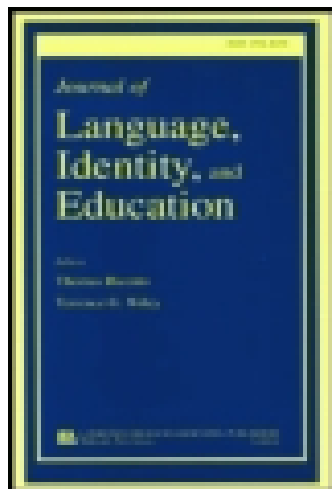


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"I am a Kirogi Mother": Education Exodus and Life Transformation Among Korean Transnational Women

Hakyoon Lee^a

^a University of Hawai'i Mānoa

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“I am a *Kirogi* Mother”: Education Exodus and Life Transformation Among Korean Transnational Women

Hakyoony Lee

University of Hawai‘i Mānoa

This study focuses on the recent social phenomenon of the *kirogi*, which means wild goose in Korean. This word also refers to a multinational household in which the mother has moved overseas for the children’s education while the father lives alone in Korea to support his family economically. I investigate the narratives of *kirogi* mothers in Hawai‘i. My analysis attends to how *kirogi* status influences the mothers’ different identities as women in a transnational space. How the mothers construct their stories and redefine themselves and others is tightly related to the larger discourses around them. I find that being *kirogi* is not only a matter of choice in life, but can also be a vehicle for a powerful life in transformation. The mothers’ narratives show degrees of transformation as they recall, recount, and reflect upon their lives.

Key words: *kirogi* (wild geese), narrative, English education, identity, immigrant, transformation

Second language learning and empowerment among immigrant women have been productive research topics in language education and applied linguistics (Lan, 2003; McMahon, 2001; Norton, 2000). For example, access to language resources within immigrant and refugee communities can accelerate shifts of identity (e.g., Gordon, 2004; Kibria, 1990; Pessar, 1984). This study further explains this tendency by investigating Korean immigrant mothers, otherwise known as *kirogi* mothers. *Kirogis* typically move to English speaking countries with their children to seek English education, and this new group of immigrant women experiences different gendered positions because of their relocation.

Previous studies on *kirogi* mothers have focused on their educational practices in the discourse of globalization (Cho, 2005; Koo, 2007; Lee & Koo, 2006), on the marital separation between *kirogi* fathers and *kirogi* mothers (Choi, 2006) and on the *kirogi* phenomenon as an extended form of studying abroad (Cho, 2002; Kim, 1998; Son, 2005). However, no previous study has focused on gender roles and the personal narratives of *kirogi* mothers’ life stories despite the importance of mothers’ roles in this phenomenon. Taking a discourse analytic approach to the narratives of two *kirogi* women, I explore how these *kirogi* mothers experience shifts of identity and construct their experiences of transformation.

In Korea, the English education market has been dramatically expanding since the mid-1990s (Cho, 2002; Kim, 1998). In 1997, the Korean Ministry of Education announced a new national

curriculum that emphasizes communicative competence over grammatical knowledge and fluency over accuracy (Kim, 1998). This reform has raised the concern that families will seek group tutoring or private English institutes to stay competitive in Korean society. Since the mid-1990s, an increasing number of Korean split-families living apart for English education have come to be referred to as kirogi or kirogi family.

The eagerness to become kirogi even at the cost of separation and possible dissolution of the family shows the intense desire to seek early English education abroad (Lee & Koo, 2006). In Korea, English education is a form of social capital (Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991) that is important enough to merit the mother's sacrifice. Korean mothers tend to view their role as integral to the maintenance of middle-class status and upward mobility (Moon, 2003; Park & Abelman, 2004). English is not only a symbol of education but also of success and wealth in Korea (Nam, 2005; Shim, 1994), though fluency in English does not automatically lead to economic success. Therefore, despite recent media reports on the negative consequences of kirogi families, such as the increasing divorce rate, kirogi father suicide rate, adulterous relationships, and kirogi families' difficulty returning to Korean society, the desire to be kirogi remains very strong.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There are various studies on immigrant, gender, and life transformation. Transitioning to a different culture and society involves changes in how one sees oneself and how one behaves. Pavlenko (2001) defines self-translation as the reinterpretation of one's subjectivities in order to position the self in new communities and to find meaning in the new environment. Her research focuses on "transformations of gender as a system of social relations" (p. 165) as well as its discursive performance during second language socialization. Such a view accords well with other studies of gendered socialization in target cultures as a dynamic process of transformation (Gordon, 2004; Norton, 2000). Moreover, contextual factors such as generation and education can be injected into the process of transformation and can interplay with women's shifted identities (Lan, 2003; Menard-Warwick, 2005; Moon, 2003; Norton, 2000; Park & Abelman, 2004; Rhee, 2006).

The present study focuses on how transformation is discursively constructed and highlights the need for narrative analysis (Pavlenko, 2007), a methodology capable of identifying transformation made visible through the mothers' shifting standpoints and self-positionings as reflected in their storytelling. The mothers' narratives include various discursive themes such as creating distance from other people and different societies, finding their voices, and repositioning themselves and others.

METHOD

This is a case study (Silverman, 2000) in which I interviewed two kirogi mothers, Kyung-Ah and Robin (pseudonyms) who moved to Hawai'i for their children's education. Data was collected from these mothers through several individual interviews in Korean over a one-year period, for which I prepared several open questions about their experiences. My data is the result of several active interviews, or naturally occurring conversation in which interviewer and interviewee

co-construct meaning, rather than the typical quasi-monologue style of the research interview (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004). I have chosen to present English translations of the interviews in this study.

Kyung-ah

Kyung-ah is in her mid-40s and has two daughters who are in first and second grades. The family is from a city located in the south of Korea. She taught English at a public middle school in Korea, and this is her first time living in another country. Her husband works as a public official. The position he has now is very stable and generally considered prestigious. The family came to Hawai'i together in 2004, when the father was studying for an MBA. He returned to work after finishing his degree, while Kyung-ah stayed in Hawai'i with her daughters for their English education. This decision was made by consensus of the family members. Now, she maintains her visa status in Hawai'i by taking English classes, and her daughters attend public school with dependent visa status. At the time of the initial interview, it had been a year since the husband returned to Korea for his work.

Robin

Robin is also in her mid-40s, and she has a son and a daughter who are in eighth and ninth grades. She came from Seoul to Hawai'i, and this is her third time visiting the United States. Her first time was in the early 1990s, when her husband was pursuing a PhD degree in the United States, and they stayed there for between four and five years. After that, in 2001, Robin went to another state again with her children, and they stayed for two years in order to maintain the children's English. Thus, she had lived in the United States twice before coming to Hawai'i in 2004, with the hopes of preparing her children to enter an American university. She had been in Hawai'i for two years at the time of the initial interview. Now, her husband works as a professor in Seoul.

Even though Kyung-ah and Robin represent only two cases of kirogi mothers abroad, they represent one of the most common types of kirogi mothers—women whose husbands came to the United States with their family to pursue a degree and then went back to Korea. Besides their backgrounds, characteristics of their narratives presented in this paper can represent kirogi mothers in general in terms of their attitudes toward English education and in-law relations.

Footnote and Evaluation in Narratives

Immigrants' narratives are reflexively constructed based on their transnational experiences, and people engage in an act of sense-making of emotionally laden experiences. Reflective commentary or evaluative moments in mothers' narratives can display some degree of life transformation. To demonstrate this, I utilize 2 concepts, evaluation (Daiute & Nelson, 1997; Gwyn, 2001; Koven, 2002; Labov & Waletzky, 1997) and footing (Goffman, 1974/1986), to analyze the participants' shifts in perspectives (Ensink, 2003; Koven, 2002; Wortham, 1996; Wortham & Gadsden, 2006). Through storytelling, narrators can produce "edited" descriptions and evaluations of

themselves and others to make identity aspects more salient at certain points in the story (Georgakopoulou, 2007). Evaluation of a narrative is the consequence of the event, and it reveals to the listeners what the point and perspective of the talk is (Labov & Waletzky, 1997).

In addition, Goffman's notion of footing refers to shifts of stance or alignment that tellers take up with regard to themselves and their audiences (Goffman, 1981). He proposes three different positions that the speaker can take: "animator" is the perspective of one who utters a sequence of words; "author" is that of one who selects the sentiments being expressed; and "principal" is that of the person whose standpoints are established within the utterance. Narrators adjust their retellings and reported speech (Goffman's animator/author) to provide evaluative comment (Goffman's principal) strategically to shift their alignments for the purpose of othering, voicing, and repositioning. These shifts of footing are found, for example, in changing pronouns, changing registers, borrowing proverbs, and presenting expertise. I have thematically sorted excerpts from the interviews in order to show how mothers take stances in different ways with regard to their evaluation by othering, by voicing, and by repositioning.

DATA ANALYSIS

Kirogi Mothering for Globalization: Evaluation by Othering

Kirogi mothers create distance between themselves and either other mothers in Korea or their husbands to frame their own roles as exceptional. The two kirogi mothers I interviewed consider life planning and educational management as a crucial part of mothering. They evaluate themselves positively in as much as they position themselves as apart from other non-kirogis or even from their husbands. In their narratives, this is manifested in the discursive practice of othering, which involves the dichotomization of the self versus the other, namely the legitimization of power relations between the self and the other (Kubota, 2001). Thus, others can be named by a speaker wishing to take a dominant stance.

In the first two excerpts, Robin and Kyung-ah make categories for others and create distances between themselves and others to value their educational practice. In terms of presenting data, the participants' use of English is italicized and closely analyzed parts are transcribed as bold.

Robin, who is living in the United States for the third time, has a concrete idea of what it means to be kirogi. She expresses that she is an educational manager for her children and that this is a crucial part of her mothering. When I asked, "what do you think of being kirogi?" she initiated her story by stating what Americans think, instead of answering directly what she thinks about the issue (line 1). Robin distinguishes her practice as divergent from what she thinks Americans believe. By polarizing two presumably different perspectives, she reveals that her status as kirogi is something meaningful and necessary. In line 2, she uses an extreme case formulation of "everybody" to extend this particular idea to an extreme case (see Koven, 2002, on extreme case formulation) and to stress the worth of her decision. Yet, by creating distance between herself and other mothers (line 4), Robin differentiates her practice from what other Korean mothers do.

Aside from creating distance, she switches to the English word "worthwhile/worthy" instead of *kachi* (worth) in Korean (lines 2 and 4), and she chooses the English word "right?" (lines 2 and 13), instead of the Korean word *kucho* (right). These word choices reveal emotional intensity. She

Excerpt 1: “If you give birth to a girl, you should plant an oak in your yard.”

- 1 R: Americans might think that we are too willing to sacrifice for our children.
 2 I know but everybody knows that *it is worthwhile, right?*
 3 What if your children become bilinguals or go to a prestigious college?
 4 then it is *worthy*. So I planned it for a long time unlike other mothers in Korea.
 5 H: Yeah.
 6 R: You know the Korean proverb,
 7 “if you give birth to a baby girl, you should plant an oak in your yard.”
 8 It means that parents should make a plan for their children’s future.
 9 I had thought that I would never make my children learn English in Korea
 10 when I got married and came to
 11 the US with my husband, who was working on his PhD at that time.
 12 If you dedicate yourself to life in the USA for only 3 years,
 13 your children can live a happy life for 60 or 80 years. *Right?*
 14 H: Yeah.

(Robin, April 2006)

uses “right” to invite me as the interviewer to jointly co-construct the story by using a second-person pronoun to explicitly appeal to me as the listener (Koven, 2002).

Robin frames her story using a Korean proverb (line 7), taking a Korean perspective to make sense of her very modern life, justify her devotion, and construct herself as a prepared mother. The Korean proverb she invokes means that parents need to prepare and plan their children’s future at an early stage. Just as the parents in the past prepared for their daughters’ financial futures, Robin has planned her children’s professional future by making them confident English speakers.

In lines 7 and 8, Robin evaluates her experiences by switching her role from author to principal. In other words, she switches from reporting shared knowledge to providing an evaluative comment. She first borrows the Korean proverb, which shows a very traditional way of thinking and then interprets the meaning of the proverb by applying it to a third party, “parents,” before evaluating her plan in view of the norm embedded in the Korean proverb.

Like Robin, Kyung-ah also points out the importance of English in her interviews. In doing so, she claims that raising children in an English environment is the mother’s responsibility, not the father’s. Kyung-ah highlights her role as an educational decision-maker by presenting distinctive gender roles in her family.

Kyung-ah constructs her role as a *kirogi* mother as different from that of the father. To formulate her role as consequential, first she highlights the value of English (lines 1–3) attributing economic value to it and, in line 5, she hypothesizes an extreme future event. She justifies her job as an educator by evaluating the hypothetical event and presenting her ownership of an important and distinctive role in the family (lines 10 and 11).

Robin and Kyung-ah’s narratives relate to Korean familism; that is, a child-centered system rather than a husband- or wife-centered one (Cho, 2005; Kim, 2002). This is why many Korean parents plan their family’s futures in terms of their children’s educational opportunities. Besides this emphasis on education, in Korean families, mothers generally take care of the children and the house, and fathers are the heads of families who provide financial support (Kim, 2002). This

Excerpt 2: "This is mother's job, not father's."

- 1 K: Speaking English perfectly has uncountable value.
- 2 So, to give a chance to them (the children) to learn English is very important.
- 3 **It is much more valuable than leaving billions of inheritance.**
- 4 As a mother, I need to prepare for their future.
- 5 **If I die suddenly someday in the future, they have to live without me!**
- 6 H: Yeah.
- 7 K: They have to live by themselves wherever in the world.
- 8 So it is my responsibility to bring up them on English
- 9 so that they can live without me.
- 10 **This is mother's job, not fathers. So, fathers even don't**
- 11 **have a right to argue with me about children's education.**

(Kyung-ah, April 2006)

distinction is diluted in modern society, since many women also have careers, and there are increasing numbers of single mothers and fathers.

However, in a new type of family such as kirogi, distinctive gender roles emerge; the mother lives abroad and takes care of the children, and the father works and makes money to support his wife and children. The significant difference here is that the mother has to serve as the head of the family while living abroad and make a variety of decisions regarding family life and education. Even though management of the children's English education might be considered as a gendered practice in Korea and being kirogi can be part of the Korean way of education, Kyung-ah and Robin view this practice abroad as a unique job that only they can do.

Dominant historical and cultural ideologies interplay with Kyung-ah's and Robin's stories and these have constructed them as devoted mothers. Thus, the mothers construct their "good mother" identity by distinguishing themselves from non-kirogis (Americans or other mothers in Korea) and diminishing the importance of the fathers in making decisions about education.

Speaking up! Mothers as Protectors in the New Society: Evaluation by Voicing

Evaluation by voicing reveals how mothers find their voice and become empowered in the public sphere, namely children's education. They create space for their own voice (Bakhtin, 1981), and kirogi mothers use their own voice to protect their children at school. These experiences influence the mothers' evaluation of their role as mother.

In this excerpt, Robin explains how she solved a problem that her daughter experienced at school. Robin received a phone call from her daughter's teacher that Robin's daughter did "bad behavior" at school. However, it was hard for her to admit it. She constructs herself as an active protector through her voice and action. The anger she felt made her initiate different actions such as calling the school, talking to an ESL teacher, calling a meeting, and showing evidence, such as her daughter's journal, to demonstrate her English ability. These actions and strategies allow Robin to express her voice to protect her child. For example, to prove her child's innocence and limited English ability, which may have caused this problem, she took an active position and insisted that her child's behavior is not an example of "bad behavior" but "a cultural difference."

Excerpt 3: "You know, it is a war for me to protect this little girl."

- 1 R: It was one year after we first came to Illinois. The teacher wrote me a letter.
 2 H: Um.
 3 R: "Your daughter wrote something mean on a card."
 4 And then she said she would send the copy of it to me.
 5 I got angry at my daughter and also at her teacher.
 6 First, I guessed that the teacher would totally understand that my daughter's
 7 English is not perfect.
 8 But then I thought why did she (daughter) do such a *doubtful behavior*?
 9 H: Um.
 10 R: But we cannot quit the school, right? So I could not show my anger to the teacher,
 11 so I just prayed and prayed.
 12 H: Do you go to church?
 13 R: No. ((laughter))
 14 I had been thinking a lot how I could solve this problem.
 15 So I called the ESL teacher because I believed that she would understand both
 16 sides, us and the school.
 17 **She said that she will check again.**
 18 **I asked my daughter, "what did you write on the card?"**
 19 **and this is what she wrote,**
 20 **"I am not your friend but I hope you come back soon."**
 21 **The teacher was saying that, "I am not your friend" was the bad part.**
 22 **But my daughter thought in a different way she said that in Korea if a girl**
 23 **says, "this boy is my friend",**
 24 **that means boyfriend, right?**
 25 H: Hum.
 26 R: **But I was angry because there was a following part, "I hope."**
 27 **I knew that she emphasized that part.**
 28 **If I couldn't speak English, how I explain this?**
 29 I asked the teacher, you know if she couldn't see this by just looking at the
 30 sentence.
 31 H: **It just is a language difference.**
 32 R: **Yeah, in Korea, virgin can be used interchangeably for two different ways.**
 33 **In English virgin and single are totally different,**
 34 **but, if somebody asks, "are you virgin?" it is very rude, isn't it?**
 35 **How rude it is! And that is culture!**
 36 H: ((laughter))
 37 R: I brought my daughter's journal to school.
 38 **I wouldn't have been this upset if I were in Korea. ((laughter))**
 39 Anyway, see, this is her journal and this is her English level,
 40 that's what I told them,
 41 and I asked them to have a conference about this issue.
 42 H: Because of that one sentence?
 43 R: Yeah, because you know how I got mad because they considered this as a
 44 *bad behavior*!
 45 I was trying to defend the fact that she is a very sweet girl,
 46 so I made them see her journal.
 47 I invited people from church and other teachers to prove this fact.
 48 I was trying to stay as calm as possible.

- 49 I almost burst into tears and told the teacher that how her English is
 50 "We came all the way here to learn your English and culture
 51 you know, it is a war for me to protect this little girl
 52 you don't know how much the mother has to prepare and be ready for her
 53 children."
 54 If not, they would end up being left out.
 55 H: How was the children's reaction to this situation?
 56 R: Well, after then, they did not do any *bad behavior* anymore!
 57 H,R: ((laughter))

(Robin April 2006)

Robin animates different people, including the teacher (lines 17 and 21), herself (line 18), and her daughter (line 23), to describe the situation and defend herself and her daughter. Robin's role of animator and author of the different characters in storytelling employ several evaluative stances. For example, her words carry more dramatic effect in terms of establishing authenticity, and they provide a space for her to construct herself as an arbitrator who mediates the two sides to solve the problem.

In line 24, Robin uses a tag question to appeal explicitly to me as interlocutor. My positionalities, such as a woman from the same cultural background as Robin, an educator who is interested in Korean immigrant families, and devoted listener of her stories, evoke our shared understanding. Here, Robin invites me to share in the story because she knows that I acknowledge cultural differences and understand the interpretation of "this boy is my friend," which was the source of trouble. Later, the story continued to a positive evaluation of her English ability (line 28) in that it is good enough to argue with schools, to solve the problem, and to protect her child. She uses our shared cultural knowledge to support her opinion and compares two different languages and cultures (lines 32–35) by using "virgin" as an example to make sense of her claim. Here, the evaluation devices reveal how Robin expresses her stance as a "strong mother."

Labov (1972) proposes the concept of *comparator* (p. 381), which refers to comparing events which *did* occur to those which might have, or could have, occurred. This can spice up the story. However, here, the comparator also justifies her anger, positioning it as her right rather than an avoidable or controllable emotion. In line 38, she says, "I wouldn't have been this upset if I were in Korea" to justify her investment and to emphasize the helplessness of the situation. Robin compares two different contexts and reveals how differently she would react to her given situation. At the same time, she presents herself as a proud, capable, and protective mother. Thus, through use of a comparator, Robin grants justification to a certain circumstance, provides an underlying evaluation of her emotion and actions, and constructs a strong stance.

Also, she conveys her emotional intensity (line 49). In line 50, she uses the pronoun *we* (*wuli* in Korean) instead of *she* (Robin's daughter) to include herself in the frame. Lines 50–53 are reported speech by Robin and here, she is animator as well as author and principal. Unlike line 50, which shows what she said to the teacher, line 51 shows how she felt about this situation. Her use of the metaphor of "war" is an extreme case formulation. Considering the larger context, English is an indispensable weapon with which Korean mothers have to prepare and equip their children. By using an extreme device, she positions herself as being "on duty" to protect her

children in a war-like situation. As a marked contrast to this extreme case, Robin describes her daughter as a little girl in the same line, and her use of diminutive indexing underscores both her daughter's vulnerability and the importance of the mother's role.

In line 52, Robin narrates herself as an expert who knows how difficult a mother's job is. Robin shows code switching in lines 35, 44, and 56. The first shift, from Korean to English in line 35, proposes her emotional intensity when she displays intercultural awareness. In lines 44 and 56, Robin animates and acts as principal in repeating the word "bad behavior," used by her children's teacher. In line 44, she selects the direct English quote and intensifies her anger. Moreover, in line 56, she conveys sarcasm through this code-switched word, which leads to mutual laughter in line 57. She implicitly evaluates her child's behavior as *doubtful behavior* caused by cultural differences, not bad behavior (see line 8).

Though Robin is newly stepping into the role of advocate, the daughter is still in a protected state. This juxtaposition and contrast of gender role and practice show that the mother is transforming to a more assertive female, while she sees her daughter differently. In addition, this difference is not only a matter of gender identity and transformation, but also it uncovers her limited extent of transformation. Therefore, through telling different stories, narrators may present their shifted stances actively or passively within a given stretch of narrative to construct a possible scope of transformation.

Similar to how Robin displays her role as an advocate of her children in American society, Kyung-ah also tells how mothering let her voice be heard and how she evaluates this change in her personality.

Kyung-ah reveals her dissatisfaction with the after-school program and shares her experience of writing a letter to the school. In line 3, Kyung-ah stresses that Hawai'i is a good place to

Excerpt 4: "I wrote a letter that we need a better after-school program."

- 1 K: I am not satisfied with the after school program here in Hawai'i.
- 2 From next semester, I want my children to learn Chinese.
- 3 **Hawai'i is a very good place to learn different languages, you know?**
- 4 But the program in the school is not good.
- 5 So, I sent an email to the school asking them for a change in their program.
- 6 **You know the proverb, "The one desperate for water digs the well."**
- 7 So I just decided to send an e-mail!
- 8 H: **Did you get a reply?**
- 9 K: **Yeah, yeah, they said they will try to review it in a positive way.**
- 10 **I felt that my personality has changed a lot.**
- 11 **Here in Hawai'i, I have many chances to speak my *opinion* like in surveys.**
- 12 **Those experiences have changed me a lot.**
- 13 **Here I have to write many e-mails for different situations.**
- 14 **I think I am used to these now.**
- 15 **I don't hesitate that much when speak up my opinion.**
- 16 **But if I have lived with my husband, it would be different.**
- 17 **I just would have asked him to do it and not bother if he doesn't.**
- 18 **But here, I have to deal with everything!**

(Kyung-ah, April 2006)

learn different languages. In line 6, she uses the Korean proverb, "The one desperate for water digs the well," which shows a very Korean way of behavior even though she uses it to explain "American" ways of doing things, such as writing a letter to the school and asking for a change. She recontextualizes the meaning of this proverb in her new environment and shares Korean cultural knowledge with me. Her use of this proverb appropriates its meaning to fit her new environment and voices how people take action in desperate situations. Using the proverb is a type of footing. She animates the proverb to present a common sense voice based on the speaker's and listener's shared knowledge in line 6. Then she turns to present the action she actually took in her situation. Kyung-ah constructs shared intertextual understanding of a particular proverb by shifting footing, making sense of herself and framing her voice as one to be heard.

After responding in the positive to my question, "did you get a reply?" Kyung-ah shifts to the principal position and then comments on how her personality has changed. Through these circumstances that require her to give her opinion, she has become able to speak up without hesitation.

Excerpt 4 shows that, as the head of her family in Hawai'i, Kyung-ah lives with great responsibility (line 18) and must make her voice representative of her family. To be sure, education is already seen as a mother's responsibility in Korea. Most Korean mothers take responsibility as the educational manager for their children, even though they experience different constraints because of different economic status and access to English education (Park & Abelman, 2004). Thus, her role as an educational manager who requests a better class is not really unique to her life in the United States. However, what is significant is that she views her role as a transformed position. She considers her sending a letter to the school as confirming her shifted identity and the change of personality. Her own perception and the assignment of meaning to this action is different in the context of Hawai'i, and expressing an opinion and its acceptance by the school means making her voice heard by others in a new society.

Robin protects her daughter, while Kyung-ah constructs herself as the family's representative. Both compare their present situations to counterfactual conditions. Robin compares her emotional intensity in various contexts, and Kyung-ah compares different degrees of responsibility precipitated by the absence of her husband.

Escape from Korean Society as Women: Evaluation by Repositioning

Evaluation by repositioning shows how mothers position themselves differently as women in a transnational space. Transformation occurs, not only in the process of merging with a new society, but also in the process of emancipating oneself from a certain society. Many studies on female escape, gender, and language practices discuss how women can be liberated from certain constraining social values or inhibiting gender-role expectations by learning and using language and how they redefine and reposition themselves through this practice (Lan, 2003; McMahon, 2001; Pavlenko, 2001). For the two mothers in this study, being kirogi is a way of being free from Korean society, and this opportunity provides a chance to reflect and reposition themselves in a new society.

During the second interview, Kyung-ah told me a story about her relations with her in-laws. She was under great stress from her extended family, especially from her mother-in-law's high expectations, and this was another reason for her immigration. Many families in all societies have

Excerpt 5: “But actually I am all worn out inside!”

- 1 K: I don't like wearing make-up just because others do in Korea.
 2 I have to visit my husband's parents, and when I visit them
 3 sometimes I do not feel like putting on make-up, but when my
 4 mother-in-law asks me to be always nicely dressed with make-up on,
 5 it really bothers me! They want me to always look good
 6 and wear good clothes when visiting, and they expect their
 7 son to be driving a nice car, **but I feel so relieved that I do not**
 8 **need to do that any more because I am here with my children.**
 9 **I feel so free. People said that I am a loyal and submissive**
 10 **daughter-in-law, but actually I am all worn out inside!**
 11 H: Um.

(Kyung-ah, November 2006)

difficulties regarding in-law relations, yet these relationships are more complicated in Korean society, since Korea is a patriarchal society in which families are enmeshed with each other (Choi, 2006; Meyerstein, 1996). As Choi explains, married women in Korea have strong obligations to their husbands' families, even though they do not live with them.

In this excerpt, we can see how becoming kirogi provided Kyung-ah with an exit from Korean society. In her narrative, she notes the burden of the family and how she can be relieved from this hardship. Here, Kyung-ah constructs herself as oppressed because of her duties as a daughter-in-law in Korea, which is in contrast to her current situation. She constructs her previous experience in Korea by comparing it to her present, and the meaning of the past experiences is renewed and transformed. While recounting her story, Kyung-ah reflects that she had to adhere to certain cultural expectations in Korea. In line 9, Kyung-ah takes different footings to show the contrast between people's beliefs and her “true self” and challenges her identities. This reveals that a true self emerges from a person's relational positioning with their surroundings. Kyung-ah constructs the assumptions of others that she is a loyal and submissive daughter-in-law, and she offers new meaning for who she is. Her experience as a head of a family and living far from her parents-in-law allow Kyung-ah to reposition herself. Here, experiencing different roles in different contexts can be integral to her identity claims.

Similar to the way Kyung-ah escapes from her Korean in-laws, Robin also feels free from Korean society when she tells about her appearance. She claims that her appearance is often judged negatively in Korea, but positively in Hawai'i, and this difference influences her evaluation of these two different societies. While Robin distinguishes herself from Americans to establish herself as a strong mother in the previous excerpt, her stance toward American culture is still favorable in regard to a new aspect of her social life, namely, gender ideologies. This apparent inconsistency surfaces when comparing her current life to the one she had, as well as evaluative moments on the active position of her “present me” and the passive position of her “old me.”

Robin recounts how women's appearances are considered in different societies. She mentions that she was dissatisfied with her small eyes, but she notices that some American people think small eyes are attractive. She reconsiders her appearance (line 4), and I offer my agreement with this opinion (line 5). Then, in line 6, Robin elaborates by animating and authoring an American's opinion that “it is because it is unique,” and shifts her own judgment as a principal in accordance

Excerpt 6: "Why are my eyes so small?"

- 1 R: I hated my appearance when I was young, especially my small eyes
- 2 without double eyelids. "Why my eyes are so small?"
- 3 That's the question I always have.
- 4 **But here, my small eyes are considered attractive . . . sometimes. ((laughter))**
- 5 H: **Yeah, American people like eyes without double eyelids.**
- 6 R: **They said, "it is because it is unique!"**
- 7 **I think it is important to teach different values in life to my children.**
- 8 **Everybody should be respected even though they do not dress up!**
- 9 H: Yeah.
- 10 R: Now I know that good appearance is just luck, that's it.
- 11 To be a good looking does not need any effort.
- 12 But think about learning language and sports.
- 13 People practice very hard to achieve these.
- 14 Korean people on TV criticize other women's appearance without a second thought.
- 15 I do not want my children to learn that. It is a "bad" influence.
- 16 H: Right.
- 17 R: Children should learn this from Americans besides English.
- 18 They have to learn good American values from America
- 19 and good Korean values from Korea, and then they can be global!

(Robin, April 2006)

with this "American" view. This shows a marked contrast to her strong resistance to an American perspective in the earlier excerpt (see Excerpt 3) in which she uses a footing in opposition to the American teacher's position. Thus, her way of shifting footings is infused with the goals that she desires to achieve discursively, rather than a static and fixed point of view, which shows a moral stance based on a coherent ideology or set of social norms.

In line 6, she establishes a firm foothold for further evaluation, and in line 7, Robin shifts to a principal role to judge educational values, "*I think it is important to teach different values in life to my children.*" In the following line, Robin stresses that "everybody" should be respected no matter what they wear. She emphasizes the relationship between educational value and how people think about their appearance. This idea reaches to her perception of what is "global" (line 19).

Robin liberates herself from Korean perceptions of women's bodies by remarking on the lack of "globalness" in Korean values. Even though female beauty is subject to public judgment in Hawai'i, too, Robin discursively constructs Korean women's identities as bound by judgments on appearance by contrasting the two cultures. She does not mention how to be a global person but rather the values we should *not* learn from Korean society, which oppressed her as a woman in Korea.

Kyung-ah feels freed because she lives away from her in-laws despite having sacrificed herself for her children's English education. Robin can also be empowered away from the Korean value that oppressed her with disadvantageous standards of a woman's appearance. These ideas show that immigration certainly provides the space and social contexts with alternative values and practices in action for repositioning in kirogi mothers' lives and that the mothers experience shifts in perspectives.

CONCLUSION

I have investigated Korean women's gendered narratives as kirogi and examined the interplay between the layers of context inherent in mothers' narratives. I have also attended to how the mothers take different stances in telling narratives, revealing some degree of transformation. To observe their shifted stances, my analysis has attended to specific linguistic evaluative tools used in the kirogi mothers' narratives.

The two kirogi mothers see themselves as empowered in society, and they construct themselves as "good mothers" by presenting evaluative comments on themselves, others, and different societies. I have investigated three major themes; othering, voicing, and repositioning. My analysis substantiates how the mothers evaluate themselves by shifting stances in their storytelling. In the evaluative components of the stories, narrators inject their current and past stances toward a particular event to affirm or challenge their agency and contest power relationships.

According to Riessman (2001), the meaning of life events evolves as they are affected by subsequent events in life. That means that meanings emerge, are broken, and reshaped so our telling or retelling of stories is a continuous process. Mishler proposes the notion of "turning points" (2006), or changes of storytellers' understanding of their past experiences. This concept is based on his view that the meanings of experiences are constantly reframed within the contexts of our current and ongoing lives. As they have been going through different roles, responsibilities, and expectations, kirogi mothers in my study experience an unpredictable "this was it" moment in narrating, which does not necessarily occur chronologically. They are constantly evaluating, reevaluating, and developing new understandings, which connect closely to their current experiences. Where/how the mothers position themselves through storytelling discloses their shifted perspectives and transformed selves.

"Through life stories individuals and groups make sense of themselves; they tell what they are or what they wish to be, as they tell so they come, they *are* their stories" (Cortazzi, 2001, p. 388). Personal narratives therefore offer windows that also reflect ourselves, so that we can see the world through them, and project ourselves onto them. Being a kirogi mother is not only a matter of choice in life for education practice, it can also be the way of mothers' identity shifts. Last but not least, in terms of educational implications, I conclude with emphasizing the need for more research on different populations studying abroad and the cultural and social meaning of this educational practice.

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