



A Humanized View of Second Language Learning Through Creative Writing: A Korean Graduate Student in the United States

Kyung Min Kim

Miami University- Oxford

kyungminkim7411@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

The changing educational landscape in higher education over the past few decades has undoubtedly resulted in English departments with lower enrollment and fewer course offerings, but during this same time, the number of second language (L2) writers has increased—although the existence of L2 writers has not been sufficiently acknowledged in creative writing literature, nor in a public discourse of creative writing. Tim Mayers’ assertion that creative writing should have a stronger presence within education is certainly a timely call to establish such studies as a “full-scale” (1) discipline. However, not many scholars deem that L2 writers also lie on the horizon that proponents of Creative Writing Studies seek to expand. In the exploration of cross-linguistic experiences, “the interdisciplinary value” (Mayers 4) and the research aspect of creative writing should not be neglected. Both creative writing and composition teaching should pursue a mutual understanding of changing creative writing in post-secondary institutions (Harper). Or at the very least they need to become concerned about “a richer, more coherent view of writing” (Hesse 31) with creative openness, while a strained relationship might persist due to the epistemological differences between creative writing and composition studies (Bailey and Bizzaro). Within the context of Creative Writing Studies, a translingual approach (Canagarajah, *Translingual Practice*; Cushman; Horner et al.; Trimbur) in composition studies buttresses the affordances of L2 literacy investigation in interdisciplinary ways.

Even with a strong endorsement of interdisciplinary studies, however, understanding L2 writers’ fluctuating identities, each with multifarious manifestations across literacies, is not an easy task. What people hardly realize is that L2 speakers already have a full-blown first language literacy (Rafoth), which may be overshadowed by their L2 proficiency particularly in a target language

culture. Michelle Cox, a second language writing specialist, points out that L2 writers are “often identified only by their language status” when they “have as many identities as any other student” (54). Transnational identities can be understood better as more fluid, rather than as a simple one-directional phenomenon where learners are stripped of their identity signified by a mother tongue (Canagarajah, *Translingual Practice*; Wei and Hua). It is not a coincidence that a considerable literature in composition studies has grown up around a translingual approach (Canagarajah, *Translingual Practice*; Cushman; Horner et al.; Trimbur). In a translingual approach, “language norms are actually heterogeneous, fluid, and negotiable” (Horner et al. 305) and in turn, difference is considered not as a stigma but as a resource to make meaning. As Canagarajah (*Translingual Practice*) accurately asserted, this definition of the term *translingual* emphasizes how “communication transcends individual language” (6). What is noteworthy in translingualism is its valid criticism of “the misleading notion that we have separate cognitive compartments for separate languages with different types of competence for each” (Canagarajah, *Translingual Practice* 7) when the term multilingual is used. In this interdisciplinary literacy study, I follow the translingual orientation to highlight the dynamic nature of the relationship between languages and cross-linguistic experiences.

What is needed more, then, is an understanding not only of how L2 students learn *about* a language in isolation but also how they *experience* one across languages. Utilizing a case study approach, this paper traces the journey of an L2 graduate student’s translingual experience, drawing on autobiographical poetry, self-narrative, and interviews in his first language. It aims to provide “humaniz[ed]” (Hanauer, “Meaningful Literacy” 106) descriptions of how the learner identified and processed emotions that emerged from learning a second language. With an interdisciplinary spirit, I situate the present study at the intersection of second language learning, creative writing studies, and composition studies. For this literacy study, poetry writing was employed primarily for its ability as an “elicitation method, or stimulus item for response” (Hanauer, “Multicultural Moments in Poetry” 84). Nonetheless, I also hope that the experimentation with a rarely-used poetic form, Korean Sijo, can suggest an instructional tool in creative writing. Sijo is a three-line poetic form with a long history in Korea. I hope this research moves creative writing studies into the context of L2 and translingual studies, which have been underserved, by providing empirical support for “the tangible benefits” (Hergenrader 5) for L2 research. Then, the question becomes how the unique capacity of creative writing as a data-collection tool can provide access to the participant’s emotion and desires that may be out of reach through non-creative methods.

THE POTENTIAL OF POETRY IN ACADEMIA

It has been well established that the examination of lived experience can provide valuable insights into individuals' identity construction and negotiation (e.g., Denzin and Lincoln) and that evocative genres of writing are legitimate methodological tools to investigate lived experiences (Bell; Park, "I Am Never Afraid"). This academic endeavor has been reinforced by the use of autobiographic narratives (Pavlenko; Huhtala and Lehti-Eklund). More significantly, a growing interest in poetry as a research method to understand human experience (Brady; Hanauer, *Poetry as Research*) places poetry in a different light in the academy. Research revealed that poetry is a powerful tool to access individuals' memories and construct a unique narrative that a simplistic characterization might overlook: a poetic representation of a wartime experience (Hanauer, "Experiencing the Blitz," "Being in the Second Iraq War"), the poetic reconstruction of traumatic events by Japanese college students (Iida, "Exploring Earthquake Experiences"), and a poetic inquiry of a Korean-American woman scholar (Park, "My Autobiographical-poetic Rendition"). Poetry as an emotionally engaging writing performance enables individuals to be very reflective (Clark), which non-creative methods hardly achieve. Although qualitative data can be collected through different methods, I selected poetry as a primary data source in this study because it can generate the types of data for this study through profound reflection leading to learning. Interestingly, regarding the organic connection of reflective writing and learning, it is not difficult to observe parallels with narrative theory. In a narrative approach, "life storytelling itself forms an important part of biographical learning processes" (Hallqvist and Hydén 1), which is defined as "learning about one's life and learning from one's life" (Biesta and Tedder 139). Narrative theory holds that self-reflection through narration is not merely "the outcome of a learning process" (Hallqvist and Hydén 1) but that it also strengthens learning.

Coupled with its ability to stimulate self-reflection, poetry is a powerful tool for reliving emotions (Clark) and unraveling the penetrating meaning of experience (Brady). Poetry promotes a high level of engagement with memories. Particularly, poetry forces a writer to use metaphors, tones, and symbolic language effective to capture a particular moment that can characterize a certain experience succinctly (Clark). Citing Gordon, Hanauer opines that "art provides physically and emotionally secure access to first-hand experience in the world" ("Multicultural Moments in Poetry" 76). Poets can create an emotional reality by applying defining characteristics of poetry such as imaginative wordplay, the musical elements of language, or allusions. Or poets may use historical terms or perhaps unusual words in daily or academic prose to bring particular emotional or connotative associations. Consequently, readers can feel "experience of the complexities of life" (Hanauer, "Multicultural Moments in Poetry" 76).

In addition to poetry as a research method, this line of investigation has evolved to include poetry writing as an instructional tool—partly in response to continued skepticism that poetry is too difficult for L2 students. Research (e.g., Disney; Garvin; Hanauer, “Meaningful Literacy”; Iida, “The Value of Poetry Writing”; Newfield and D’abdon) demonstrated how English language learners can produce poetry in English and how writing poetry can be used to develop their L2 literacy and empower their voices in general. For example, in an interview study of 19 ESL students’ perceptions, Hanauer and Liao offered empirical evidence that academic and creative writing have different characteristics. Taking a step further, Liao proposes “a translingual poetic literacy pedagogy” (46) in her case study of a Chinese study abroad student at a U.S. university. One of the poetry books reported in the study was written multilingually through a code-mix of English and Chinese. Liao concluded that poetry either in a second language or in a mix of first and second languages promoted the learner’s ownership and represented the learner’s identity effectively. This study exemplified one of the ways a translingual pedagogy can be enacted. In Liao’s article, translingual pedagogy is embodied in a way that the poet used his full linguistic repertoires of English and Chinese by mixing the two languages in his poems.

Poetry in research and pedagogy is one of the promising ways to broaden the scope of the creative writing studies as an established academic discipline mature for qualitative research-based inquiries. At the level of research, this article enacted a translingual approach in that it explored the nature of the connection of language learning to identity across languages. At the level of pedagogy, the Sijo lesson embodied a translingual approach in that the participant created meaning, using a full repertoire of his resources including his first language.

THE HUMAN DIMENSION OF L2 LEARNING

Understanding the connections between subject positionalities, L2 learners, memory, and desire is essential to contextualize the participant’s recollections. Interestingly, the pursuit of an integrated understanding of language with the recognition of its fluidity resonates with research efforts in applied linguistics despite a different emphasis from composition studies. Claire Kramsch, a well-known applied linguist, examined the subjective dimensions of language learning by analyzing data from foreign language learners and published narratives of former language learners. She introduced a survey of learners’ perspectives about language learning. Learners of different foreign languages used striking metaphors for language learning such as the following:

Having a molar extraction...

Pulling my hair out...

Walking on a frozen lake without being able to see where the ice is thin...

Getting hit by a truck over and over again...

Having a six-inch nail pounded into my head every morning at nine... (60-62)

As Kramersch justifiably claimed, “the foreign language is first and foremost experienced physically, linguistically, [and] emotionally” (60). Essentially, these metaphors accentuate the considerable extent to which feelings are woven into the fabric of the learning process.

David I. Hanauer strengthens the scholarship on subjectivity of language learning in the context of second language (e.g., “Meaningful Literacy,” “Multicultural Moments in Poetry,” “L2 Writing and Personal History,” *Poetry as Research*) by proposing a meaningful literacy framework. At the center of his attempt to “humaniz[e]” (“Meaningful Literacy” 106) additional language learning is an assumption that language learning is “an emotional and embodied experience in addition to being a cognitive process” (Hanauer, “Meaningful Literacy” 108). Hanauer’s meaningful literacy aims to make language learning personally meaningful. Its guiding principles include getting students to produce autobiographical and emotional writing which involves an in-depth reflective process (108). The meaningful literacy scholarship (e.g., Garvin; Iida, “Exploring Earthquake Experiences”; Park, “My Autobiographical-Poetic Rendition”) addressed various ways in which personally meaningful inquiry tasks such as poetry writing can be utilized in L2 contexts. For example, Hanauer (*Poetry as Research*) examined the experience of ESL students at a U.S. university, using poetry. Over six years, he collected poems written in English by English language learners enrolled in ESL College Writing. He reported how the poets positioned themselves in the American culture, responded to language and academic classrooms emotionally, and negotiated the new culture. The ESL poetry showed moments of “embarrassment, marginalization, anxiety, fear and even anger” (128) in learning and using a second language. Further validating creative writing in L2 contexts, more literature has recently emerged that documents autobiographical memory and L2 learners (Iida, “Exploring Earthquake Experiences”); the intricacy of multilinguals’ emotions (Chamchariatsri); the unique engagement that comes with autobiographical creative writing (Nicholes); L2 creative writers’ identities (Zhao); ways of expressing emotions in L2 (Dewaele). For instance, Iida (“Exploring Earthquake Experiences”) investigated how Japanese L2 writers felt about the magnitude 9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011 by analyzing 773 poems. These poems were written in English by 78 students for a college English course at a Japanese university. Iida claimed that poetry writing in L2 could be a tool to make sense of

the traumatic personal memories. These L2 poems covered a wide emotional range including the learners' confusion, anxiety, sadness, disappointment, anger, fear, resilience, relief, and hope for the future. Iida strongly argued that "poetry communicates the emotional messages of the writers as well as articulates how they understand and respond to the event" (132). This study also demonstrated that even L2 writers with relatively low English language proficiency could transform painful memories into coherent poems, contrary to the misgivings about the feasibility of poetry writing in L2 classrooms that some instructors might have.

In addition to the importance of subjectivity and emotions for a more sophisticated understanding of L2 learning, a wider acknowledgment of desire in language learning (Benesch; Clough and Halley; Motha and Lin) further highlights the dimensions that have been neglected over fairly long periods. Specifically, the construct *desire* can be a useful tool to expound the subjective dimension of L2 learning. By theorizing "desire as situated and co-constructed" (333) particularly regarding language learning, Suhanthie Motha and Angel Lin maintained:

...at the center of every English language learning moment lies desire: desire for the language; for the identities represented by particular accents and varieties of English; for capital, power, and images that are associated with English; for what is believed to lie beyond the doors that English unlocks. (332)

Motha and Lin made quite a strong argument by claiming that desire exists at "every English learning moment" (332). Unquestionably, teachers would admit that English language learning entails some form of affective factors such as desire, attitudes, dedication, self-esteem, or motivation. However, some teachers, or conceivably many, might have a lingering doubt about whether desire is *that* important. What Motha and Lin defined as desire in language learning interacts with a range of emotions and subjectivity. And perhaps "the centrality of desire" (333) that they argued for comes from the dynamic interaction between emotions, subject positionalities, and desire. However, despite its importance, there remains a paucity of research on the complex web of learners' emotions, desires, memories, state of mind, and subject position in language learning; this important area still lacks an empirical research base.

At the level of analysis, Motha and Lin conceptualized desire as "coconstructed" (333) in English language learning by analyzing it in terms of five interrelated levels: (1) desires of learners; (2) desires of communities to which learners belong; (3) desires of teachers; (4) desires of institutions; and (5) desires of the government. For instance, a teacher can have a firm belief in the value of poetry in English class while the institution desires to focus more on grammar and vocabulary, along with explicit preparation for standardized English tests, to increase the competitiveness of its students in the job market after graduation. If the department requires teachers to use a strictly-structured baseline

syllabus to fulfill the desire of the institution, the teacher may have to revise what and how to teach the class. Learners come to this framework with their own desires to master a prestige variety of English or to gain more power. From Motha and Lin's perspective, the desires interact with other desires and "co-constructed" (333), which ultimately shapes the experience of the learner. Thus, Motha and Lin's framework of desire is useful to a more detailed understanding of the participant's experience. For instance, when the participant went to the writing center with restless dissatisfaction, how did the desire of his graduate professor affect the expectations for the participant's paper and his consultation session? How did interactions among conscious or unconscious and satisfied or unsatisfied desires shape his experiences? In sum, subjectivity is one of the perhaps quintessential qualities of the language learning process an individual goes through to transform into someone the individual desires to be. If this is true, it should be recognized as such.

My efforts to honor the individual experience and my intention to foreground the subjective nature of the language learning process that is affected by many variables led me to conduct a qualitative case study inquiry. Specifically, the present research required a methodological approach that can "penetrate situations in ways that are not always susceptible to numerical analysis" (Cohen et al. 289) and large-scale studies for "thick description" (Creswell 204). By following one participant, a case study approach will provide an emotional understanding of language learning experiences through concrete instances of a real person with rich emotions, aspirations, and desires.

THE STUDY

The present research explores English language learning experiences, utilizing autobiographical poetry, narration, and interviews. More precisely, how individual experiences are reconstructed by the individual is the object of inquiry. This study was conducted at a mid-Atlantic university in the United States. As part of a larger study involving nine Korean international students, this case study reports on Yoogoon's (pseudonym the participant chose) stories over the years from his childhood to graduate school. I selected Yoogoon as the focal participant in this study for two reasons. Firstly, his English experience is characterized by being both an ESL (English as a Second Language) and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learner, unlike the other participants. He had been in the United States for the longest period among the participants. Although the other participants can be labeled as ESL students at the time of data collection, their length of stay in the United States was very short, and they received all their formal education in South Korea. Secondly, Yoogoon was the only one who had elementary school years in the English-speaking country as well as undergraduate and graduate years. Thus, I decided to follow his experience mainly because of his active engagement with both American and Korean communities. Following

Hanauer (*Poetry and the Meaning of Life*), poetry is defined in the present case study as “a literary text that presents the experiences, thoughts and feelings of the writer through a self-referential use of language that creates for the reader and writer a new understanding of the experience, thought or feeling expressed in the text” (10).

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

After approval from the Institutional Review Board was obtained, a graduate student, Yoogoon, participated in this study voluntarily. The research project involved a two-hour Sijo workshop. Although he was already familiar with Sijo poetry because it is part of the formal education curricula in South Korea, he was reminded of the information about Sijo, along with examples of traditional Sijo. The Sijo shared at the workshop included the following:

청산리 벽계수야 수이 감을 자랑마라
 일도 창해하면 다시 오기 어려워라
 명월이 만공산하니 쉬어간들 어떠리 (by Hwang Chin-i)

Deep blue stream, don't boast so loud
 of your passing through these green hills.
 Though your way runs swiftly down to the sea
 there is no such easy return.
 While the bright moon floods these lonely hills
 why not pause? Then go on, if you will.

(translated by McCann, McCann 117)

The usual syllabic distribution: number of syllables (approximately 45 syllables in total)	The syllabic distribution of the example Sijo above by Hwang Chin-I (44 syllables in total)
초장 (Line 1): 3 4 3 (or 4) 4	Line 1: 3 4 4 4
중장 (Line 2): 3 4 3 (or 4) 4	Line 2: 2 4 4 4
종장 (Line 3): 3 5 4 3	Line 3: 3 5 4 3

Table 1. The Structure of Sijo

Sijo is a three-line poetic form with typical syllabic distribution although it allows variations in the structure and syllable count, as seen in Table 1.

For poetry instruction, I employed Hanauer's ("Meaningful Literacy") instructional framework of ESL/EFL poetry writing. Yoogoon was given the following prompt to generate his poems:

Think about the significant moments of your life. Go over in your mind your memories and think of those moments that truly made an impression on you. Think of real moments and try to see them in your mind. Close your eyes and really imagine and relive the moment you are thinking of. Try to see, smell, hear, touch and taste the experience. (Hanauer, "Meaningful Literacy" 112)

The participant was particularly asked to recreate his memories of English learning experiences in Sijo and narratives. After he produced Sijo and accompanying narratives, he shared his stories during the three sessions of interviews with his poems and narratives in front; the first interview was immediately after the Sijo workshop, while the second and third interviews happened over a week later. The interview questions were about what he wrote, what message he wanted to communicate, and why each memory was important to him. During the interview, I allowed room for the topics to emerge naturally as well. When I noticed him feeling enthusiastic about an issue, I let the conversation run its course. It is necessary to point out that the interviews were conducted in Korean. I asked the participant to select a language to make sure that he would communicate his emotions to their fullest. As research indicates, L2 learners often prefer to use their first language to express their emotion (Chamcharatsri). Yoogoon's choice was Korean. I shared the first language with him and translated the written data into English for this study. Thus, it is reasonable to say that Yoogoon was able to express his perceptions and emotions as descriptively as he would wish. ,

THE PARTICIPANT

At the time of data collection, Yoogoon was aged twenty-nine. He visited the United States with his parents for travel when he was nine years old. Around ten, he came to the United States to stay with his uncle's family in South Dakota for two-and-a-half years. Yoogoon attended a public school, where he was the only foreigner and Asian. At home, he used Korean to communicate with his family. Then he went back to his country and received the rest of his formal education in South Korea, approximately eight years including the initial years of college. He came back to the United States again to earn his undergraduate and graduate degrees. He majored in Hospitality Management for his bachelor's degree and Sport Management for his master's degree. During his undergraduate and graduate years, he belonged to diverse social communities including both American and Korean students.

DATA ANALYSIS

In total, three sources of data were collected: nine poems, five narratives, and three interview sessions, approximately three hours long combined. The interview transcript, poems, and narratives were read and analyzed multiple times to discover emerging themes and the types of experiences. For analysis, I employed Hanauer's (*Poetry as Research*) analytical procedures of poetic identity. He defines poetic identity as "participant's subject position on autobiographical events and experiences expressed through the focusing potential of literary language resulting from a specific physical and discursive context of writing" (62). That is, he argued that the researcher can examine poetic identity which is constructed in a poem organically by three categories: (1) context of writing, (2) content, and (3) literary and linguistic choices. Hence, I concentrated on the writer's poetic identity by analyzing the contexts of Yoogoon's autobiographical memories, content, linguistic choices, and emotions. Unlike Hanauer, however, the present study expanded its analytic capacity by examining narratives and interviews as well. This addition enabled me to grasp the richer nuances of the language learning process. With poetry as a central data source, I conducted a thematic analysis of interviews and narratives. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and read multiple times to flesh out the experience displayed in poetry by identifying contexts and reasons for his actions and feelings, which sometimes were related to past events, and more significantly his evaluation of what each experience meant to him. When I analyzed narratives, I carefully considered the physical setting, the people in that setting, the acts they did, the events that happened, and the participant's emotions. Together, the use of multiple sources of data enabled me to obtain a more holistic picture of Yoogoon's learning trajectories in the current case study (Cohen et al.). The next section offers snapshots of Yoogoon's English experiences.

RESULTS

This section reports the memories Yoogoon felt significant in his experience with English. First of all, the summary of the content he described provides an overall picture of his language learning experience.

The participant organized his poems chronologically that can be divided into three themes: (1) his entry into the English-speaking world as a child with little English knowledge, (2) one of the turning points in his translingual experience, and (3) English for specific purposes either for a workplace or academic contexts. Three of the nine poems showed positive emotions overall, while six poems addressed negative emotions. This section highlights three distinct phases of Yoogoon's learning as an L2 speaker and writer. These phases epitomize his evolving subject position with English.

Title of Poem (N=9)	Content and Context	Narrative (N=5)
Sijo #1: 카오스 (Chaos)	How confused he was on the scene of the last meal with his mother at Gimpo International Airport in South Korea	Narrative #1
Sijo #2: 선택 (Choice)	How regretful about his choice to come to America without fully understanding what it meant	
Sijo #3: 뭐라고? (What?)	How he did not have any clue like a deaf person when Americans spoke to him at Chicago O'Hare International Airport	
Sijo #4: Untitled	His perception on waiting for a long time without understanding what was going on at Chicago O'Hare International Airport	
Sijo #5: 나만의 첫 수업 (My unique first class)	How he became confident again on the first day of school in the United States	Narrative #2
Sijo #6: ESL 수업의 색 (The color of ESL class)	His enjoyable learning experience in ESL class as he became literate in English	Narrative #3
Sijo #7: J.S.	The description of his ESL teacher, the best teacher he has ever had in his entire life	
Sijo #8: 실전영어 (Workplace English)	Felt no further growth in English; the stark difference in English between what he studied until then and what was needed as an intern at a hotel (undergraduate)	Narrative #4
Sijo #9: Writing Center	Felt conflicted about his academic writing (graduate)	Narrative #5

Table 2. Summary of Poems and Narratives

DEPARTURE AND ISOLATION: 10 YEARS OLD

When he was ten, he took a flight alone to the United States.

Untitled

한참을 기다려요 영문(이유)도 모른

채로 한참을 생각해도 영문(영어)을 난 몰라요.

난 그저 우두커니 시간을 따라가요.

I wait around quite a while

without any clue to why (reason).

I rack my brains, yet I don't have any slightest clue in the English

language (English).

Being lost in thought, gazing vacantly,

I simply follow the time (my trans.)

On purpose, he used a homonym “영문” in the first and second line, which are similar in syntactic structure, with the meaning he intended in parenthesis. “영문” is a homonym of two distinct Korean words: “이유” meaning “reason” in the first and “영어” meaning “English” in the second. This arrangement helps visualize the state of uncertainty and emotional upheaval, if momentarily, he was in as a ten-year-old boy with little knowledge of English; he was standing alone at an airport in Chicago, with only “태어나 처음 만져본 내 여권과 알수없는 글씨로 가득한 비행기 티켓 (a passport that he had never even touched before and a boarding pass full of letters incomprehensible to him” (Narrative). Meanwhile, the information vacuum was being filled with fear and confusion. A combination of the use of similar syntactic structures and the homonym nature of the Korean word “영문” describes how his first day in the English-speaking world was disorienting.

Yoogoon elaborated on this experience in four poems, a narrative, and interview at length. His mother saw him off at Gimpo International Airport in South Korea after she bought him 갈비탕 (*gal-bitang*: a beef short ribs soup) of which he did not feel any taste. He felt as if he “물과 고무를 씹는 듯한 (had been chewing a collection of water and rubber)” (Narrative). Then, when his mother handed his passport and boarding pass to him, he was seized with alarm all of a sudden. On Northwest Airlines to America for about ten hours, he could not respond to any question that a flight attendant asked. He was apprehensive about his unknown future while still having a vague sense of hope, at

least on the plane. After he got off the plane, he tried to “그림 맞추기 (solve a picture puzzle)” (Narrative) by looking carefully at his boarding pass. While he was deciphering the boarding pass that he perceived as a picture, the little boy laboriously dragged two huge suitcases with his backpack on his back and walked to the gate he thought he was supposed to use for his connecting flight to South Dakota. He did not even realize that he could have taken a train between terminals. The minutes lengthened. He stood at the gate for several hours, clutching the ticket and gazing vacantly in “공포 (horror)” (Interview). Towering over him, an African-American woman asked many questions that only reminded him of “Country Chip” without any clue (Narrative). It took a few minutes for her intention to help him to sink in. After waiting many hours that seemed like several years to him, the woman finally got him on the plane with a warming smile. The long day of fear, tension, and worry drained him of energy. In no time, he drifted into deep sleep without eating anything, dreaming of his uncle’s family who he would be meeting soon. He had expected to a certain extent with mounting anxiety that the first day would be confusing. Still, he had not anticipated that it would be that horrifying and intimidating. He was forced to question his ways of being and understanding. A series of activities—writing a poem and a narrative, and participating in an interview—allowed the writer to relive his memory in great detail and reflect on the intensely private experience that happened twenty years ago. He explained this memory was noteworthy because it brought home to him the utmost importance of English for the very first time.

ESL CLASS: “BREATHE AGAIN”

The poems that depict Yoogoon’s ESL class experience at school demonstrate a considerably positive emotional tone. He recounted an enjoyable experience and provided a glimpse of the meaning of learning a language in the Sijo below.

Title: ESL

수업의 색 갈색은 편안하고 보라는 즐거웠다

수업은 행복했고 배움은 유쾌했다

문맹을 벗어나며 나는 다시 숨을 쉰다.

Title: The color of ESL class

Brown made me feel comfortable;

Purple pleasant The class made me happy; Learning was enjoyable

As I finally escape from illiteracy, I start to breathe again. (my trans.)

This Sijo depicts his experience of an ESL class in a public school he had begun taking several weeks after he had come to the United States. While Yoogoon had attended PE, mathematics, science, and arts in mainstream classes, he had been in an ESL class for social studies and English. After roughly one year of ESL support, he had been integrated into every course. In contrast to his other poems, the calming and pleasant tone of this Sijo is worth noticing. He recalled that whenever he entered the small room, brown and pastel purple came across in his mind. Brown meant “편안함과 안락함 (a comfortable sense)” to him (Narrative). Pastel purple indicated “환희 (delight)” (Narrative). It signifies he perceived the class as a safe and supportive learning environment; as he wrote, he felt a pure joy of learning in that class. Especially, on the third line, the author wrote that he “escape[d] from illiteracy” (Sijo); he learned “영어로 읽고 사고하는 방법을 (how to think as well as how to read in English)” (Narrative). His ESL class experience was a critical turning point in his English learning trajectory as he began to use English as a resource to understand the world around him. It is evident from his reflection that a combination of his teacher’s ways of teaching and the supportive environment created an upward spiral of raising his subjective awareness of the world around him. He associated this new capacity with physical sensations (“start to breathe again”) in the poem; the central piece of his being a human. Before this point, he experienced isolation and feeling out of place as an Asian boy who was the only foreigner in the school.

An interesting reflection on the ESL class experience was when he explained about the class. One of his Sijo poems illustrates the enormous and lasting impact a single person can have on a boy from another culture. An ESL teacher, “꺅다리 빨간 머리 큰 안경 장군 형상 (A tall teacher with red hair wearing big glasses like a general)” (Sijo), helped him feel normal and welcomed. His teacher’s meaningful instruction fed his confidence as an English language learner, as he recalled. He speculated that the teacher might have possessed a master’s degree in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) or may have been a graduate student at that time. He also said that she approached teaching as if she had been conducting research. This inquiry-based approach, Yoogoon recalled, was “확연하게 (in stark contrast)” (Interview) to what he experienced in South Korea. On the first day, the teacher put piles of Lego bricks on the desk. Using the parts, she created situations and asked many questions: “How many people are there?” “Where is a man with a blue cap?” “What do you think they are doing?” (Narrative). She explained as if she had been playing with a kid. After playing with Lego for about a month, she got him to keep a diary in English. Initially, he was scared because he was not used to writing in English. Once he began writing, however, he found himself enjoying writing. After a while, she added another homework assignment. He had to write a story once a week. He wrote about a series of funny stories that were popular in South Korea at that time. He wrote about the history of his country. Then the teacher gave him an additional assignment; he read a book titled *Journey to the Center of the Earth*. He read a chapter every week to discuss the story and his response to the story with the teacher. After

roughly eighteen months, the poet, who had already been out of ESL class then, felt exhilarated by how he “escape[d] from illiteracy” (Sijo) and how he outperformed his cousin, particularly in social studies and English, in which he was struggling most (Interview).

EMERGING TRANSLINGUAL IDENTITY AS AN ACADEMIC WRITER: RENEWED EXPECTATION AND RENEWED DESIRE

The young teenager went back to his country to receive the rest of his formal education, eight years, in his home country. He came to the United States again as a college student and graduated successfully. The reconstruction of his writing center experience as a graduate student below exemplifies how he desired to be empowered further as an English user.

Title: Writing Center

내 글은 쓰레기다 내 글은 쓸모 없다

그들은 칭찬한다 좋다고 평가한다

내가 맞는 건지 그들이 맞는 건지

My writing is rubbish; My writing is useless

They shower me with compliments; They evaluate my writing as good

Are they right? Am I right? (my trans.)

It was encouraging and rewarding that he was commended for the quality of his essay by the tutor. The second line celebrates a sensation of delighted wonder. Still, the first line shows that his perception about his academic writing seems to be far from satisfactory although he was a strong writer based on the comments from professors, tutors at the writing center, and his boss at the hotel where he worked as an intern. Uneasiness is evident, as indicated in the first line where he described his work as “쓰레기 (rubbish)” (Sijo) and in the third line where he questioned the tutors’ evaluation. It is entirely possible that his unease stemmed from the gap between his expectations for himself as an academic writer and the tutor’s expectation for his capacity for an L2 writer. Yoogoon might have assumed that the tutor thought his writing was good *for* an L2 writer while he wanted to be simply a good writer who would meet or exceed a higher expectation for a graduate student. In contrast to the higher expectation, the tutor’s reduced expectation for the quality of writing may have generated frustrations.

What was most surprising in the analysis of this memory was the overall tone of ambivalence and ambiguity of his identity. The poet recalled in the interview that he became somewhat pleased and confident. Nonetheless, in the back of his mind, he suspected that the positive comments might have come partly from the tutors' generosity, when they said, what he interpreted as "perfect를 남 발한다 (overusing perfect)" (Narrative). Thus, it is clear that the delighted sensation was not deep enough since he questioned whether or not his self-evaluation was legitimate in the third line of the Sijo. The questioning on the last line indicates that he positioned himself as an English user who can evaluate his English critically depending on his negotiated definitions of academic writing as a graduate student. The writer moved from pleasure at positive comments to a position of critical evaluation.

At a deeper level, his ambivalence can be connected to a broader framework of translingual identities. The discord between his written English and his perception of himself as a mature graduate student seemed to be a particular frustration to Yoogoon. "쓰레기(Rubbish)" in the first line of the Sijo epitomizes his despair combined with desire. Looking at his draft he worked on every day, he lost confidence in his English capability and felt his sentences appeared childish for a graduate research paper. To escape the constant state of "걱정과 불안, 초조 (despondency, restlessness, and anxiety)" (Narrative), he went to the writing center almost every Monday even when he did not particularly have to. The tutors praised his writing to the skies. He wanted to feel "일주일에 하루 주어지는 안도 감이라는 주사를 맞고 하루만이라도 편하게 살려고 한다 (relaxed at least one day through an inoculation of relief against frustrations he faced for the rest of the week)" (Narrative). He perceived the incredible sensation as "an inoculation," as if it had given him the energy to survive frustrations and fulfill his aspiration to be creative with his English use, which in turn would empower his voice. It seems that the weekly dose of confidence helped him keep going. This reflection reveals a defining moment in the process of language learning, a less visible but more meaningful moment; there existed conflicting desires simultaneously, the desire for being evaluated as a learner and for evaluating his expressive capacity as a user.

Yoogoon realized the importance of the writing center especially after he began graduate studies for a master's degree, which required a far higher expectation for the quality of writing. Accordingly, he reset his expectation for his writing. As such, inwardly he desired more and questioned more whether he acted up to this redefined expectation, possessed a wide, fluid vocabulary as he wished, and expressed his ideas as clearly as he could. More to the point, he doubted whether he had the ability to be creative enough to go beyond undergraduate level work. And he was wondering what to learn and where to learn all the time. He felt that "영어는 나를 질책하며 발전 없는 놈이라고 (English chastised [him] for stagnant linguistic growth)" (Narrative). His longing for continuous improvement was stymied by the ongoing complexity of his renewed expectation for his English identity and his redefined notion of academic writing. His previous concept of good academic

writing was then questioned with these changing subject positions. At the time of data collection, his concern was not about grammar anymore; the style and quality of writing mattered. Improving his English was not about getting a better grade anymore; he became more interested in the extent to which he expanded linguistic capacity, particularly vocabulary, to use the second language as a resource to represent and further construct who he was.

DISCUSSION

This case study aims to provide descriptions of how a translingual individual felt over the course of learning an additional language with enough contextual information and details that are not softened. A series of vivid instances of Yoogoon's English experience shows the trajectory of his translingual identities that have been negotiated over the long years of using English as an additional language. First, a subject position is forced to change, as detailed in Yoogoon's recollection. A new language which he studied for leisure suddenly became directly intersected with numerous ramifications in the boy's life. This abrupt change in his subject position with the second language involves strong emotions. Specifically, learning a language is an emotional process of making organic connections between words and realities that the words represent (Kramsch). In a telling memoir of her life in two languages as an immigrant from Poland, Eva Hoffman described her earlier experience of English:

But mostly, the problem is that the signifier has become severed from the signified. The words I learn now don't stand for things in the same unquestioned way they did in my native tongue. "River" in Polish was a vital sound, energized with the essence of riverhood, of my rivers, of my being immersed in rivers. "River" in English is cold—a word without an aura. It has no accumulated associations for me, and it does not give off the radiating haze of connotation. It does not evoke. (106)

The various moments at the airport Yoogoon recalled seem to be the moments when "the signifier" was cut off from "the signified" (Hoffman 106). In this sense, airports are described as symbolic space where Yoogoon was situated between words and realities as well as two cultures. He wrote four poems about his entry into a new world, America: two of his memories of Gimpo International Airport in South Korea and two of Chicago O'Hare International Airport in the United States. Standing at the airport in a foreign land for him was a moment of nervous anxiety in that this was the end of his motherland and the beginning of a new English-speaking world, not yet his. Standing and waiting at the airport is not as traumatic as experiencing war or natural disasters in any way. On the contrary, it may be an unremarkable if annoying part of everyday life. However, the moments when Yoogoon desperately tried to decipher the boarding pass in relation to the signs at the airport

were perceived as a panic and evoked strong feelings in the young boy to a point where he remembered them vividly even after twenty years. In a way, every entry point into a new language and culture can be brutal since it inevitably entails “no continuity, no ‘living connection’ between words and things in English” (Kramersch 69).

Second, Yoogoon’s reconstruction of the turning points in language learning suggests the significance of an organic understanding of the language learning process. In his ESL class, he wrote letters, fiction, and discussed books with the teacher, as discussed in the previous section. Although he made a lot of errors in writing and speaking and was a slow reader and listener, his teacher gave him chances to create situations and generate stories using English for meaningful purposes, instead of employing a linear approach to language learning. She did not wait for him to master so-called basic skills, such as filling out subject-verb agreement worksheets, before he wrote and talked about stories. She might have believed that language learning is nonlinear (Kim; Ortega and Han), as previous research confirms (Harklau; Hudelson; Perotta), rather than learning step by step in isolation. While this approach may be dominant in the United States, it may not be dominant in L2 teaching. And her belief proved to be valid for this L2 learner because a boy who did not know “trash can” and “restroom” (Sijo) became “literate” (Sijo) and motivated enough to keep a diary and write stories about the history of his country in English. Yoogoon’s desire to be included in an English-speaking community was so strong that he felt he finally “start[ed] to breathe again” (Sijo). The fact that someone makes a subject-verb agreement error in speaking English does not necessarily mean that the person cannot share a meaningful story in the second language as “student writers’ command of various features of writing fluctuates” (Horner et al. 312). In addition to her teaching method itself, her underpinning beliefs about a student from another culture are worth noticing. By encouraging the student to access what he already knew and to draw insights from his life, she helped him use his rich repertoire of resources. The teacher’s nonlinear approach ultimately facilitated the process of learning a new language. The meaningful space, what Canagarajah (*Translingual Practice*) and Cushman would call translingual space, that was created by her beliefs about learning and teaching surely enabled Yoogoon to develop his translingual awareness further.

Finally, the analysis of Yoogoon’s writing center experience explicates how he experienced “the thrills and frustrations of desire” in language (Kramersch 14), thereby unveiling sophisticated matrices of identity across languages. Kramersch highlighted how some scholars who view foreign language learning simply as a tool for pragmatic goals neglect desire, which is “the basic drive toward self-fulfillment” and “touches the core of who we are” (14). On the one hand, Yoogoon’s reflection of the writing center experience precisely illustrates empirical evidence for the “construction of imagined identities” (Kramersch 17). On the other hand, his reflection reveals how his desire for the empowered imagined identities led to more motivation, frustration, and investment.

This observation certainly strengthens Motha and Lin's theorization of desire in English language learning. His deliberate contrast between grammar and getting a better grade and the quality of writing and his style in the interview is indicative of his desire as a language user and fluctuating perceptions of his English use. His writing center experience was partly the outcome of the intricate interaction among desires at different levels (Motha and Lin): the expectations for second language writing at the writing center, the expectations defined by Yoogoon's graduate professor, and the expectations for graduate level work in general, which again have been shaped by his discipline. He must have strived to learn how to establish his style of writing, how to evoke the type of response and the whole set of connotations he wanted, and how to convey intricate nuances as a writer in such a way that it would communicate his knowledge and intention faithfully and accurately. This is the imagined identity that he desired to construct. He had a first language identity and sought to reaffirm or recreate a similar identity in L2. But he also sought to merge the ways of being and writing he had developed into that subjectivity; the outcome would be "hybrid identities" (Canagarajah, *Critical academic writing and multilingual students* 188). More significantly, a steady dose of self-doubt and confidence enabled him to fulfill his desire for more creativity and freedom in English writing. Therefore, language learning should be conceptualized as "the construction of imagined identities that are every bit as real as those imposed by society" (Kramsch 17) and thus "a means of empowerment" (18).

Overall, the results suggest that language learning means to Yoogoon a process of constructing emerging translingual identities to bridge the gap between who he is and who he desires to be. His emerging identities reflect the changing interaction between his established identity and imagined identity. Then again, what faithfully defines him is not a mere combination of the two separate characters; it organically emerges as he maintains his characteristics while shaping and reshaping his subjectivities. The importance of seeing language learning from a translingual perspective (Cushman; Horner et al.) is grounded in this observation. It seems that the translingual movement and negotiation of the two or more identity options entails a range of emotions, as discussed in the previous section. His sense of self becomes more complicated, considering that how others perceive a person is also a function of essential elements of the person's identities (Cox). Thus, the analysis unravels the real complexities of the process of developing translingual identities embodied in his cross-language experience. Methodologically, using creative writing in research can unveil the emotional perceptions that were formerly out of reach in education research. The act of deeper reflection helped him discover new meaning and see himself in a new light, from a language learner to a legitimate language user. Evocative writing and interview stimulated by poetry in this study reveal the writer's inner feelings and changes in subject positions in the process of becoming part of a new linguistic culture.

CONCLUSION

This article began by challenging the superficial understanding of L2 learners and learning in the public narrative, which overlooks the dynamic nature of different languages in translingual individuals. This narrative reduces the centrality of the learner as a human being with emotion, desire, and rich history (Hanauer, “Meaningful Literacy”) and ignores the fluidity of language practices (Cushman; Horner et al.). The focus of this literacy study was to uncover the emotional shifts, shifting self-perceptions, and shifts in identity which are a significant part of the L2 learning process, through multiple lenses of self-doubt, desire, and confidence. Contextualized within the scientific studies of creative writing to address this underexplored area, this case study offers a humanized depiction through personal anecdotes of the changing identities of a Korean L2 learner and ways a balanced combination of self-doubt and confidence leads to greater motivation. Yoo-goon’s stories addressed how an L2 learner raised an awareness of himself as a legitimate language user, not simply a learner, and forged his hybrid identities over the years through the first entry into a new world, a turning point in English development, and struggles with different registers including academic English. Through various forms of negotiations, Yoogoon transformed from a young boy who desired to understand and be included in the new linguistic and cultural world to a translingual English user who can evaluate and shift his use of the language across expectations and contexts. Thus, I argue that language learning is a transformative and life-changing experience (Hanauer, “Meaningful Literacy”; Kramsch) of constructing translingual identities which entails a wide spectrum of emotion, desire, and dedication: desire to understand the world; to be included in the world; to empower oneself as a user.

The analysis also suggests that poetry offers a different method to access real moments that summarize experience from the poet’s perspective. Here lies a crucial implication for creative writing and L2 instructors. Motha and Lin persuasively suggested that English language educators should promote “a shift of desires from unconscious to conscious planes” (352) through research and practice using reflection on desires regarding English. I claim that a combination of autobiographical poetry and narrative is precisely one of those activities, because the creative writing instruction helps writers to ponder their desires and to reframe varying levels of frustration. L2 instructors can get students to compose poems and narratives about what memories made them desire to learn English. Language instruction would be embedded in the endeavors to communicate learners’ ideas, desires, and emotions clearly with the reader. Likewise, creative writing instructors could integrate a poetry writing component into a unit of literacy narrative or personal narrative for powerful reflection. On a more general level, I recommend integrating creative writing into the undergraduate level curriculum starting with First-Year Composition. Ideally, creative writing

would also be included in any follow-on composition courses, as well as those for graduate students. For an advanced composition or research writing course, students could be asked to conduct a poetic inquiry or poetic autoethnography, which involves synthesizing existing literature to contextualize research, collecting poems as data, analyzing the poetry in relation to the literature review, and drawing a conclusion from the research process. Or English departments could offer creative writing for L2 writers as a way to endorse using creative writing as an empowering option for language learners.

This study is not intended to be comprehensive, and it is still far from complete. To move the scholarship forward, more research into study abroad experiences is necessary. I am aware that a limitation of this study is that the participant was not being asked to connect his creative writing to explicit learning in L2. As such, this study cannot provide convincing evidence that creative writing directly influences the learning of the second language. To demonstrate the greater pedagogical potential of poetry, it would be worthwhile to research the learning outcomes that content creation in a second language could produce. That is, there is a definite need for further inquiries into whether writing poetry in English indeed produces desirable learning outcomes in English language learning and, if it does, how it works. This line of research will surely help teachers recognize the value of creative writing in L2 as a tool of making meaning.

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