A Study of the Linguistic Culture of Korean Adolescents
: Focusing on the Identity Construction and Power Relationships in Peer Groups

Yang, Sooyeon   Seoul National University (1st Author)

Chung, Hyeseung   Gyeongin National University of Education

Lee, Sunyoung   Gyeongin National University of Education

Ryu, Sanghee   Korea University

Min, Byeonggon   Seoul National University

I. Introduction

The present study approaches the linguistic culture of adolescents from a sociocultural perspective, examining their selection of expressions and the contexts of their use of language. In particular, it aims to elucidate the language use and interactions of adolescents in relation to their identity construction and peer group power relationships.

In studies of the language of Korean adolescents, mainstream researchers in the beginning of the 2000s tended to develop descriptive and analytic studies on the use of vulgarisms and curse words (Lee et al., 2005). Some studies suggested measures to improve adolescents' language practice with prescriptive and practical approaches (Park, 2012). In contrast, researchers have recently been defining adolescents as active social actors, taking a macroscopic approach to "their linguistic culture" in order to understand adolescents and their lives (Kim, 2015).

For decades, various researchers abroad have conducted studies on the language of adolescents (Heath, 1982; Godley & Escher, 2012; Hill 2009; Labov, 1972; Eckert, 1988). A discussion by Bucholtz (1999) is part of an exemplary study that investigated the linguistic culture

of adolescent subgroups. Bucholtz (1999) studied a minority group consisting of intelligent students with weak social skills among female high school students in California, U.S. She illustrated the identity construction process of this minority group through their linguistic interactions in which they defined themselves as "nerds" and positively evaluated their "intelligence." Bucholtz's (1999) discussion provides valuable implications for the present study, as it analyzed the linguistic culture of adolescents from the perspective of identity and the division of the center from the periphery.

The definition of the period of adolescence varies from one study to another according to the laws of each country. The maximum age range for adolescence according to Korea is from 9 to 25, and the minimum is from 12 to 18 years (National Youth Policy Institute, 2014). Adolescence is a period of dramatic psychological and social growth; people often refer to it as a "period of storm and stress." This is a transitional period between childhood and early adulthood. During this period, adolescents start to question and explore their own characters and form their identities (Erickson, 1968). Peers have a tremendous influence on each other in building their identities, as adolescents spend most of their time at school. McCarthey & Moje (2002) considered identity to be socially constructed, and argue that identity always holds the potential for change based on social interactions. In order to reach a concrete understanding of adolescents' linguistic culture, therefore, it is highly meaningful to examine how adolescents interact with each other in peer groups, how they construct and negotiate their identity, and how their language use varies according to their negotiated identities. Adolescence is characterized by strong peer conformity. Adolescents tend to follow the behaviors and perceptions that are accepted and allowed by their peer group (Berndt, 1979). The reference group for peer conformity is usually the focal group in class. For this reason, it is important to examine how different aspects of adolescents' language use change according to the power relationships in their peer groups. This study attempts to

answer the following research questions.

First, how do adolescents position and construct their identities through linguistic interactions?

Second, how do adolescents' linguistic interactions occur in relation to the power relationships in their peer groups?

The present study selects a few adolescent subgroups and studies them further based on the above research questions, collecting the natural language spoken in those subgroups. As a qualitative study, this study essentially approaches the context of adolescents' lives from an insider's perspective in order to gain a closer look at the linguistic culture and life of adolescents. From this viewpoint, this study analyzes their linguistic interactions in relation to their identity construction and power relationships among peers, considering adolescents as active and agentive speakers.

II. Theoretical background

1. Concept of the linguistic culture of adolescents

Min et al. (2015; 2016) and Chung et al. (2017) provide well-organized discussions on the concept of adolescents' linguistic culture. This study further builds on this topic through a literature review of these existing studies; we then briefly outline the focus of this study.

Min et al. (2016) define linguistic culture as incorporating both language in life and language consciousness. They further elaborate that it is "a language activity with which the members of a speech community acknowledge and communicate with each other, and transform the culture" (pp. 14-15). In other words, linguistic culture is internal linguistic knowledge, attitudes, values, and norms. This is to say, a linguistic culture consists of "expressed linguistic culture," which is explicitly expressed and verifiable, and "inherent linguistic culture" that exists in the core of expressions such as linguistic knowl-

edge, attitudes, values, and norms. Expressed linguistic culture refers to individuals' linguistic expressions materialized in observable forms in daily language practices such as in expressions using language, linguistic activity, language etiquette, and linguistic norms. Inherent language refers to "the way of thinking (consciousness) that generates and underlies the daily language practice such as language expressions taking visible forms, language activity, and language etiquette and norms" (pp. 14-15). In other words, it refers to the "perception and attitude toward language and daily language practice" (pp. 14-15). Table 1 below shows a summary of the concept.

Table 1. Concept of language use

Expressed linguistic culture	The use of language taking observable form in daily language practices such as in linguistic expressions, language activity, and language etiquette and norms.
Inherent linguistic culture	A way of thinking (consciousness) that generates and underlies the daily language practice which is materialized in observable forms such as expressions, language activity, and language etiquette and norms. Inherent linguistic culture refers to the perception of and attitude toward language and daily language practice.

Based on the existing discussion, Chung et al. (2017) suggest that the linguistic culture of adolescents is "the totality of daily language practice and consciousness which adolescents construct in an active and dynamic manner as autonomous users of language" (pp.16-17). The present study thoroughly supports this concept of the linguistic culture of adolescents. It aims to capture the point when adolescents' identity is actively and dynamically constructed through their peer interactions, and conducts an in-depth analysis of their language use based on the power relationships in their peer groups. To this end, it closely examines the expressed linguistic culture that exists in observable forms, and investigates the psychological, social, and cultural mechanisms at the base of such linguistic expressions. The study aims to ultimately analyze inherent language use. As also mentioned in a study by Min et al. (2017), our study does not limit the range of ado-

lescents' linguistic culture to the superficially observed characteristics of their linguistic culture. Instead, in this paper, we comprehensively incorporate not only the behavioral aspect of language but also the inherent way of thinking that underlies such behaviors.

2. Characteristics of the linguistic culture of adolescents

1) Adolescence as the period of identity formation

The present study approaches the concept of identity from a sociocultural viewpoint based on Mead's (1934) symbolic interactionism. This is because this study supports the idea that people socially construct their identity through many relationships with diverse members of a society. Mead conducted an enormously sophisticated analysis of the process in which individuals develop their social ego and form a society and community (Mead, 1934/2010). The gist of Mead's (1934) symbolic interactionism is that the processes of human interaction and communication are prerequisites for the human mind and ego. In other words, individuals using language acquire a certain identity, consciousness, and senses through living in a specific society. This theory by Mead (1934) had a great impact on a number of theories that developed into the concept of socially constructed identity.

McCarthey and Moje (2002) also suggest that identity is constructed in social contexts. Individuals form their identities through social interactions and these identities hold the potential for continuous change and conflict. McCarthey and Moje believe that identity is neither stagnant nor permanent but evolves through the dynamic results of social interactions. We actively support Mead's (1934) and McCarthey and Moje's (2002) perspectives. We thus conducted this study based on the belief that adolescents' identity is not permanent or unchangeable but that adolescents shape it through interactions with others, including peers, and that the development of their identity, in return, influences their interactions amongst themselves. The ultimate aim of this paper is to demonstrate that the communication

and identity of adolescents are mutually correlated in a cycle of inter-active influence. Therefore, we assume that people form their identi-ties through communication with others, and a constructed identity can, in turn, influence communication with others.

Min et al. (2017) believe that identity formed during adolescence has a lifelong impact. They maintain that identity formation comes from developing a certain image of oneself through diverse social interactions. They emphasize that individuals' language and behavior are the media of interaction, and the former is the key means of com-munication with which individuals represent themselves to others and make others understand them. Following these ideas, we closely examine the contexts of classroom discourses, and perform an in-depth analysis in terms of identity formation, which is one of the most important development characteristics of adolescents. Specifically, we assess the language and the ways in which adolescents represent themselves in interactions with peers in order to elucidate how they form and construct their identity.

2) Power relationships in peer groups

A peer group is a type of group that has, at times, a greater influ-ence on adolescents at school than do teachers (Levine & Havighurst, 1989). Adolescence is when affection for the family is converted into attention for and interest in peers. Adolescents during this period spend a great amount of time with peers, forming social relationships. According to Min et al. (2015), the time adolescents spend talking to their parents remarkably drops around elementary school in sixth grade, and time spent speaking with peers rapidly increases around the same time, peaking during the second year of middle school. As shown in this survey, adolescents going through this process achieve great cognitive and emotional development through intensive conver-sations and profound exchanges with peers.

Existing studies have examined the functions of peer groups, coming to the following conclusions. First, peer groups provide social

support and a sense of stability, and adolescents can gain psychological support from peers. Second, a peer group functions as a reference group. Adolescents use their peer group, and their peers' behaviors, to set references against which to compare their own experiences, opinions, and judgments. Peer relationships help adolescents grow socially, and they can build profound interpersonal relationships based on these skills. In this way, peer groups play an important role in shaping the identity of adolescents (Atwater, 1996; Lloyd, 1985; Brown, Eicher, & Petrie, 1986).

At the same time, peer groups can be divided into many different levels within classrooms. During adolescence, adolescents start expanding social relationships outside their familial relationships with their parents and siblings at home. Adolescents in this stage belong to specific groups and experience conflict in classrooms with peers throughout their school lives.

Diverse subgroups and subcultures develop within an individual peer group. Researchers can classify subcategories of peer groups according to the characteristics of subgroups or the type of the peer group in question. A study by Clark (1962) provides a good example of subgroup classification according to the former standard, classifying subgroups into an academic subgroup, a fun subgroup, and a delinquent subgroup. A study by Lee (1992) shows a good example of the latter classification approach, including chums, cliques, crowds, and gangs.

In this study, we classify subgroups into focal and non-focal groups according to the power relationships between peers in classrooms, and examine the diverse linguistic interactions among adolescents observed in this setting. The power group in the classroom consists of students with traits that the peer group has accepted (for example, high-achieving students or best athletes in the class). The adolescents who are recognized in the peer group form the focal group of the class (Choi, 2013). The non-focal group comprises students who do not have any traits that are particularly valued by the

peer group and whom the class has marginalized. Adolescents positioned on the periphery tend to conform to those with power in class. We define peer conformity as the behavioral tendency of adopting and following the behaviors of a peer group (Berndt, 1979). The body of existing studies that we review in this section suggests that peer conformity and the power relationships between peers not only impact adolescents' school lives but also are closely associated with their language use.

In brief, adolescents are positioned in a limited space, the "classroom," where the complex power relationships between peers greatly impact them. In this context, we will discuss how adolescents use language and construct relationships with each other during this special period of adolescence by analyzing various discourse situations produced in classrooms based on the literature review.

III. Methods

1. Study subjects

The National Institute of Korean Language conducted a "survey of adolescents' language use and practice" (Min et al., 2016). This survey classified the subcategories of the linguistic culture of Korean adolescents across the country (from the fourth year in elementary school to the third year in high school). It investigated the differences in adolescents according to gender, school grade, region, and situations in and outside of school, and examined their linguistic culture as a whole. Based on these data, we concluded that the period from sixth grade in elementary school to the second year of middle school is the linguacultural turning point for adolescents. As previously mentioned, according to Min et al. (2015), the time adolescents spend speaking with their parents noticeably decreases starting in sixth grade in elementary school and continuing from there. The time

spent speaking to peers increases greatly during the same year, and time spent on that activity peaks in the second year of middle school. Therefore, our study selected sixth graders in elementary school and second year middle school students among adolescents as a focus group and investigated their linguistic culture in depth. All elementary schools across Korea are coeducational institutions, but middle schools are classified into boys' schools, girls' schools, and coeducation middle schools. Considering this, two elementary 6th grade classes and three middle school 2nd grade classes (boys', girls', and coeducation schools) were selected as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Study subjects

Category	Selecting study subjects				
School	Elementary school		Middle school		
Grade	6th grade		2nd year		
Classroom	Class 2 (A elementary school B elementary school)		Class 3 (A Middle school B Middle school C Middle school)		
Gender	Coeducation classroom	Coeducation classroom	Coeducation classroom	Girls' classroom	Boys' classroom

2. Data Collection and Analysis

This is a mixed-method study combining a variety of research methods, including quantitative methods like Social Network Analysis (SNA), and other, qualitative approaches, such as case studies, discourse analysis, and in-depth interviews.

First, for selected research purposes, this study was designed in our study meetings from March to May 2017. Classroom data were collected during the study period (from August 7 to November 30, 2017). These data include video recordings of classroom interactions, audio recordings of peer interactions, interview recordings, and students' assignments as well as the author' observation notes, which

record theoretical and practical issues requiring special attention in each class in relation to the study problem. The entire discourse corpus for this study was transcribed. All transcribed discourses were cross-sectionally and categorically indexed. The data were systematically analyzed with a variety of investigative procedures, which provided a diverse set of grounds for the authors' interpretation.

The SNA was applied together with observational methods in order to select study participants. SNA demonstrates the networked relationships between members of a certain group to allow observers to understand the peer relationships in classrooms. Considering the research problem of the present study, SNA can be useful for investigating the language use of adolescents according to peer group power relationships. "Social network" means a network connecting individuals based on personal relationships (Son, 2002), and represents the linkage between members of a specific group or community. In this study, we investigated the network of elementary-school 6th graders and middle-school 2nd-year students (8th graders) to identify focal students. Based on power relationships, we analyzed study participants' real-life language use.

In this study, the SNA was conducted based on the study items of a preliminary survey. Surveys are one of the most frequently employed methods to collect relationship data in SNA (Lee, 2012). For this study, we applied the survey items developed in the Survey of Adolescents' Language Use and Practice (Min et al., 2016) commissioned by the National Institute of Korean Language to explore peer relationships. Question 44 was newly added at the end of the existing survey questionnaire as shown below in order to explore peer relationships more concretely. Items (1) to (5) of Question 44 are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Question 44 in the survey questionnaire

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44. Please write the number of students among your classmates who correspond to the following.

- List a maximum of 3 classmates in order.
- You can list the same classmate multiple times for the items (1) to (5).
- List only classmates in your class. Do not name students in other classes or schools.

(1) Your closest classmate(s) with whom you frequently meet and play together
(2) Classmate(s) whom you want to speak to when you have problems
(3) Classmate(s) who is/are nice and fun to talk to
(4) Classmate(s) who actively participate(s) in discussions or debates during classes
(5) Classmate(s) who actively participate(s) in presentations or ask questions during classes

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Discourses were later analyzed based on the ample qualitative data produced by study participants. Of these, target discourses for in-depth analysis were selected in relation to the themes for each case (classroom). Selected discourses were located in the comprehensive data collected from each classroom for in-depth analysis. This study employed a micro-ethnographic discourse analysis as the key discourse analysis method; this technique was developed based on the ethnography of communication and interactional sociolinguistics. The "micro-ethnographic discourse analysis" applied in this study is considered an approach based on sociolinguistic ethnography (Green & Wallat, 1981) or a microethnographic perspective (Bloome et al., 2005). This study emphasizes "interaction" as the core of this discourse analysis methodology. A method of inquiry was then established to analyze the entire data set. The framework of discourse analysis was used as the key foundation to analyze interactions between communication participants, involving analysis in terms of the interactions of Propose, Recognize, Acknowledge, and Consequence, drawn from Bloome and Egan-Robertson (1993). In the analysis by interaction, various symbols such as ♠ and ▲ were used to distinguish topics every time a new topic was suggested.

In case the proposed topic was recognized by a interlocutor(s), the same symbol marked how the topic continued into the later dis-

cussion. For example, if adolescent A proposed the topic "life," ♠ was placed in the column "Propose" of the interaction analysis framework. The same symbol was placed in the column "Recognize" of the framework when the recognition of the proposed topic life was expressed. When it was acknowledged that the flow of discussion was appropriate, ♠ was placed in the column "Acknowledge" of the framework.

Table 4. Interaction analysis framework used for in-depth discourse analysis

	Speaker	Message unit	Interaction			
			Propose	Recognize	Acknowledge	Consequence
1						
2						

The interaction analysis was used to explore who suggested a new topic, whose proposals were recognized and/or acknowledged, and the social consequences of their interactions. The methods of data collection and analysis are summarized in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Study subjects, data collection, and analysis methods

School	Study participants	Types of collected data	Data analysis methods
A elementary school	Select students who actively participate in class discussions and show each positive/ negative use of language	- Basic questionnaire surveys of participating students - Onsite class notes of class observations in classrooms - Video recordings of formal discourses - Video or audio recordings of personal discourses - Interviews with teachers - In-depth interviews with students - Class materials and data from students' activities related to the linguistic culture of adolescents	Social Network Analysis Case Study Observation Discourse Analysis In-Depth Interview
B elementary school			
A middle school (Boys' school)			
B middle school (Girls' school)			
C middle school (Coeducational school)			

- Observation and interview data collection for more than 80 hours in about 4 months.
- 40 hours in the elementary school and 40 hours in the middle school.

IV. Study Results

1. Identity Construction Through Linguistic Interaction

1) Identity construction through relative evaluation and grading

Korean adolescents frequently used a comparative language for their identity construction and negotiation and identified themselves through comparisons with their peers. This is a result of the Korean learning environment, which is highly sensitive to grading and scores and induces students to constantly evaluate school performance through intense competition for university admission. Table 6 below demonstrates the use of language reflecting this climate.

Table 6. Hierarchical evaluation of universities (B elementary school, September 7, 2017)

	Speaker	Message unit	Interaction			
			Propose	Recognize	Acknowledge	Consequence
1	Hanmin	Bullshit, you will end up in a rural university.	you : rural university (♣)			Suggesting a rural university to his peer
2	Jungi	What?		♣		He recognizes Hanmin's remark as something but has not clearly understood what it is and asks again.
3	Hanmin	A university located in countryside, university.	♣			He provides an additional explanation.
4		You in a rural university.		♣	♣	Ascribing an identity based on the proposition.

As Table 6 above suggests, students grade universities beginning from elementary school and evaluate others' learning capacity

and define their identities accordingly. Hanmin is one of the students with high centrality. In the above conversation, Hanmin gave Jungi an identity by stating "bullshit, you should end up in a rural university." In Korea, the university that can be admitted only when the score is relatively high is the one in the capital city of Seoul. Hanmin's expression "rural university" judges universities according to a region-based hierarchy and gives Jungi the new identity of being "a dumb student who can't be admitted to anywhere but a poor rural university." Jungi recognized that Hanmin attempted to link him to something, but asked "what?" in reply, as he did not understand exactly the subject of the connection. Hanmin then gave an easier explanation of "rural university" by rephrasing it as "university in a rural area" and defined a new identity for Jungi by stating "you in a rural university." This informal discourse clearly demonstrates that Korean adolescents put universities and peers' learning ability in a hierarchy beyond classroom levels and define their own and others' identity based on this conception.

A similar pattern of evaluating others' learning abilities and defining the identity of others based on such ideas is equally observed in the girls' middle school, as shown in the below conversation.

Teacher: Is it xx? She looks different in pictures. xx from Class 1? Well, xx is good at swearing!

Sujin: Yes, her swearing is of another level. But she is the one who speaks most decently. A bit, well! She is the smartest one in our class.

Jinju: Oh, the one who got the full score (100 points) in English? Why do I remember her by her score?

[B middle school, October 18, 2017]

In the above conversation, Sujin identified a specific student as "the smartest student" in the class. Jinju inquired to verify if it was the same person, asking "The one who got the full score (100 points) in English?" The two students talked about the student in question by

her school performance. Jinju recognized that she remembered her classmate by her school performance, as demonstrated by her statement, "Why do I remember her by her score?" at the end of the conversation. However, she is not aware of the reason and is probably unable to figure it out, as the conversation ends here. This is likely because individuals in Korea grow used to the competitive environment, which leads people to evaluate and recognize others by their school performance from childhood.

On the other hand, the pattern of language use that identifies individuals through relative evaluation and grading goes beyond school performance to the evaluation of appearances. As shown in Table 7 below, adolescents consolidate "my" position by undervaluing others or using evaluative remarks about them. The conversations below show a pattern of more direct evaluation of others than in the previous conversation of Table 6.

Table 7. Pricing each other's faces (B elementary school, September 14, 2017)

	Speaker	Message unit	Interaction			
			Propose	Recognize	Acknowledge	Consequence
1	Dong-hun	If that thing with the face costs 20,000 won, his face is only 20,000 won . Mine is worth 30,000won.	Linking face to pricing (◇)			Linking the price of an album with pricing a person's face
2	Jong-hyeon	Wow. Mine is worth 30,100 won then.		◇	◇	Assigning a price to his own face
3	Hyeon-jin	And the clothes, and with xx…				
4	Dong-hun	Nope. Yours is just 10 won.		◇	◇	Pricing other's face
5	Jong-hyeon	Oh really? That's a reasonable price.		◇	◇	Agreeing

| 6 | Dong-hun | xx's face is 5 won. It's alright, because Gihun's face is only 1 won. It's still all right, Jinhyeok's face comes at no price. | ◇ | ◇ | Pricing everyone's face, and identifying a peer with an extreme tag, "free of charge" |

The adolescents priced their own and their peers' faces. On the first line, Donghun brings attention to his identity by stating, "His face is only 20,000 won. Mine is worth 30,000 won." Jonghyeon then says, "mine is worth 30,100 won then" to secure his position 100 won higher than Donghun's suggested face price. On the fourth line, Donghun says, "Nope. Yours is just 10 won." to rebut Jonghyeon's claim that his face price is higher. Jonghyeon gives a humorous response, saying, "Oh really? That's a reasonable price." Donghun then suggests the prices of others' faces. He ranks himself and his peers on a hierarchy based on their face value and constructs their identities through face evaluation, as demonstrated by his remark, "Jinhyeok's face comes at no price."

This kind of conversation can be partly characterized as humorous word play. However, its psychological basis is for speakers to represent their own beings and evaluate others through direct numerical values visible to our eyes, and to rank or grade themselves and others. Based on this, adolescents avow their own identity and ascribe that of others. Through this process, they either agreed or disagreed with the ascribed identity, and their identity is constructed through negotiation process (Im, 2014, pp. 215-216).

2) Masculine identity construction through the sense of superiority and bluff

Compared to elementary school students, who expressed their identity through humor based on comparison with others, male mid-

dle school students secured their position by directly expressing their sense of superiority and bluff about their ability to construct their masculine identity.

Table 8. Evaluation of one's own soccer skills (C middle school, September 27, 2017)

	Speaker	Message unit	Interaction			
			Propose	Recognize	Acknowledge	Consequence
1	Jun-seong	Hey, Minseok				
2		Sliding! Well it was crazy.	Sliding (◆)			
3	Min-seok	Hey, by the way, you know, Sangyun.	Sangyun (□)			
4		Fuck, man, I almost swore when I was doing this.	Sangyun swearing			
5		Yeah, man, he was good.	Sangyun –being good at something			
6		Fuck, man, but then today				
7		We made tons of fucking mistakes.	Junseong mistake (■)			
8	Jun-seong	Ya, that was a lousy shot.		■	■	Acknowledging Minseok's criticism and negatively evaluating his own shot
9		I'm not gonna make any shots.		■	■	
10		Damn, man.		■	■	

11		My dribble was good but then I failed to make a good shot.	Himself : dribble (△)	■	■	Suggesting his good dribble and expressing sadness about his failed shooting.
12	Min-seok	I fucking wet my pants (a Korean slang expression expressing extreme emotions)		■	■	Agreeing with Junseong
13		I shot it for the inside but it's gone outside xxx.				Explaining the concrete situation for his feeling of sadness
14		Oh, damn.				Expressing sadness
15		The post is right here and I can't ever make it in.				Expressing sadness
16		I did xxx and fucking never hit the post.				Expressing sadness
17		Cause I did xxx.				Expressing sadness
18		And he doesn't make it to xx.				Expressing sadness
19	Jun-seong	Man, to be honest, my dribble was crazy.	△			Positively evaluating what he did well (the dribble)
20	Min-seok	Yeah, your dribble was good, man.		△	△	Acknowledging the evaluation

The above conversation concerns a soccer match with classmates. Junseong in the conversation is one of the focal students of his class. In the first half of the conversation, Junseong acknowledged the re-

marks of Minseok that he made many mistakes that day and negatively evaluated his own performance of missed shots using slang. At the end of the conversation, however, Junseong evaluated his skills positively, saying that his dribble was good. At this point, Junseong thought that his shots were not significant but judged that his dribble was remarkable. He actively highlighted his value by giving a positive evaluation of himself and expressed a sense of superiority. This is a pattern of language use commonly observed in male adolescents with a high focality in classrooms. This is to say, although male adolescents acknowledge others' negative evaluations of them, they actively restore their honor through other means such as a sense of superiority or bluff. Through this negotiation, they explicitly present their identity as skillful male soccer players.

3) Feminine identity construction through the use of polite language

In our study, female adolescents frequently use the language of politeness to be humble even though they are proud of something. They use a language that implicitly represents their identity, unlike the way male adolescents do so through a sense of superiority or bluff.

Table 9. Desire to lose weight (B middle school, September 20, 2017)

	Speaker	Message unit	Interaction			
			Propose	Recognize	Acknowledge	Consequence
1	Minji	I think I'll look better if I slim down my chubby face.	Chubby face (▲)			
2	Juhui	You will look slim if you can make your face slim.		▲	▲	Acknowledging Minji's opinion of her chubby face
3	Minji	You've got a small face for your height.	Face size to height (☀)			Minji's compliment about Hyeyeong's small face

4	Hye-yeong	What is it even good for, I'm so fat.		☀	☀	Hyeyeong evaluates herself as fat despite her small face
5	Minji	Ah, I want to lose weight	Wish to lose weight(♠)			
6	Hye-yeong	Me too, I want this and this part gone.		♠	♠	
7	Minji	Oh, I'm so sad about it. I feel I'm so fat because I am like this.	Minji's sad experience related to her weight (▶)			
8	Juhui	By the way, does the chin fat start from here? [chatter]	Chubby chin (⚘)			
9	Hye-yeong	Every time I say I'm fat, girls tell me I am tall. I don't understand why they keep telling me this because being fat is being fat, no matter how tall I am.		☀	☀	Linking height with fat in relation to the proposition that her face is quite small considering her height

This conversation is from a moment when female middle school students were speaking about their desire to lose weight. In Row 3, Minji compliments Hyeyeong, "You've got a small face for your height." What is interesting is that Hyeyeong does not acknowledge the compliment of her small face. She evaluates herself as a fat girl by saying, "What is it even good for, I'm so fat." She rather responds with self-depreciation to the compliment of her small face. She implicitly acknowledges her small face but employs the expression of polite-

ness to point out that she is fat to offset the compliment. Hyeyeong employs the language of politeness at the end of the conversation as well. Hyeyeong talks about her peers' evaluation of her weight. She implicitly shares the compliments of her height by the peers around her, but on the other hand expresses herself politely by emphasizing that she is fat despite such positive comments.

As previously examined regarding Table 8, this speaking pattern of female adolescents is quite unlike that of their male counterparts, in which Junseong acknowledged the criticism of his mistake by his peer but saved face and demonstrated his sense of superiority by positively evaluating himself. Female adolescents likely spoke as they did in consideration of their relationships with their peers, keeping in mind that their peers might become jealous of or hate them if they directly acknowledge their superiority. They probably showed such a pattern in recognition of this point. Their manner of speaking probably originated from the psychological mechanism of speaking the language of politeness humbly rather than emphasizing or elevating their presence.

2. Aspects of linguistic interaction according to the power relationships in peer groups

There are various in-groups in the classroom that can be divided into the core and periphery. Within this relationship, adolescents use language in various ways to obtain, maintain, and expand power.

1) Leading actions that are communally accepted

Adolescents at the center of the classroom are sensitive to actions that have been communally accepted, such as entertainment culture or the use of buzzwords within the classroom, and actually direct the group. Adolescents on the periphery show peer conformity toward the ones at the core, and tend to imitate their language use and actions.

Jaejoon, who has high centrality in A Elementary School, is the most popular student in the classroom. In fact, when the homeroom teacher told the male students in the classroom to write down the student with whom they wanted to share a room with on the school trip, Jaejoon got the most votes (referred to in the observation log of September 28, 2017, at A Elementary School). He is a good student and uses considerate language, and, according to the homeroom teacher, makes his peers comfortable and tends to listen attentively to his friends. Jaejoon actively leads competitive dialogue based on word play, as shown in the dialogue below.

(When returning to their seats together after submitting a survey conducted in class)
Jaejoon: I built this classroom.
Hyeonsoo: I made this earth.

[A Elementary School, September 28, 2017]

The dialogue above illustrates a pattern found typically among the elementary school male students we observed, showing a competitive dialogue based on word play. This is a communally accepted game in the classroom, and the student who first proposes and leads this kind of dialogue is a student like Jaejoon at the center. The adolescents on the periphery capture the pattern of the linguistic interaction of the ones at the center, and tend to go along with it, as shown in Table 10 below.

Table 10. Competitive dialogue based on word play (A Elementary School, August 28, 2017)

Speaker	Message unit	Interaction			
		Propose	Recognize	Acknowledge	Consequence
	[Seong-min suddenly cuts in from the next group]				

	Speaker	Utterance				Notes
1	Seong-min	I'll let you go to the wedding (of Song Joongki and Song Hyekyo)	Competitive dialogue(▷)			Seongmin: Attempt at competitive dialogue based on word play
2	Jaejoon	(Doesn't seem much interested. Eating pizza) Song Joongki?		▷		
3	Seong-min	My cousin	▷			
4	Jaejoon	How about Kim Kwanghyun?		▷	▷	
5	Seong-min	My older brother		■		
6	Jaejoon	If so, Yang Joonhyuk is my dad.		▷	▷	Participates in Seongmin's game
7		And Oh Seunghwan is my great-great-grandfather.		▷	▷	
8	Jinsoo	Then Choi Dongwon is my great-great-grandfather.		▷	▷	

Seongmin, who appeared in the dialogue above, is a student on the periphery in the classroom. The result of social network analysis also showed that, in a survey asking students which friends they want to talk to when they have concerns, the adolescents excluded Seongmin. This puts him on the periphery. Seongmin often calls or looks for Jaejoon and wants to become closer friends. In an in-depth interview with researchers (A Elementary School, November 22, 2017), Seongmin said that the reason he wants to be good friends with Jaejoon is because he is comfortable talking to Jaejoon

and also because he is a reliable friend. In this context, during a group activity, Seongmin suddenly pops into an adjacent group that includes Jaejoon and says, "I'll let you go to the wedding of Song Joongki and Song Hyekyo."(Song Joongki and Song Hyekyo are South Korean celebrities.) Seongmin has observed the dialogue pattern often used by Jaejoon and now leads the communally accepted language game.

2) Drawing boundaries by distinction

Adolescents in elementary schools organized and fluidly build their relationships with a focus on playmates, whereas in middle schools, the distinctions between in-groups and out-groups become clearer even within peer groups (Byeon, 2011); members increase solidarity or reveal themselves based on these distinctions.

Table 11. Distinguishing in-group and out-group (B Middle School, September 27, 2017)

	Speaker	Message unit	Interaction			
			Propose	Recognize	Acknowledge	Consequence
1	Sujin	I went to xxx yesterday and ate with the others as well. A keeps acting weird, turning on Facebook streams and stuff, like xxx.	A's behavior (◇)			Introducing A's behavior
2	Ara	Yeah, she's weird.		◇	◇	Agreeing with Sujin
3	Sujin	I mean, who cares about that stream anyway?		◇	◇	
4	Ara	Attention seeker, attention seeker		◇	◇	

5		Attention seeker... She's more than that. After her dancing rehearsal – you know her dad – he owns a tire shop or something. I know his shop from when I was good friends with her a long time ago.		◇	◇	
6		She's going to an audition?	A's dream is to be a celebrity (♣)			Introducing A's dream
7	Sujin	Well… I don't know		♣		
8	Ara	She writes things like "All set for the audition" or something on Instagram.		♣	♣	
9	Sujin	Oh, right. I guess she wants to be a celebrity.		♣	♣	
10	Ara	That's crazy. She needs to get plastic surgery.		♣	♣	
11	Sujin	If she ever becomes a celebrity, I'm going to slander her. I wonder if she'll ever have fans.		♣	♣	
12	Ara	She needs plastic surgery.		♣	♣	
13	Sujin	She does. She thinks she's pretty, so she wore matching off-the-shoulder tops with xxx.		♣	♣	
14	Ara	I think xxx's figure is all right.	xxx's figure(◎)			

15	Sujin	Yeah, but xxx is a little… no, not good. Her belly sticks out a little.		◎		
16	Ara	Ugh… I have a headache	Ara's headache (▲)			
17	Sujin	Oh no…		▲	▲	Sujin is concerned about Ara's headache

In the dialogue above, Sujin and Ara are talking about their friend A. As shown in 1, Sujin went out to eat with many classmates, including A, yesterday. But even though they are all in the same class, Sujin tends to keep a distance from A and does not acknowledge her as a member of the same in-group. Sujin describes A's behavior to Ara and says she's "more than an attention seeker." In Korean, this is 'gwanjong,' meaning someone who behaves in a way that is likely to get attention. Sujin consistently refers to A as "she" and keeps her distance. Listening to Sujin, Ara echoes her words in rough language about A such as "yeah, she's weird" or "that's crazy." However, Sujin's attitude toward Ara is quite different compared to A's. When Ara says she has a headache, Sujin seems truly concerned, saying, "Oh, no…," as shown in 17. Adolescents form and maintain a community through language that brings solidarity to the in-group, such as caring for another member or being considerate, while also brusquely using slang and expressing anger toward members of another group to which they do not belong or that seems different. They thus distinguish the in-group from the out-group, and use language criminately. Although the above conversations were based on different topics, appearances and headaches, adolescents often showed discriminatory responses to each other based on their closeness.

3) Seeking attention and being acknowledged by the others

In power relationships between peer group interactions, students on the periphery show peer conformity by imitating the language and actions of students at the center, but at the same time, they use language to constantly seek the attention and acknowledgment of others.

Table 12. Seongmin seeking for the attention of Minjoon(A Elementary School, September 29, 2017)

	Speaker	Message unit	Interaction			
			Propose	Recognize	Acknowledge	Consequence
		[Children are kidding around and playing in front of the observation camera]				
		[Jaesung shows his eyes to the camera lens]				
1	Jinsoo	It's like that thing. The thing used for eye exams by the eye doctor.	☺			
2	SS	Giggle-giggle. Cool.		☺	☺	
3	Seongmin	Minjoon, can you put your face up here like this?	Encouraging Minjoon to participate (♦)			Encourages Minjoon to participate
4	Jinsoo	Kyuhyeon wants to try as well.	♠			
5	Seongmin	Minjoon, try it!	♦			Seongmin encourages again

Table 12 above shows children joking around as they put their faces in front of the observation camera installed in the classroom. In this situation, Seongmin encourages Minjoon to put his face in front

of the camera, as shown in 3. Jinsoo says Kyuhyeon, who is standing next to him, also wants to try, but Seongmin only pays attention to Minjoon, which is why he ignores Jinsoo and tells Minjoon once again to try, as shown in 5.

Minjoon has an extremely high centrality in the class. Even though he does not talk very much, he is a great athlete and makes friends with everyone easily, which is why many students follow him. Classmates' opinions of Minnjoo in the following dialogue show this aspect as well.

Minseok: Minjoon, I drew you.
Taeksoo: The star of our class.
Minseok: Ah, I also want to be popular like that.
[A Elementary School, November 15, 2017]

Seongmin constantly seeks attention from Minjoon, but Minjoon actually does not show much interest in Seongmin. Detailed field notes also reveal this situation in Table 13, below.

Table 13. Field note (A Elementary School, September 22, 2017)

Detailed field notes	Seongmin always hovers around Minjoon During recess before the 5th period, Seongmin has his arms around Minjoon from the back. Minjoon, slightly annoyed, says to Seongmin, "Get lost."

Adolescents on the periphery within the power relationships in peer group interactions seek attention from friends that are at the center of class, and sometimes, as we show in the dialogue below, struggle to have their abilities acknowledged.

[Art class, making a catapult]
Seongmin: (Flying paper with the catapult) It works, it works, see? Did
you see? Look. It's a legend. See. There's a barrier here.
(Flies paper again, but something does not work)

(Children not interested)

Seongmin: Come on, one more time. Give me another chance. Here, here.

    (Children still not very interested)

Seongmin: Hey, hey. Jaejoon, Jaejoon, Jaejoon.

    (Jaejoon is talking to other friends in the next group)

Seongmin: Jaejoon, Jaejoon, Jaejoon, Jaejoon. Jaejoon, Jaejoon, Jaejoon!

    (Keeps flying paper on the catapult by himself)

Seongmin: Ugh, why doesn't it work?

[A Elementary School, September 22, 2017]

In the situation above, Seongmin keeps calling Jaejoon, who is as popular as Minjoon in class, and seeks his attention in art class while making a catapult. In addition, Seongmin constantly talks to himself and seeks out friends with high centrality, saying things like "It works, it works," or "Here, here" and wanting others to acknowledge the catapult he made.

V. Discussion and conclusion

Building off of previous studies, this study uses the foundational belief that adolescents achieve the special development task of identity construction during the transitional period between childhood and youth, accepts Mead's (1934) concept of identity from a socio-cultural viewpoint based on symbolic interactionism, and presumes that identity is socially constructed (McCarthey & Moje, 2002) within the relationships between various members of society. Therefore, this study set its research questions based on the idea that identity can be continually constructed according to the possibility of change and conflict of social interactions. To this end, this study conducted a detailed analysis of the spoken language and discourse of adolescents in the classroom in order to take a snapshot of the point when adolescents are actively and dynamically constructing their identities, as

well as the point when they are creating various complex interactions according to the power relationships of peer group interactions in a limited space such as a classroom. Based on our interpretation of the findings, we present the following discussion points regarding language use by adolescents.

First, adolescents in Korea constructed and negotiated identity according to relative evaluations and ratings. This is a reflection of the learning environment in Korea, which is known for its fierce competition over college entrances as well as high sensitivity toward ratings or scores, including the evaluation of each other's school grades. This type of evaluation and rating consciousness can also be found in daily life, such as when students evaluate one another's appearance outside of the learning environment. As we showed in Table 6 and Table 7, adolescents in Korea are conscious of others and discuss others' identities with evaluative remarks according to subjective ratings. It seems that the psychological mechanism in which another person is perceived as a rival may be at work in the process of determining rankings and order. This shows that, in the specific situation of competitive classroom culture for adolescents in Korea, adolescents construct their identities based on relative evaluations and ratings according to peer group interactions. This supports the findings of previous studies that show that identity is dynamically constructed according to interaction with others; at the same time, it offers insight into the newly discovered identity construction of Korean adolescents in the socio-cultural context unique to Korea. The study participants were in the sixth grade of elementary school and in the second year of middle school; the aspect of defining the identity of oneself and others according to relative evaluations and ratings may be even more intense in high school, when students are about to enter college.

Second, the use of language to reveal one's identity and define oneself varied according to gender. As examined above, unlike male adolescents who engaged in superiority language or bluffing, female adolescents preferred to lower themselves by using honorific lan-

guage even when they had something to show off, and instead used language that subtly revealed themselves. Previous discussions have also actively studied the difference in linguistic culture according to gender in terms of different aspects of conversation and choices of expressions (Lakoff, 1975; Zimmerman & West, 1975; West & Zimmerman, 1983; Sachs, 1987; Gleason, 1987; Och & Taylor, 1995). Studies based on feminism have also revealed that there are differences in the way men and women talk and participate in conversation (Eckert, 1993; Eder, 1993; Goodwin, 1990; Coates, 1999). The discussions of previous studies indicate that these differences are learned socially and not biologically; this study also has significance in that it verifies the differences in the way male and female students talk while also confirming that this reflects the cultural context unique to Korea. In other words, Korean women tend to be conscious of "themselves" within their relationships with others more than "themselves" as individuals in the culture of collectivism, and we can see differences in their topics of conversation (e.g. appearance, diet) as compared to those of men.

Third, the aspects of language used by adolescents varied depending on the power relationships in their peer group interactions. The classroom to which they belong does not exist as a homogeneous group but has various in-groups within it that can be divided into the center and periphery. Within these relationships, adolescents use language in various ways to obtain, maintain, and expand power. Adolescents with high centrality tend to lead communally accepted actions, through which they intend to strengthen their power and secure "their" status. In addition, adolescents with high centrality act as a kind of role model for those on the periphery. In other words, for those on the periphery, adolescents with high centrality serve as a reference group regarding language use. Accordingly, adolescents on the periphery tend to conform to and imitate the language use and actions of those with high centrality. This study could verify this fact in line with previous discussions regarding the characteristics of peer

groups (Atwater, 1996; Lloyd, 1985; Brown, Eicher, & Petrie, 1986). Furthermore, adolescents on the periphery use language to constantly seek attention and acknowledgment from others. This is one of many language use strategies that adolescents on the periphery can use in situations where their propositions are constantly rejected or not recognized due to the difference in power relationships in peer group interactions.

Moreover, adolescents in Korea use language discriminately according to in-group and out-group distinctions; they tend to reveal their power and secure their positions based on the boundaries between groups. As shown in Table 11, if adolescents think of another person as part of their in-group, they form a community by using language that confirms the inner solidarity of the group and reinforces fellowship. On the other hand, with members of the out-group or those who seem different, they brusquely use slang and express anger, clearly distinguishing the in-group from the out-group and discriminately using language.

This study examined the language culture of adolescents, focusing on identity construction and the power relationships in peer group interactions. The significance of this study is in discovering the fact that there is a universal language phenomenon that has already been discovered in various discussions of previous studies overseas; this phenomenon is reflected in the language culture of Korean adolescents, and it coexists with particular language phenomena unique to the socio-cultural context of Korea. Follow-up research is expected to further explore the effects of the linguistic culture of adults on identity construction, the linguistic interactions of adolescents, and adolescents' perception of discriminatory verbal expressions.

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ABSTRACT

A Study of the Linguistic Culture of
Korean Adolescents
: Focusing on the Identity Construction and
Power Relationships in Peer Groups

Yang, Sooyeon · Chung, Hyeseung
Lee, Sunyoung · Ryu, Sanghee · Min, Byeonggon

This study aimed to explore the linguistic culture of Korean adolescents by examining their linguistic interactions, focusing on identity construction and peer group power relationships. The setting for the study was two sixth-grade classrooms in two elementary schools and three second-year classrooms in two middle schools in Korea from August to November 2017. In each classroom, we selected four focal students based on Social Network Analysis and analyzed the video files of their peer group interactions, drawing on micro-ethnographic discourse analysis. Findings from observations, video recordings, and interviews with these students revealed that Korean adolescents often construct their identities according to relative evaluations and ratings. In addition, the use of language to reveal one's identity varied according to gender. Unlike male adolescents, who engaged in superiority language or bluffing, female adolescents preferred to lower themselves by using honorific language. With regard to power relationships, the aspects of language used by adolescents varied. Adolescents with high centrality tended to lead communally accepted actions, while adolescents on the periphery tended to conform to and imitate the language use of those with high centrality. This study could contribute to extending our understanding of the dynamic nature of identity construction and power relationships within adolescent interactions.

KEYWORDS Linguistic culture of adolescents, Adolescents' language use, Identity construction, Power relationship, Peer group, Linguistic interaction