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A Study on Chang-Rae Lee's Novel *Native Speaker*: Focus on Identity and Language³¹

Analiza romana *Native Speaker* Chang-Rae Leeja: identitet i jezik

Sažetak

Ovaj rad svojevrsni je pokušaj dubokog zarona u književni ocean, istražujući zamršene slojeve Izvornoga govornika / *Native Speaker* Chang-Rae Leeja. Ne drži se uobičajenih etiketa i kategorija, već osporava status quo, tvrdeći da nisu u potpunosti obuhvaćeni bogata složenost glavnog lika, Henryja Parka, i njegovo identitetsko putovanje. Rad ima ulogu vodiča kroz labirint granica i nacionalnih rasprava. Tvrdi se da zastarjeli načini razmišljanja – „ovdje“ i „tamo“ – više ne vrijede. Pojmovi kao što su „hibridni“ ili „treći identitet“ također ne uspijevaju obuhvatiti pravu bit Henryjeve borbe za identitet. Rad uvodi svježju perspektivu nazivajući Henryja „manjim strancem“, što bi se moglo usporediti sa stavljanjem novih naočala kako bi se vidjelo na drugi način. Ovaj izraz priznaje Henryja kao autsajdera, ali također prepoznaje kako je zamršeno utkan u okolno društveno tkivo. To je nijansirani način razumijevanja njegova mjesta u društvu. Usvajanjem koncepta „manjeg stranca“, rad nas vodi na putovanje u složenost Henryjeva identiteta. Poput sećiranja slagalice, proučava se njegov ples na društvenom terenu, suočavanje s odnosima i kulturnom dinamikom koja oblikuje ono što će on postati. Ali ne radi se samo o Henryju. Rad se bavi promjenjivim pogledima na granice i nacionalnost u našem međusobno povezanom svijetu. Zastarjeli način razmišljanja o „ovdje“ i „tamo“ više ne vrijedi. Henry postaje svojevrsno ogledalo koje odražava globalnu dinamiku koja se razvija i tjera nas da preispitamo vlastito poimanje identiteta. Izraz „manji stranac“ također baca svjetlo na dinamiku moći u društvu. Henryjeva pozicija „manjeg stranca“ otkriva suptilne načine na koje ljudi bivaju marginalizirani i tretirani kao autsajderi unutar vlastitih zajednica. Ne radi se samo o Henryju, već se potiče i nas da preispitujemo svoje pretpostavke o identitetu i pripadnosti. Na široj razini rad promatra „izvornog govornika“ u kontekstu književnog univerzuma. Analizira kako postupci Chang-Rae Leeja u pripovijedanju i karakterizaciji likova daju nijansiraniju sliku identiteta. Roman postaje platno koje čitatelje poziva na razmišljanje o fluidnoj i složenoj prirodi individualnih i kolektivnih identiteta. Zaključno, ovaj je rad poput detaljne karte koja nas vodi kroz zaokrete i preokrete

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identiteta u „izvornom govorniku“. Odbacivanjem starih etiketa i prihvaćanjem koncepta „manjeg stranca“, dodaje slojeve našem razumijevanju načina na koji se identitet odvija u svijetu u kojem se granice i nacionalnost neprestano pomiču. Ne radi se samo o romanu – pokreće se širi razgovor o tome kako naši identiteti plešu s društvenim strukturama.

Introduction

Chang-rae Lee can certainly be viewed as an American author despite his Korean name, since his nationality is American. Lee is one of the acclaimed authors in the Anglophone literary scene. Rising interest in South Korea might seem relatively less than America, but it has been never little. For instance, his five novels, including *Native Speaker* (1995), *Gesture Life* (1999), *Aloft* (2004), *The Surrendered* (2010) and *On Such a Full Sea* (2014) have all been translated in South Korea. His life has inspired a Hong Kong-American director Wayne Wang and was made into a film of a drama genre, “Coming Home Again,” in 2019. In an interview given at the 24th Busan International Film Festival in 2019, Wang admitted he made the film after being deeply touched by Lee’s essay for *New Yorker Magazine* in 1995. The writing depicts a male protagonist’s complicated feelings, a writer modelled after Lee when he nursed his mother with stomach cancer for about a year. The protagonist has the same name as Lee, and the author himself participated in the screenwriting process (Bak, Jaehwan 2019).

The booming interest in Lee in South Korea in addition to the popular culture is also reflected in scholarship. According to the Naver scholar service, there have been 132 academic articles on Lee’s literature, written from 2000 to 2020. 41 degree theses have been published on Lee. The studies are found in many disciplines, including English literature, Korean literature and social science. Lee has been considered exceptional as a contemporary writer of our time. He has been a subject of academic interest right after the debut and has drawn a steady interest amongst postgraduate researchers. Lee is a writer representing an unusually persistent phenomenon for the last 20 years in Korean scholarship (Naver 2021).

What would make Lee an interesting academic subject in South Korea? The most evident and foremost reason would be the quality of his literature. Undeniably, well-composed literature becomes a subject of interest and gains acclaim. Another reason would be the uniqueness of his works. Although it is generally acknowledged that great literature appeals to both universality and particularity, the reader’s interest is captured by the particulars in his writing. Indeed, it is worth looking at Lee as a particular writer in Korean literary scene. His literary works are characterized by “Koreanness” – sometimes indicative

and sometimes connotative – which, it seems to me, has impressed Korean readers and critics. The writings that represent his ethnic roots may have appealed to the inner realm of the Korean reader. Reading him, the reader considers the author as different or unique from other Korean or American authors. It is the point of encounter where the idea of Koreanness manifests itself. His works cannot be discussed without considering Koreanness, especially his early works such as *Gesture Life* and *Native Speaker*. In the same manner, one cannot address his literary works without examining the details of Koreanness from the perspective of a Korean reader.

Here, I would like to point out the difference between the writer's self-awareness and the reader's reception. Whereas Lee sees himself as a person who has "come (오다)" from Korea in America, just like his characters including Henry in *Native Speaker*, the Korean readers and critics see him as a person who has "gone (가다)" to America. This paper explores the distinctive aspect in Lee's position that makes him stand out amongst other writers. The Korean reader's view of him as an American writer is universal yet particular, which distinguishes him from the other readers in other countries such as America.

A stranger and a lesser stranger

이방인 (*i-bang-in*, 異邦人): a person from other countries

The translation of a Korean term *I-bang-in* (이방인) in English is a stranger. A stranger can also mean someone one does not know. There is a nuanced difference in the definition of *I-bang-in* between Korean and American culture. It is important for Koreans to consider a person's origin or orientation to set the idea of *I-bang-in*. Here, the origin does not merely include the place of birth; the idea reaches to the root of family ancestry, and race. Regardless of the strength of the bond, one could think of or refer to their friend or acquaintance as an *I-bang-in* if the person is outside their group. One could even 'confine' someone to that category. After all, in Korean culture, the sense of 'coming from the outside' constitutes the significance of the term: *i-bang-in*, a stranger who has come from the outside to the inside.

On the other hand, according to the literal standard of the Anglophone context, the term is no longer valid once you get to know the person; they no longer are a stranger. Whether a person is regarded as a stranger or not is subject to "I," the one who makes a relationship with them. Therefore, the concept pertaining to the term is based on the stance of the individuals who define the term. What matters is the one who sees the stranger, not their origin. In short, to understand the idea of a stranger in Anglophone culture, the notion of "I" plays a crucial

role. If Korean culture tends to define *I-bang-in* by positioning them in accordance with specific criteria, the standard in Anglophone culture is often made by a personal judgement. To make a claim short, whether a person is an *I-bang-in* or not depends on the subject who makes the decision; it can be “us” as the majority or “I” as an individual.

G. Simmel's account of a stranger offers an idea to negotiate the two different approaches to the definition. In his essay “The Stranger,” Simmel rejects the old concept of the term as the wanderer who “comes today and goes tomorrow.” According to Simmel, the stranger is rather “the person who comes today and stays tomorrow.” The phrase can be interpreted in two ways: it could mean a person from the outside as defined in Korean culture, or a person inside, hence, someone I could know or not, according to Anglophone culture. Simmel claims the stranger as an incomplete being who has not yet overcome the distinction of coming in and going out of the group although they remain in the group. They are connected to the individual elements in society, including local community and relatives, but they are “inorganically appended” to the group. Because of the trait, the stranger can obtain objectiveness. He is free from preconceptions of what is given in the group, due to his distance, hence, he is careful in evaluation and perception. The stranger is not tied to a fixated idea, and therefore, his position assures freedom to think and express (Simmel 2005: 79-83). To interpret Simmel's words through the rhetoric of “we” and “I,” the stranger is someone who has departed from the “us” from the other group they used to belong to, and who can still make a relationship with “me” in his new group where I belong. Yet, he is who has not assimilated as one of “us” in my group.

Despite its insightful observation, Simmel's discussion lacks a crucial aspect of the notion, which is, as this paper argues, the stranger's viewpoint. The stranger's viewpoint is derived from his origin, or orientation. His view is based on the point of their departure, not the point of remaining and wandering. For the members inside the group, the view would be appreciated as an objective one due to his particular position, but in fact, it is just another view of another person. In a way, it could be a subjective view of someone. For instance, if a person left Korea and moved to America, it would be natural for him as a stranger in America to compare things about Korea and America. For Americans, the person's view could appear as objective, as the stranger in America does not apply the traditional American way of thinking, while, in fact, it could be a Korean's personal view of America.

What is essential in these bizarre relations is that the stranger's view does not only direct to the place he stays; it comes back to himself. To reiterate this through the rhetoric of “we” and “I,” the stranger's view starts from “us” in the group over there, for example, Korea, and is then directed to ‘myself’ in

the group over here, say, America, through “us” in the group he remains. He or she first looks at America, that is, us inside the group, through his Korean perspective. Then, he surveys himself; the object of surveillance now directs his sight to the one who looks at America through a Korean perspective. In short, a stranger cannot wholly belong to us in the group. Such a process constructs a trait of the stranger that is self-reflective. Seeing what he essentially lacks in the group, he then looks back on himself as he cannot completely form a unity with either group – the group over here, where he is staying, or the other group over there, whereof he has originated.

One could state that the stranger’s position works as a mirror of his own self. The mirror is hardly an object through which he can comfortably observe a group from a distance. Yet it can show the true self, whereas it can also give a wrong image of the essential aspect of self. Even though the mirror reflects the objective image of self, one may perceive the image as distorted. The stranger’s fate may be then to realise the difference between his old and current self in the group he remains in, and to look back on it, and then, finally, to profoundly contemplate the true self. A stranger is not a single concept. Depending on where he stands, the characteristics and identity vary, and this should not be overlooked.

Lee is a Korean-American novelist who emigrated to America with his family when he was three. Born in Seoul, Korea in 1965, he moved with his mother and other family members after his father, who was a psychiatrist, went to settle before them (Bang 2009: 135). As many other immigrants, he initially found it difficult to communicate with people. His mother gave him an English name Chuck instead of his Korean name Chang-Rae, hoping he would overcome the language barrier and make friends. Having an English name is one of the most common means how Korean immigrants escape their status as a stranger as quickly as they can. However, his mother’s attempt ultimately was gratuitous, as his American friends had already become familiar with his unique Korean name by the time he was given another name. In contrast to his mother’s concern about him, a child from another country, Lee was neither a stranger nor someone their friends did not know. Since then, Lee has used his Korean name as his official name. (Constantakis 2017: 6). After studying English literature at Yale University, Lee worked in finance in Wall Street. Later, in 1993, he pursued MA in creative writing at Oregon University, followed by the publication of his first full-length novel *Native Speaker* in 1995. The novel was also his degree dissertation. As the protagonist of *Native Speaker*, all of his protagonists in *Gesture Life* (1999), *Aloft* (2004), *The Surrendered* (2010), *On Such a Full Sea* (2014) are characterised as not only Korean American but also other nationalities such as Japanese American, Italian American and Chinese American.

His writing explores one's identity such as home-coming, ancestry and history usually in a retrospective manner, but in his recent work, he also chose to set the near future in *On Such a Full Sea* (2014). The standpoint of the narrator also varies. In *Gesture Life*, a novel that depicts Korean comfort women during the Japanese colonisation of Korea, he sets a narrator as a Japanese man and takes an offender's point of view. Since Lee explores the characters in a wide range, his novels appeal to the reader's interest in ethnic minorities, even those who used to be indifferent to the subject. By expanding the extent of the particulars in his writing, Lee has achieved the universal. His books' fame has resulted in rewards despite the specificity of an ethnic minority as a literary theme; it was awarded 1995 Discover Great New Writers Award, 1995 Oregon Book Award, 1996 Hemingway Foundation/PEN Award. It was a finalist for the 2014 National Book Critics Circle Award and the 2011 Finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in Fiction for *The Surrendered* and is frequently mentioned as a Nobel Literary Prize Nominee (Park 2019: 1).

The translation of *Native Speaker* has been published in the same year when the novel was published. Jin Man Hyun's translation, which was based on the fact that Lee is Korean (Chon 2017: 125), earned some criticism regarding translation quality (Koh 2002: 619). This paper refers to Young Mok Chong's translation (2015), which was published under the title *A Constant Stranger* (영원한 이방인).

Studies on *Native Speaker* can be summarised into two strands. One strand is concerned with the topic of language that includes the characters' language presented in the novel and its translation. Another strand is the topic of identity that includes multiculturalism. The premise of Lee's literature is the exploration of identity, and language is the key to it. Critics and scholars have stressed the subject's importance through their writing and speech, and the writer himself has mentioned it. He admits that identity matters (to himself) and that he takes the issue as a life question. Although born in Korea, Lee says, he is not a Korean in America. He lives a virtually similar life to Americans, but he regards himself as Korean, feeling a "strong connection" to his birth country (Kim 2014: 336). However, the phrase "strong connection" should not be taken as an entirely positive concept. As Ji (2004) points out, the bond can be a result of negotiation, after one's exhaustive process of identification and counter-identification in everyday life. Ji observes a condition that is neither Korean nor American in the novel and argues that one should construct the concept of a "third identity," that is, a hybrid identity, when reading *Native Speaker* (Ji 2004: 316). Despite the appealing claim, Ji's idea is not new in academia.

Writers from the East – the so-called stranger writers – have been often understood in the frame of "hyphenated condition," which means a condition unable to fit perfectly in any group (Ling 1999: 13). Ironically, the impasse

reveals that the writers unwittingly wish to belong to any groups. Although the writers, who have left their country at a young age and are educated in America, believe they are used to thinking in an American way, others in the group do not regard them as American. The same idea applies the other way round. In their birth country, people treat them as Americans due to the linguistic and cultural traits they have, which distinguish them from Koreans. One could call this situation a “demand to belong somewhere.” Either way, they are forced to be categorised. In Korea, they are those who left their home for other countries, and in America, they are still unknown. We see an irony here, as they are treated as strangers in both groups. This comes as a conundrum to the writers themselves, causing a profound struggle with the problem of belonging.

The writers preceding Lee tend to have this trait more saliently; one can arrive at this conclusion by looking at the content of their work. The first (or 1.5) generation writers include Yonghill King and Hak Kyung Cha, who, for instance, set the focus of their writings on the root-finding and assimilation. Kang’s *The Grass Roof* and Cha’s avant-garde style writing, *Dictee*, a postmodern approach to the essence of her quest for roots, are compelling examples of this phenomenon.

Both Kang’s and Cha’s works present a sense of belonging to their birth country. The sentiment could also be seen as an attitude that the characters, or the writers themselves, take in the hyphenated condition. They try to find their true self in their original notion of “us,” that is, Korea. As American society puts them into a hyphenated condition, they attempt to locate themselves based on the beginning of their life: the home country. The two writers’ case bears witness to the adapted notion of “the stranger’s view” originally proposed by Simmel. In these Korean-American writers’ literary work, we can observe a view that eventually returns to themselves for self-reflection. However, one should bear in mind that this proposition might have been popular in Korean scholarship due to the critics’ approach to them that was simply based on ethnicity. The critics might have put too much emphasis on the “Koreanness” in their works.

Another way of interpreting the phenomenon is to understand the writer’s work as an autobiographical journey to find their place as members of society, as Kim (1982: 32) argues. They no longer consider themselves as guests or visitors of America, and finally reach the last stage of exploration to find out their own sense of “belonging.” Still, the writers are not entirely free from the forceful demand to ultimately belong somewhere. This means that the Korean-American writers before Lee have exhaustively questioned whether they or their characters are Korean or American; in other words, if each of them was a member of a group over here or there. They tended to name and interpret their work as an exploration of identity. However, this kind of approach could also be

seen as a manifestation of the Korean “we-ism,” which demands that one must belong to a certain group (Jin 2002: 79-101).

This paper proposes to read Lee's literature beyond the dichotomous limit that would categorise a person according to a group either on this or that side. Although Lee acknowledges the stranger's undeniable existence in his writing, he goes further and deeper to explore the matter of identity. When he presents the problem of one's identity, he does not limit the answer to the boundaries of roots that often are manifested as nationality and ancestry.

His technique and characterisation can be explained through a notion of “a lesser stranger.” I would propose the term as Lee's character shows a state that is not entirely alienated from a group. Although the character is situated in a “hyphenated condition,” he is closer to the group he has come to and remained in, rather than the group he has left. If the hyphenated beings tend to derive their identity from “us” in the group they left, a lesser stranger shows more complex aspects in this tendency. He still has the self-reflective view of a stranger, but he is subjective and interested in personal matters. He tends to draw his identity from “us” in the group in which he remains. Consequently, the language of a lesser stranger is the language of the group he stays in, and the relationship he aims for is also directed towards “us” in the group he remains in. He even tends to view the previous relationships he has made in the group he left behind from the new perspective of the new group he is in. To take a metaphor of a diagram: us in the group over there one has left – less of a stranger – us in the group over here, where one remains. Although it could certainly be said that Lee belongs to the group he remains in, that is, America, the characters in his novels, especially the ones like Henry in his early works, should be read as a lesser stranger.

The language of a stranger and “Henry's fallacy”

Language: the method of human communication, either spoken or written, consisting of the use of words in a structured and conventional way.

The idea of language, particularly that of a stranger, and language itself holds significance in *Native Speaker* (Kim 2019: 7). Not only is language related to the self-identity, the characters in Lee's works, such as Henry in *Native Speaker* are correctly aware of the relationship. Although Henry, the character this paper calls a lesser stranger, believes that every human being has a different identity, and, in order to construct it, one needs to make one language settled inside the self. Therefore, Henry is persistently conscious of the language of his group: English. I would argue that such a habit puts him into what I propose to call “Henry's fallacy.”

Henry is a Korean-American who has been educated in America and married an American wife. Although he has mastered a virtually perfect English at a native level, he is always conscious of his pronunciation. Pronunciation, as it is known, is the most ostensible component of language fluency. Henry's exaggerated consciousness creates a stark contrast with another essential character of the novel, his wife Lelia, whose job is a speech therapist. Henry's fallacy can be defined as his misbelief about the concept of identity. He thinks that he can be an American if he speaks the language correctly. He is a being who is fixated on the idea of language.

The fallacy can be observed through the relationships he makes with other people and the language he uses therein. First, we see the language Henry speaks with his father. The two characters demonstrate how English can be a power beyond a mere communication method in American society. Henry knows this precisely and uses it thus. He dismisses his father, who has spoken broken English since he moved to America. His father also dismisses his South American employees who do not speak English.

Distinctively, Lee characterises Henry's father as a husband who is verbally abusive toward his wife by speaking English. Also, the novel features another interesting character, quintessentially Korean, Ahjuma. Ahjuma is a paid maid who helps Henry's mother with housework. She hardly ever speaks Korean with Henry in the house, and it seems to Lelia, Henry's wife, that Henry is not treating her with respect. The readers see a metaphorical pyramid of power which takes a measure of language, in this context, English. To advance the claim, as Kim, Jin Kyeong argues, Lee sets English as a yardstick for Enlightenment that divides light and darkness, just as it divides civilisation and savagery (Kim 2019: 10).

American as a non-stranger is located on the top of the pyramid in Henry's household. Henry, a young 1.5 or second-generation immigrant, has his place underneath. His father, a first-generation intellectual immigrant whose English is rather imperfect, stands on the level below the son. The bottom of the pyramid is comprised of strangers from Asia and South America. The potential hierarchy allocated by language is represented as the characters' jobs. Henry is "ostensibly" a professional and "internally" a spy. His father is a shop owner whose regular customers are lower-class people. The South Americans are the shop employees. Lastly, Henry's mother is a housewife isolated from the society. None of the characters appear as an object of envy.

I would offer my account of "a lesser stranger" to clarify the character map. On the top of the pyramid stand "us in the group over here," whereas below – Henry as a lesser stranger, and his father as a hyphenated condition, and further down we see his mother and Ahjuma as those psychologically regarded as "us in the group over there." Henry's family takes being American as a desirable

identity, hence it tends to worship English. There is also an undercurrent agreement in the family that a person with broken English can never become an American, one must speak English to be compatible. The agreement is where Henry's fallacy originates. However, it can also be considered a relative matter, because the significance of language and the relationship between language and identity differs according to subject's position. In the same manner, speaking one language is not necessarily equivalent to having a single identity.

Next, we see the language between Henry and Lelia. Although the couple has no problem communicating in English, it is crucial to notice the difference in how Henry and Lelia consider language. Lelia's character, a native English speaker whose job is a speech therapist, speaks fluent language and teaches it to others. However, Lelia's understanding of English is contrasted with Henry's. The way Lelia educates the couple's son, Mitt, demonstrates their difference. Henry wants Mitt to have a single concept about a homogenous life. This reveals another example of Henry's fallacy through his belief; it is a belief that one language forms one identity, hence, makes him engrossed in one language. He insists that his son speak one language perfectly and thinks in that language only, which is represented as English in the novel. He even does not read a book to his son, as he thinks his pronunciation does not help Mitt's language development at all.

In contrast, Lelia, a fluent English speaker, is generous about the matter. She wants her son to attend a Korean school. Her idea of English is not as strict as Henry's. For the native speakers like Lelia and Mitt, English is not a subject to overcome through practice but something that one acquires naturally. Lelia is not as demanding as Henry toward her son, because her English is not a result of an utmost endeavour as Henry's is. Henry overlooks that a multilingual can also be a part of "us" within the group he remains in, the group that he wishes to belong to. In contrast to his thoughts, the people inside the group in America do not even fall into Henry's fallacy, that is, a tendency to get fixated in one language.

Lelia's address of Henry as a "False Speaker of Language" shows Lelia's understanding of Henry. She knows that Henry's verbal fluency does not indicate the expression of truth. For Lelia, what matters is not the language itself but whether there is truth when one speaks. Henry's job as an industrial spy and his individual identity as a stranger in America consistently complicates his relationship with his wife, as he does not open his inner mind towards his wife. In contrast, Lelia has a more flexible and profound understanding of a human. She has an insight into distinguishing what is true or false, and an awareness of the role of language as a medium. Again, we see Henry's fallacy in their relationship. Henry is obsessed with the notion of language as it is, so much so that he neglects the truthfulness of the content.

Lastly, we can observe the language between Henry and John Kwang. The two communicate in English. Both of them are as fluent as natives. They also share the same Korean ethnic background. However, from the moment John loses his power, his language begins to collapse. His voice changes during the speech, and his pronunciation is no longer clear. Henry, seeing John's change as such, wishes he could speak with John in Korean. This reflects Henry's assumption that speaking one's mother tongue language, the language he has spoken before becoming a stranger, would deepen their relationship. One could read Henry's empathy for John from this scene; Henry would have felt his life was somewhat similar to John's, since he hid his true self from Lelia by speaking English. Henry believes that underneath English as a medium of their communication, there must be another language that can capture something more essential and more original from the speaker. Perhaps Henry wanted to talk to John Kwang in Korean in the hope that he could find out the sincere side at the bottom of his mind, even if their conversation in Korean is not as polished as English.

Here again, we see Henry's fallacy, a conception that one language constructs one identity. Henry wanted to confirm John's true identity through his mother tongue, Korean. Later on, Henry's attempt fails. The novel shows that the language fluency has nothing to do with the revelation of true identity or sincerity. Instead, the incident reaffirms how difficult it is to convey one's heart and soul even in his native language. John's language, either English or Korean, is powerful when he is in dominant social position. However, it fails to perform its primary function as a medium of communication after losing the power. Such a shift in John's status demonstrates that the power of language is derived not from the language itself but from the social position of the speaker. The main language the characters speak is English. However, the way the speaker uses the language varies according to the relationship he makes. Language is meant to be used depending on the particularities of relationship in society. The same language would embed different tones and manners, depending on the situation.

Language is not only the core of communication but also the first appearance of self toward others. Language plays a vital role, as it continually constructs and reconstructs the self through the complex relationships we make with others (Bang 2009: 146). However, it would be dangerous to claim that language is identical to self. One language can hardly represent the self as I have exemplified when explaining the phenomenon of Henry's fallacy. If a lesser stranger like Henry acquires an additional language, one could become more prone to Henry's fallacy.

It could be a colonialist ideology to claim that one language forms one identity. Forcing all of those who can be deemed the stranger in a group to speak one language perfectly is a consequence of colonial culture. It is crucial to look critically at whether it can be justified that a community forces strangers to acquire

the ruler's language and divides power by classes. (Korea has experienced this during the Japanese colonisation). As Henry's example shows, fluency does not lead to assimilation in a new culture. It can become another barrier. If language acquisition means a perfect unity, the phrase 'bamboo ceiling' should not exist. After all, we, the ones who use the same language, still understand one another imperfectly. We are in a way another Henry (Bang 2009: 151).

Conclusion: Henry, a stranger of the identity³² and a lesser stranger

As discussed, the studies dedicated to *Native Speaker* have produced a particular focus on the matter of identity. Presumably, the unique characterisation of Henry, or furthermore – the uniqueness of the author Chang-rae Lee, would have led the tendency. Identity is a challenging concept. It is difficult because the idea of subjectivity as a fundamental notion to understand the term requires a clear understanding. Subjectivity, according to Tak's definition, is an attitude that treats a phenomenon internally rather than superficially (Tak 2000: 103-114). Understanding identity is linked to understanding interiority. The only chance for the other to notice it is through the observation of the relationship. Language or behaviour exposes the particulars of relationships.

Henry is an industrial spy who hides his professional identity and observes other people or things. The spies invariably have two tasks: they should not be detected, and they should extract something that others do not want to reveal. Both tasks call for concealment of the spy's own identity. Because of this, Henry's self-esteem sinks lower and lower, as he treats his life as the other; he remains estranged, from the periphery (Bang 2009: 139). His identity is close to an observer or an outsider who lacks the will to belong. This makes him into a lesser stranger. From a conventional perspective, self-identity is known as an idea that is fixed and unchanging. However, from the postmodern perspective, identity is not a homogeneous concept; it exists as diverse, reproductive and multilayered. It is neither fixed nor absolute, but instead – relative and empirical. Therefore, identity exists in multiple dimensions.

Studies on "Native Speaker" in South Korea have focused on identity from a conventional perspective. The existing arguments consider identity within the distinctions of society and discuss whether Henry is American or Korean. It is important to read Henry from a modern perspective. Reading how he understands himself through the mirror he has formed with his own personal traits is as important as questioning whether he belongs to a group or category of society. Given the postmodern aspect of contemporary culture that is bound to

32 Identity: the fact of being who or what a person or thing is.

be inclined towards hybridity, the conventionally favoured frame to read *Native Speaker* calls for revision because it often applied a dichotomy of East/West, self/other, colonising/colonised and mainstream/minority. A revised concept would be pluralism or hybridity, which can be used to explain matters that are inexplicable by dichotomy.

Kim, Jin Kyeong's (2019) discussion is worth noting, as she takes a postmodern approach to *Native Speaker* (Kim 2019: 24). She suggests to read Henry's identity as a combination of hybridity and tolerance, or as a principle in the age of transnationalism. According to Kim, claiming Henry's identity through the rhetoric of dichotomy is an old value, and one should understand it as a representation of hybridity. A hyphenated condition is one of the examples to interpret Henry's case, though he has another identity in addition to it, as I would argue; he is a lesser stranger who does not perfectly fit in the group over here, where he remains. Although Henry tries to define himself as a complete stranger, he is not a perfect fit for it either. Therefore, this paper concludes by offering the phrase "Henry's fallacy" to elucidate the character's ironic circumstances. The phrase demonstrates the symptom of him as a lesser stranger. His over-immersion in English beyond the effort to master it, his apathy towards the rupture from the place he originally resided in, and lastly, his firm belief that a new language in a new place can give him a new identity bear witness to it.

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