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MY NAME

An Autoethnographic Reflection

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Introduction

My name is Joseph Sung-Yul Park. At least that is how I present myself formally (for instance, it is the name as it appears in my passport) and professionally (as it appears under the title of this chapter above). But, it is also not my name. I say this because your name is supposed to be you, a familiar string of sounds that identifies you and that you can call a home; yet my name only gives me a feeling of awkwardness and insecurity. It is not that I do not like the name that has been given to me by my parents. It is that my name, composed of three foreign and clashing elements, seems to constantly remind me of the liminal and uneasy position I occupy as a transnational Korean-American. Born in the US, having grown up in Korea, having received higher education in the US, living and working in Singapore but maintaining various familial, cultural and professional ties with both Korea and the US, I live a life on the border, and it feels like my name is always there to underline the uneasiness and anxiety of my in-betweenness through its cacophonous clanging of component parts.

Originally I had hoped that this juxtaposition of name-elements would have the opposite effect, offering me flexibility and adaptability that would make me recognizably at home in both countries and beyond. The English name 'Joseph' was supposed to allow me to slip in easily and soundly into the US society, while 'Sung-Yul' would indicate to Koreans that I remain one of their own. But instead, what I am left with is an obtrusive baggage that gets stuck in the doorway each time I try to navigate the border between Korea and the US. Rather than making me more authentic and unnoticeable, my name highlights my foreignness and difference, both in the US and in Korea, representing in symbolic terms the residue that I am. In this way, my name betrays me, denying me a home and a true sense of belonging.

In this chapter, I would like to talk about the psychological and subjective dimension of globalization. As Hall (2014) points out, social theorists of globalization often characterize our era as one of insecurity, instability and anxiety. With growing cross-border mobility, deterioration of a sense of national and communal belonging and the prevalence of the neoliberal ideology in which we are positioned as individuals, each responsible for one's own fate, subjects in globalization are increasingly made to feel insecure, lost and fearful. But here, I focus on subjectivity not just because it is an essential aspect of globalization, but because it is also a window for observing how the historical and political conditions that drive globalization find their manifestations in our personal lives. In particular, I show how the intersection of language and globalization serves as a useful juncture for considering the subjective consequences of those conditions. For this purpose, in this chapter I reflect on several scenes in my own life in which my name has led me to confront the material and historical groundings of my transnational trajectory.

Subjective Experience of Names

It is not uncommon to find people from East Asia, who already have a name in their own language, adopt another name in English. This is particularly so in the context of globalization, where those people come into greater contact with Western culture and heavily invest in English language learning. In China, for instance, the practice is so prevalent that Chinese American journalist Huan Hsu was surprised to find that his not having an English name was a source of bewilderment to the Chinese he interacted with in Shanghai (Hsu, 2009). It is often assumed that picking up an English name is motivated by a desire to mix easier with English speakers from the West and to signal an alignment with Western identity and culture. Academic research on this topic has added more sophistication to this view. For example, Li (1997) suggests that English names used among Hong Kongers may be a pragmatic strategy to achieve a more egalitarian interaction in bicultural and bilingual context. Henry (2012) considers the cultural basis of such behavior by pointing out how adopting an English name is deeply embedded within traditional Chinese practices through which a person's name is determined. And Kim (2007) discusses how the varying social positioning and cultural expectations of Korean immigrants to Canada may lead to different choices regarding whether to adopt an English name or not.

What I want to talk about here, however, is the deeper subjective implications for having names that are perceived as 'English' or 'Korean.' Names are not merely labels that individuals freely pick up or reject like masks as it pleases them. Names call us into being. In other words, they interpellate—as a police officer might hail us on the street by shouting, 'Hey, you there!' and making us turn around and become an individual answerable to and subject to the authority of the law (Althusser, 1984:48). Here, I am not just talking about the fact that names are used to call or refer to us. Names also place us in particular junctures of historically

rooted relations of power, pressing us to become particular kinds of persons. In this sense, names position us as historically constituted subjects.

For instance, what counts as an English name in the first place? After all, only a small portion of what is recognizable as 'English names' can be traced back to Old English roots, with many coming from languages as diverse as French and Hebrew (Tan, 2001). Underneath the fascination about East Asians taking up English names lies an ideology that conceives the world in terms of neatly demarcated languages, which in turn represent distinct people and their cultures—Koreans are defined by their Korean culture and their Korean language, which neatly differentiate them from Americans who speak standard American English, for instance—even though the modern history of cultural and linguistic contact problematizes such boundaries, particularly in the increasingly globalizing world of today. Indeed, it is through such differentiation, through such acts of boundary making, that a sense of 'being Korean' is constituted, against the image of a modern, advanced, Western 'Other' (Park, 2012; 2015). Adopting a name in a particular language, then, is to be subject to the ideologies that presume the distinctiveness of that language as well as the historical conditions that gave rise to and reproduce those ideologies.

Considering the subjective experiences of living with names, variously understood as belonging to different languages and cultures, then, is to look into the historical and political conditions that make up the subject hailed by those names. It is through such experiences that the relations of power which shape and reproduce multiple forms of inequality on global and local levels come to exist in embodied ways. By reflecting on such experiences, we learn that globalization is not simply about smooth flows of people, culture and ideas across borders that can be facilitated by an act as simple as acquiring a global language like English or taking up a new name in English—for those experiences recount to us how the weight of history and social relations do not get washed away by the currents of globalization, but continue to exert itself on our shoulders.

Name of the Other

Joseph is not a name that I picked up for myself; it is a name that was given to me by my parents, who were both graduate students studying in the US in the 1960s. My mother once said it was derived from St. Joseph, the patron saint of the sick and dying (she was not Catholic, but she attended a Catholic university in the US). I do not think my parents ever questioned whether my sisters and I should be given English names in addition to Korean ones. When we were born in the US, they immediately gave us English names, as most Koreans living in the US were doing back then. As they spoke English to us at home, naturally those English names were what they used to call us. Even after we returned to Korea in the early 1970s and Korean replaced English as the home language, our English names were still used more frequently than our Korean ones. But outside of the

home, as I interacted with other Koreans at school and elsewhere, my English name was mostly kept hidden, until I returned to the US to pursue my graduate studies.

Back in the US, where Joseph had become my publicly known name again, one of my fellow graduate students from Japan once asked me, 'Why do Korean people have English names?' It might have been an innocent factual question inquiring the reasons for the cultural difference between Koreans and Japanese, where Japanese people are much less likely to adopt English names than Koreans (for that, Heffernan, 2010, proposes some explanations). But, to me it was a deeper, scathing question that foregrounded the reason of the discomfort that my English name generated for me in Korea. It pointed to the unnaturalness of the act of picking up an English name, something that cannot be just explained by Korean 'culture,' due to its political nature in a context where English and the US stands for a distant but powerful Other.

Ever since the US military occupied the southern half of the Korean peninsula following the fall of Japanese colonialism in 1945, the US exercised an enormous influence on South Korea. Due to Korea's geopolitical significance, located at the intersections of Russia, China and Japan and situated at the front line in the contest with communism, the US maintained continuous control on South Korea through military, economic, and cultural influence and by condoning a series of military regimes that thwarted the country's democratization. South Korea's ruling elites maintained their power by building their connections with and asserting their loyalty to the US, and oppressing voices of criticism towards the role of the US in Korea. Even though the Cold War subsided and South Korea's procedural democracy stabilized, the American influence over Korea still persists, through neoliberal conditions of the global economy and the enduring power of the conservative elites of Korean society.

In this context, taking up an English name in Korea cannot be an innocent act of appropriation. Regardless of one's intent, it cannot be free from suspicion of others who might view it as evidence of an opportunistic desire to profit from an affiliation with those in power. When my parents gave me a name in English, certainly they were hoping I would be able to benefit from my US-born heritage and my familiarity with English. My parents had come to the US when Korea was barely recovering from the total destruction of the Korean War, and they were among the very few privileged Koreans who gained the opportunity to study in the center of the modern world. The American degrees they acquired would later secure my family a stable middle-class life back in Korea with a valued cosmopolitan flair. The English name they gave to me was a symbolic way of passing down this privilege—a marker of my provenance in the US, a reminder that I should one day return there to retrace my parents' path. Indeed, here I am, having acquired a doctoral degree in the US, and living a career in the global academic scene in which English is the dominant language of operation.

The name Joseph thus invokes for me layers of global, national and familial histories and the place I occupy within them. It indicates the classed privilege I was inherited within the space of Korea's modern history, and the distance that it implies from the arduous struggles of the Korean people against dictatorship, imperialism and economic inequality. It also narrates the deep embodied nature of my position, cultivated by my memories of childhood interaction at home and sustained through my transnational middle-class upbringing. In this sense, this English name places me in a particular time-space, leaving me to confront, through my own life, the questions of power and inequality that still overshadow Korea's relation with the US and the world.

Anxiety of Being Unpronounceable

Sung-Yul is another name that my parents gave me. In Korean it is 성열 [sʌŋjʌl], and when I introduce myself to other Koreans, this is the name I give them, never Joseph. But even though it is supposed to be a given name with equal status to Joseph, in the context of my full name it is placed second, occupying the awkward position of a middle name, a notion that does not even exist in Korean. This reduces my Korean name into a diacritic for my English name, a distinguishing mark that differentiates me from others who might also be called 'Joseph Park.' My Korean name is thereby absorbed into a format familiar to Americans, something they would be able to recognize and understand. In this sense, the place of my Korean name reflects an anxiety—an insecurity about being accepted into the cultural order of the English-speaking world, a desire to be called upon in English.

This anxiety is also reflected in the way my Korean name is represented through Romanization. It is actually a terrible instance of Romanization, for no one (including Korean speakers) seems to be able to pronounce it (typical first guesses are [sʌŋjul] or [suŋjul]). My excuse for this bad Romanization is that I decided on it before I started to study linguistics. I remember having a discussion with my father about the Romanization of my name right before I was to return to the US for the first time after more than 20 years of living in Korea. My father emphasized the importance of Romanization, saying that it is crucial that Americans know how to pronounce your name. The model he gave was none other than Syngman Rhee, South Korea's first president, who avoided the problem of representing the high back unrounded vowel of his name with an ingenious <y>: 'That way, anyone can pronounce it,' my father said. But we were unable to come up with something as clever as the president's, so reluctantly we settled on Sung-Yul, along with the unsightly hyphen to mark the syllable boundary, (injudiciously) hoping it would be clear enough for Americans.

The problem with the Romanization of my name is that it is actually more of an Anglicization. Instead of following a formal system of Romanization (such as

the revised Romanization system of the Korean government, which would give Seong-yeol; or the McCune-Reishauer system widely used outside of Korea, which would result in Sŏng-yŏl), it represents the vowel with the grapheme <u>, attempting to build upon the way it is often pronounced in English (in words such as *sung* or *lung*). I am not alone in this choice, as it is a common practice found among many other Koreans, such as the figure skater Kim Yuna, whose given name is [yʌna]. The prevalence of this strategy of Romanizing Korean names based on English can also be evidenced in many names, such as those of past presidents Kim Young-sam and Roh Moo-hyun, the first syllables of whose given names are [jʌŋ] and [mu], respectively.

Seo (2000) is right to argue that choice of Romanization is always a political choice, for one must decide whose linguistic assumptions about grapheme-to-phoneme correspondence should be privileged. If so, Koreans' impulse to identify Romanization with Anglicization cannot simply be attributed to the fact that English is the only foreign language taught mandatorily to all students in the national education system and thus the one most familiar to them. I want to suggest that it reflects an underlying identification of the US with the modern and global, a source that one must emulate in order to be recognized as having an authentic and legitimate place in the world. If insecurity is primarily about a perceived distance between one's own place and where one desires to stand, then the constant elevation of the US as the ideal center of the global order places Koreans in an unending state of insecurity (Park, 2012). They must constantly wonder and worry how the speaker of American English will view them, whether their name would be pronounced correctly, whether their name will be remembered, whether they would be recognizable as a person rather than as some nameless, insignificant alien figure.

My father's praise of Syngman Rhee is no coincidence in this regard. The first Korean to receive a PhD from a US institution of higher education (Princeton), Rhee ascended to power through his political connections with the US and his fluency in English, and while he is criticized for his dictatorship and unwillingness to purge elites who collaborated with Japanese imperialism, among his supporters he is still idealized as a 'good bilingual' who managed to translate himself successfully into the English-speaking modern world without compromising his Koreanness (Choi, 2014). Continued reverence for Rhee demonstrates the persistence of the Korean belief that successful representation of oneself in the eyes of the English-speaking West is a sign of legitimacy in the global world. Thus, while Heffernan (2010) rightly points out that the Chinese and Korean practice of adopting an English name is not motivated by the desire to make one's name easier for Westerners to pronounce, that desire that is often invoked to explain such practice is real. Being unpronounceable, uncallable and unrecognizable by the Western, or American, Other is a fear that Koreans continue to struggle with, as the historical-political conditions of Korea still position the US as the cultural center of the world.

Embracing the Surrogate

Park is my surname, family name, or what in Korean is called *seong*. The importance of *seong* in the Confucianism-entrenched Korean culture cannot be emphasized enough. *Seong* is not really a separate 'name' to begin with; and it certainly does not come 'last.' The conspicuous initial character of one's name, it fuses with a person's given name to be an inalienable part of how the person is identified. 'I'll change my *seong*' is an epithet that one utters when swearing for the veracity of some statement; the sheer blasphemy of the action promised in case the statement turns out to be untrue serves as a guarantee of its truthfulness. The fact that women in Korea do not change their surname when married has nothing to do with feminism; it merely testifies to how the essential patriarchic bond that one's *seong* forms with the person is, as an inheritance from one's father, stronger than any new identity that may be offered by a husband (cf. Zhu, 2016). Naturally, the 1939 ordinance of the Japanese colonial government that forced Koreans to change their *seong* to Japanese style *ssi* was one of the most humiliating moments of colonialism for Koreans.

It is surprising, then, that Park is not really my surname after all. While I noted the terrible Romanization my Korean name is subjected to, my *seong*, when rendered in Romanized form, becomes something entirely different. While some people use Bak to capture the original pronunciation of [p̚ak̚], Park is by far the most common form used by people of this *seong*, even though this is obviously an adoption of a preexisting English name that can approximate the sounds of the surname (for instance, there is no [r] sound in my surname at all). In a culture where one's *seong* is considered one of the most inalienable and immutable aspects of the person's identity, one might find it surprising that such adoption of an English name is hardly questioned.

Perhaps this should not be a big deal. In many cultures, people have multiple names over the course of their lives, and it is not unusual at all for someone to be known by different names to different groups (Jacquemet, 1992; Rymes, 1996). Why is it problematic if a Korean surname is represented through a different name in English, especially when there is some traceable phonological similarity between the two names? What strikes me as odd, however, is the obliviousness of Koreans to the potential contradiction underlying this choice. Nearly 4 million people in Korea share this surname, making it the third most populous *seong* (after Kim and Lee), and over 95% of them use Park to represent it, so this is clearly not some odd choice by a quirky minority; yet this use of an English name to replace a Korean surname is rarely problematized. In the discussion forum on the Romanization of Korean surnames organized by the National Institute of Korean Language (2009), the institution in charge of promoting and standardizing the Korean language, participants displayed concerns about the inconsistencies in the way people were Romanizing their names, but nothing was said about the contradiction of Koreans willingly modeling their names upon English ones despite the significant cultural values they associate with surnames.

I, for one, admit that I never gave as much thought to my Englishized surname as I did to my two given names, for it has never bothered me that every non-Korean is calling me by a name that is not my own. Even when I felt nervous about revealing my English name among Koreans or informing non-Koreans about how to say my Korean name, writing down my surname as Park never made me squirm, not in Korea, not in the US, not elsewhere. In fact, there were occasions in which I felt mildly annoyed when some American English speakers called me 'Parks,' a common variant of the English name that I am emulating—as if my name is really [pʰɑrk] and I have the right to be called that way.

I believe that Koreans' obliviousness to the gap between their *seong* and the way it is represented is a powerful illustration of how deeply naturalized is their desire for the English-speaking West. Despite the strong ethnolinguistic and nationalistic value attached to cultural heritage in Korean society, using English names as the model for Korean names virtually escapes critical scrutiny, demonstrating how beliefs in English as the normative order of the world are taken for granted. I do not mean to say that language ideologies ought to be consistent and such contradictions should not be tolerated. But if anxieties and insecurities are important elements of being positioned as a subject, so are the ease and comfort with which one overlooks the contradictions that underlie one's practice. The naturalness by which I embrace the surrogate for my surname, for this reason, forces me to critically reflect on the feeling of tension and confusion that I experience between my two given names.

Conclusion

We do not experience globalization in the abstract. We experience it through our lives, feelings and sense of being, where material and historical consequences of globalization take root to find their concrete articulations. Through some vignettes from my own life, I tried to suggest above how names can serve as a powerful illustration of this. Ideologies that define and dictate the boundaries of language work against the greater mobility and linguistic contact of our lives under globalization, thrusting upon us the weight of historical relations that are built upon those ideologies. To move across different names associated with different languages, to balance multiple names and to find ways to string them together across linguistic spaces, then, is to confront the relations of power and inequality that are reproduced and sustained by those ideologies. In my own case, my name that straddles English and Korean conjures up ideologies that demarcate a boundary between the two languages, and those ideologies in turn call me into a social space where the English/Korean binary stands in for multiple other hierarchical distinctions along the lines of nationality, ethnicity, class, native-speakerness and legitimacy. My name, thus, positions me at a particular historical juncture of Korea's relation with the modern world, revealing one cross-section of its contradictions and inequalities, a space that I embody through my experiences, feelings and desires.

The evolving trajectory of my transnational life brings me more opportunities for reflecting on this. For instance, living in Singapore, where appropriation of English and English names has long constituted a well-established element of its lively multilingualism (Tan, 2001), encourages me and teaches me to accept my own name more. But at the same time, it also reminds me of the historical situatedness of the significance names carry. Obviously, forms of names themselves do not have determinate meanings that fix us into a particular social position. What matters is the social and material relations that lie behind the name to fill its form with meaning, and that reproduce their presence every time that name is called out. For this reason, my name also serves me as a lens for observing the world. The tensions and sensitivities that my name instill in me transform into an impulse to look for the historical nuances and subjective experiences that constrain and color the way we call each other and label ourselves, leading me to wonder, as I encounter new worlds through my border crossings, what collective memories and unshared narratives might be resonating through the sounds of others' names.

Questions for Discussion

1. Reflect on some of the feelings you have regarding your own name. In what way might they be related to the widely held beliefs about languages in your community or culture?
2. If you were to move to and live in a different country or culture, would you adopt a different name? Explain your choice.

Author Profile

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