

# ***THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES***

## **Language Hierarchy and Multiculturalism in South Korea: Multilingual Scenes from *Tongue Tie* and *NEPAL* in Omnibus Film *If You Were Me***

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### **Abstract:**

*South Korea's active involvement in the global economy has led to racial and ethnic diversity in a country that has once championed its "single bloodline." Such changing social and cultural conditions have led to the buzzword "multiculturalism (damunhwa)" increasingly used in government policies and academic discourses. Produced in 2003 by the National Human Rights Commission, If You Were Me was a conscious effort to expose and represent the adverse reality of contemporary "multicultural" South Korea. The omnibus film's six episodes each undertake marginalized subjects of the Korean society, thereby highlighting how rather than becoming a truly multicultural society in which diverse cultures coexist on an equal level, the different cultures have formed a hierarchical and therefore exclusive culture. This paper examines two episodes from the omnibus film, aiming to analyse the phenomenon of language hierarchy represented in the episodes. The episodes Tongue Tie and Never Ending Peace And Love (NEPAL) portray a language hegemony which promotes a "cosmopolitan striving" through English superiority while dismissing third world languages. This paper focuses on the movie's critical representation of cultural hierarchy, delineated through its portrayal of the diverse yet stratified languages, and contends this hierarchy mirrors the global economic order, leading to socioeconomic and cultural separation rather than a truly harmonious multicultural society.*

**Keywords:** *If you were me, tongue tie, never ending peace and love, multiculturalism, English imperialism, Language*

### **1. Introduction: Multiculturalism in the South Korean Context**

Korea no longer has to decide whether it wants to become a multicultural society. It made that decision years ago – perhaps unconsciously – when it decided to be a full participant in the emerging global economy. It confirmed that decision when it decided to actively recruit foreign migrants to meet the economic and demographic needs of a fast-growing society. (Castles, 2007, p.1)

Around the early 2000s "Multiculturalism (*Damunwha*)" emerged as a buzzword to explain and examine contemporary South Korea. The rapid socio-economic changes Korea faced had led to subsequent cultural and political transitions, especially in the increase of multi-ethnic and multi-racial residents. As Stephen Castles (2007) notes, South Korea's active involvement in the global economy has been the instigator of change, causing tension between the country's "cosmopolitan strivings" for a prominent position in the global society and its nationalist tradition of championing a "single bloodline." *If You Were Me* (2003) is one of the first films in Korean cinema to address the issue of multiculturalism. This paper examines two episodes from the omnibus film, *Tongue Tie* and *Never Ending Peace and Love* (hereby referred to as *NEPAL*), aiming to underline the movie's representation of the existing hierarchy amongst languages in the Korean society. The movie's two episodes each provide examples of how thinly veiled language hierarchy promotes a "cosmopolitan striving" through English superiority while dismissing third world languages, with Korean language ambiguously vacillating between the two. Jongwoo (*Tongue Tie*) and Chandra's (*NEPAL*) episodes portray how the hierarchy subjects marginalized citizens to both corporeal and epistemological violence. Furthermore, the cultural hierarchy represented in the film's diverse yet stratified languages mirrors the global economic order. Hence the film functions as critical commentary on the reality of Korea's contemporary multicultural society, which is marked by its socioeconomic and cultural separation rather than a truly harmonious multicultural society.

Scholars trace the roots of Korean "multiculturalism" to the South Korean "globalization" project of the early 1990s, which was fuelled by a "drive to transform Seoul into a world-class city" that would substantiate the nation's global significance by attracting more foreign nationals to the country (Jirn, 2014, p.317). Jirn (2014) also notes that the nation's shift from a labor-exporting country to a labor-importing country marked the arrival of a "new foreign transnational class," especially industrial migrant workers (p.315).

Another factor that contributed to the influx of permanent foreign settlers was marriage migration, which led specifically to “the rapid increase in the number of migrant women” (Kim, 2007, p.101). According to Hyun Mee Kim (2007), “multiculturalism” in the South Korean context was coined only after:

the racial, sexual, and class violence stemming from ethnic nationalism based on pure-blood ideology was thought to seriously encroach on the rights of migrant workers, biracial people, and migrant women. Multiculturalism in Korea is thus used as a counter-concept to Korea’s violent mono-ethnicity, rather than its general meaning of recognizing or having a mutual understanding of cultural difference. (p. 103)

Therefore “multiculturalism” in the Korean context has been more of a watchword only superficially employed in government and academic discourses, failing to be incorporated into actual political or cultural movements. Multiculturalism has since been a highly contested concept, with a disparity between its definition and application. As Castles (2007) summarized, Korea was thus inevitably facing the decision of “what type of multicultural society” it desired to be; it could either become an inclusive society, or an “*exclusionary society* in which immigrants and minorities are treated as second-class citizens, discriminated against and socially excluded” (p.1).

*If You Were Me* (2003) was a film conceived in this context, contributing to the discourse surrounding the contested concept of multiculturalism in Korea. Commissioned to six leading South Korean film makers by the National Human Rights Commission of Korea, the omnibus film provided one of the earliest conscious—and somewhat educational—portrayals of human rights issues in the Korean society, its topics being minority issues and ethnic diversity. The two films discussed in this paper, *Tongue Tie* and *NEPAL*, either explicitly or implicitly introduce the issue of language diversity and hierarchy functioning in the society. There is a two-fold hierarchy, in which English reigns over the Korean language on the upper tier, while Korean assumes the position of power in relation to third world languages. Hence *Tongue Tie* displays the dominance of English in Korea, which represents a “cosmopolitan striving” for upward social mobility. Contrastingly, *NEPAL* features the lower tier of the hierarchy, in which Korean language is a symbol of superior, advanced culture. A pattern of linguistic imperialism is repeated in the two films, with Korean switching positions between the dominant and the subservient. The films represent the exclusive nature of the languages, by displaying how the hierarchy subjects marginalized minorities to various forms of violence. A young boy’s tongue is cut during a traumatising surgery, while a female migrant worker is incarcerated in a mental hospital for six years as her mother tongue is mistaken for “crazy Korean talk.” Although the two film segments have no direct connection to each other, when seen together, they alert the audience of “multiculturalism” gone wrong. The film thereby successfully conveys the consequences of when the word is used only as a buzzword, or as a means of national promotion in the global order; the individual subjects are neglected to suffer in various levels of violence.

## 2. Tongue Tie: From Linguistic Imperialism to “Cosmopolitan Striving”

Directed by Jin Pyo Park, *Tongue Tie* lends a powerful insight to the consequences of the hegemony of English in contemporary South Korea, as it links the desire to speak English with the desire for class mobility and the subsequent violence such desire accompanies. The title of the movie refers to a medical condition, specifically the tongue’s inability to move. The condition is caused especially by the shortness of the frenum, which binds the tongue to the floor of the mouth—it was a popular belief in Korea during the late 90s, that by cutting the frenum, a child would more easily emulate the fluent pronunciation of native English speakers. The movie follows young Jongwoo, who is coerced by his parents into the surgery which literally cuts his tongue. The film effectively nuances how English is elevated in South Korea as a desirable instigator of upward class mobility, thus compelling parents to force their children to undergo body transforming surgery. This section reads *Tongue Tie* while tracing the studies of linguistic imperialism, especially how language confines and constrains an individual’s mind and body. Frantz Fanon once conflated linguistic imperialism with race; and while race and class are interconnected issues, Nancy Abelmann and So Jin Park (2004) readdress the issue in the context of modern South Korea, concentrating on class and thereby identifying a “cosmopolitan striving.” In this context, *Tongue Tie* is a film which highlights the brutal consequences subject on the individual.

Anxiety and obsession with fluent and proper English diction is a theme underscored throughout the film, starting with Jongwoo’s parents recording his Christmas recital at an English preschool in the beginning of the movie. Seeing her child singing English carols, Jongwoo’s mother records the performance while commenting that “Jongwoo’s English is so good, I could cry.” However, Jongwoo’s mother constantly compares him to his American classmate, as she points to the blond child standing next to their son. When she says “his (the American boy’s) pronunciation is *so good*,” Jongwoo’s mother is implying that Jongwoo has more to aspire to be—he must arrive at the ‘native’ level of diction. Even when her husband points out that the other child is speaking “in his mother tongue,” her reluctance to accept Jongwoo’s pronunciation as satisfactory is evident when she reluctantly whispers, “but still.” The implication is that Jongwoo can, and must, do better.

By portraying this infatuation surrounding the “proper” and “native” pronunciation of a language—the desire to perfectly comply to a standardized way of speaking, *Tongue Tie* suggests the administrative power of language which governs the individual’s mind and body. This power invested in Western language cannot be discussed without considering its historical and colonial context. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon (1961/2005) discusses how the colonizer’s language “reorganizes” the colonized people’s mind (p. 161). In a more detailed account illustrated in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon (1952/2008) agrees that “every dialect is a way of thinking”; thus when a Negro speaks a different language, he is learning to think and exist in a different way. (p. 14) Fanon notes how both the mind and the body of the speaker must change to incorporate a new language. In order to do so, he describes the torments of a Martinique Negro who is fixated with the pronunciation of *R*:

The Negro arriving in France will...practice not only rolling his *R* but embroidering it. Furtively observing the slightest reactions of others, listening to his own speech, suspicious of his own tongue—a wretchedly lazy organ—he will lock himself into his room and read aloud for hours—desperately determined to learn *diction*. (p.11)

When speaking French, the first thing the Negro learns is to be ashamed of his tongue; this shame pressures him into voluntary incarceration. This bodily pain of the Martinique Negro resonates in Jongwoo's surgery shown in *Tongue Tie*, highlighting the assault language can force upon the speaker's body. The movie unfolds around the central image of Jongwoo strapped down on a surgical chair. This image of a young boy straddled on a surgical chair, repeating the diction of *R* and *L* as instructed by the doctor, readily conjures the image of Fanon's Negro perfecting his diction while locking himself up. While Fanon's Negro is motivated by his own shame, Jongwoo's episode illustrates a more explicit and forceful instillation of shame as well as pain. Jongwoo is constantly told by others his pronunciation is flawed, and despite his refusal, is compelled into surgery. When the medical procedure eliminates the "wretchedly lazy organ" by incising his tongue, the incapability to properly pronounce truly becomes a medical malady which must be forcefully cured.

Thus when the background music of the film features a child singing the English alphabet song, abruptly halting at the alphabet *R* and repeating it, the music effectively becomes the contextual backdrop for the surgery featured in the movie. What was once an innocent and educational nursery rhyme becomes a gruelling metaphor of Koreans struggling with English diction. In the aforementioned scene, which happens during the preparation stage prior to the surgery, the doctor instructs Jongwoo to pronounce "la-la-la" repeatedly, marking the child's tongue's movement in order to determine where to cut, implying the struggle Koreans have in distinguishing the pronunciation of the alphabet *R* and *L*. Significantly, these are the only distinguishable words Jongwoo says during the entire film. Other than these words necessary to mark the movement of his tongue, Jongwoo is literally silenced. Throughout the film he is under anaesthesia, embodying and experiencing the shameful yet forcefully imposed silence his inadequate diction causes. The power which administrates his body effectively controls how he speaks, what he speaks, and whether he will speak at all. Jongwoo will be allowed to speak once his tongue has been cut; even then, the doctor warns, only "practice will make perfect (diction)." Presumably, the violent modification of his bodily organ will leave young Jongwoo scarred both literally and figuratively for his life.

Accordingly, the climax of the movie is inevitably the moment when the actual tongue cutting happens. As the movie unfolds, it becomes clearer to the viewer that Jongwoo is not aware of what entails the surgery. He shows nervousness at the beginning when he initially refuses to follow the doctor's orders. When the actual tongue cutting begins, Jongwoo's pain and terror becomes visible as he aggressively resists the doctor despite being anaesthetised prior to the operation. After pinning down the child to the surgical chair, Jongwoo's mother answers a phone call from her husband, to whom she says "even if it hurts (he must take it), it is for his behalf." Similar lines are repeated by the nurse, who tells the resisting child that he must "endure the pain for better pronunciation."

The camera's persistent and extreme close up on the magnifying screen, which displays the minute details of how the surgery knife and needle slits the tongue and then sutures it, amplifies the extremity of the bodily violence and aggression the young child is subject to. In a scene prior to the ending credits, the film features quotes from elementary school students subject to English education both at school and after school. One of the children comments: "I want to throw up every time I see Thomas, my English tutor." Children have a somatic response to the figures who inflict the English language upon them. The final scene of Jongwoo's surgery ends with the boy lying unconscious in his mother's arms; the doctor's comment that even after the surgery his pronunciation will need constant effort foreshadows the control and discipline the child will have to encounter when speaking English. The film thus marks the violent hierarchy and aggression of linguistic power that intersects both the body and the mind of the speaker, showing how young children like Jongwoo learn from their own parents to be ashamed of their diction, and are forced to undergo surgery to "rectify" their stigmatized accent.

Fanon (1952/2008) explored why the Antillean Negro is so "fond of speaking French," to which he concludes that a historical context of colonialism must be accounted for: "it must be understood that the Negro wants to speak French because it is the key that can open doors which were still barred to him fifty years ago" (p. 16; p. 25). While the imperialist Western language still opens doors, in the 21st century, the concept must be reimagined in the context of global capitalism and conflated with the issue of class. Scholars theorizing contemporary linguistic imperialism concentrate on how Western languages—predominantly English—monopolize both cultural and economic power in the global society, consequently yielding authoritative powers in non-english speaking countries as well. For instance, in *Linguistic Imperialism*, Robert Phillipson (1992) defines an 'English Linguistic Imperialism.' He quotes Raymond Williams and Lenin to indicate he uses the term 'imperialism' in a primarily economical sense, in the context of neoliberalism and neo-colonialism (p. 45). According to Phillipson "a working definition of English linguistic imperialism" is:

that the dominance of English is asserted and maintained by the established and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages. (p. 47)

To Phillipson it is of crucial importance to identify the neoliberal and capitalist intentions behind English linguistic imperialism. He underlines how English is marketed as a language of success and international mobility, resulting in the hierarchy of languages as seen in international organizations and the Western languages they use. (2001, p. 313; p. 315) This "marketing" of English holds significance in the context of globalization in South Korea as well; in efforts of globalizing the country, the nation has often stressed the importance of learning the de facto international language, English; along with Japan it has long been a market for English education. For these reasons the neoliberal power of English and its interconnection with English education, especially ESL education has been noted by many East Asian scholars as well. Yukio Tsuda (1998) discusses how English Language Teaching (ELT) justifies and legitimises the imperialist faculty of English (p. 222). Continuing the line of research, Ryuko Kubota (2011) also focuses on how English is given its power in a neoliberal society. According to Kubota, the promise that English proficiency will result in both

national and individual benefit, an underlying assumption of linguistic instrumentalism, fits in a “broader neoliberal discourse of human capital in a knowledge economy” (p.249)<sup>1</sup>.

Hence as English is increasingly associated with the globalized cosmopolitan lifestyle, such as experience abroad, English in Korea has been perceived as a device of upward class mobility. Park and Abelmann (2004) define this particular desire for English as a “cosmopolitan striving.” Their research focuses on Korean mothers from various class backgrounds and their efforts to educate their children in English, unearthing how global discourses of English superiority intersect with local and individual desires in contemporary Korea. Despite differences in class or personal experience, South Korean mothers shared the belief that English would provide broader opportunities for their children. Park and Abelmann note that “knowledge of and comfort with English has been a sign of educational opportunity” (p.646). While they corroborate the function of English as an “ideological vehicle,” Park and Abelmann also recognize how English in South Korea thus becomes more than a language; it is a “project” of upward class mobility<sup>2</sup>. Notably, this mobility is projected upwards in a national, local level, but at the same time is also directed towards a broader, “global” world outside national boundaries. Such research provides explanation to Jongwoo’s situation, especially why his mother is aggressively pursuing perfection in the young boy’s pronunciation.

At the end of the movie, just before the ending credits starts to roll, the director inserts quotes coming from various elementary children subject to English education. One of the quotes reads “To be a great person, you have to be good at English,” suggesting a mantra of English as a means to upward mobility that has been repeated to the child. Another striking feature of this final scene is the illustration that subsequently follows the quotes: the cut tongue of a child circles around a blue-and-green drawing of the Earth globe. The illustration represents the “cosmopolitan striving” of both the individual, as well as the nation, to gain significant standing in a global order is foregrounded through the English speaking tongue. *Tongue Tie* visualizes the two-fold violence language hierarchy engenders. Driven by their cosmopolitan striving, Koreans consent to the hegemony of English and thus aspire to embody the valorized “native” pronunciation of it—in a demeanour comparable to Fanon’s Antillean Negro who ardently learns French diction. Through the surgery it captures, *Tongue Tie* portrays how the child’s peripheral body becomes the site of contestation in which global discourses and individual desires are invested into, causing its audiences to reexamine the reality of Korean multiculturalism.

### 3. Never Ending Peace and Love: Diversity as Promotion

While *Tongue Tie* reveals a language hierarchy between English and Korean, *Never Ending Peace And Love* exposes another level of language hierarchy between Korean and third world languages in Korea. The former film describes the suffering of Koreans aspiring to conform to the standards of the superior, international language. The latter film discloses the violent suppression of marginalized languages and cultures of migrant workers while the local language, Korean, acquires a superior position. Concerning language diversity, *NEPAL* is even more problematic compared to the first movie, as the other language is never fully recognized. The film exposes the darker side of multicultural South Korea and its involvement in the global economy, in which the industrial migrant workers are dismissed as dispensable components of a larger economic system and excluded from legal and cultural boundaries.

*Never Ending Peace And Love*, the title which forms the acronym NEPAL, is a film based on the true story of a Nepali migrant worker. Directed by Chan Wook Park, the director of the internationally acclaimed film *Old Boy* (2003), the film recreates the story of Chandra Kumari Gurung, who was incarcerated in a Korean psychiatric hospital for six years. A migrant factory worker with minimal Korean language ability, Chandra gets lost while wandering around the factory. Only after eating at a diner does she realize that she has also lost her wallet. Without co-workers to help her communicate, Chandra is eventually arrested by the police. Despite her constant pleas that she is Nepali, the police eventually conclude that she is mentally unstable and send her to a psychiatric ward. The fragmented Korean Chandra could speak only adds on to the police and doctor’s suspicions that Chandra is a mad Korean woman. By the time a Nepali finally reaches out to Chandra, she has been deeply traumatized by her experience in Korean mental hospitals. The film ends with Chandra back in Nepal, talking to the camera in her mother tongue.

Showcasing Chandra’s unbelievable case, the movie raises questions concerning the language hierarchy between Korean and Nepali, and what the case signifies in the context of Korean multiculturalism. The film visualizes the violence and discrimination ethnic and language minorities face in contemporary South Korea, exposing another form of language hierarchy and cultural hegemony functioning in the shadows of the “multicultural” Korean society. The film focuses on the way Koreans dealt with Chandra’s broken Korean and Nepali, a third world language. During her six years’ confinement in the psychiatric hospital, Chandra learns to speak Korean, assumes a Korean name (“Sunmi”), and claims to be a Korean in order to avoid being chastised or labeled as a schizophrenic. Re-imagined interviews of police officers and hospital workers also reveal how officials involved in the case were unable to comprehend her language and her ethnicity as Nepali (as they simply had never “met” or “known” a Nepali, or were

<sup>1</sup>Korea, sharing the language concerns of Japan such as the English education frenzy or public discussions of officializing English as a second language, shows similarities in the academic discourse of English and its globalising force as well. Majority of the research concerns with the direction of English education in Korea; in “The Method of Cultural Coexistence in Multi-language Situation” Jinsu Park questions the positioning of English as a global, cosmopolitan language. Chang Bong Lee and Jusik Park’s research on the “Cultural Imperialism and Critical English Education Curriculum” expands from such criticism and seeks for alternative education methods in the context of linguistic imperialism.

<sup>2</sup>Expanding on an example analogous to Jongwoo’s situation, Fanon also describes how desire for perfect diction is a classist one. French language has a hegemony upon the Antillean Negroes, manifest in the language habits of the middle class in particular. Diction is a class marker that divides the masters from their servants. Fanon notes how “the middle class in the Antilles never speak Creole except to their servants. In school the children of Martinique are taught to scorn dialect. One avoids Creolisms.” (Fanon 10)

indifferent/ignorant of the small underdeveloped country). Chandra's attempts to identify herself as a Nepali and thereby leave incarceration were dismissed as a mad woman's attempt to escape. The aggressive confinement Chandra faces echoes the experience of Fanon's Negro, or Jong Woo in *Tongue Tie*, displaying the administrative power of a language and culture.

As South Korea has transformed into a multicultural society since the late 1990's with the spread of globalized neoliberalism, consequently the media has responded to this social change with increased multicultural representation, albeit narrow and prejudiced. Such limited representation of racial others reflects the complex issues coexisting in the Korean society: the increase in racial and ethnic diversity, the expansion of government policies to promote multiculturalism, and socioeconomic tension and racial discrimination caused by nationalism and the economic hierarchy of Korean society. Despite efforts to diversify the representation of racial others in the Korean society, television shows and movies of the early 21st century often were left with adverse results, Otherizing the marginalised racial groups through its narrow portrayal of minorities. As Jirn (2014) emphasizes, despite the "hype and hold surrounding multiculturalism, the representation of Korea's unskilled migrant workers remains at best marginal" (p. 317). Instead of thoroughly representing the marginalised members of the Korean society, such media illustration only contributed to the Otherization of such minority groups.<sup>3</sup> In the depiction of a multicultural, multiethnic Korean society, non-ethnic Koreans, especially the ethnic minorities from underdeveloped countries are portrayed as the "inferior Other" that are to be distinguished from the "superior" Koreans. Such tendentious portrayal can be designated as a form of "internal orientalism," a term derived from Edward Said's (1979) theory of Orientalism. According to Said, the West, in order to define itself first defines the Orient as a different and therefore Inferior Other by "reiterating European superiority over Oriental backwardness" (p. 7). Accordingly, the framework of internal orientalism refers to the "operation of Orientalist discourse within the states" that defines a national identity not in relation to external objects, but by othering the internal others, such as certain ethnic minorities. (Jansson, 2003, p. 296)

The past decade, however, has seen the advent of a critical approach to the hitherto problematic representational practices of multiculturalism in Korea, consciously promoting minority sensibility in the Korean society in a revisionist approach. This tendency could be found especially strong in movies such as *Bandhobi*, *Wandeuky*, and *Hwanggu* which focused on the discrimination and bigotry that racial and ethnic minorities faced in Korean society. In the same line of these films, *NEPAL* problematizes the violence on ethnic minorities, in particular by revealing the internal orientalism embodied by the language hierarchy of the Korean society; the hierarchy between English and Korean is converted into a similar hierarchy and discrimination between Korean and Nepali, which results in inflicting violence and constraints on the individual's body.

While this cultural hierarchy and linguistic imperialism descends from the historical context of imperialism, as explored in the examination of *Tongue Tie*, it is crucial to identify a changing context in the case of Chandra. *NEPAL* explicitly introduces the audience to the context of transnational division of labor in a neoliberal world economy. Chandra's migration from Nepal to Korea is fuelled by neoliberalism and the resulting transnational division of labor—the leading factor behind Korea's development into a "multicultural" state as well—. Owing to migrant workers being regarded as 'human capital' in the system of globalized neoliberalism, their migration to different nations innately embody risks and danger. Migrant workers such as Chandra move to Korea without education or preparation for language and cultural differences in foreign countries. As they are perceived merely as 'tools' or 'labor force,' "[l]anguage and vocational training courses for immigrant workers are generally provided only when it is absolutely necessary for the production process" (Castles, 2000, p. 35).

Consequently, migrant workers or ethnic minorities in Korea face both cultural and political impediments. Despite moving to a developed foreign country, due to their lack of language proficiency migrant workers are typically confined to work in the allotted site or factory. Once they leave the premises, language becomes an immediate barrier as shown in Chandra's case; ethnic minorities become literally and figuratively voiceless. Additionally, policies of the Korean government, which should assist such minority groups become obstacles as they focus on assimilation, rather than making an effort to understand and validate different cultures of immigrant workers. In this context multiculturalism is "becoming harder to sustain" and adversely results in the "racialization or ethnicization of "minorities" (Castles, 2000, p. 198). This can be read as the result of Korean internal-orientalism that fails to recognize the diversity of languages or cultures of underdeveloped countries, and derogates immigrant workers as depending on the economic status of more developed countries—Korea, in this case. *NEPAL* deals with this problem in terms of language hierarchy as a consequence of internal orientalism; it emphasizes how Korea's "multicultural" imagination is in reality based on mono-cultural imagination.

Significantly, the reason Chandra's constant claims that she is Nepali was ignored by the police and medical team is chiefly attributable to Korea's internal Orientalism. While English ranks as a superior language in relation to Korean language, Korean language takes the superior position in relation to the language of third world countries, where the migrant workers come from. In this context Chandra's Nepali was not even considered a foreign language which should be understood, translated, or comprehended, for it is a language of an underdeveloped country. In Korean society, the notion of a 'foreigner' and 'foreign language' mostly refers to the light skinned caucasians from developed countries and the Western languages they speak. In other words, because immigrant workers in Korea mostly, come from underdeveloped countries in Southeast Asia and have darker complexions compared to Koreans, their languages are not even allowed to enter the category of 'foreign language' in the linguistic hierarchy of Korea. They are not foreign,

<sup>3</sup>Researchers pointed out that the media tend to stereotype them into two main categories according to the genre of the media. They are portrayed as dutiful wives or innocent and hard workers in TV Dramas, while in reportage or new programs, they are victimized, revealing the problems of Korean society. (Kim & Park, 2009; Lee 2006) Likewise, public movie industries also tend to portray them as an object of sympathy or romanticize their process of assimilation to Korean society, thus failing to illustrate the reality of the ethnic minorities of Korean society. (Huh 2012)

but rather, inferior. Furthermore, their ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity is dismissed due to the Korean society which on the surface promotes multiculturalism, but actually discriminates against the cultures of racial minorities from underdeveloped countries. While the reception of Chandra's language is significant, equally compelling is the language she used to mask herself and the language used to address her. It takes six years after her incarceration for Chandra to meet a Nepali, K. P. Sitoura. The scene is significant in various aspects: Sitoura hands his greetings in Korean, to which Chandra responds in terror, saying that she is not Nepali. Her experience in the mental hospital has taught her to put on her own white mask—a Korean mask, in this case. On the Antilles' desire to speak French, Fanon (1952/2008) acknowledges that "historically...the Negro wants to speak French because it is the key that can open doors which were still barred to him fifty years ago (p. 25). Fanon has also stated that "the same behaviour patterns obtain in every race that has been subjected to colonization" (p. 15). Speaking the Korean language and masking herself as Korean would have opened a door to Chandra as well; that is, the door leading to her country. In the film's interview scene, Sitoura says that he himself did not know why he spoke to her in Korean; perhaps, as a business man who has long worked in Korea, he may have gotten used to wearing his own Korean mask, assuming a mainstream identity rather than identifying as a racial minority. The recreated interviews of police officers and the medical teams of psychiatric wards in the film highlights how the aforementioned new form of Orientalism blatantly displayed amongst Koreans assaults Chandra both bodily and mentally. A nurse who treated Chandra explains: "See? If you hear closely, Nepali language sounds mad... like an insane Korean uttering madness. Think of it that way and try listening to her." The doctor's interview is even more explicit in showcasing his internal Orientalism, when he says that "life in Nepal, as well as life in the factory, is pretty much simple. She would have been able to cope with such a life. But as she was dragged here by the police, and met strangers, which is when her innate schizophrenia revealed itself." The incomprehensible Nepali language is perceived as insane speech to the nurse; the doctor assumes that the Nepali have an innate inferiority. The Koreans' perceptions of the Nepali seem to display their internal Orientalism in a form of what Said (1979) defines as manifest Orientalism: The distinction I am making is really between an almost unconscious (and certainly an untouchable) positivity, which I shall call *latent* Orientalism, and the various stated views about Oriental society, languages, literatures, history, sociology, and so forth, which I shall call *manifest* Orientalism. (p. 206)

This manifest Orientalism, in which Korea assumes the position of the West and Nepal the East, constantly Otherizes and marginalizes Chandra and her culture, exerting violence on an epistemological level. As aforementioned, her language is presumed as 'crazy talk,' and she is labeled a schizophrenic. Like the West, which defined itself by first defining and marginalizing the Orient, Korea defines itself as the superior, rational and developed race in comparison to the incomprehensible, ambiguous and underdeveloped Nepal. In his explication of Fanon, Kyung Won Lee addresses the issue of a constructed madness as well. Lee (2011) quotes how Foucault points out that the West regards madness an opposition to reason. "Once stigmatised as insane, the patient experiences alienation and isolation. ...it is colonialism that drives the Negro mad... Fanon views schizophrenia and inferiority complex a by product of colonialism" (p. 228). The incomprehensible and exotic language Chandra speaks is thus stigmatized, Chandra's ethnicity alienating and isolating her from the mainstream Korean society. She is confined first to a factory, then to a mental hospital, forever forced to remain in the periphery. Thus the two movie segments portray the language hierarchy in Korean society, which in turn characterizes the ambiguous position of Korea and its language in a neoliberal global context. This ambiguity leads to Korean and its speakers being both the victim and assailant of violence in a multi language situation: it is both silenced and silencing other languages, oscillating between the position of a superior and inferior language.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study examined language hierarchy in multicultural society and entailing violence upon periphery subjects of contemporary South Korea by analyzing the two episodes of the omnibus Korean film *If You Were Me*. The episode *Tongue Tie* emphasizes the language hierarchy in South Korea where English language gains superiority over Korean through linguistic imperialism. English is assigned with cultural power, a hegemony over the Korean society, because it is seen as the bona fide cosmopolitan language, a language that grants one upward class mobility by becoming a global elite. This hierarchy results in a two fold violence in both the mind and body of the speaker; the movie, visualises how a South Korean child's body becomes the site of power manifestation and contestation. Meanwhile, the episode *Never Ending Peace and Love* unearths another aspect of language hierarchy and cultural discrimination; this time Korean gains a superior position in relation to third world languages—an internal orientalism is at work. The ambiguous position of South Korea in international economic order is mirrored in its ambiguous position within the hierarchy of language; it may be inferior to first world countries and its languages (represented by English) but superior to underdeveloped, third world countries (represented by Nepal). By foregrounding a young child and immigrant worker, both representing the bodies of peripheral subjects in the Korean society, the movies expose the epistemological and corporeal affliction that the weaker subjects experience.

Language and its relationship with power have been discussed by many scholars, for example, based on materialism, Mikhail Bakhtin pointed out the social nature of language: language is a social phenomenon, the meaning of which is always determined in the social context where different powers struggle for superiority. Therefore, it can be said that there are more possibilities of violence engendered by language problems in this globalized neoliberal and multicultural world where different languages conflict for power within particular socio-economical context.

With that in mind, the language hierarchy and the violence depicted in the film seems to shed light on new perspectives to read multi-dimensional aspects of the language problems. While the previous language issues regarding multiculturalism, such as language barriers for immigrants workers and marriage immigrants, have dealt with the relationship between two different languages, the two episodes of the film underscore the positionality and interrelation of various languages. In a globalized neoliberal world, the status of a

language is allocated according to the economic status of the country that uses it, and this circumstance involves a strong tendency to build a similar hierarchy between several languages. Accordingly, the notion of multiculturalism and its language problems should be considered with the broad scope that encompasses positionality in hierarchical structure.

In that respect, the two episodes of the film underline not only the language problems in multicultural society but also the interrelation of various languages and problematic position of Korean language in the language hierarchy, foregrounding the violences from the hierarchy among languages at the same time. Moreover, the episodes highlight the problematic aspects the space embodies; the power of language and the violence it begets appear more explicitly, and the ideology of neoliberalism is reinforced by the medium of language in a country like Korea which actively tries to follow the rules of neoliberalism. Finally, by combining linguistic imperialism, internal orientalism and hegemonic language hierarchy, the film suggests that the language issue in a multicultural society should be paid attention to not only by the human rights practitioners, but also from the perspective of the society as a whole, raising the question of the possibility of resistance toward the oppressive power of language hierarchy and its violence, and to the ideology that operates within them. The alarming cases of Jongwoo and Chandra showcase how the individual body becomes a battleground upon which these ideologies and values administrate power and oppression.

In terms of cultural practice, *If You Were Me* can be a fine example of cultural resistance that reveals the problematic phenomenon and discloses the ideology behind it, denouncing the society that supports an ideology that desensitizes one to the ferocity of language hierarchy and its violence on weaker subjects of the society. On an epistemological level, humanities studies and discussions on these issues should suggest more specific means to respect cultural and language diversity and the particularity of an individual, a significant value to be established on this globalized neoliberal world. Meanwhile, by respecting the differences and singularity of others, one can practice ethical acts on a personal level, resistant to the operation of political and cultural hegemony that prevents the coexistence of multiple languages and its speakers and reinforces the dehumanizing neoliberal capitalism inherent in the current neoliberal world.

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