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## **Translanguaging as an Agentive Action: A Longitudinal Case Study of Uzbek EFL Learners in South Korea**

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### **Abstract**

With the increase in linguistic and cultural diversity in South Korea, the landscape of English education in Korean classrooms has been changing. This has led to an increased need to explore the language and literacy practices of the emergent multilingual youth in Korea where one (official) language (Korean) has been predominantly used as the medium of instruction for English teaching and learning. Addressing this need for more research on how emerging multilingual children learn English in the diverse Korean classrooms of today, this four-year longitudinal case study explored out-of-classroom English language learning experiences of three Uzbek students in South Korea. Drawing upon the conceptual framework of *translanguaging* and *agency*, data were collected from various sources. I found that the actions taken by these students to learn English depended on their interlocutors, practical and academic purposes, and language ideologies embedded in contexts, which in turn influenced learners' agency and translanguaging practices. More specifically, the findings show the students exercised agency over their choice of linguistic and non-linguistic resources in order to expand their linguistic repertoires on their own accord. These findings provide implications for EFL research and pedagogy, particularly within the context of the transition from monolingual to multilingual.

**Keywords:** Global Englishes, Translanguaging, EFL migrant youths, Korea, Uzbek

As a consequence of globalization and internationalization, teaching and learning English as a foreign language (EFL) has been highly prioritized across the world (de Jong & Zhang, 2021). EFL education has been globally implemented given the perceived importance of English (Pennycook, 2006). Similarly, in Korea, the Ministry of Education classifies English as a compulsory subject emphasizing the importance of English language proficiency as a vehicle for global communication. The strong emphasis on English education in line with globalization is also found in the 2015 Educational Curriculum Revision in Korea. Namely, the English curriculum set in place aims to foster global citizenship by developing students' communicative and critical literacy skills in English.

With priorities set on globalization such as those expressed in the national curriculum for English education in Korea, one might expect multilingualism to be increasingly more common than monolingualism. Yet, EFL education today in Korean schools demonstrates a monolingual orientation under the assumption that EFL learners all share one first language (L1), Korean. As a result, actual classroom pedagogy does not address the changing demographics of Korean society despite an increasing number of migrant multilingual students. Corollaries to the situation in Korea can be found in prior research on other multilingual EFL contexts (e.g., Kalaja & Pitkänen-Huhta, 2020), which showed that foreign language education is still mostly organized for monolingual speakers (Kramsch, 2012). The predominance of monolingual instruction is often reported to limit the available resources found for multilingual children (e.g., L1, L2, and non-linguistic resources); these resources could be used during meaning-making and when building a sense of agency, all essential to students' academic development (Bauer, Presiado, & Colomer, 2017).

In order to challenge the prevailing monolingual approaches in multilingual classrooms, a growing number of second language (L2) scholars have advocated a multilingual turn in education (e.g., Conteh & Meier, 2014; The Douglas Fir Group, 2016; Kalaja & Pitkänen-Huhta, 2020; May, 2014; Meier, 2017). In line with this idea, an important body of research has attempted to explore the advantages of migrant multilinguals' language and learning experiences out of school, and their use of multilingual resources in mainstream classrooms (e.g., Alvarez, 2014; Chen, 2017), and how their translanguaging practices support and enhance their language learning practices and processes (see Creese & Martin, 2003; French, 2015; García, 2009; Makoe, 2018; Makoe & McKinney, 2009; Stille & Cummins, 2013). Yet, only a few translanguaging studies have investigated emergent multilingual children's EFL learning practices in contexts where one official language is predominantly adopted as the medium of English instruction (e.g., Beiler, 2020).

Thus, building on the conceptual frameworks of translanguaging and agency, this study explored translanguaging practices of emergent multilingual youths in South Korea (henceforth Uzbek EFL learners) and their development of agency through translanguaging practices. The goal of this research was to better understand how students agentively and voluntarily do language learning within and beyond EFL educational spaces by examining the practices of a small group of Russian speaking EFL students in South Korea between 2018 and 2021. The present study is part of a larger, ongoing project which aims to investigate the social and linguistic practices of Uzbek multilinguals in Korea based on data collected since 2018. Two research questions guided this study: (1) How do Uzbek EFL learners in South Korea engage in translanguaging practices in out-of-school contexts? And (2) how do they develop a sense of agency in the process of using their multilingual resources for language and academic development specific to English? In the subsequent section, I will present a theoretical framework and review the relevant literature to this research.

## Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

### English as a Global Language and Translanguaging: The Impact of Multilingualism

As Pennycook (2006) noted, the term "global Englishes" is closely linked to "processes of globalization" (p. 5) in which globalization is viewed as "an inherently destructive force homogenizing the world" (p. 18). Here the word "global" refers to "comprehensive" or "all-inclusive," indicating that it cannot be suitably understood in terms of a more complex and pluralized vision of globalization (Mufwene, 2010). In order to move beyond a static view of global Englishes, it seems necessary to understand the role of global Englishes in both complex and critical manners –in terms of new forms of power dynamics, ideological relations, and identity shifts, by relocating Englishes in multilingual and translanguaging flows. In line with

this idea, global Englishes can be viewed as “one of the things that constitutes [one’s] identity as a particular kind of subject” (Cameron, 1995, p. 15) which enable emergent multilinguals’ creative and critical semiotic reconstruction and performativity (Pennycook, 2006).

This is especially observable within the context of rapidly growing multilingual populations in that Englishes acquire local characteristics “fundamentally [involving] a radical act of semiotic reconstruction and reconstitution which of itself confers native user-hood on the subjects involved in the act” (Kandiah, 1998, p. 100). Just as literary translations of English are most often made with consideration of local languages and cultures, the practice of Englishes seems to always be under the influence of the linguistic habits of local speakers (Mufwene, 2010).

In addition, with the influence of globalization and increased (im)migration, the multilingual impact on global Englishes has been accelerated, which provides an insight into the sociolinguistics of globalization, such as ‘translanguaging’ (Bolton, 2019). Jenkins (2015) argued that “English is available as a contact language of choice but is not necessarily chosen” (p. 73) in multilingual communication. She further noted that (Jenkins, 2018, p. 601):

*there will most likely be many kinds of Englishes used predominantly in transcultural communication among multilingual English speakers, who will make use of their full linguistic repertoires as appropriate in the context of any specific interaction. This means, in turn, that their language will involve a good deal of translanguaging.*

In line with this idea, concurrent research on Englishes centers around multilingualism in a rapidly globalizing world in which individuals participate in translanguaging practices on a daily basis (Bolton, 2019).

A number of studies on English education in Asia have confirmed that both English and multiple other languages, which include diverse L1s of local and international students, are used in EFL settings (Baker, 2021). They assert that EFL settings are typically multilingually oriented, and, accordingly, translanguaging is very common. Yet, English teachers, policy makers, and even students often do not recognize translanguaging as a resource aiding English language learning and teaching experiences. Moreover, there surfaces a prevalent preference for an idealized native-like English standard and linguacultural norms which often lead to marginalizing the use of varied linguistic resources and conforming to a more traditional and monolingual pedagogy (Baker, 2021). In response to this, García and Kleyn (2016) suggested a translanguaging pedagogy transforming EFL classrooms into multilingual ones. They also argue that the translanguaging approach in the classroom leverages students’ use of L1s, enhancing their critical multilingual awareness as well as aiding their English learning experiences. Likewise, Canagarajah (2013) posited that language forms and functions should be considered negotiable and that negotiation plays a vital role in preparing students for global communication.

“English is a social practice being (re)negotiated and (re)configured by multilingual speakers over time according to their values, interests, and language repertoires in various communicative situations” (Sembante & Tian, 2020, p. 52). Thus, with this post-structural point of view on how to learn Englishes as a global language, translanguaging works on English education can provide an understanding of Teaching English to Speakers of “Other Languages.” That is, learning and teaching Englishes in the globalizing world involves multilingual and translanguaging practices, which is why research on global Englishes should be undertaken in respect of the heterogeneous, flexible, and fluid nature of Englishes in a multilingual world (Jenkins, 2015).

## **Translanguaging for and in Promoting Emergent Multilinguals' Agency in Learning English**

Acts by individual speakers include, but are not limited to, “negotiating, choosing to accept or deny, self-assessing, planning, questioning, and making decisions” (Saenkhum, 2012, p. 126). Their acts of agency are their choices that construct their beliefs, the actions of others, languages, and contexts (Shapiro et al., 2016). Every individual (re)develops their agency in order to communicate with others within contact zones through language and literacy practices involving the multiple diverse acts of others, resources, and contexts. Here, agency can be defined as “something that has to be achieved in and through engagement with particular temporal-relational contexts-for-action... [and] that people do” (Biesta & Tedder, 2007, p. 136). This definition implies that every individual is certainly capable of translanguaging multiple and dynamic resources voluntarily and independently.

Yet, multilingual students’ acts of translanguaging often do not surface in form-focused EFL learning environments in which meaning negotiations across multiple languages are less likely to occur, while the opposite happens outside of the classroom. In detail, since form-focused instruction is common across EFL classrooms, students focus on producing formal, grammatically correct, and timed written responses for academic purposes. Thus, their translanguaging practices are often unrecognized or marginalized (Rajendram, 2021).

An example can be found in Schreiber’s (2015) study on multilingual undergraduate students’ language and literacy practices. Alexandar, a Serbian university student, started English learning in school at the age of nine; however, his English experiences of American hip-hop music and movies (beginning at the age of six) served as a major influence for his growing English skills and translingual identity. Likewise, he demonstrated a creative integration of multiple linguistic and semiotic resources for meaningful communications and built his membership in both local and global communities beyond school walls in what he perceived as highly multilingual and international audiences. However, Alexandar’s translanguaging practices were less likely to be observed or were marginalized in his monolingual EFL courses where traditional literacy remained fundamental. As Alexandar’s case illuminates, students’ acts are heavily affected by perceived linguistic diversity, usefulness of diverse resources, and multilingual ideological conditions.

Kulavuz-Onal and Vásquez (2018) also showed how EFL students in two different countries (Egypt and Argentina) utilized their full linguistic repertoire in the “English only space” on Facebook, which was created by their teachers, Annal (an EFL teacher in Egypt) and Martina (an EFL teacher in Argentina). Despite the teachers’ effort to explicitly discourage the students’ use of L1s (Arabic and Spanish), their L1 use became accepted by both students and teachers under the conditions that were used for: translating English to their L1s or vice versa, introducing particular L1 knowledge and culture, offering metalinguistic explanations, and managing pedagogic functions. It is important to note that the teachers did not provide clear instructions regarding translanguaging. Rather, they explicitly guided their students to use English only; however, the students voluntarily and agentively made use of non-shared resources (Arabic and Spanish) for meaningful communication. Kulavuz-Onal and Vásquez (2018) concluded that EFL students’ deliberate, agentive code choices in the English-only zone is afforded by the “situated language ecology of individual users” (Barton & Lee, 2013, p. 56) and the different purposes and functions of their use of diverse languages.

As such, in bi- and multilingual EFL learning contexts, language learners not only participate in sense-making practices and processes but also “negotiate the meaning of their social positions and emerging identities” (García-Mateus & Palmer, 2017, p. 247). That is, their engagement in translanguaging practices can play a part in the (re)construction of agency by

assisting learners with more profound opportunities for meaningful communication (Dryden, Tankosić, & Dovchin, 2021; Kim & Park, 2019). Namely, more expressive EFL learning environments (e.g., Instagram) –contexts in which individual learners fluidly and flexibly communicate ideas and express meaning– can make young (im)migrant English learners become creatively and critically aware of their natural language practices and linguistic values, which in turn enable them to actively utilize their full linguistic repertoire across multiple contexts in an agentive manner (Rajendram, 2021).

This goes to say that adopting the notion of translanguaging and agency for the exploration of emergent multilingual youth's EFL learning practices makes it possible to consider how they engage in language and learning practices, what they do, and why. It also opens up a space to acknowledge that their engagement in the practices and enactment of agency influence and are influenced by the availability of social, cultural, and economic resources within the contexts in which they are situated.

## Method

### Research Context, Participants, and Researcher's Role

The current research was conducted in an Uzbek (Russian-speaking) migrant community in *Dusan* (pseudonym) located in the southwestern part of South Korea over the course of four years (2018-2021). The collection of data is ongoing and currently in its fifth year (2022). This community exhibits the characteristics of a newly arrived migrant population in the initial state of settlement, fueling drastic changes in schools, local interpretations, and local communities in a short period of time. Among the initial settlers in this community, three households (Tina's family, Artur's family, and Lera's family) participated in the study.

The typical pattern of migration was that the paternal figures (fathers) first moved to Korea as migrant workers, while their families remained in Uzbekistan. The fathers in these families had lived in South Korea for about 10 years, when the rest of the family members, including the children, resettled in *Dusan* in 2015 (Tina's and Lera's case) and in 2017 (Artur's case). The children navigated their daily lives together to some degree, particularly in their community with their Russian-speaking peers. Given that they had some commonalities since they, as Russian speakers, were new to Korean-dominant contexts and learned English as a foreign language in Korean schools where Korean was the primary language of instruction, in this paper, I decide to focus on the cases of three students' (Tina, Artur, and Lera).

I would like to explain my roles in the research and my relationship with the participants first. My commitment to working with and for migrant children started a decade ago (2011) when I first became a Korean EFL teacher in an elementary school in Korea. As a novice EFL teacher unprepared to help migrant children (mostly from Uzbekistan, speaking Russian as their L1), I struggled to figure out how to support them in my class and beyond. This experience as a teacher inspired me to examine the emergent multilingual children's language and learning practices across multiple contexts (school, home, and community). Over the course of four years (2018-2021), I (a Korean English bilingual) performed multiple roles as not only an elder sister figure for the students, but as a Korean and English language tutor and researcher as well. I am still involved in their lives in various ways today. During those years, I taught English and Korean to them via both online and offline formats and helped them as much as they needed. Although I could not understand and speak Russian, I did my best to communicate with them by using English, Korean, and Google Translate. I even started to learn Russian. Furthermore, I built relationships with their parents and teachers to better understand the children's everyday language and literacy practices.

All the participants (Tina, Artur, and Lera) originally migrated from Uzbekistan while speaking Russian as their first language, and they seemed to share similar language learning histories. Yet, their language backgrounds and language learning histories of English and Korean varied among them. According to Tina (a 13-year-old girl in Grade 6 at the start of data collection in 2018), her family was among the first Uzbek migrants in *Dusan* in 2015. Her whole family lived together in a two-bedroom apartment –grandparents, parents, two little sisters, and an uncle who was attending a regional Korean university, while speaking Russian at home. Her complete lack of prior experience in Korean and English language learning before her migration to South Korea led to enormous linguistic challenges in the Korean school system. Despite these challenges, Tina showed rapid development of Korean and English skills with the support of her uncle, the most proficient Korean and English speaker in her family.

Artur (a 13-year-old boy in Grade 6 at the beginning of the study in 2018) knew the Uzbek language in addition to Russian and received English and basic Korean tutoring at home before his migration to Korea in 2017. Equipped with this limited knowledge of English and Korean, Artur expressed that English learning in a Korean English classroom was like ‘learning Korean in English class rather than English.’ Especially when doing schoolwork and taking exams, he found it difficult to follow English instructions in English classes because Korean was predominantly used as a language of instruction rather than English. Five years of learning and experiencing Korean and English changed his outlook and plans. He initially hoped to work at Google in California later in his life, but over the course of the study, he changed his dream, envisioning himself becoming a professional linguist.

Lera (a 16-year-old girl in Grade 9 at the start of data collection in 2018) migrated to South Korea with her mother and younger brother in 2015 with no-prior knowledge of Korean. Her first experience of Korean learning occurred in Korean elementary school in 2015, in the sixth grade. As for English learning, Lera had learned English in her Uzbek school for several years before migrating to Korea. Yet, learning English in Korean English classrooms brought academic challenges for Lera, not because of her English skills, but because of her limited knowledge of Korean. Despite the linguistic and cultural challenges that she encountered in the Korean education system, she built close relationships with Korean peers and Russian-speaking peers through various sources (e.g., Instagram, Facebook). She loved watching movies in multiple languages and mostly spent her time reading novels in Russian, English, and Korean.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Data were collected through various sources over the course of the four years (2018-2021). I frequently visited the three participants’ households and communities to observe their colloquial language and literacy practices and to interview them (a total of 35 hours of interviews with each student). For these semi-structured interviews, the children were mainly asked about their language and learning practices across diverse settings (e.g., home and school) and their perceptions of varied language use and learning based on writing artifacts (e.g., school tasks), video- and audio-recordings, and screen-captured data (e.g., Instagram posts) which were collected before the interviews. The collection of writing artifacts was conducted during virtual meetings through messengers (i.e., Instagram, Facebook messenger, and Kakaotalk (popular Korean messenger)) and emails.

In terms of data analysis, the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 2017) was employed in order to generate major themes concerning the research questions of this study. The data analysis was an iterative process starting once the data had been collected from multiple sources. First, both observation and interview data were translated and transcribed and fieldnotes and artifacts were examined. Then, following procedures of qualitative data analysis, I coded and analyzed the accumulated data inductively to identify salient patterns and themes

(Duff, 2018). For example, initial codes include self-initiated and sustained language learning activities, language learning strategies, the utilization of non-linguistic and linguistic resources. The main themes emerging from the data analysis were:

- (1) translanguaging practices to overcome academic challenges
- (2) English as a resource for meaningful communication and knowledge construction
- (3) self-initiated and sustained translanguaging practices

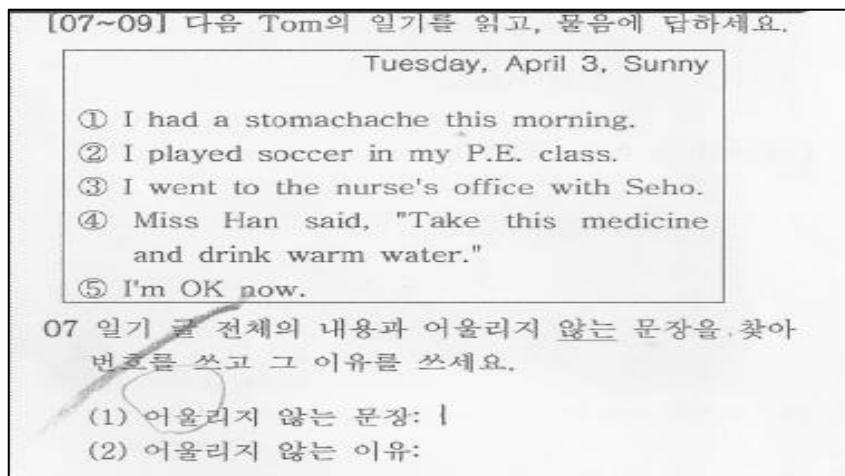
After each case was analyzed, a cross-case analysis was conducted across the three individual cases in order to improve transferability to other contexts and conditions (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020). During data collection and analysis, the inductive and systematic comparative nature of the method helped me to discover the findings regarding the following research questions: (1) How do Uzbek EFL learners in South Korea engage in translanguaging practices in out-of-school contexts? and (2) How do they develop a sense of agency in the process of using their full linguistic repertoire for academic development?

## **Findings**

Here I focus on three major findings in terms of how Uzbek EFL learners engage in translanguaging practices and develop a sense of agency in Korea. The students traversed across linguistic and non-linguistic resources in multiple settings including their homes, online forums, and their communities in order to overcome academic challenges in their English classes, to develop their language skills, and to be involved in meaningful communications. Especially in online spaces and when communicating with English users (e.g., me, a Korean-English bilingual), they seemed to employ English as a translanguaging resource for meaning negotiation and knowledge building. Lastly, they showed self-initiated and sustained translanguaging practices using diverse online platforms (e.g., *Naver*, a popular search engine in Korea) and participating in language learning communications via online messengers (e.g., *Kakaotalk*, a popular Korean messenger).

### **Translanguaging Practices to Enhance Academic Achievement: A Transformative Act.**

One of the most important findings about Uzbek EFL students' code choices out of school was that they seemed to engage in translanguaging practices to overcome academic challenges. Over the course of data collection, I frequently observed the Uzbek EFL learners' being challenged by the English work and tests in their Korean school. The major cause of these challenges was invariably not their lack of English knowledge but their limited grasp of the Korean language. For instance, at the beginning of the data collection in 2018 (the second year of Artur's stay in South Korea), Artur fully grasped the meaning of the English used in the test item in Figure 1; however, because Artur could not understand the directions written in Korean, he failed to respond to the question correctly.

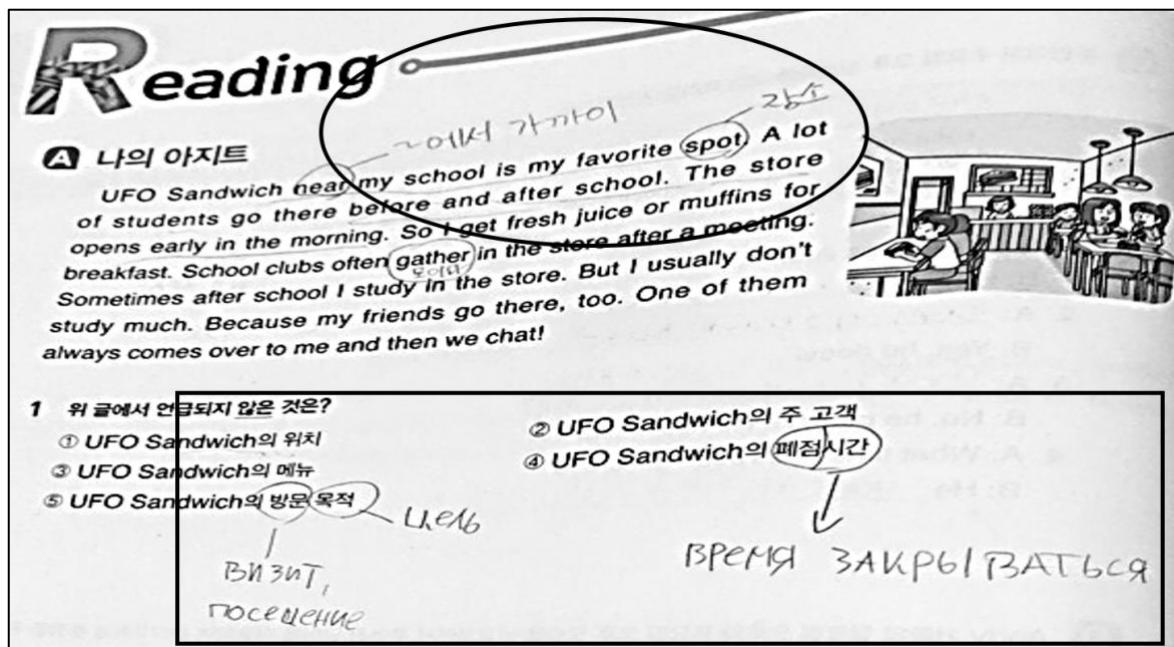


**Figure 1. English Test Question in Artur's Exam in His EFL Class in 2018**

Similarly, Tina and Lera could not achieve good test scores in English by learning English through Korean (and English) but had to utilize their full linguistic repertoire to negotiate meanings across different languages (English, Korean, and Russian) for academic purposes, particularly at home. Specifically, they mainly used Russian to have a clearer sense of new English and Korean word meanings, and if they already knew the Russian meanings of certain English words, they simply searched for Korean definitions to prepare for Korean English assignments and tests. Yet, because there was no or little space for their use of Russian in Korean EFL classrooms, their translanguaging of multiple languages was less likely to be observed in the formal educational settings.

Below is an example from Tina's English workbook (Figure 2, a digital photo taken in late 2018) that she worked on at home. Since it was her fourth year in South Korea, she seemed confident in communicating and completing academic tasks in Korean. However, in the interview, Tina highlighted that learning English through the medium of Korean was difficult due to her limited knowledge of English and Korean. In particular, she stated that when reading English texts, she could sometimes think of the meanings of new English words in Russian *or* Korean, but *not in both*. Thus, she sometimes had to look for the English definitions in Russian and/or Korean in order to grasp a clearer sense of the word meanings.

Specifically, Tina wrote the Korean definitions of English words in the English text because she knew the English word meanings in Russian but not in Korean (indicated by the circle in Figure 2) because she already knew the Russian meanings of the words. On the other hand, she scribbled Russian definitions of Korean words in the multiple-choice items that she did not know (in the box in Figure 2) because she needed to understand the Korean word meanings to solve the problem. This example shows her agentive and voluntary attempt to understand the English word meanings in Korean and the Korean word meanings in Russian not only for meaning negotiations but also for expanding her linguistic repertoire. Hence, by doing so, she could better comprehend and complete Korean English assignments.



**Figure 2. Tina’s Use of Diverse Languages in Solving an English Workbook Question**

Other examples were found in the vocabulary notebooks that the three students created for English learning at home. The left image in Figure 3 shows Lera's word list task assigned by her Korean English teacher; the left column of the list displays a list of English words from a Korean English textbook, while the right column was initially left empty so that Lera could search for and fill the blanks with corresponding Korean meanings for each English word. Similar to Artur's experience of taking an English test (Figure 1), Lera had no space to use Russian or other semiotic resources on her school vocabulary list. On the other hand, as shown in the right image of Figure 3, for learning or memorizing English words by herself at home, Lera voluntarily made a word list in English, Korean, and Russian.

It is important to note that Lera started to create her own word list for English learning from the early days of her resettlement in South Korea. Although the example shows the list produced in 2018 (her third year in Korea), Lera stated that she made similar word lists even in 2015, the year when she first attended Korean elementary school. According to Lera, since English was a mandatory subject that was taught and assessed in Korean language in the Korean school system, she had to figure out how to learn new English words and corresponding Korean words along with their Russian translations. Particularly back in the early years of her stay in Korea, due to her limited knowledge of Korean and English, she wrote down every single English word meaning in both Russian and Korean in her word list. This suggests that her involvement in translanguaging practices was her agentive and voluntary act to successfully orient herself to the new learning environment, which continued and was (re)shaped during the course of her resettlement in Korea.

5. 필수 중학영어단어		
번호	단 어	의 미
1	activity	활동
2	high school	고등학교
3	active	유익한
4	outgoing	나가는
5	person	사람
6	goal	골
7	achieve	이루다
8	honest	정직한

The word list task given by Lera's teacher  
Photo taken on 2.14.2019

English	Korean	Russian
distant (ee)	거리감	расстояние (отдаленность)
complicated	복잡한	сложное
simply - simple.		просто
advertise	광시하다	рекламировать
as if	마치 ~인 것처럼	как будто
competitors	경쟁자	конкуренты
get through	통과하다	пройти через
fail to		
category	범주	категория
consumers	소비자	потребители
truly	진실로	истинно
rather	차라리	вместо
for example	예를 들면	например

Lera's personal word list for English learning  
Photo taken on 10.6.2018

**Figure 3. Lera's Vocabulary List in Two Different Versions**

Further, her selective and fluid use of multiple linguistic resources is compelling, as she did not necessarily write down every English word meaning in both Russian and Korean but made a record of them only when she felt it was necessary. This suggests that her translanguaging acts had been transformed with the expansion of her linguistic repertoire. For example, Lera wrote Russian definitions if she was uncertain about the English or Korean (or both) word meanings. If she was aware of the English word meanings in Russian but not in Korean, she wrote down the Korean meanings only without the Russian definitions. In case of knowing both the Russian and Korean meanings of an English word, she just left the boxes empty (as in the red box in the right image of Figure 3).

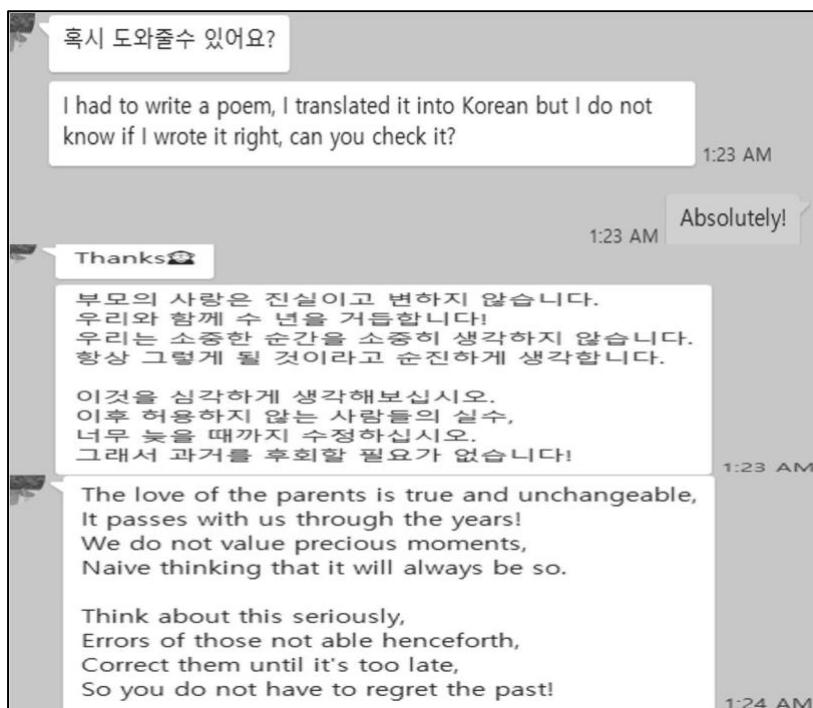
Tina's and Lera's examples show how they developed a sense of agency in the process of overcoming academic challenges. In other words, their translanguaging practices and strategies in Korean EFL contexts did not develop in only a short period of time but were (re)constructed based upon their previous and concurrent language and literacy experiences. In the first few years of their stay in Korea, the Uzbek EFL learners faced enormous academic challenges in English which resulted from their limited Korean and English knowledge. In order to overcome these challenges, they had no choice but to learn Korean as a second language with the additional burden of learning English as a foreign language. Additionally, to gain a clearer sense of English word meanings as well as to succeed in the Korean English classroom, they strategically negotiated meanings across the three languages (Korean, English, and Russian). By doing so, they extended their linguistic repertoires, which in turn was reflected in and transformed their translanguaging practices.

With the expansion of their linguistic repertoires, their use of multiple languages was less likely to surface, particularly in completing their academic tasks in Korean (and English for English assignments). Thus, in late 2019 and in 2020, I frequently observed their selective and intentional use of languages such as merely employing Korean (and English) in doing school assignments while utilizing multiple languages (Russian, Korean, and English) in communicating with speakers of other languages beyond school walls. In other words, their Russian use for academic purposes became less likely in the Korean-dominant contexts. Yet, in linguistically and culturally diverse contexts (e.g., home, online community, and the tutoring sessions with me), they continued to agentively and voluntarily participate in translanguaging practices. These examples show that the students' translanguaging practices and strategies were agentive acts that transformed and developed over the course of the years that they attended Korean school.

### English as a Translanguaging Tool for Meaningful Communication and Knowledge Building

One of the important features of these three Uzbek EFL learners' language and learning practices was their deliberate and agentive use of English as a translanguaging resource for meaningful communication and knowledge building. Especially in communicating with native Korean speakers, on the assumption that English would be used as an international language in South Korea, the Uzbek EFL learners often attempted to employ English along with Korean to make themselves understood. This reveals the students' concerns that their limited Korean language skills and their use of Russian might lead to miscommunication between Koreans and themselves.

For instance, one day in 2018, as shown in Figure 4 below, Lera texted me (a Korean-English bilingual) in Korean first, asking a simple question, “혹시 도와줄 수 있어요? (Can you help me?)” and later in English explaining what specific help she requested, “I had to write a poem [for Korean Language Arts assignment]. I translated it [the Russian version] into Korean but I do not know if I wrote it right, can you check it?” (Originally in English) (Figure 4). Since Lera was more confident in English than in Korean, she intentionally delivered her detailed request in English instead of Korean. Further, in the following message (shown at the bottom of Figure 4), she sent me the Korean version of her poem along with its English translation. She could have texted the Korean version only; however, here again, she messaged the English version to improve the chances of accurate communication.



**Figure 4. Lera's Text Messages in English and Korean for Meaningful Communication**

The students' English use was also found in the translanguaging practices that they engaged in for knowledge construction. Artur, Tina, and Lera hoped that learning English in addition to Korean would enable them to achieve a higher socioeconomic status in Korea. Thus, to further develop their language skills, they frequently visited their school library and looked for Korean and English versions of books they had read in Russian. Yet, given that most of Korean school library books were in Korean, they often first found Korean versions in the library and had to search for English versions online later at home.

As an instance of this, Lera shared her experience of reading *The Little Prince* in English, Korean, and Russian. She had already read Маленький принц (Little Prince) in Russian in Uzbekistan. She loved the story; thus, later when she visited her Korean school library in grade 8 in 2017 (approximately 3 years after her migration to South Korea), she immediately recognized the image of the little prince on the book cover of 어린 왕자 (Little Prince in Korean). At that moment, Lera thought she might be able to learn more Korean words by reading this book, because she already knew the full story.

Yet, while reading the Korean version, she experienced linguistic challenges – some Korean word definitions that appeared in online dictionaries were not comprehensible to her. Thus, she reread the Russian version and decided to read the English version of *The Little Prince* while reviewing the Korean version. By doing so, she could negotiate meanings across the three languages while expanding her linguistic knowledge. For example, since the Russian and Korean explanation of 우물 (a water well in Korean) in online dictionaries did not seem to help her understanding of the word, Lera checked the corresponding English word (in the red box of Figure 5) and its definition online. It is important to note that Lera did not merely rely on her Russian and Korean knowledge but made use of English as a translanguaging resource to bridge the linguistic gap while developing her linguistic knowledge. This translanguaging experience led her to look for more books in multiple languages –enabled her to take more actions for language learning– so that she could construct more authentic and practical linguistic knowledge in out-of-school settings.

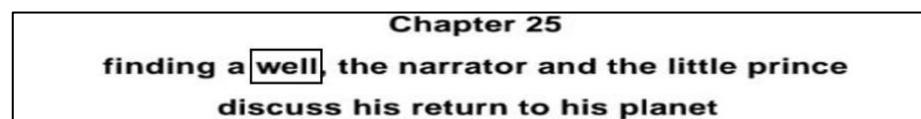


Figure 5. A Screen Capture of Lera's Searching of the Word, 'Well' in *The Little Prince*

### Self-initiated and Sustained Translanguaging Practices for Language Learning

The most frequently observed translanguaging activity was their use of multiple online search engines (*Google*, *Naver* (a popular search engine in Korea), and *Yandex* (a popular search engine in Russia)) for meaning negotiation. For instance, in one of our online tutoring sessions, Artur and I were working on an English reading comprehension workbook in preparation for an English exam in Korean school (Figure 6, screen captured on 10.27.2018). While checking Artur's text comprehension, which had been assigned as study material, I asked him if the Korean meaning of the English word "ligament" was understandable, which is shown below in Figure 6 and marked by the red box. Instead of talking about how difficult it was, Artur shared how he made use of his linguistic resources to understand "ligament" by showing me one of the Naver search results on his phone (the left image of Figure 6).

**Figure 6. Artur's Agentive Use of the Online Search Platform, Naver**

According to Artur, he attempted to understand the given English text in both Korean and Russian by utilizing multiple search engines. He searched for the English word meanings in both Korean and Russian using *Google* and *Naver* but also the practical use of the Russian words, *растяжение/связка* (ligament in Russian) in *Yandex*, so that he could properly use the term in Russian-dominant contexts. In addition, when discussing how the English word, ‘ligament,’ can be translated to Korean and Russian, he deliberately used the Korean definition, **인대** (ligament in Korean), rather than “ligament,” in order to practice and memorize the Korean word. The critical point in his translanguaging practices is that he agentively initiated his use of multiple linguistic and other resources (search engines) without any explicit instruction on how to mesh or blend codes for meaning negotiation. Furthermore, in Artur’s case, this was not a one-time event, but a sustained translanguaging activity that frequently surfaced over the course of online tutoring sessions and other times during the data collection period. Likewise, for all the Uzbek EFL learners, learning and using English does not necessarily indicate getting involved in an English-only zone. As exemplified in Artur’s example above, even in learning English through Korean, they translanguaged with diverse linguistic and placed resources.

## Discussion

These findings demonstrate how the three Uzbek EFL learners participated in translanguaging practices while building a sense of agency in out-of-school environments in South Korea. As exemplified by Artur’s Korean English test and Lera’s vocabulary list from her Korean English teacher, there was no space for Russian use in formal Korean English education. There was only learning English through Korean (and English). This created enormous academic challenges for the Uzbek EFL children who were learning Korean as a second language.

Yet rather than accommodating to the Korean-dominant instruction, they (re)developed their translanguaging practices beyond school walls (e.g., home, community – including any informal/formal communications, and the tutoring sessions with me) to overcome academic challenges in English learning and to improve both English and Korean language skills. In other words, to orient themselves to Korean English classrooms, the Uzbek EFL learners became accustomed to learning English through Korean in school. Furthermore, to support their academic learning processes in their own way, they attempted to use Russian while studying English through Korean at home, although they were not provided with any explicit guidance in translanguaging practices. Emergent multilingual children’s translanguaging practices are the transformative acts of leveraging multilingual identities while grappling with monolingual values and beliefs. They do this while demonstrating a desire to succeed

academically, signifying their developing sense of agency. Their transformative acts in learning English suggest “the natural tendency to combine multiple resources [driving] them to look for more cues and exploit different resources” (Li, 2018, p. 25) that are available in learning environments.

Similar to the Uzbek EFL learners’ examples, the emergent multilingual youths, Maf-nin and Aung, in Daniel (2018) showed a wide variety of literacy practices and the (re)development of their agency in the process of completing their academic tasks (specific to English language arts and social studies) within and beyond American high school. When working on academic tasks, Maf-nin and Aung drew heavily on out-of-school language and literacy practices. Their examples demonstrate the use of multiple search engines, translanguaging in diverse languages, and their overall integration of linguistic and semiotic resources in interpreting, drawing, and writing. The findings from Daniel (2018) suggest that “recognizing and facilitating translanguaging could rightly be an aim of teaching and learning with youth from [diverse linguistic and cultural] backgrounds” (van Viegen, 2020, p. 72).

In addition, for the Uzbek EFL learners, English played a pivotal role for meaningful communication and knowledge building by bridging the linguistic gaps between Korean and Russian –the benefit reaped from the practical use of English in everyday life. As addressed in Lera’s examples of poetry writing and readings in multiple languages, the Uzbek youths employed English as a translanguaging resource. Their translanguaging acts were (re)shaped, reflecting on their accumulated language use and learning experiences in South Korea. In other words, perceiving English as a global language and in consideration of their interlocutors’ linguistic repertoire (e.g., me as a Korean English bilingual), their English use was central to the explicit production of their intended meanings and to construct linguistic knowledge via meaning negotiations. Namely, their deliberate and purposeful code choices in everyday literacy practices reinforced the youths’ understanding of the beneficial roles of translanguaging in multiple contexts (Song, 2016). By participating in translanguaging practices, emergent multilingual youths engaged in learning how to traverse across different languages while “learning the foundations of learning” (Holliday, 1993, p. 93) via multiple and dynamic sense-making processes.

Lastly, the self-initiated and sustained translanguaging activity example of Artur also shows the beneficial role of translanguaging in English language learning and use. Artur’s search for the English word meaning (*ligament*) in Korean and Russian via online search engines offered more sustainable multimodal opportunities for leveraging his multilingual competences and improving his English language literacy skills. The findings of this study are congruent with previous studies in that (im)migrant English language learners’ translanguaging practices outside of classroom are self-initiated and continuous activities (Daniel, 2018; Kulavuz-Onal & Vásquez; 2018; Schreiber, 2015).

The Uzbek EFL learners’ translingual work, combined with the images and texts that they created or found online, enabled them to move onto more flexible and fluid communications and discussions in online spaces (Bigelow et al., 2017). Namely, the findings of this study show the self-initiative nature of the Uzbek EFL learners’ language and literacy practices that depict their agentive use of “digital media [as] a delivery system for language” (Gee & Hayes, 2011, p. 2). In short, the findings suggest the critical role of translanguaging in the development of language and literacy skills for global interactions in (im)migrant EFL learners.

## Conclusion

The Uzbek EFL learners’ examples indicate that translanguaging plays a shaping role in understanding and building a connection between language and agency through the way it

mediates social contact and code choices, especially in the case of (im)migrant youths (Gritsenko, 2016). Additionally, the use of multiple linguistic and non-linguistic resources in learning and using English has never been typical of the Uzbek EFL students' languages and cultures. This implies that there is still work to be done in promoting multilingual and translanguaging ideologies into teaching and learning English as an international language (Sayer, 2020). Drawing upon the theoretical framework of translanguaging, future work needs to focus on promoting English language learners' translanguaging identity and agency so that the learners can "learn to do translanguaging" (García & Lin, 2016, p. 132).

Furthermore, the findings of this study have brought pedagogical implications and an insight into a vital aspect of English language learning through translanguaging practices. First, the Uzbek EFL learners' out-of-school translanguaging practices suggest the necessity of translanguaging assignments. Translanguaging academic tasks will create linguistically inclusive learning spaces across home and school in English literacy development. Finally, given that multilingual resources were supportive in improving not only English, but also Korean language proficiency, holistic multilingual development for all students should be considered at an institutional level. One way this can be realized is by creating more robust translanguaging spaces in which students can find more multilingual resources available for the development of their English literacy as a language among many others.

## About the Author

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