen 2006; Sandelowski 1991). Through narrating significant events, individuals construct their identities (Barkhuizen, 2013; Bell, 2002; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008). Narratives of language learning show how language learners gain access to language learning and their imagined identities, and how they negotiate these identities to construct desirable identities (Early & Norton, 2012; Kinginger, 2003; Norton & Early, 2011; Ro, 2010; Szabo, 2006). For instance, in the study of two Korean English language learners at a high school in the U.S., Ro (2010) identifies the complexities that exist in their identity negotiation processes in school communities. Although they were academically successful, they continued to accept, contest, and reshape the identities that were imposed on them by others. The process highlighted the students' interest in her personal agency enabling her to belong to the group that she desired to belong to through utilising various strategies and resources.

English language learners' narratives can uncover the complexity of identity negotiation processes of language learners. Pavlenko (2002), examining narrative, claims that "there is no doubt that recent developments that legitimize personal narratives are extremely important for the TESOL field, as they allow for both teachers' and learners' voices to be heard on a par with those of the researchers" (p. 213). ELL narratives have been examined in related issues of identity (Darvin & Norton, 2014; Early & Norton, 2012; Szabo, 2006). Early and Norton (2012), for example, examined the construction of self and identity across contexts through the narratives of language learners. The study of narratives also allows us to look at emotion with a richer understanding of a language learner's language learning process (Swain, 2013).

The Study

In this article, we investigate how Jessica (a pseudonym), an Asian migrant woman in NZ, navigates her language learner identities in complex social domains with the purpose of entering her imagined community, a university degree programme. We examine how identity becomes an issue for Jessica and how language learning defines her as a language learner and the language learner identity obstructs the access to their imagined communities. To gain access to her imagined communities, she begins to study a language in order to acquire qualifications which will hopefully lead her to obtain legitimate employment. We also show how her emotion is shaped and reshaped throughout the journey, and also how the emotion plays a significant role in the decisions she makes.

Jessica: The Participant

A snowball method was used to recruit participants, leading to Jessica and others agreeing to take part. Jessica had the option of doing interviews in Korean, her heritage language, since the interviewer was also a Korean. However, she opted to do the interviews in English, in order to improve her English speaking skills.

Jessica migrated from South Korea and was married to a New Zealander and had lived in Hamilton since 2007. She had one son who was a preschooler when the initial interview was conducted. She had had a few part-time jobs such as a grocery store assistant both in Korea and in NZ. Jessica was trained as a jewellery maker in Korea. However, she perceived only limited job opportunities in the jewellery making industry in NZ. To increase career options in NZ, she obtained a postgraduate diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) from a local tertiary institute. However, after discussion with her husband, she then wanted to enroll in an Early Childhood Education (ECE)

programme at the same institute, before participating in the research.

Research Method

The data was collected through iterative in-depth individual interviews over eleven months. It was analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Jessica was involved in the research from February to December 2013. There were eight individual in-depth interviews—one initial, six post-recount, and one reflective. Jessica recounted significant events related to her identities in NZ. In the research project, significant events refer to recent specific moments or experiences which include strong positive or negative emotions (Bennett & Detzner, 1997; László, 2008). The first seven interviews were conducted by the first author (referred to here as ‘the researcher’) roughly once a month, focusing on the significant events. The researcher then revisited and summarised the collected stories. During the last reflective interview, the researcher presented three summaries: one was Jessica’s overall journey; another was about the communities that she belonged to; and the last was the most significant event in each interview. During the presentation of the researcher’s interpretation, Jessica confirmed the validity of its content, further elaborated and sometimes corrected the significant events identified.

The section below shares observations of the data analysis and interpretation. Firstly, we document the significant events that Jessica recalled and confirmed. Secondly, we describe themes that arose within and across Jessica’s interviews that relate to her emerging and changing identities and her sense of self as an English language learner.

Findings and Discussion

Significant Events

The stories that Jessica shared during the research period focused on her desire to enrol in a degree programme which would lead her to develop a legitimate career in her new home, New Zealand. The researcher presented this interpretation to Jessica during the last reflective interview, and she confirmed and modified the researcher’s understanding of what was the most significant event of each interview session in relation to her identity trajectories. As seen in the table below, there are five significant events that relate to her efforts to enter higher education.

TABLE 1
Significant Events Recounted by Jessica

Interviews	Significant Event	Background
First	Rejected and referred to a lower level foundation course than her previous qualification	Early Childhood Education programme application
Second	Given no reasonable answers to her placement	Conversation with administration staff
Third	Feeling undermined and mistreated by a tutor	Interaction with a tutor in a writing class
Sixth	Accepted to a degree programme at University	Application to a degree programme

Significant event recalled in the first interview session involved a feeling of rejection on account of the fact that she was a language learner. Jessica reported that her application to an Early Childhood Education (ECE) programme was rejected, and she was instead asked to do a Foundation Studies course even though she successfully completed a higher level course than the Foundation Studies at the same institute prior to the application. Jessica’s emotional response to the rejection was recounted during the second interview. Not understanding her placement in the course, she reported great frustration when she sought information about her placement. She recounted that the staff did not provide reasonable answers in

response to her questions. Her negative emotion continued. She reported that she nevertheless decided to finish the course, not only because she thought it might lead her to an ECE programme, but also because she was relying on social support (governmental allowance for students) to support herself and her family.

In a writing class of the Foundation Studies, Jessica perceived that her voice was silenced and disregarded by her tutor. She was not happy with the course and felt she did not benefit from it. Her emotion took a clear turn during the seventh interview. Jessica reported a story of her husband seeing her as a confident English user. When he realised that the researcher was a Korean, he complimented Jessica on her efforts to learn English and her fluency when doing research interviews in English. During the sixth interview, she reported that she had been accepted into a degree programme at a university. She was excited to begin her new journey as a university student.

Central to Jessica's eleven-month narrative was her driving desire to enter a legitimate programme that would provide her with a future career. She reported this as below.

If you don't have that kind of thing [a qualification; here, she meant a degree], you will have to be stuck in certain jobs. And then if you get minimum wage, you can't survive with one job. (Interview 8)

Obtaining a legitimate qualification began for Jessica with learning English. However, learning English in a formal institution was not easy for her. After Jessica migrated to NZ, she had wanted to study in a tertiary institution. However, she became a mother and the priority became child-rearing. Instead of enrolling in a tertiary language course, she used a free language course offered at a community centre. At the same time, she started to speak English to her son at home at the cost of her son having an opportunity to learn Korean—his heritage language. Her statement in the seventh interview revealed the complexity of the problem of learning English as a mother.

I don't teach Korean to my son because if I speak Korean to my son when I go back to school, I can't [won't be able to] speak English. . . . And I don't think I am really good at [learning] languages. I work hard to get it, but I am not talented [enough] to learn a new language. I can speak this [well] much because I work hard. When I speak Korean to my son, I may not speak English properly at school. . . . But people [in the Korean community] worry about "Aren't you teaching him Korean?" . . . "You have to teach him otherwise he can't [won't be able to] speak Korean." . . . That is true. If I am [was] talented, I wouldn't worry about it. (Interview 7)

Jessica settled in a *not good at learning language* identity to justify her decision about communicating with her son in English rather than Korean. It could be interpreted that home provided a place for Jessica to profile herself with a confident language learner identity. She felt able to create a successful identity as a learner through her home-based actions.

As seen in the excerpt above, she had tried to be a *good* language user. She obtained a graduate diploma in TESOL with merit. However, she could not gain entry into the ECE programme because she failed to produce appropriate documented evidence of her English language competency. This was the moment when she commenced her participation in the current research project. The themes that emerged from the significant events are presented below.

English Language Learner Identity

As seen in the section above, Jessica indicated that she finished a graduate diploma in TESOL, which was NZ academic Level 7. She hoped to enroll in an ECE programme at the same institute to secure her career for the future. However, she was referred to a Level 4 (Foundations) course without any indication that there would be future acceptance into the ECE programme. The process can be interpreted that Jessica perceived that the Level 7 course could help access the ECE programme while the institutional

application process did not acknowledge the qualification as a legitimate measure of her academic skills. Jessica assumed that she was acceptably proficient because she had received a pass mark in the higher level course. Her experience illustrates the identities ascribed by reified gatekeeping not only ascribes identities but also can be internalised by migrants themselves. Being referred to a Level 4 Foundation Studies, Jessica saw herself as having been relegated to being an unsuccessful language learner.

Even though she thought ECE might be a good option, she resisted pursuing it due to the perceived lack of possibilities and also the despair and distress she felt during this process. This can be interpreted that the emotional response to the rejection mediated her decision making. The second interviews with Jessica highlighted the frustration and emotional distress she felt during the process as seen below.

They referred me to the level 4 course . . . just saying “you are not accepted” because of the literacy test, because of the writing. Then I understand. If they don't like my writing, just tell me. “You need IELTS (International English Language Testing System)”, or just simply saying “You are not accepted”. Don't send me somewhere which I don't need . . . They don't seem to believe that I can do an ECE course . . . I have no other option [but to] finish the level 4 course. (Interview 2)

She reported that she felt like an unsuccessful language learner as seen in her statement, “They said that my English is not good enough.” and “They don't seem to believe I can do an ECE course.” At the sixth interview, she recounted a story about waiting for the result of her application to enter a University programme. She said, “I felt like ‘Am I that bad?’ I didn't have self-esteem. ‘What should I do?’ So bad, so stressful.” (Interview 6). Such statements added by Jessica when narrating her experience suggest that language learner identities were assigned and imposed in both social interactions and higher education application processes.

As seen in Jessica's story, her language learner identity is reified by the programme application process. Such work of reification confirms the argument of Wenger (1999) that reification indeed is part of meaning making. Even though Jessica finished the level 7 course, she was a language learner who needed to show a legitimate test score. The requirement serves here as a gatekeeping tool put in place for those who use English as an additional language.

From Jessica's narratives, we saw that the organisation she wished to join, the standardised testing regime, and other people in her context assigned her a reductionist identity, that of only a language learner, which she then internalised as unsuccessful as well. The label influenced how she viewed herself which led to negative feelings about herself and the educational setting, in line with the literature on emotion in applied linguistics (Imai, 2010; Miyahara, 2015, Swain, 2013) that emotion is situational and socially constructed. The process upset her and she stopped pursuing her imagined identity as an ECE teacher. The emotion was a strong mediator of her identity negotiation process.

After the initial disapproval, disappointment and frustration, Jessica accepted the fact that she did not do well on the literacy and numeracy test that was part of her enrolment process in the ECE programme. She said “I am not good at exam[s], and I am not good at writing in limited time. I wasn't good” (Interview 2). It could be interpreted that the writing test failure was not directly related to her lack of English proficiency. She contested her placement—and her assigned unsuccessful English language learner identity. This is the second theme and is discussed below.

Contesting Imposed and Assigned Identity

At first, Jessica could not believe the placement she had been assigned. She had been quite confident before her placement because she had successfully finished a Level 7 course. She believed she was a successful language learner prior to the enrolment process to the ECE programme. She desperately tried to find reasonable answers to her unsuccessful application and her relegation to the Foundation Studies course. In this way, she started the process of contesting her assigned identity. She explained:

I talked to the manager of ECE, and the manager of the administration department. . . . So I went to

them [TESOL tutors] and explained to them. They were trying to find out what happened. . . . So I went to the office, they are saying excuse after excuse. . . . And I went to the office, but there was no one there to ask (Interview 2)

The above statements indicate that she could not get reasonable answers. Later, she found that, as a migrant using English as a second language, she was required to provide an English proficiency test score from the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). She reported the experience as frustrating and that she would not have gone through the application for the ECE programme—literacy and numeracy tests and series of interviews—had she known the procedure in advance. She was again relegated to an ELL identity.

She also contested her assigned language learner identity in other ways. In the Foundation studies class, she differentiated herself from her peers as seen in the statement, “I am not a secondary [school] student who tries to piss teachers off”, and “I kind of have a feeling I am too old for this class” (Interview 4). Her view on what it meant to be a student seemed to be different from that of her peers, as she described: “Our team, it is kind of hopeless. . . . They don't concentrate” (Interview 3), and “Oh gosh! Everyone was texting, talking, and texting. It was really annoying.” (Interview 4). These statements indicate that she challenged any perceived identity which associated her with those who should be in a Foundation studies course.

Further, Jessica criticised how the course was delivered—the structure and curriculum. As mentioned previously, she had a one-year learning experience in a tertiary course, a postgraduate diploma. She was well aware of what tertiary study involved. She felt that this experience was nothing new for her, as she revealed in her statement, “I am doing exactly the same thing but [it is] easier. Why do you have to learn a baby language when you already speak like an adult?” (Interview 2). For her, it seemed like a waste of time and money as she stated later at the second interview. Furthermore, she was not happy with the structure of the class as seen in the excerpt below:

One subject taught by two tutors. If they don't communicate [with] each other, then it doesn't work [very] well. Uh, this time, one tutor kept saying “You have to upload in Moodle. One tutor says “Don't” . . . every tutor requires a different style of APA I think, the teacher who marks our presentation should teach them all. Not this computer tutor teaches how to make slides and then the presentation tutor just marks the presentation. It is not efficient. (Interview 2)

The course structure did not make sense for Jessica. She was contesting the learning material and the structure of the course delivery. Her frustration was evident in her tone of voice and her comments. She accompanied her story-telling about the course curriculum and structure by showing her handbook and course material to the researcher. These stories can be interpreted as her ways of contesting the assigned identity as a less proficient language learner.

In response to her identity construction by others, Jessica negotiated the challenges in diverse contexts to contest and reconstruct the unsuccessful or less proficient language learner identities. Her journey is in line with many language learners' stories in the literature, like those of Norton (2000) and Kinginger (2003). Jessica's narratives about contesting her assigned identity highlight the work of agency in identity negotiation, which confirms Block's (2007) argument that personal agency relates to the complexity in one's identities. Jessica's story resonates in many migrant women language learners' narratives like Katrina in Norton (2000). The work of agency is linked to imagination. The desire to belong to the mainstream society, her imagined community, is a strong motivator for Jessica.

Constructing a Successful English Language Learner Identity

While Jessica contested her Level 4 language learner identity as seen above, she also tried to develop a *successful English language learner* identity amongst other possible identities. There were stories of this

endeavour. One was about an English-only policy at home (as illustrated in the section of significant events), where she made English the dominant language. She had one child, a son, and she understood that it also would be beneficial for him to learn Korean. However, she spoke only English to him to maintain and improve her own English proficiency. The following excerpt illustrates this strategy:

Because, in NZ, I am studying, so I am struggling with English. If I speak Korean to him, then my English will be mixed up so I can't speak Korean to him so he can't learn Korean. (Interview 1)

The second story related to an interaction with her husband. After a couple of research interviews, when he realised the researcher was also a Korean, her husband said to her, "I thought you were going to speak Korean." She replied, "No, I am smart now" (Interview 7). She commented that she meant this in a playful manner. In saying this, she wanted to affirm her identity as someone who would not have any problem in an English only conversation.

The third story was about her acceptance into a university degree programme. While she was taking a Level 4 course, she also searched for an alternative degree programme. She was against doing the ECE programme after her unpleasant application experience. While she was taking the Level 4 Foundation Studies, she had investigated possible options for further study. She decided to apply to an Applied Linguistics programme, successfully. She then began her new journey as a university student in July with a renewed sense of identity as a successful language learner. While the power of these reified admission processes officially reassigned her as a successful language learner, she was yet to face the possibility of further negotiation toward legitimate membership in her newest academic community.

Entering Jessica's imagined community, a degree programme, is closely associated with positive emotion about her language learner identity. Unlike the negative emotion related to her limited language learner identity seen in the Section of English language learner identity, positive emotion was associated with the successful language learner identity construction. This shows how emotion includes "states, processes, and relationships" (Pavlenko, 2005, p. xii). As illustrated in Jessica's journey, the trajectory of emotion is associated with her identity trajectory: she started with learning the language, entering a degree programme and hoping for a career. The journey continued and was ongoing for Jessica for her increased possibilities to enter her imagined communities.

Imagination and emotion both highlight the psychological aspects—self—in social identity theory. In the process of the assigned identity contestation, it appeared that her sense of self developed and expanded, specifically in relation to the notion of legitimate membership of certain communities (such as her membership identity as a university student) developed and expanded. Jessica's narratives illustrate not only the link between imagined identity construction and legitimate membership but the complexity in the process, as the concept of self is great part of social identity theory. The link between self and identity negotiation is also suggested in the literature on identity (Kawakami, 2009; Pailliotet, 1997; Ventegodt & Merrick, 2014). In particular, Sökefeld (1999) argues for the concept of self in the analysis of an individual's identity negotiation process. Thus, study of language learner identities needs in-depth exploration of such research.

Implications and Conclusion

Jessica's journey towards entering a degree programme illustrates complex and dynamic processes of identity construction as an Asian migrant woman learning English. The journey illustrates the way the language learner identity is reified and the way emotion plays a significant part in the process. This study is limited in that a single case of a woman migrant language learner is explored. However, the narratives respond to the call for exploration of the complexity in the literature on language learner identity (Block, 2007, Ricento, 2005). At the same time, Jessica's journey stresses the aspect of self and emotion in the process. This points to the importance of emotional aspects of language learning—a focus called for in

recent literature (see for example, Bown & White, 2010; Imai, 2010; Miyahara, 2015; Swain, 2013).

Jessica's ongoing struggles to overcome diminished assigned identities illustrate the social and structural effects on the identity formation of language learners. Jessica's statements such as, "Why do you have to learn a baby language when you already speak like an adult?" (Interview 2) arguably confirm that adult language learners should be viewed as individuals with complex language learner identities, each of which has associated knowledge and skills that often remain unseen by others.

The emerging sense of self in Jessica's negotiation process suggests implications for adult English language teaching and learning. It reminds us to be mindful that adult language learners are also people who need to be heard and valued for who they are, with an identity construction that frames them as a valuable member who can contribute to the society. We have previously suggested the importance of story sharing for EAL students (Lee, Hunter, & Franken, 2014), but we here stress the fact that these stories should be personally significant, and personally authored - not authored or interpreted from a culturally representative perspective.

Practical implications for policy makers and language education providers can be drawn from Jessica's narratives. Firstly, the system of evaluating students' needs to be explored. As seen in the findings, the outcome of testing and the requirement of the IELTS score determined the ways Jessica was viewed. She was objectified by assessment as seen in the narrated story of the encounters with administration staff. In one sense, reductionist identities ascribed to ELLs are not new. However, the current proliferation of high stakes educational testing and measurement practices reifies these identities. People become not just language learners, but test scores. Re-educating management and academic staff is critical because clear and sympathetic communication could have helped her to construct positive attitudes towards the institute and the programme.

In relation to entrance screening, secondly, broadening entry requirements to tertiary education needs to be considered. It may be feasible to develop a system that uses interviews with prospective migrant ELL learners as a reliable source of assessment. As pointed out earlier, adult language learners have associated knowledge and skills which cannot be simply measured by tests like IELTS.

Thirdly, the support systems of tertiary education providers should be emphasised. As we have seen in Jessica's story, entering tertiary education is a step toward belonging and becoming a valuable member of society as a migrant. Tertiary education providers benefit from high enrolments of migrants and international students. Adequate and proactive pastoral and academic support for ELLs like academic writing courses, learning centres and more can increase their likelihood of success in achieving their imagined identities. While such facilities have been common in ELL programmes, recent sociopolitical developments have frequently led to their downsizing.

Lastly, more stories like Jessica's need to be studied and disseminated. Such stories can provide in-depth understanding of the reality of people's lives. Policy makers and education providers can examine how their policies and programmes are received by students and migrants. A desirable outcome would be that mainstream society could see migrants as real people, albeit with challenges, who can overcome problems in creative ways.

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