

Korean-English Bilinguals (KEB) vs. English Monolinguals (EM): Language and International Marriage Partnership

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1. Introduction

This ethnographic study investigates how the asymmetry in linguistic proficiency is perceived and utilized in international marriages between Korean-English bilinguals (KEB hereafter) and their English monolingual (EM hereafter) spouses.

Despite the sizable body of the literature on interracial/international marriage (Beck 1988; Blau et al., 1982; Cottrell, 1990; Cretser, 1990; Hwang and Aguirre, 1997; Imamura, 1990; Johnson and Warren, 1994; Larsson, 1965; Lee and Yamanaka, 1990; Nitta, 1988; Penny and Khoo, 1996; Romano, 1988), the previous studies do not discuss specifically the asymmetry in linguistic proficiency and its implications for the attitudes and perceptions of individuals in international marriages. Furthermore, what most previous research tends to overlook is participants' "perceptions" on their own language competence and culture issues in international marriages. This study analyzes introspective narratives of both KEBs and EMs in international marriages that provide useful insights into their linguistic and cultural conflicts as well as their collaboration in their relationship. Following questions will be addressed in this paper: (1) How do KEB and EM couples in international marriages view their linguistic and cultural differences? (2) What roles do a *perceived asymmetry* in linguistic proficiency¹ and cultural² differences play in their partnership?

In the following section, an overview of previous research on international and interracial marriage will be presented.

2. Previous Studies

Among the studies on marriages (Blau et al., 1982; Cottrell, 1990; Cretser, 1990; Hwang and Aguirre, 1997; Imamura, 1990; Johnson and Warren, 1994; Lee and Yamanaka, 1990; Mansfield & Collard, 1988; Nitta, 1988; Penny and Khoo, 1996), quite a few have taken the power approach to the study of companionship in marriage (see, e.g. Thompson and Walker, 1989; Kamo 1988; Ferree, 1990; Komter, 1989). However, their notion of power is related mainly to gender differentiated division of labor and parenthood-related housework. Moreover, they neglect to deal with language issues, which, as this study will demonstrate, yield an interpretation of the structure and distribution of power in inequality in international marriages.

Several studies provide guidelines on how to conduct qualitative analysis oriented research including the life course approach and interviewing technique (see, e.g. Askham, 1984; Burgoyne and Clark, 1984; Finch & Mason, 1993; Fontana and Frey, 1994; Hatch and Wisniewski, 1995, LaRossa &

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¹ This refers to Cummins' (1984) notion *basic interpersonal communication skills* (BICS) in English. It does not predominantly concern *cognitive/academic language proficiency* (CALP). Thus, speaking and listening skills are more relevant than reading and writing skills.

² *What the participants label* "culture" (e.g. customs, concepts, ideas about doing things) is classified as culture.

LaRossa, 1981; Polkinghorne, 1995; Okita, 2002; Olson, 1977). A semi-structured in-depth interview is suggested as one of the main methods for data collection. For instance, Burgoyne & Clark (1984) stress the importance of “independent accounts of the participants’ and ‘common’ experiences” (p. 51). For the present study, interviews were conducted individually based on the same set of questions, and commonalities and differences in the participants’ answers were analyzed subsequently. In the process of conducting interviews, having the interviewees take the lead was not discouraged. Fontana & Frey (1994) support this approach by stating that “the semi-structured interview involves asking pre-set questions ... there need to be no contradiction between this and having interviewees take the lead (pp.45-46). MacDonald (1986) also emphasizes participants taking initiative and playing an active role as follows: “to give full value to the world view of informants; for women as language users to be the subject, not the object, of enquiry.” In my own study, I encouraged the participants to take initiative in narrating their experiences as a bilingual or monolingual spouse.

Humphrey (1994) gives a detailed analysis of an informal interview of a Buryat women talking freely about her domestic affairs and personal feelings to a Buryat linguist (also a woman). Humphrey argues the importance of “casual chat” as a means of self-disclosure. There is a parallel between Buryat women participants in Humphrey’s research and the Korean women in the present study in terms of talking freely about their domestic affairs and personal feelings to the Korean female researcher who shares the same ethnic and linguistic background with the participants. Even the EM participants in my study talked freely during their interviews. At the end of each interview, as suggested in (LaRossa & LaRossa, 1981), ‘debriefing’ was attempted by asking the participants what they thought of the study and the interview. This was critical for providing a forum for the participants to reflect on both the questions of the interview and their answers.

In discussing perspectives of any sort in ethnographic studies, striking a balance between insider and outsider’s perspectives is essential. Fitzpatrick (1988) stresses “insider” and “outsider” views on relationships. She emphasizes the importance of presenting both insider and outsider views and points out potential challenges regarding this approach. Her position is the following:

Both the insider and outsider perspectives are important, as are different types of data from both perspectives. On one hand, couples are not always aware of how they behave with each other; on the other hand, outsiders may misconstrue the meaning of certain marital messages. The best models of marital interaction include both insider and outsider perspectives on the marriage; when the two perspectives conflict, or the data derived from both perspectives disagree, these models seek underlying theoretical reasons for divergence and convergence. (p.39)

This study is intended to present participants’ insider perspectives on language and culture in international marriages. They were specifically asked questions that tap into self-assessment of their own happiness in the relationship. Questions such as *Are you happily married?*, *Would you choose your spouse if you had a choice to do this all over again?*, or some versions of these questions were raised during the interview and each participant offered his or her assessment of happiness. Furthermore, the participants were asked to elaborate on reasons why they think of their marriage as happy or unhappy. This certainly provides the insider perspective. As for outsider perspectives, what is attempted in this study is to carry out a systematic discourse analysis of interviews collected from each participant and to keep a detailed observation log. Whether or not each participant’s claim is articulated consistently throughout his or her interview is the main approach the researcher takes in illustrating the outsider’s perspectives. Any kind of inconsistency in the participants’ narratives is checked against the researchers observation log, which contains detailed descriptions of the participant’s paralinguistic behavior during the interview. Whenever there is a conflict or inconsistency between the insider’s and outsider’s perspective, this discrepancy will be pointed out.

For more linguistically oriented and participant’s perspective centered research, the study of Burton et al. (1994) is an exemplar. Their study is closely related to the topic of the present study—language and culture. Burton et al. specifically deal with the issue of the bilingual women’s

second language use. Burton critiques Steiner's (1984) argument that these women have a "privileged inferiority" and suffer from sexual, legal, economic exploitation while benefiting from a mythology of special regard. Burton et al. see Steiner's argument as incomplete and state that "it does not take into account women's perceptions of themselves as language users, nor their capacity to construct their own identities (individually or collectively) through their use of the languages available to them (1994:3). Indeed, participants' self-perception as language users is important. However, Burton et al.'s study fails to address bilingual spouses' sense of inadequacy despite two languages available to them. The fact that they have access to two codes, Korean and English, does not guarantee them a sense of empowerment in every facet of their relationship with their English monolingual spouse.

Burton (1994) further responds to Haugen's (1979) argument that "for many people 'bilingual' is a euphemism for 'linguistically handicapped'" by stating that "a negative perception of bilingualism may create a double bind for poor women in minority groups, disadvantaged by gender as well as by race and class" (p. 4). Burton seems to argue that outsider's bias against bilingualism is the only force behind disadvantages bilinguals might have to suffer from. Bilinguals' underestimation of their own language skills with reference to the power dynamics in their relationship with their EM spouses is neglected all together. She further suggests that gender, race, and class are major factors contributing to the disadvantageous position of minority bilingual women. However, the findings of the present study indicate that gender, race, and class do not complete the picture of power dynamics in international marriage. Without consideration of linguistic inequality, theoretical accounts of the power asymmetry in international marriage seem to be incomplete. All KEBs in the present study point out that their non-native English speaker status disempowers them in arguments with their English native speaker spouse. The main determining factor regarding who has more power in their relationship has to do with who has so-called a linguistic and cultural "upper hand" in the relationship, not who is a husband or wife. In other words, gender is not an issue rather the native speaker status matters. Comparative linguistic inadequacy contributes to the sociolinguistic power dynamics of couples in international marriage.

Another point raised by Burton's (1994) is the notion such as "linguistic promiscuity." She reacts to Steiner's (1984) claim that "eros and language mesh at every point" as follows: "Bilingual women may be seen as being sexually as well as linguistically promiscuous" (p.5). This linguistic promiscuity, in particular, was never brought up by the participants themselves in this study. However, they expressed their frustration with others' discriminatory attitudes towards Korean women who are married to westerners because they are married to non-Koreans. Sexual promiscuity was the prevalent image associated with these women according to some of the anecdotes told by the participants during the interviews.

Some of the tendencies in research on international marriage are problematized by Cottrell (1990). She first classifies literature on cross-national marriage into three types: (1) isolation and alienation war bride/colonizer (2) educated westerner & non western wives—cultural adjustment and marginality. (3) educated westerner & western marriages wives' desire for bi-lingual children and career fulfillment. The second category, namely *cultural adjustment and marginality* is closely related to this study. Cottrell further points out some of the limitations such as small non-random samples and its emphasis on foreign wives/experiences. However, I argue that her problematization needs to be problematized. In other words, whether these limitations are necessarily problematic is debatable. For example, if the focus of a given study is on participants' perceptions of language and culture through their own life experiences, are small samples really a problem? If the analysis is based on extensive narrative data, should the findings based on a limited number of not so random participants be dismissed as unreliable and invalid simply because they are not selected at random? A limited number of participants still have compelling stories to tell about their intimate life experiences.

One of the solutions to the problems occurring in intercultural marriage is termed the "asymmetric solution," which is discussed in *Adjustment in Intercultural marriage* (Tseng et al., 1977). In this edited work, Markoff articulates the phenomenon that "one of the marital partners adopts, almost entirely or in large part, the culture of other" (1977:60). This asymmetric solution seems to be a

prevalent mechanism to solve domestic conflicts in couples who participated in this study. The most predictable and never questioned language choice between husband and wife seems to be English—with no exception. The KEB participants expressed frustration with their “perceived” linguistic inadequacy and asymmetry but never suggested that their EM spouse should learn Korean.

Language issues, however, do not complete the whole picture. Another layer of complexity comes from the cultural aspect in international marriage. Char (1977) provides an example of a white male marrying a Japanese woman because he feels a Japanese female can better satisfy his desire to have a wife who is willing to wait on him. In fact, one of the American participants in this study openly admitted his similar expectations of a submissive Asian wife and later on realized that his wife was not so different from American wives.

Yu (1999) states that intermarriage between Asian Americans and Whites has a symbolic meaning such as “ fulfillment of a certain American dream” (p.458). Yu further asserts the following: “intermarriage has appeared as both a sign of success in assimilation and a dangerous process of ‘race-mixing’ and ‘cultural loss.’ Intermarriage was seen to represent both difference and the erasure of difference” (1999:458). The representation of “both difference and the erasure of difference” is such an intriguing notion. The majority of the participants in the present study seem to be more conscious of “difference” rather than “erasure of difference.” However, Rubin and Sander (2001:15) issue a caveat against cultural stereotyping and prejudices as follows:

While cultural/national differences clearly do exist, much of what passes for such differences may well be the result of *expectations and perceptions which, when acted upon, help to bring about a form of self-fulfilling prophecy*. Perhaps the best way to combat such expectations is to go out of one’s way to acquire as much information as one can beforehand about the people in other cultures view the kind of problem under consideration (emphasis added).

They argue that “expectations and perceptions” are related issues to cultural differences. This certainly motivates the researcher to examine the participants’ expectations and perceptions about their linguistic and cultural differences. In the subsequent section, participants’ language and culture related expectations and perceptions will be presented through examples from their interview preceded by details of the study such as participants and data collection procedure.

3. Data

3.1 Participants

The original methodological plan included interviews with both husband and wife so that their voices could be equally represented, at least in terms of the number of participants. However, since participation in this study was voluntary and essentially was dependant upon participants’ availability³ and their willingness⁴ to share their stories, the number of the participants inevitably changed. Originally 7 couples, 14 participants were contacted by an acquaintance of the researcher who has better community access than the present researcher. The participants who expressed their interest in participating in the study were contacted subsequently by the researcher to set up an individual interview. All together 7 participants, 5 females and 2 males participated in this study.

All these participants reside in a city in Central Illinois. The age of the participants’ ranges between 30 and 64 and the length of their marriage varies from 4 to 40 years (see Table 1). This

³ Both emotionally and physically.

⁴ The process of recruiting participants was extremely challenging. Despite the researcher’s assurance of their anonymity, individuals who did not want to participate in the study expressed their feelings of discomfort either with the topic *international marriage* or/and the idea of their interview being recorded.

variability⁵ among the participants can offer insights into whether how old they are, how long they have been married and whether wife is KEB and husband EM or husband is KEB and wife EM influence participants' view on language and culture in their marriage. In terms of sampling, homogeneity could not be maintained mainly due to a small number of eligible⁶ and available participants who are in international marriage. In spite of heterogeneity of the participants, if a consensus or some common patterns emerge in their perceptions on linguistic and cultural differences in their marriage, then that supports that international marriage presents similar types of linguistic and cultural challenges in the relationship.

Table 1. Profile of participants

Participant	Language Bilingual/Monolingual	Sex	Age	Length of Marriage at the time of interview	Reported Socioeconomic status
KEB 1	Korean English Bilingual	F	64	35	Middle class
KEB 2	Korean English Bilingual	F	62	40	Middle class
KEB 3	Korean English Bilingual	F	45	17	Middle class
KEB 4	Korean English Bilingual	F	39	15	Middle class
KEB 5	Korean English Bilingual	M	30	4	Middle class
EM 1	English monolingual	M	62	40	Middle class
EM 2	English monolingual	F	32	4	Middle class

3.2 Design and methods

This study is extensively based on detailed transcriptions of interview data and the interviewer's observation logs. Data collection was conducted through a semi-structured interview for each participant. The duration of an interview session was approximately two hours for each participant. All the interviews were audio-recorded. KEB participants were interviewed in Korean. Their interviews were first transcribed in Korean and then translated into English for detailed analyses. A set of 25 guiding questions (see, Appendix 1) on various issues of language in international marriage was at the researcher's disposal when each interview was conducted. These questions ranged from general background-checking questions⁷ to specific questions regarding linguistic and cultural differences in their marriage.⁸ These questions were only used to guide the discussions so that a fair amount of flexibility was allowed in terms of how the questions were phrased and the sequence of the questions followed and how each interview unfolded according to each participant. When a participant volunteered interesting information, which was not part of the original guiding questions, the researcher took the liberty of having the participant pursue that issue.

Some KEB participants codeswitched from Korean to English. In that case, the original English part is presented in the upper case in the transcript to indicate that it was the participant's original wording and not the researcher's translation. As for the EM participants, English was used for interviews. Each participant was contacted and interviewed on an individual basis. When both husband and wife agreed to be interviewed, their interviews were conducted separately and each participant was asked not to discuss the content of the interview with his or her spouse.

⁵ This might be pointed out as a limitation of this study. However, it was unavoidable due to the nature of the sensitive topic and limited number of available and accessible participants in the research site.

⁶ The following two major criteria are applied for recruiting participants: (1) They are legally married. (2) One spouse is Korean English bilingual whose native language is not English and the other spouse is English monolingual.

⁷ e.g. *How long have you been married?*

⁸ e.g. *Have you had any heated discussions or arguments? If yes, do you think it is due to cultural differences/ communication problems (language difficulty)/ gender differences/ or just simply being married?*

4. Discussion

This section examines the narratives of the subjects along two major themes: (1) Sociolinguistic subordination and an asymmetry in language proficiency in section 4.1 (2) Culture: Positive and Negative in section 4.2.

4.1 Sociolinguistic subordination and an asymmetry in language proficiency

An “asymmetry” in linguistic power is pointed out by the KEBs as the main source of their frustration and linguistic insecurity. In general, language proficiency is reported to become more of an issue when the participants engage in some type of arguments either with their EM spouses or children. Language and communication problems seem to be the main theme in the interviews of both the KEB and EM participants. However, as for the KEB participants, perceived asymmetric proficiency in English results in their disempowerment in the relationship. This is not to claim that an asymmetry in language proficiency always has negative consequences in their relationship. In fact, in certain situations, KEBs’ bilingualism gives them a strategic advantage over their EM spouses. For instance, the fact that an EM spouse does not understand his or her KEB spouse’s Korean prevents their arguments from developing into something more detrimental.

The KEB participants report that they “vent” in Korean and this gives them a considerable sense of privacy and control. The EM participants state that they are not emotionally affected by their Korean spouse’s hurtful comments since they do not understand Korean. Although the EM participants can sense that those comments are directed to them and they are negative comments about them, they do not understand exactly what was said about them. Therefore, they can easily “tune out” and not “let it get to them.”

The rhetoric construction of sociolinguistic subordination of the participants in this study can be understood along three psychological dimensions: (1) unfairness (2) insecurity (3) frustration.

Unfairness

The paradigm instance of unfairness is reported by KEB4 in example (1) below. She conveys a sense of unfairness about the fact that her husband speaks English as a native speaker and therefore he does not experience frustration resulted from imperfect language skills, but she does.

(1) (KEB 4, F, 39 years old)

KEB4: I want to explain better and persuade him. I try and try and I realize I can’t do it, and it is over. English is my husband’s native language so he can say whatever he wants to say. That’s what makes me really angry.
[...]
it is unfair!

Female KEBs are *not* the only ones who experience the consequence of linguistic subordination. The male KEB participant, KEB5, also feels that his EM wife unfairly exploits her native English speaker status in their domestic arguments by correcting his English in the middle of a heated argument (see, example (2)).

(2) (KEB5, M, 30 years old)

I asked her to bring it to my attention when I make mistakes. But here is the thing. It has to do with what kind of situation in which my English is corrected. If the situation is good and friendly, I appreciate it, but if we are in the middle of a heated argument and she corrects my English. Wow, that is so unfair and petty of her.

The fact that both male and female narratives express, by and large, the same effects of their non-native linguistic control indicates that social subordination and issues of power are not entirely a gender issue. In fact, it may have something to do with bilinguals' perceived inadequacy in their second language. In this study, I will use this as a hypothesis for further sociolinguistic investigation. The fact that KEBs could utilize two language codes does not contribute to getting access to more linguistic power. What matters is who has native knowledge of a language code which is perceived to be more powerful between the two codes by the couple. Example (3) indicates that his wife, EM2, is fully aware of her own strategy of using this "language capital" to occupy a more powerful position in their argument. She recognizes that it is an unfair game, but she admits that she does it anyway.

- (3) (EM 2, F, 32 years old)
When he said something stupid in English, I will correct his English in the middle of the fight.
That is definitely unfair.

Insecurity

The KEBs express their linguistic insecurity in the examples (4)-(7). These examples demonstrate again that language proficiency, not gender, is at issue. Both female and male KEBs express their linguistic insecurity hinged on their non-native English status. Especially when their EM spouses make this linguistic inadequacy more salient to their KEB spouses, this aggravates the situation. For the male KEB, when his linguistic inadequacy is made public in front of his friends, he feels that he undoubtedly loses his face, which in traditional Korean contexts should be avoided at all cost. However, for female KEBs, whether this linguistic inadequacy is pointed out in public or in private at home does not seem to make a difference. What matters to them is the fact that their EM husbands point out that their KEB wives' linguistic performance is fossilized. Both male and female KEBs equally seem to suffer from a sense of linguistic inadequacy reinforced by their EM spouses' specific mention of it, directly or indirectly.

- (4) (KEB 1, F, 64 years old)
He never complained about that before but these days there are times when he would say, "How come your English is not improving at all after all these years you have been living in America?" I feel definitely offended. I am not happy about it at all. When you think about, I am not a person who majored in English and never tried seriously to improve my English.
- (5) (KEB5, M, 30 years old)
I can handle it in front of Americans but as you know Koreans notice that. "Oh he is married to an American woman so his English must be good." And if the wife corrects the husbands' English, then it is not just about my wife anymore. It is about what others think.
- (6) (KEB1, F, 64 years old)
When I first got married, I spoke fewer than 10 phrases a day with my mother-in-law. Even those 10 phrases had to be carefully rehearsed and planned. Since I could not carry out conversation, I used to avoid her phone calls. (laughing) It is true! I realized I couldn't do that forever. I don't know how my English has become good enough to carry out conversation. Probably I have picked it up over the years. You have to be exposed to different accents.

- (7) (KEB 2, F, 62 years old)
My husband used to say that I sounded too cold and kind of choppy as if I was cutting something off. He commented on my English sounding too cold as if I was DISSECTING things all the time.

Frustration

KEB4 feels unbearably frustrated with the fact that her ideas and the content of her argument are perfectly good, but she does not win the argument because the way she can express her ideas is limited in comparison to her EM husband.

- (8) (KEB 4, F, 39 years old)
R⁹: So you think you can easily convince him if you could talk to him in Korean?
KEB4: Yes, yes (with great enthusiasm) Nothing frustrates me more and makes me angrier than that.

Another KEB expresses her frustration in example (9). She is convinced that she is the only one who experiences frustration with reference to the language issue.

- (9) (KEB3, F, 45 years old)
I am the only one who's frustrated. [...] He can say whatever he wants to say to me.

Language related frustration, however, is not exclusive to the KEB participants. The EM participants also express their frustration with their spouse's imperfect English. In addition, they claim that the fact that they do not understand their KEB spouse's Korean actually helps them in their relationship. EM2 loses her patience with her KEB husband's English when she is upset. She also expresses her frustration with her husband's making the same type of mistakes after her repeated attempts to correct him overtly. Examples (9)-(10) clearly demonstrate the rhetoric of frustration.

- (10) (EM 2, F, 32 years old)
Sometimes I think when I am angry, his English is less attractive to me and it is even more on my nerves, you know what I mean. When this wonderful person says something so sweet anything, we care about meaning. But when he is...vicious, that is just one more thing that bothers him (laughing). "I corrected you so many times. When are you going to learn it? That is a middle school English mistake." (laughing) something like that.
- (11) (EM 2, F, 32 years old)
Yeah, sometimes he says something and he goes round and round in circles. It just doesn't make any difference I just think "shut up" (rolling her eyes) but other times he really makes a good point. That was perfect then I said "Honey, that was great!" "It was well said and well thought out." Then he said, "Really ? really?" (laughing) Yeah, he was very happy and then he wants me to repeat it and write it down, and then it never comes again.

The language problem is not merely a communication problem. It is also closely related to the issue of how you raise your children linguistically. An EM complains about her Korean husband's lack of engagement in conversation with their daughter and yet at the same time expresses her disapproval of the husband's "wrong" use of English with their daughter when he tries. She does not want her husband to talk to their daughter in English because her husband is not a native speaker of English, and therefore she argues that he cannot provide good language input for their daughter. She is afraid that

⁹ Researcher

her husband will “corrupt” their daughter’s English and she will end up sounding like her husband. In her view, no matter how much training one has in English, a non-native speaker of English cannot be a model for teaching. The following two examples (12) and (13) demonstrate this.

(12) (EM2, F, 32years old)

I could excuse the grammatical errors until we had a child. We have a child now. I want her English to be perfect. I don’t want her to struggle in English... I want his Korean role to be, his Korean should be perfect too in front of Ann but instead he will say things...stupid things like “IKE CWUSEYYO please”¹⁰ What are you doing? (rolling her eyes)

(13) (EM2, F, 32 years old)

He speaks English to her and it is wrong (whispering again).

When situations become too frustrating for KEB participants to bear, they report that they fall back on Korean and release their stress by engaging in a monologue type of long-stretched utterances unintelligible to their spouse.

(14) (KEB 2, F, 62 years old)

When we do not get along and if he hurts my pride, I just start talking in Korean. If I start venting in Korean, he thinks I am cursing. I just mumble something like “he is acting strange and he does not make sense” blah blah blah. And he tells me to stop CURSING. I keep on saying he doesn’t understand Korean and I go on and on. I feel a lot better. I do the same with my kids. When my second son talks back and goes blah blah blah. I switch to Korean. I used to go on and on in Korean. And he becomes speechless.

Another interesting point raised by an EM participant is also specifically related to the language proficiency issue. However, this time it is perceived as something positive. This EM in example (15) uses a language barrier to tune out from her husband’s angry comments. When they engage in a heated argument, the very fact that she does not understand Korean, her husband’s native language, seems to help her not pursue the argument, and as a consequence, the argument does not escalate to something more serious or hurtful.

(15) (EM 2, F, 32 years old)

Once in a while he yelled at me in Korean, so I could see how it feels like but anyway I sometimes tell him I liked it better because “I don’t understand you anyway.” He yells at me in Korean. So that I can tune it out easy.

4.2 Culture: positive and negative

Cottrell (1990) reports that participants in cross-national marriages are free from strong cultural constraints and they desire to maintain a bi-cultural identity and conform to the cultural standards of the country of residence. She asserts that social “attitudes” about racial/cultural differences are more the source of conflict than the difference themselves. Indeed, this particular observation about social attitudes resonates with the findings of this paper. The participants in this study report that the attitudes about cultural differences often trigger a conflict in their households. Both KEBs and EMs recognize that they do not share the same “customs” or “ideas about doing things.” They report that these differences could lead to major conflicts and arguments. However, the EM participants acknowledge

¹⁰ “Give me this!” in Korean

that their own knowledge of American culture and their KEB spouse's inadequate knowledge of American culture enable them to assume the position of a "culture educator" for their spouse.

*Freedom and equality*¹¹

Female KEB participants believe that they have more "freedom" and "equality" in international marriage. They express unlikelihood of enjoying the same level of freedom and equality if they were married to a Korean. The following four examples illustrate this point. KEB2 believes that she has more freedom than regular Korean wives who are married to Koreans. She further states that her husband does not force her to do something that she does not like to do or stop her from doing something she wants to do.

- (16) (KEB 2, F, 62 years old)
The best thing about international marriage is the fact that we can raise our kids more freely. That applies to communication as well. IT IS JUST AS FREE AS I CAN BE [...] Either me expressing my feelings or my husband doing the same thing. Both raising children and expressing your feelings or communicating with one another is very open.
- (17) (KEB 3, F, 45 years old)
Other Korean guys seem to be so selfish and they are trying to control and dominate their wives. They treat their wives as if there were nothing, you know, nobody. There is no equality between husband and wife.
- (18) (KEB 4, F, 39 years old)
But when I see other women who are married to Korean guys, they have to prepare three meals for their husbands everyday. It is almost like they serve them. When you look at it closely, the guys wanted to be pampered despite the fact that they do not live in Korea anymore and are in America. They expect their wives to get a job and work as much as they do and they wanted to be treated like their king or master or something like that.
- (19) (KEB 3, F, 45 years old)
I can go out whenever I want [...] He lets me do things. He sometimes doesn't want me to do things. But in the case of Korean husbands, they not only do not like their wives to go out in the evening but also they would stop them from going out in the evening, period. But my husband would never do that to me. He might not welcome my idea, but he would never stop me from doing something that I desire. He does not invade my privacy.

This rhetoric of "equality and freedom" sharply contrasts with the rhetoric of language related "inequality" and "unfairness." This sense of equality and freedom regarding gender roles is not exclusive to female KEB participants. The male KEB also mentioned equality between husband and wife as one of the strengths of international marriage. He feels that he does not have the typical Korean husband's burden of taking care of his wife all the time because his wife is an independent American woman. In addition, he does not feel pressured to come across as a strong and capable husband all the time to his wife, which would be expected in a Korean household. In fact, he claims that he gets comfort from the fact that he can talk to his American wife about his problems at work and she can provide advice as a marriage partner.

¹¹ This is *not* contradicting to "inequality" in linguistic power, which is discussed in section 4.1. This sense of equality has to do with gender roles as in what is expected of husband and wife in marriage.

- (20) (KEB 5, M, 30 years old)
Yes, the best part, in my opinion, is that my relationship with my wife, what is the word? Truly equal. Really equal. What would be a better expression? Very intimate and yet equal... We don't have to worry about our pride too much.

"New and best of both worlds"

As for the questions regarding strengths of international marriage, the EM participants did not mention equality or freedom. Instead, they mentioned the excitement of experiencing new things together, having the best of both worlds for their children and themselves, and having better control or so-called having the upper hand in their relationship because they speak English as a native language and they know their home ground better than their Korean spouse. The following three examples (21)-(23) illustrate this.

- (21) (EM 1, M, 62 years old)
The best thing, the very best thing about international marriage, the children the offspring have the best of the both worlds and they I think it's a new uh uh new. Their brains are better. Their thinking is better. And they are capable uh uh athletically and they are quicker, the Orientals are predominantly quicker in movement and yet the Orientals study more and the genes have been developed in Orientals mixed with a common ordinary slow American like me...I am serious. I am not real a faster thinker. I am not a chess player. I am not good in politics. I am not good in a lot of things. But I am good in hard work. That's about it. I think this mixture produces better capability.
- (22) (EM 1, M, 62 years old)
Everything's new...New excitement everyday. She can teach me the way she wants to teach me. I can teach her the way I want to teach her.
- (23) (EM1, M, 62 years old)
I don't think I can find a wife like the one I found. I don't think there was any one here. I think I went overseas and got the cream of the crop—the best woman ever in the whole world. Yeah.

Cultural manipulation

The EM participants certainly exploit their status as native speakers of English and competent possessor of American culture knowledge to their advantage. Example (24) demonstrates that EMs in international marriage use their spouse's lack of cultural knowledge or being naïve about American ways of doing things as a legitimate reason for them to educate their Korean spouse as they wish. They argue that they can change their spouse by fully capitalizing on their Korean being the sole authority of their spouse's cultural education and adjustment in life in America.

- (24) (EM 1, M, 62 years old)
I don't have to teach her everything I don't want her to know. I can teach her only what I want her to know. (laughing) so I can actually mold her into a very acceptable wife liking everything that I like.

Disagreement: my way vs. your way

The KEB participants expressed that cultural differences can create potential tensions in their marriage. However, they do not use the word *culture*. Instead, they use the expressions such as

customs, concepts, or ideas about doing things. These types of utterances are classified as “cultural difference” narratives.

A KEB illustrates how she and her American husband differ when it comes to raising children and punishing children for not being academically successful. KEB3 believes that her way of raising children is right and her punishment is not harsh at all. She wishes that her husband would be more supportive of her position. She expresses her disapproval of her American husband’s leniency toward their children. At one point, she points out how ineffective and confusing it could be for her children if the parents have different policies on punishment. KEB3 displays her strong feelings about the legitimacy of her punishment toward their children and her dissatisfaction with her husband’s uncooperative attitude regarding implementing consistent punishment for their children. Examples (25) and (26) illustrate a conflict derived from different cultural practices about child-rearing.

(25) (KEB3, F, 45 years old)

As my kids go to UPPER GRADE and have some TROUBLE with their HOMEWORK and so forth, the main source of conflict between us comes from the fact that we have different CUSTOMS.

(26) (KEB4, F, 39 years old)

You know the way I have lived my life is different from the way my husband has lived his life. When it comes to how to raise children, my husband’s way of thinking is drastically different from my view. Because of that, we ARGUE a lot. ... For example, I tell her to memorize two sets of multiplication table, she does only one set, not both, she can’t watch TV that evening. If she fails to memorize both sets, she can’t play any COMPUTER GAMES. Her access to her computer will be denied—no EMAIL. She is really into the INTERNET surfing. A more severe case of punishment is to GROUND her. That is the last resort. My husband thinks IT IS JUST TOO STRICT.

Americans do...but Koreans do...

Identity is certainly a central dimension to be addressed in international marriage. Erdmans (2001) stresses the need to recognize the multidimensional and dynamic nature of social identities. She says, “The borders of ‘Asian,’ ‘Latino,’ ‘Black,’ and ‘White’ identities are contested and evolving. We cannot simply box up identities” (p. 174). However, none of the participants in the present study point out the complex nature of their identities. During their interviews, all KEB participants overtly express their “Koreanness” and how differently they think and behave from their EM spouse. Also, the EM participants identify their spouse’s certain behavior as an indication of being Korean, and they normally add a comment such as “You Koreans do... but we Americans do...” with a specific example.

In the section above *My way vs. your way*, ethnic boundaries were never made apparent by the participants. They simply mention that their spouse think differently from them. They do not attribute their differences to their different ethnic background. However, the following examples (27)-(30) contain the rhetoric of the explicit dichotomy related to their ethnic background and national origin. In the examples (27)-(28), the EMs express their irritation about their KEB spouses not understanding American sense of humor or pretending and not being honest about their emotions in the presence of others.

(27) (EM 1, M, 62 years old)

American people joke a lot. They say things sometimes that they really don’t mean... Very seriously. Oh yes. Such as, for example, the example is one day uh someone told my wife “all the children look like you.” “They don’t look like your husband.” And I said jokingly all

that mail men or milk men coming around and I don't know. You know how it is in life. .. No, she got to think about it for 2 days. She was mad at me. I didn't know it. Little things like that over the years

- (28) (EM 2, F, 32 years old)
[...] he was upset all the way home, whatever. We could try. We can go to my parents and pretend because Koreans pretend. I can't. I can't it is not one of those things Americans learn from we are young. When we upset we cry. Yeah. I am supposed to fake, but I can't. In fact when I feel so upset and then I see him faking it huh huh huh (mimicking her husband's laughter) with his friends. It makes me want to strangle him. How dare you go out have a good time when I am still fuming.

Particularly in example (28), by stating "Koreans pretend" EM2 further suggests that "pretending" is part of Korean culture. She mentions an incident where there was an unpleasant exchange of verbal attacks between her and her husband and her inability to pretend that everything was fine in front of her parents who were visiting them at that time. Her contempt for her husband's pretending to be happy in front of his friends is extremely strong as indicated in "It makes me want to strangle him."

In example (29), another EM points out that his KEB wife is serious and has different ideas about what is funny and meant to be a joke versus what is meant to be serious.

- (29) (EM1, M, 62 years old)
EM1: Whenever I say something, sometimes she misunderstands.
R: Why do you think that is?
EM1: Customs
R: Not about language?
EM1: Not about language. It's the customs.

In the next example, EM2 does not overtly state that a case in point is about cultural differences but implies that her Korean husband has a specific attitude toward man's position in the household.

- (30) (EM 2, F, 32 years old)
He is not one who takes wife's advice. He is a man. He thinks he knows everything.

As demonstrated in the examples in this section, certain aspects of cultural differences such as what is perceived as the equal status between husband and wife are evaluated as positive by the KEB participants, whereas differences in how to raise children, what is funny, and how to behave as a couple in public are viewed as negative aspects of cultural differences. In addition, The EM participants report that they take advantage of their status as a true "American" who was born and raised in America in the acculturation process of their Korean spouse.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study support that both KEBs and EMs are aware of linguistic and cultural differences. Spouses who are bilingual but not native speakers of a dominant language spoken in a local community make an extra effort to reduce this apparent linguistic asymmetry. Language and communication differences play both positive and negative roles in their relationship. The KEB participants report that an asymmetry in language proficiency puts them in a sociolinguistically subordinated position when it comes to arguments. In contrast, the EM participants are found to use this asymmetry in language proficiency to their advantage to win an argument. At the same time, the KEBs assert that their being bilingual helps them express their anger and frustration freely and yet not

aggravate their conflict with their EM spouses precisely because their monolingual spouses do not understand their mother tongue, the Korean language.

Culture is found to be another critical dimension in international marriages. The participants in this study report that these cultural differences trigger the main conflicts in their marriages. However, cultural differences are also viewed as positive by the EM participants because these differences could be used to their advantage. The EM participants capitalize on the fact that they are native speakers of English and their KEB spouses do not possess completely proficient cultural knowledge of America. Therefore, the EMs feel that they can comfortably assume the role of being the full authority in their bilingual spouse's acculturation process. Sociolinguistic subordination KEBs are subject to is compensated for their sense of freedom and equality in non-linguistic domains in their international marriage partnership. The attitude that "I gain some lose some" seems to maintain their interest in this linguistic and cultural collaboration called "international marriage."

Appendix 1 Guiding interview questions

1. How long have you been in the States/ Urbana-Champaign? (to KEBs) / Have you been outside the States? (to EMs)
2. How long have you been married?
3. Do you have children? What do they think of your marriage?
4. How did you meet your spouse?
5. How long did you and your spouse go out before getting married?
6. Were you dating anyone at the time you met your spouse?
7. Did you speak your spouse's native language when you met him/her for the first time?
8. What made you think this was the right person for you?
9. Did you think your spouse was drastically different from the ones you used to date aside from obvious differences such as physical appearances?
10. Was there any anxiety or concern prior to your wedding? If yes, what was your biggest concern at that time?
11. How did your parents or siblings react to the news that you were about to marry someone outside your country?
12. Were there any problems in convincing your family members about your decision? If so, how did you deal with the situation?
13. What was the first thing, either positive or negative (e.g. strange or annoying), that you noticed about your spouse immediately after the wedding?
14. In retrospect, what were the different things that your spouse noticed about you after the wedding?
15. What do you think is the best thing about international marriage?
16. What do you think is the most challenging or difficult thing in international marriage?
17. Have you had any heated discussions or arguments repeatedly with your spouse? If yes, what is the most frequently raised issue?
18. Why do you think your marriage has this issue? In your opinion, is it due to cultural differences/ communication problems (language difficulty)/ gender differences/ or just simply because you are married and not dating anymore? Or something else?
19. Could you give me an example of your typical argument, if any? Or is there any single incident stuck in your head?
20. Why do you think this incident is particularly important for you to remember after all these years?
21. Do you think you would have the same type of arguments if you were married to a person from your own country?
22. Is there anything about your spouse that bothered you when you were newly-weds but not anymore? Or vice versa? Why do you think you feel differently about that? Is it you that have changed or your spouse?

23. If you could do this all over, would you still choose international marriage? Do you think you would choose your current spouse?
24. What was your first reaction when you were contacted by me about the interview?
25. How do you think the interview went? Is there anything else you want to mention or add?

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