Korean Migrant Women in Australia

Breaking through the employment barriers

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Barriers

- A lack of suitable employment
- Employer behavior
- Overseas qualification/experiences
- Child care
- Social isolation and lack of information
- English
- Racial/sexual discrimination
- Underemployment (skills mismatch)
- Hidden unemployed
- Double burden of domestic labour
- Cultural norms
Proposition:

KMW without strong *English language skills* will experience difficulties in accessing and negotiating Australian labour market.
## Methodology

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<th>Stage</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Result</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Questionnaires</td>
<td>Demographic data, incl. Education levels</td>
<td>Identify trends</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Case studies</td>
<td>Elicit perceptions and experiences of subjects</td>
<td>Hear the unimagined, unconstrained</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Discourse analysis</td>
<td>Linguistic representation of perceptions/experiences</td>
<td>Render subjectivity visible</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Legislation/Policy review</td>
<td>Comparison of terms</td>
<td>Suggest how to make more relevant to subjects</td>
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### Five Groups of KMW identified in the Study

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Group</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Group I:</strong> Don’t want to work in Australia and <strong>don’t work</strong></td>
<td>Neither frustrated by unfulfilled desire to perform work nor constrained by perceived barriers to labour market participation</td>
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<td><strong>Group II:</strong> Want to work in Australia but <strong>don’t work</strong></td>
<td>Willing to work and regard themselves as essentially career oriented but who for some reason do not participate labour market despite the desire</td>
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<td><strong>Group III:</strong> Don’t want to work in Australia but <strong>do work</strong></td>
<td>Forced into labour market participation by circumstance</td>
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<td><strong>Group IV:</strong> Want to work in Australia and <strong>do work:</strong> changed upon migration</td>
<td>Did not work in Korea but were keen and happy to participate in the labour market upon migration</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Group V:</strong> Want to work in Australia and <strong>do work:</strong> always career oriented</td>
<td>Worked in Korea or another country prior to migration and then continued to work upon immigration.</td>
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Don’t want to work and don’t work

Gyung Hee

- No interest in labour market participation in Korea or Australia
- Education, class, parental aspirations = marriage
- Provider husband and good wife, wise mother
- Virtues: obedience, servitude, self sacrifice, endurance, national virtue
- Appeals to Christianity & Confucianism

“When I came to Australia, I found some women had to go to work to support their families…. I didn’t have any job skills and with my poor English, I just thanked God that I didn’t need to.”
Want to work, but don’t work

Jung Ok

“I did not dare to think about getting a job even though I have a lot of experience and expertise in Korea ... because of my poor English. I worked in a Korean counseling company for two years, but I don’t think that I really worked in Australia ... that means speaking in English.”

“...of my friends who worked in a company where nearly everyone was Anglo-Australian... resigned...sick of running to the toilet whenever the phone rang...
Want to work, but don’t work

Jung Shin

- University graduate/work experience
- Studied English in Australia for 1 year
- After married immigrated to Australia
- Got a job in the public sector
- Retired when she had her second son

“When I first started working in Australia, English caused me a lot of problems...During the first months I was scared of the telephone...Whenever the phone rang my nerves would start running.”

“When I applied for the position, I already knew that it was far lower than my qualifications but I accepted the situation because my English was not as good as Australian-born staff.”
Don’t want to work, but work

Bang Seng

- High school teacher for 10 years in Korea
- Wanted to become a travel agent but unable to get experience: racism?
- Support husband’s business: good wife, wise mother
- Business failure = full financial responsibility
- Husband’s illness and death
- Voluntary caring work

“...I was the manager of a fashion outlet. I worked for five years but it was so hard with my limited English. All different kinds of people I had to serve, and it was tiring. So I retired from my job.

“...I completed a tourism course at TAFE, hoping that one day may I could have my own travel agency but to get a travel agent’s license, I needed two years’ work experience...Australian travel agencies would not hire me because of my accent...Korean agencies did not want to hire me...for fear...a future competitor.”
Want to work in Australia and do work: post migration

Jee-in

“ My husband’s written English and comprehension was good but he was never confident with his spoken English...he often had trouble understanding his colleagues’ English during coffee breaks or lunch times or social functions. ”

“The problem is that it is a dead-end job...after 20 years you are earning the same money as someone who has been working the job for three years. ”

- 7 years as full time housewife in Korea
- Bilingual: TAFE course
- Mother in law encouraged migration: western promise, educational promise
- Husband’s business failure
- Dead end job, no career ladder: labour market segmentation interpreters are migrant women
- Australia good for Korean women but not Korean men
Want to work in Australia and do work: always career oriented

Ji Won

- QANTAS sponsored migrant
- Experiences of racism
- American English v Australian English
- Asian women with American accents
- Lack of knowledge about Australia: feels left out
- Confidence

“I feel that Asian women with American accents have barriers to being understood and making friends in the workplace.”

“Often when Australian colleague talk about certain places in Australia and cultural or historical events, there is no way to understand what they are talking about unless someone explains because we do not know enough about Australia.”

“Most Korean staff had difficulties with the differences between American and Australian English.”
Results

Proposition:

KMW without strong *English language skills* will experience difficulties in accessing and negotiating Australian labour market.

The proposition is refuted as:

- Only Group II women say they did not get a job because of their poor English
- Group I women, not interested in getting a job/ middle class women
- Group III, IV, V women all work
Beyond the Existing Propositions

Limiting of Existing Propositions

- KMW as responsible for childcare and household tasks, part time or casual, for limited periods or in industries with limited progression.
- KMW do manage to negotiate these situations and do, overall, find labour market opportunities.
- Many KMW in this study have achieved considerable English language proficiency, some even to the level of becoming accredited translators and interpreters.
- Negative impacts once in the labour market/ English language difference.
- Regarding communication as their own problem.
Technical and cultural Linguistic competence

- Technical linguistic competence—understanding the vocabulary and grammatical rules of a language—is the formal foundation for verbal communication.

- Cultural linguistic competence

The AMEP

- Not universally effective for migrants with language radically different to English, e.g. Asians and Arabic speaking people (Tzannes 1999)

  ‘to accord the same numbers of hours to migrants whose first language is in the same script as English with for example, Asians and Arabic speaking people who use a different script cannot be right.’

- ‘Australian diplomats need an average of 1,320 hours to reach a functional level in some languages with a non-Roman script’ (Tzannes 1999)
Knowledge of how English is used in Australian settings

What types of communication are appropriate in particular social situations.

Beyond a purely technical knowledge of the language e.g. accent, use of slang, the ability to engage in jocular conversations.

‘Colour of your English’ (Creese and Kambere 2002)
Effective Communication

Effective communication requires not only technical language skills, but knowledge of prevailing norms about appropriate linguistic exchange.

- ‘A linguistic situation is never purely linguistic’ (Bourdieu 1993: 67)

In order for your words to count

- ‘You must not only say the grammatically correct words, but the socially acceptable words’ (Bourdieu 1993: 79)

And acceptability is defined by the conformity of words

- ‘Not only the immanent rules of the language, but also to the intuitively grasped rules that are immanent in a ‘situation’, or rather a certain linguistic market’ (Bourdieu 1993: 79)
Recommendations

Different level of English language class

- According to Academic level of students/ client
- Culturally relevant English
- Accent, use of slang, the ability to engage in jocular conversations
- Workplace English/ according to industry
  - Knowledge of communication rules, styles, and etiquette/ culturally-specific (Clyne 1994: 208)
- Knowledge of how English is used in Australian settings
- Types of communication/ appropriate in particular social situations
References