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Translingual Practices in Digital Environments: A Five-Year Longitudinal Study of Russian-Speaking Ethnic Korean Community

Jinsil Jang^{1*} , Youngjoo Yi² 

¹ Division of Language Arts and General Education, Gangneung-Wonju National University, Gangneung-si 25457, Republic of Korea

² Foreign, Second and Multilingual Language Education, Ohio State University, Columbus, OH 43210, USA

ABSTRACT

This five-year longitudinal study examines Russian-speaking ethnic Korean community members' translingual practices in digital environments drawing upon the concept of translingualism. This study aims to investigate the pivotal role of the migrants' online translingual practices in their daily lives and social integration in South Korea. For this study, data was collected from multiple sources and inductively analyzed. The findings reveal that during the initial settlement in South Korea, Russian-speaking ethnic Korean migrants (called Koryoin) predominantly used the Russian language in online (and offline) interactions as their local practices were mainly centered within the Koryoin community. However, as the migrants immersed themselves into various communities, they had slowly more engaged in translingual practices by switching between and mixing languages (Russian and Korean) for meaningful digital communication. Their translingual practices in digital environments enabled individuals to (1) situate and access resources within a broader online spatial context, (2) (re)build social relationships with other local community members, and (3) challenge social inequality in a host country (Korea). This study underscores the transformative potential of digital translingual practices, which appear to facilitate the (re)allocation of social status within their community and the (re)shaping of their language use. These findings suggest valuable implications for research and pedagogy for marginalized communities around the world.

Keywords: Online Translingual Practices; Migrants; Socio-Spatial Repertoires

*CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Jinsil Jang, Division of Language Arts and General Education, Gangneung-Wonju National University, Gangneung-si 25457, Republic of Korea;
Email: truejang@gwnu.ac.kr

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1. Introduction

South Korea has traditionally been perceived as a largely monolingual and monocultural society (e.g., ^[1]). However, in recent decades, the impact of globalization and a substantial increase in migration have profoundly transformed South Korea, reshaping its sociodemographic landscape ^[2]. According to an immigration report released by the Korean Ministry of Justice, the proportion of foreign-origin residents reached 4.37% of the total Korean population in the year 2022.

Notably, Russian-speaking ethnic Korean migrants, who hold the Overseas Korea (F-4) visa, represent a significant group, ranking among the top five foreign-origin resident populations in Korea. These Russian-speaking ethnic Korean migrants are often referred to as “Koryoin,” which is the focal participants in this article. The individuals hail from various regions, including Russia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan ^[3].

The Koryoin migrant population in South Korea stands out for its unique linguistic and cultural characteristics. They identify Russian as their first language, while simultaneously regarding Koryo-mar (a Korean vernacular predominantly employed by Koryoin, amalgamating elements of North Korean and Russian) as their heritage language. Furthermore, Russian remains the primary language of communication within their migrant community in South Korea, highlighting the importance of acquiring and using Russian, especially for the younger generation ^[4]. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that their communicative practices incorporate a diverse range of linguistic resources—Russian, Korean, and English—alongside other semi-otic elements. These practices are often evident in communal settings such as migrant centers and churches ^[5,6].

The influence of these distinctive communicative practices is not confined solely to physical spaces but extends into the digital realm; however, current research on the communicative practices within digital spaces has not yet delved into the specifics of language use in South Korea, particularly in relation to translingual practices. In addition, within the South Korean context, there is a significant gap in scholarly research on how digital spaces

function as key platforms for legitimizing perspectives, amplifying voices, and fostering social connections through communication practices. Equally understudied is the discursive construction of migrants’ individual and collective translingual practices in the context of social media. Acknowledging and addressing these research gaps and the potential significance of understanding ways in which this marginalized community engages with language/literacy practices and (re)constructs their identities, social relations, and communities in digital spaces, this study aims to (1) investigate the translingual practices of Koryoin migrants in digital spaces, (2) showcase unique insights from the Koryoin community by highlighting their perspectives and voices, and (3) expand the methodological conversations for research on language and literacy practices on digital environments by examining the following questions:

1. What do Koryoin migrants’ translingual practices in digital environments look like?
2. How do they engage in translingual practices in these environments?
3. How do translingual practices in digital environments play a role in their daily lives?

By examining underexplored translingual dynamics within South Korea, this study broadens the scope of digital language research, specifically among Koryoin migrants. It also contributes new methodological perspectives that deepen our understanding of how marginalized communities use digital spaces for communicative practices, identity formation, and social connection.

2. Review of Literature

2.1. Russian-Speaking Ethnic Korean Community in Korea: Language Use and Social Relation

The focal community examined in this research is a Russian speaking ethnic Korean group known as Koryoin. This migrant population is unique in that they have returned to South Korea about 150 years after their migration to the Russian Far East which began in 1863 ^[7]. Due to socio-political changes in Russia, including Russifica-

tion policies and their forced deportation to Central Asia in 1937, the Koryoin gradually lost proficiency in the Korean language, with Russian becoming their first language (L1) over the past 1.5 centuries^[7]. They have been relocating to South Korea from Central Asia and Russia, primarily driven by socio-economic inequalities and political instability in their home countries following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

When discussing the language and literacy practices of this particular population within the host country, it becomes evident that they possess distinct characteristics when compared to other ethnic Korean communities in foreign nations, such as China and Japan. Notably, this distinction arises from the fact that Koryoin in Central Asia have experienced a significant shift in their linguistic identity. They have, in essence, relinquished their heritage language, Koryo-mar, which is a Korean vernacular pre-dominantly utilized by Koryoin. Instead, they have come to regard Russian as their primary or native language.

Additionally, what sets Koryoin in South Korea apart from other migrant populations is their dominant use of the Russian language within their community, often with limited or no proactive endeavors to learn and use the Korean language. Frequently reported are the concerns surrounding the exclusive use of the Russian language and the limited Korean language proficiency, which have emerged as pressing social issues in Korea. These language-related challenges have had a detrimental impact on their social interactions with South Koreans^[4].

However, it is important to note that Koryoin people themselves perceive Korean language proficiency as the single most crucial factor for successful integration (e.g.,^[5]). As demonstrated in Jang's^[5] study on the language and literacy practices of Russian-speaking ethnic Korean students within and beyond school environments, the students frequently utilized Korean and other resources to establish and maintain social relationships with both Koryoins and Koreans. In school settings, students tended to alternate between languages based on the linguistic backgrounds of their interlocutors. For instance, they communicated in both Korean and Russian with Koryoin peers, while predominantly using Korean when interacting with Korean

peers and teachers. Their use of Korean was largely influenced by their social relationships with Koreans and their proficiency in the language. However, in out-of-school contexts, such as participation in online communities, their language practices became more fluid and dynamic, incorporating Russian, Korean, and English. The literature underscores the unique historical and socio-political factors that led to the community's dominant use of Russian over Korean and the challenges in integrating into Korean society.

Similarly, Koryoin's language and learning practices in digital spaces exhibit notable distinctions when compared to their offline practices. This digital realm demonstrates a dynamic and adaptive use of various resources to maintain and nurture social relationships across different contexts, including their homes, schools, and communities (e.g.,^[8]). Surprisingly, despite these observations, there remains a paucity of studies that delve into their engagement in translingual practices within social media contexts. By conducting situated and localized analyses that delve into translingual practices within online spaces, studies can unveil the intricacies of how multiple semiotic resources are utilized to engage in translingual practices and social interactions and to establish social relations^[9].

2.2. Translingual Practices in Digital Space

Translingual practices can be understood as the way individuals engage in communication across various linguistic and communicative systems, adapting, mixing, and merging languages to create new forms of expression^[10]. Especially, the dynamic landscape of new media has given rise to translingual affordances, enabling individuals to seamlessly integrate language with various modes of communication^[11]. Moreover, as people engage in online interactions, they not only participate in the creation of meaning within digitally mediated texts but also develop the capacity to establish and sustain relationships and identities through digital practices^[9,12]. The ever-expanding array of opportunities within the digital realm have urged applied linguists to explore roles that translingual practices play in multilingual individuals' lives.

Individuals' online translingual practices are intri-

cately connected with their daily offline communications, fostering opportunities for learning and social engagement^[13]. It can be found in Yin et al.'s study of the translanguaging practices of six Chinese international students studying in Sydney and Auckland. The study indicates that the students consistently utilized their full linguistic repertoire for online communications and academic tasks. For instance, Blair, one of the participants, employed a Chinese social media app, WeChat, not only for academic purposes but also for discussions with Chinese classmates she interacted with daily. It illustrates a seamless transition of in-class offline activities to corresponding online activities, with the use of Chinese and/or English. In the process of meaning negotiation, Blair generally valued the L1 (Chinese) support system available in her city (Sydney), allowing her to flexibly blend languages to accomplish tasks and meet her communication needs.

The translocal interconnectedness between offline and online spaces underscores that emerging multilingual speakers actively engage in discussions and reshape their language norms, establishing new translanguaging norms, rather than merely adopting the norms of native speakers^[13]. Specifically, as emerging multilingual individuals participate in translanguaging practices during their daily lives, the practices are reflected in their online interactions. It coincides with the assertion of Dovchin et al.^[14] which emphasizes “being online [constitutes a genuine reality], and [offline experiences] are permeated by the online”. It suggests a seamless interconnection and intertwining of online and offline activities across both space and time^[13].

In fact, the concept of translanguaging practices could be powerfully employed to capture the diverse and hybrid nature of multilingual individuals' spatial and linguistic activities^[15]. A compelling illustration of translanguaging communications as socio-spatial practices can be found in the digital ethnographic study conducted by Tankosić et al.^[16]. Their study explored how Mongolian women in Australia engaged in translanguaging practices to sustain the flow of their interactions, and navigate their feelings of discomfort, anger, and humiliation while sharing their stories with one another.

Specifically, the Mongolian migrant women strategically utilized Mongolian, English, Russian, and other

semiotic resources to ensure that their online interactions remained fluid and continuous. They expressed and coped with their emotions, particularly their anger, humiliation, and frustration, while also bringing themselves closer to others who shared their language and culture. Their online translanguaging discourses revealed that these women harnessed the resources at their disposal to make sense of their experiences. In doing so, they united their interlocutors in their values, beliefs, and personalities, creating shared lived experiences rather than succumbing to pain and unhappiness in isolation. This study exemplifies how translanguaging practices can empower individuals to maintain cultural connections, forge meaningful connections in digital spaces, and navigate complex emotional landscapes, underscoring the transformative potential of translanguaging communications as socio-spatial practices in the digital age. The existing research highlights that digital platforms enable fluid language mixing and adaptation, which supports community-building and the expression of complex identities.

In short, for multilingual individuals, their online (translanguaging) practices can serve as gateways to literacy learning and social relation building, playing a central role in enabling full participation in the economic, political, and cultural facets of life in their host country^[17]. In such online translanguaging practices, they tend to make use of their socio-spatial repertoires, which encompass linguistic, cultural, spatial, and political resources^[17]. In line with these ideas, drawing upon the conceptual framework of translanguaging practices (e.g.,^[18]), this qualitative case study explores how members of the Koryoin community engage in translanguaging practices in digital environments and how such practices play a role in their daily lives.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Researchers' Positionality

The data for the present study constitute a segment of a larger qualitative case research project that spanned five years (2018-2022). The larger research investigated local language practices, particularly how both migrants and

local residents in Korea contribute to the evolution and transformation of linguistic landscapes in various contexts, such as homes, schools, churches, and small enterprises like cafes and restaurants. In doing so, the larger research aimed to illuminate ways in which translanguaging, particularly from the grassroots, becomes an integral part of the Koryoin community's identity and interactions. As part of this larger research endeavor, the present study reported in this article focuses mainly on examining Russian-speaking ethnic Korean community members' translanguaging practices in digital environments.

For this study, data is sourced not only from onsite community interactions but also from digital platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Telegram. This comprehensive approach allows for the examination of both synchronous and asynchronous social media communications among Koryoin individuals. To ensure the ethical conduct of the research, potential participants received consent forms explicitly outlining the collection and potential utilization of digitally captured data for publicly available journal articles. Additionally, a verbal explanation was provided detailing the data collection and analysis process.

In this study, Jin (pseudonym), a Korean-English speaking scholar and first author of this article, was the primary researcher. She collected data and conducted an initial data analysis. Sobin (pseudonym), a second author of this article, supervised Jin's research as an academic advisor and served as a "critical partner" for data analysis, interpretation, and writing-up^[19].

3.2. Research Contexts and Participants

This research was carried out in one of Koryoin communities located in Dusan (a pseudonym), situated in the southwestern region of South Korea, where there has been a large influx of foreign migrants beginning in 2015. At the time of data collection in 2018, the Koryoin community in Dusan, in particular, exemplifies the characteristics of an initial settlement for a migrant population in Korea. Here, the rapid increase in the number of migrants has engendered dramatic transformations in local norms and community dynamics within a relatively short timeframe.

To explore Koryoins' online translanguaging practices

and their role in everyday life, this study recruited Koryoin households consisting of parents and school-aged children. Four Koryoin households (referred to by pseudonyms: Iroda's family, Alexandria's family, Ludmilla's family, and Olga's family) who were among the initial settlers in the community, participated in the study. All of these focal households hailed from Uzbekistan but possessed limited proficiency in the Uzbek language, primarily communicating in and perceiving Russian as their first language (L1). This article focuses more on the language and literacy practices of mothers and their children in digital environments given that fathers seemed to play a relatively less prominent role in their digital space.

Iroda (3rd generation of Koryoin mother) made her journey to South Korea, along with her two sons, Alexei, who was in the second grade, and Artur, who was in the fifth grade at the time, in order to reunite with her husband in 2017. He had been employed in South Korea since his own migration in the late 2000s. Iroda played a highly active role online, regularly in sharing essential information with fellow community members, as well as keeping her friends and relatives in Uzbekistan informed of their life in Korea. In fact, Iroda is the one who introduced the first author to the rest three focal households so that Koryoin family participated in this study and received free tutorials from the first author. Following his mother's footsteps, Artur (older son) actively engaged in digital literacy practices by uploading online posts on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Telegram (a messaging app widely used by Koryoin members for communication with family, relatives, and friends in Korea and other countries).

Another Koryoin mother, Alexandria and her husband migrated to South Korea, initially leaving their daughter, Tanya, with her grandparents in Uzbekistan in early 2015. However, several months later, Tanya finally moved to South Korea to join and reside with her parents. Alexandria maintained a Facebook account for communication purposes, primarily connecting with her close friends and family members in both Uzbekistan and South Korea. Nevertheless, she was not active online and primarily used messaging services when necessary. In contrast to her mother, Tanya (in grade 7 at the beginning of the data collection in 2018) exhibited a strong inclination

for sharing her daily experiences online. She employed various messaging applications, including Telegram and KakaoTalk (a widely-used messaging app in South Korea), in addition to being active on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram.

Similar to Iroda, Ludmilla, migrated to Korea with her son Leo (in grade 3) and daughter Lera (in grade 6), in 2015 to reunite with her husband, who had been employed in South Korea for several years prior to their move. Following her relocation, Ludmilla frequently shared her daily life experiences on Instagram, and she was also a regular contributor to discussions and comments under her children's and neighbors' social media posts. She used these platforms as a means to engage in conversations with her own children and connect with local Korean and Koryoin residents. Much like their mother, both Leo and Lera displayed a high level of online activity. They were active users of social media platforms, actively communicating and exchanging information with their peers and close Koryoin community members.

Olga was the pioneer settler in the Koryoin community in Dusan. She arrived in South Korea in early 2010, accompanied by her husband, leaving her daughter, Katya, under the care of her mother in Uzbekistan. It was in 2015 that Katya (in grade 3) was finally invited to join her parents in Korea. Olga emerged as an exceptionally active member within the Koryoin community, engaging in various aspects of the lives of fellow community members across online and offline spaces. She frequently shared her day-to-day experiences, highlighting her life alongside her daughter, a narrative that resonated not only with the local population but also with relatives and acquaintances in Uzbekistan. In a manner reminiscent of her mother, Katya displayed a penchant for sharing her daily experiences online and maintaining communication with her friends in Uzbekistan and Korea through messaging apps such as Telegram, as well as through social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

This research was carried out in one of Koryoin communities located in Dusan (a pseudonym), situated in the

southwestern region of South Korea, where there has been a large influx of foreign migrants beginning in 2015. At the time of data collection in 2018, the Koryoin community in Dusan, in particular, exemplifies the characteristics of an initial settlement for a migrant population in Korea. Here, the rapid increase in the number of migrants has engendered dramatic transformations in local norms and community dynamics within a relatively short timeframe.

To examine Russian-speaking ethnic Korean community members' translingual practices in digital environments, a qualitative case study approach is employed, allowing for a comprehensive investigation of a contemporary phenomenon (the case) within its authentic real-world setting. This approach is ideal for an in-depth examination of a complex phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly defined^[20]. To furnish corroborative support for this case study, we remained committed to the following foundational principles throughout the data collection process, as outlined by Yin (^[20], p. 113): "(a) employing multiple sources of evidence; (b) maintaining a chain of evidence."

Recognizing the critical importance of these principles in ensuring the robustness of the case study, the first author gathered data through a variety of channels, which included conducting semi-structured interviews, making observations, keeping detailed fieldnotes, and collecting artifacts, such as screen-captured Telegram messages, Instagram and Facebook posts. While the use of other digital resources by Koryoin individuals, such as KakaoTalk (the popular messenger app in South Korea), was observed, our focus was primarily on digitally-captured data from Telegram, Instagram, and Facebook. This decision was based on the higher activity levels of participants' social media communications on these platforms. Furthermore, in instances where specific events or actions were identified online, they were screen-captured. Subsequently, participants were interviewed via Zoom, or when feasible, the first author, Jin, conducted onsite interviews by visiting their households. This data collection effort extended over a span of five years within a Koryoin community in Dusan.

The data were analyzed using an inductive coding

approach and the constant comparative method ^[21]. Initially, all collected data were transcribed and organized for analysis. Inductive coding was applied to identify emerging patterns and themes related to participants' translingual practices ^[22]. Initial codes include 'online translingual communication,' 'social media,' 'social relations,' 'connecting to the migrant community,' 'connecting to the local host (Korea) community,' 'resource sharing,' 'translingual resources,' and so forth. As prominent themes emerged from this initial analysis, further theoretical categories were deduced, drawing upon both the existing literature and the insights gleaned from the data. This iterative process allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the dataset and the generation of meaningful findings. Overall, three major themes emerged throughout the data analysis: (1) online translingual communication to situate, access, and share resources, (2) online translingual practices to (re) establish social connections with local community members, and (3) the use of translingual resources to challenge social inequality.

In order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the data and to facilitate the identification of patterns and themes across all the cases, a cross-case analysis approach was employed ^[23]. This approach aims to assess the applicability and relevance of the findings to other similar language learning environments, with a focus on crafting more nuanced and robust explanations ^[23]. Through the cross-case analysis of multiple instances, we were able to pinpoint the specific conditions under which particular findings manifested. This approach allowed for an assessment of the plausibility of extending these findings to other analogous conditions, thereby contributing to a richer understanding of the subject matter at hand ^[23].

4. Findings

In this section, we provide vivid descriptions of Koryoin migrants' translingual practices in digital environments. Such descriptions directly address our research questions 1 and 2, that is, "What do Koryoin migrants' translingual practices in digital environments look like?" and "How do they engage in such practices?" In addition, to address our research questions 3 (i.e., the role of digital

translingual practices in their lives), the Findings section is organized into three subsections (major themes): (1) online translingual communication to situate, access, and share resources, (2) online translingual practices to (re)establish social connections with local community members, and (3) the use of translingual resources to challenge social inequality. Here we present major findings about Koryoin migrant mothers' and children's translingual practices in digital environments.

4.1. Online Translingual Communication to Situate, Access, and Share Resources

One of the most important findings in this study is that Koryoin migrants engaged in translingual practices in order to situate, access, and share resources in a host country. In particular, translingual communication in digital environments played a significant role in accessing and sharing resources and information (e.g., educational resources for children) valuable to their lives in Korea. For instance, migrant mothers exchanged information about learning resources for their children while creating and sharing online posts written mostly in Russian in Facebook (see Figures 1 and 2 for their online posts). They shared and wrote about the learning material, called Red Pen Story box, educational materials that included books, vocabulary cards, and a read-aloud audio device, and workbooks.

Figure 1 below illustrates a Facebook post shared by Iroda within her Koryoin community. This online post was originally written by an educational specialist from the education company, "교원" (Kyowon), targeting Koryoin parents. Iroda who was satisfied with this educational material wanted to share this information with other Koryoin parents by posting it on her Facebook. Though it was predominantly composed in Russian, of note is that this shared post strategically incorporated specific Korean terms, such as "교원" (Kyowon), denoting the education company, "인강" (acronym for 인터넷 강의, signifying online lectures in Korean), "예습" (preview in Korean), and the academic subjects in Korean (e.g., "수학" and "과학," math and science in Korean). This translingual approach was employed to distinctly articulate certain terms commonly referenced within the educational setting.

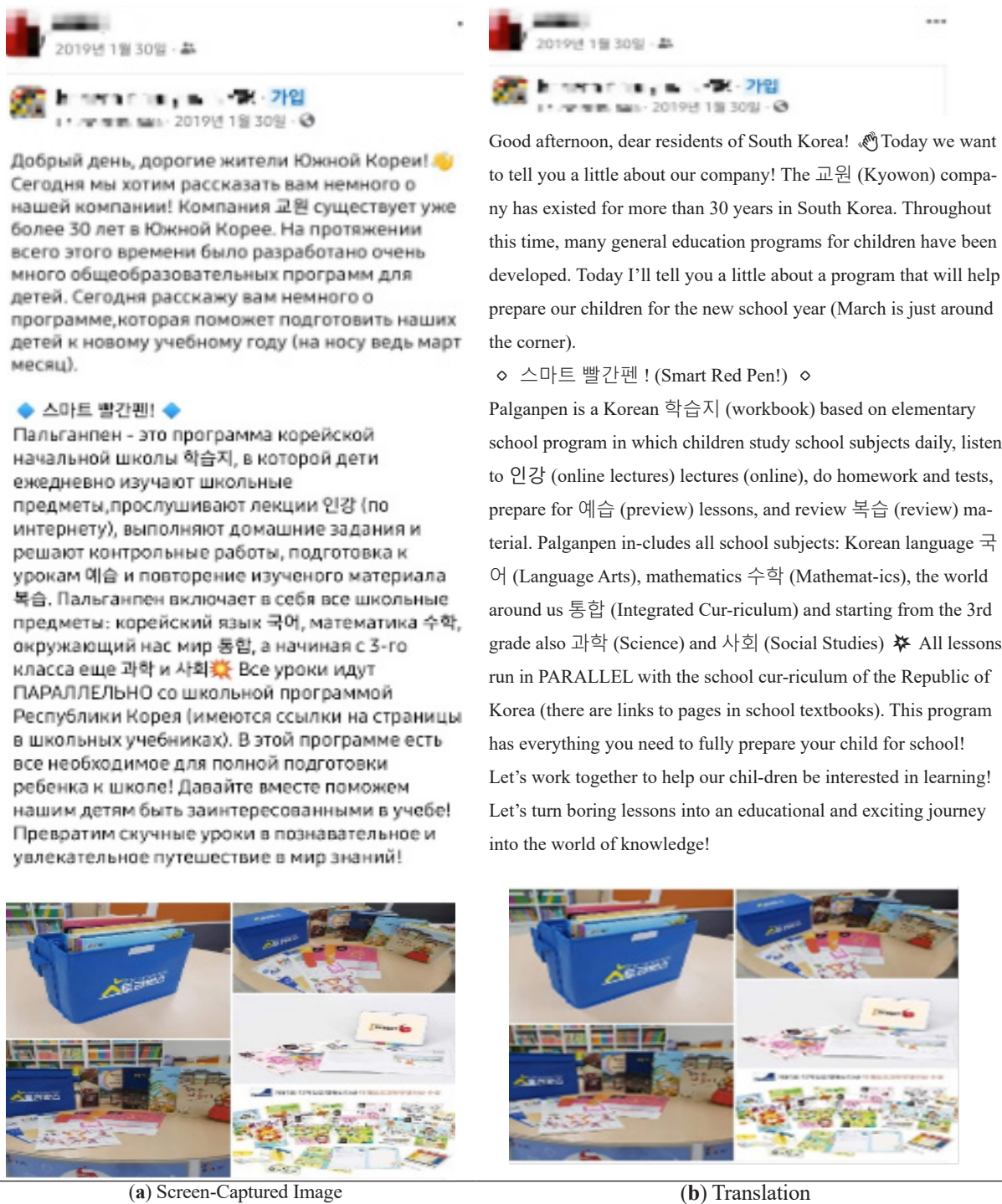


Figure 1. Iroda’s post introducing learning materials for academic support of Koryoin children.

The online post written in Russian, Korean, and emojis enabled Koryoin parents to access and share significant resources with other Koryoins, which seemed to lead to strengthening relations among Koryoin community members. It resonates with Iroda’s statement:

“The [online posts] are shared with the aim of informing the community members of the resources available for the education of their children. Sometimes, I invite Alexei’s friends to our home so that they can, at the very least, gain a firsthand glimpse of how Alexei utilizes his

교원 빨간펜 (Kyowon Red Pen) learning materials.”

It demonstrates her engagement with translingual practices to share valuable information among members and foster a sense of community.

As another similar example, Iroda shared an online post about her son’s completion of the Koywon reading

program. She proudly posted the Certificate of Completion of a reading program, called “150 Reading Marathon,” with her heartfelt statement in Russian, “Успех моих детей – самый лучший подарок! 😊” (The success of my children is the best gift! 😊) (see her online post in **Figure 2** below).

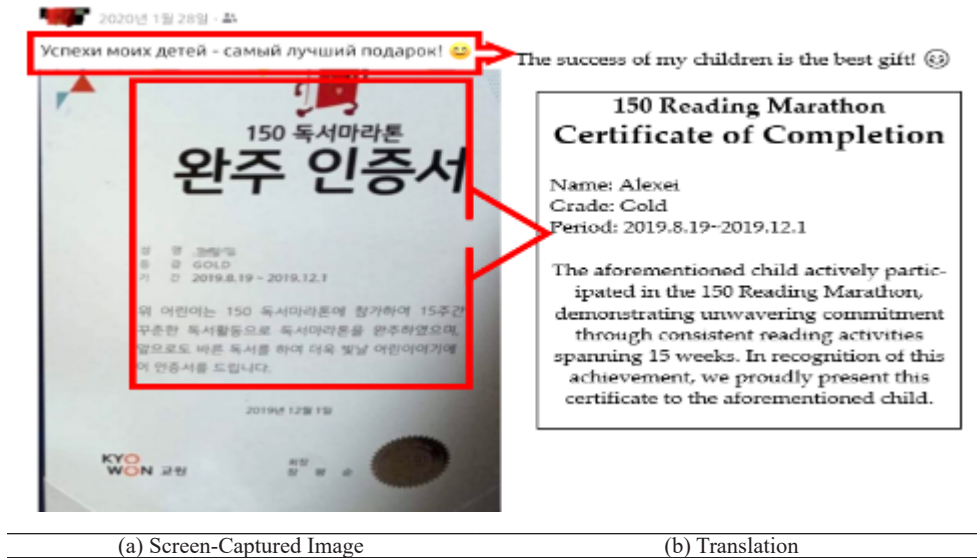


Figure 2. Koryoin mother’s online posting about her son’s completion of a reading program.

Iroda’s son, Alexei (in grade 4) eagerly participated in the program for 15 weeks while reading books and writing book reports in Korean. Iroda was extremely proud of Alexei’s accomplishment. She further believed that this reading program and other educational materials from Kyowon facilitated Alexei’s increasing knowledge of academic Korean language. Her online post gained many likes and heightened other Koryoin parents’ attention towards the learning materials she had acquired for her sons. All these examples indicate that Koryoin migrants engage in online translingual practices as a way to situate, access, and share resources.

Another significant aspect of these online posts is that they illustrate the multi-modal, especially non-linguistic aspects of translingual practices. When we talk about translingual practices, we often overlook the use of non-linguistic resources (e.g., im-age, sound, color, fonts) in translingual practices. From this study, we found the use of non-linguistic semiotic resources for communication was as critical as their use of multiple languages (Russian and Korean) in their translingual practices. Utilizing

non-linguistic semiotic resources (e.g., Photos of Red Pen Story box) seems to be especially valuable when they shared resources or information in Russian as those resources were often presented in Korean and/or English on Kyowon’s official website, potentially impeding the community’s ability to locate, access, and effectively utilize these resources. In other words, migrant parents often had quite a limited access to useful information and resources regarding educational opportunities and/or materials when they were written in L2 (Korean). Thus, the incorporation of non-linguistic semiotic resources as well as multiple linguistic resources to their communication appeared to be particularly beneficial for them to locate and access information and to be in a better position to share resources with other Koryoin migrant community members.

4.2. Online Translingual Practices to (Re)Establish Social Connections with Community Members

Koryoin migrants also engaged in translingual

practices to (re)establish social connections with people. Translingual practices in digital environments play a significant role in fostering and sustaining social connections with people in their local community and in the schools. In particular, migrant children engaged in translingual practices to be better connected with (1) their Korean friends in Korean schools, (2) other migrant children in Korea, and (3) friends and relatives in their home country (i.e., Uzbekistan). Most importantly, their translingual practices seem to be locally situated. Here we describe migrant students' translingual practices to establish social connections with other friends, followed by a migrant mother's practices in their community.

First, a Koryoin migrant student, Katya demonstrates her translingual practices to make connections with her friends across multiple contexts (e.g., school, community, online). Katya's initial year in Korea was challenging, but she received invaluable assistance from her Korean friends, who helped her adapt to the Korean school. As she had slowly nurtured her connections with Korean friends in school, her digital relationships with them had deepened and expanded. She frequently posted Instagram reels depicting her enjoyable moments with her Korean friends

in Korean. Below (Figure 3) is Katya's Instagram reel and an accompanying post uploaded by Katya in 2018, which were captured and shared on the same day. The two images show how she engaged in translingual practices in sustaining and building relationships with her Korean friends.

The Instagram reel (the first image in Figure 3) depicts her strolling down the street with her friends as Katya captured the moment on video. In this visual narrative, Katya chose to overlay a Korean text, "친구들" ("friends"), alongside a purple heart with a smiley face. The use of Korean language and the substantial size of the text (the Korean text, 친구들) seem to demonstrate the profound significance attached to her friendships with Korean friends.

Her close relationships with the Korean friends seem to become apparent in another online post (the second image of Figure 3). When Katya uploaded her selfie with some emojis, her Korean friend, Somin (Pseudonym), left a comment in Korean, saying, "이쁘당" ("You look pretty"). Katya soon responded with emojis 😊❤️ that conveyed her genuine emotions and showed her connection with Somin.



Figure 3. Katya's online posts that show her social connections with Korean friends.

Another teenage participant, Tanya (grade 8 in 2019) also engaged in online translingual practices through which she seemed to foster and maintain her social relationships with her Korean friends as well as her Koryoin

friends in the community. An example can be found in Tanya’s class photo taken during a school field trip posted on Instagram (**Figure 4**).



Figure 4. Tanya’s instagram post on her school field trip.

With this class picture, she added its description as “Мой счастливый день! ♥️ 행복한 날! ♥️.” This description is the combination of Russian, Korean, and emojis. The Russian phrase, “Мой счастливый день!” means “My lucky day!” and the Korean phrase “나의 행복한 날!” means “A happy day.” Tanya intentionally used both Russian and Korean to express her happy feelings while considering both Koryoin (Russian-speaking) and Korean friends. What is very interesting here is that her Koryoin classmate, Mark, who was also in the photo, added a comment, “И я здесь совершенно не вписываюсь! 😭 😭” solely in Russian, which can be translated as “And I don’t fit in here at all! 😭 😭” in English. In response to Mark’s comment, Tanya used the similar emojis that illustrate a face with tears of joy, “😂 😂 😂” to convey that she understood Mark’s feeling of being a foreigner or migrant student among Korean students. Two Koryoin stu-

dents, Tanya and Mark, seem to strengthen their relationships by using their secret code (Russian) and the similar emojis as well as by sharing a similar sense of being different from other Korean friends. As such, Tanya seemed to solidify the connections with both Korean and Koryoin friends through online translingual practices.

In addition to the migrant students’ translingual practices, migrant mothers also engaged in translingual practices to foster and sustain their social relationships with people in their communities. For instance, Ludmilla, the mother of Leo and Lera, was a religious individual who regularly attended a regional Christian church for Russian-speaking migrants. Many of her posts on Instagram and Facebook were closely connected to her experiences within the church community. One of her Instagram posts (Figure 5) demonstrates her active engagement with a local church community.



Figure 5. Koryoin mother’s online post to stay connected with the local community.

In this online post, Ludmilla uploaded a photo of a banner displayed on her church wall. This banner advertised the Easter service (“부활절예배”). At the top of the banner (photo), a Russian phrase, “Пасхальное служение” is inscribed. The Korean phrase, “부활절예배” (Easter service) in the largest font is centered in the banner. The banner itself included both Korean and Russian words to target local Korean and Koryoin members. With this photo of the banner, Ludmilla added its description as “ПАСХА” (EASTER) in Russian right under the image. She intentionally used Russian (i.e., “ПАСХА”), accompanied by a church emoji 🏛️, in order to inform the Koryoin community about the Easter service that would be held at the Korean church. By conveying this information in Korean within the photograph, as well as in Russian and through other semiotic elements, Ludmilla made a deliberate effort to maintain connections with the church community members (Korean and Koryoin people) who played a vital role in her life. This example highlights the significance of translingual practices in establishing and maintaining social relationships in the context of real-life

situations that extend into the digital realm.

4.3. Translingual Practices to Challenge Social Inequality and Promote Social Mobility

Findings from this study show that Koryoin migrants used translingual resources to challenge social inequality and promote social mobility. A notable example is Iroda’s Facebook post regarding the precarious visa status of fourth-generation Koryoin migrants (see her online post in Figure 6). Oddly, the Overseas Korean Act applied to ethnic Koreans from the United States; thus, they could hold Overseas Korean visa. Yet, this Act had more restrictions for ethnic Koreans from China and the former Soviet Union countries, and thus Iroda’s children (fourth-generation Koryoin migrants) had experienced challenging visa issues to live in Korea.

In this post, Iroda shared a national petition directed to the Blue House (metonymically referring to the South Korean presidency and its administration), urging the revision of the Act on the legal status of Overseas Koreans, particularly focusing on the young Koryoin migrants who

belong to the fourth generation of ethnic Koreans. This national petition was originally created by an anonymous Korean national residing abroad and composed in the Korean language. Nevertheless, it was widely shared online and received support from both Korean and Koryoin individuals. If the national petition directed to the Blue House

received over 200,000 supporters within 30 days, the Blue House would promptly respond to the petition. In fact, national petitions to the Blue House have often addressed significant sociopolitical issues and also demonstrate the collective power of online social and political engagement of Koreans.

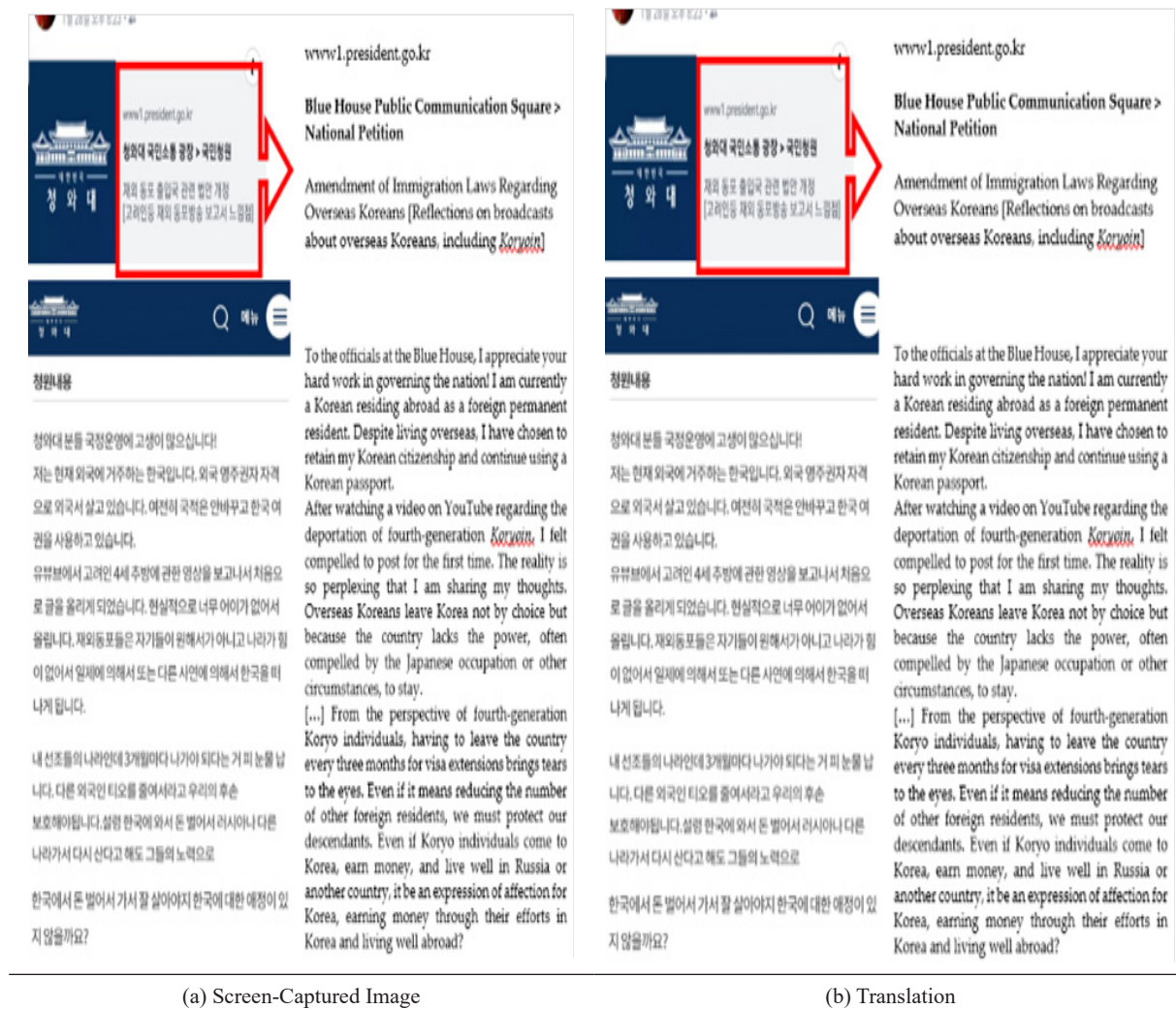


Figure 6. Iroda’s online post to share a national petition.

Beyond sharing this petition in her Facebook community, Iroda’s efforts to raise awareness about the petition resulted in the establishment of a Telegram group titled “Non-Korean F1 Visa Holders: Channel for Coordinating Organized Movement” (see the screen shot that captured the Telegram group in Figure 7 below). Telegram was a messaging app that many Koryoin members use to communicate with their family, relatives, and individuals in their home country (Uzbekistan) and beyond. In this Tele-

gram group chat, Russian was chosen as the primary language for invitations, as the group is specifically tailored for Koryoin individuals. However, according to Iroda, they leveraged multiple linguistic resources, including Korean, Russian, and images, when discussing the petition in an effort to facilitate an informed decision-making process. The information about this Telegram community was also posted and shared on Iroda’s Facebook.

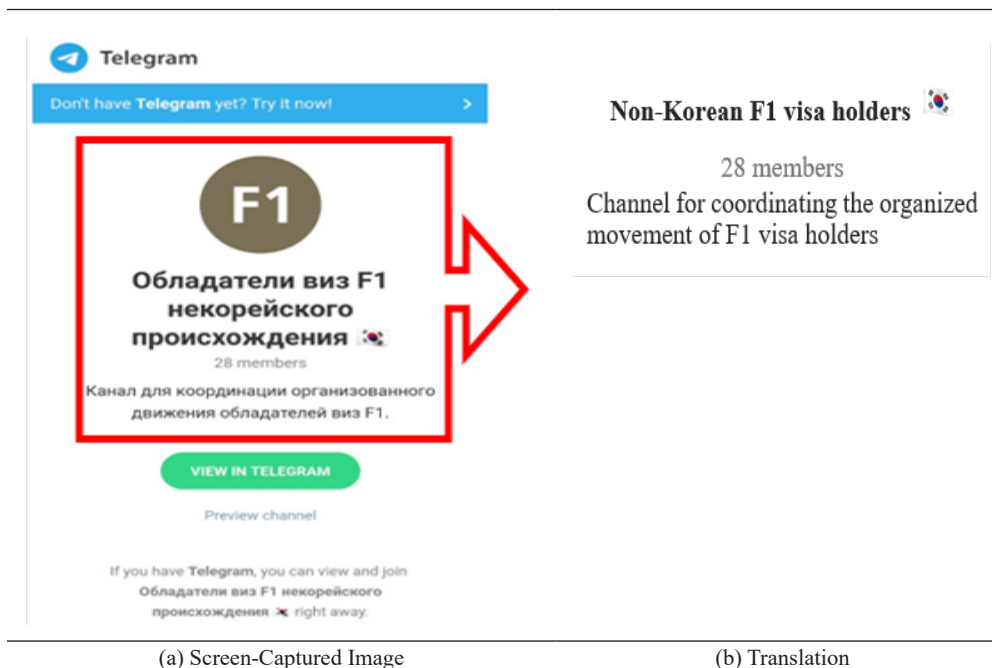


Figure 7. Iroda’s telegram group for non-Korean F1 visa holders.

Iroda’s actions demonstrate that her online translanguaging practices enabled her to challenge social inequality (e.g., the unstable visa status for fourth-generations of ethnic Koreans). In early 2019 (approximately 20 months after her migration to Korea), Iroda was not fluent in reading and writing in Korean, yet she wanted to address social inequality and raise others’ awareness of this issue through online translanguaging practices. Later on, the Overseas Korean Act was revised by equally treating ethnic Koreans overseas.

5. Discussion

In this section, we provide vivid descriptions of Koryoin migrants’ translanguaging practices in digital environments. Such descriptions directly address our research questions 1 and 2, that is, “What do Koryoin migrants’ translanguaging practices in digital environments look like?” and “How do they engage in such practices?” In addition, to address our research questions 3 (i.e., the role of digital translanguaging practices in their lives), the Findings section is organized into three subsections (major themes): (1) online translanguaging communication to situate, access, and share resources, (2) online translanguaging practices to (re)establish social connections with local community members, and

(3) the use of translanguaging resources to challenge social inequality. Here we present major findings about Koryoin migrant mothers’ and children’s translanguaging practices in digital environments.

Throughout their settlement in the host country, migrant mothers and children demonstrated a remarkable ability to adeptly and consistently leverage their linguistic and other semiotic resources. It enabled them not only to exchange everyday experiences and essential information but also to establish and sustain social connections with both local Koreans and members of the Koryoin community. The example, such as Iroda’s sharing of educational resources, underscores the migrants’ ability to center their interactions around shared interests. By centering their interactions around shared interests, interest-driven practices enable migrants to collaborate with online users from diverse backgrounds^[24].

The findings of this study hold significant implications for policy-making and integration strategies aimed at supporting migrant communities. One critical insight is the importance of recognizing and facilitating translanguaging practices as a means of fostering social inclusion. For instance, policymakers could develop initiatives that provide digital literacy programs tailored to multilingual migrant populations. These programs should emphasize the practi-

cal use of multiple languages in digital spaces, equipping migrants with the skills to access resources and engage more effectively within their host societies.

Additionally, we found some important characteristics of online translanguaging practices for building social relationships. First, their online translanguaging practices for relationship-building were locally situated. Although our participants engaged in online translanguaging practices to maintain connections with their family, relatives, or friends in their home country (Uzbekistan), the most salient translanguaging practices in digital environments took place with and for their local friends. Their online translanguaging practices were the continuation of their practices in off-line contexts (e.g., school, church, home). This finding is quite unique and different from previous research findings that translanguaging practices are often transnationally-oriented^[25,26]; however, Koryoin migrants' translanguaging practices in this study were rather locally-oriented. Koryoin migrants actively sought to build and maintain social connections with people (both Koreans and other migrants) in their local communities (e.g., school, church, community center). This finding indicates that Koryoin migrants engage in moments of online interaction that closely mirror their everyday, offline experiences^[24].

Second, Koryoin migrant children expressed their strong emotions and made emotional connections with their peers through their online translanguaging practices. This finding is similar to previous studies: Middle Eastern refugee families^[27] emphasized emotional connections through online translanguaging communications, and Mongolian women in Australia^[16] engaged in translanguaging practices to navigate their emotions while sharing their stories one another. Online translanguaging practices seem to afford (im)migrant people to make social and emotional connections with people in their lives.

Clearly, the findings of this study highlight the idea that "communication transcends words and involves diverse semiotic resources and ecological affordances"^[28]. Moreover, the concept of socio-spatial repertoires plays a crucial role in enabling individuals to navigate and access a wide range of semiotic resources within a broader online spatial context^[29]. It suggests, from a translanguaging perspective, diverse linguistic and other semiotic resources

collectively form a multifaceted and dynamic repertoire that individuals employ to communicate, comprehend, and negotiate meanings with others^[30].

Social media platforms like Facebook and Telegram serve as important grounds for cultural, social, and political discourse^[31-33]. Such social platforms allow people who share common interests to congregate to engage in discussions that may be challenging to have offline. We similarly found that our Koryoin participants used social media platforms to engage in the exploration, negotiation, and challenging of social inequality, which in turn would facilitate their social mobility. Iroda's example of engaging in online translanguaging practices to challenge social inequality underscores the notion that online communications act as a means to draw attention to existing inequalities and ideologies that may have been naturalized or taken for granted in offline contexts but become amplified or accentuated when mediated online^[24].

One critical point that distinguishes this finding from the existing research is that Iroda's translanguaging practices did not contribute to the "reproduction of certain biases in the offline/online nexus"^[24]. For example, Karina in Darwin^[24], a Filipino migrant worker in Hong Kong, refrained from sharing challenging situations or issues she faced in the host community on platforms like Facebook and TikTok. Instead, she selectively uploaded content showcasing the luxurious and enjoyable aspects of her life. Despite being aware that her posts could create misleading perceptions of overseas Filipino workers, Karina continued emphasizing the positive aspects of her experience. Her intention was to present a narrative aligning with the expectations of her family and friends regarding the life they anticipated for her as a Filipino transnational in Hong Kong.

Similar to Karina, Iroda had the option to selectively share only the positive aspects of her life online. However, she chose a different path by using her online presence to address socio-political issues that required resolution for fourth-generation Koryoin individuals. In doing so, her online translanguaging communications empowered individuals (both Koryoins and Koreans who supported the national petition) to build their own communities dedicated to a common goal, allowing them to share information and

critically assess their understandings within and beyond their communities^[33].

Here both Koryoin migrants and members of the host society seemed to create and collaborate in “translingual contact zones”^[18,28] to achieve a shared goal. In other words, the national petition that Iroda tried to share with others addressed issues of the ethnic Koreans overseas; however, this national petition was widely shared with Koreans and non-Koreans and received support from both groups. While discussing this issue, Koreans and Russian-speaking Koryoins made use of socio-spatial repertoires, a collection of cultural and linguistic tools and practices, which naturally led to creating translingual contact zones^[17]. Namely, within the zones, the dynamic and fluid negotiations of socio-political issues and solutions took place through translingual practices as socio-spatial repertoires.

The findings suggest that social media platforms can be powerful tools for community-building and advocacy. Therefore, local governments and non-governmental organizations should consider partnering with social media influencers or community leaders within migrant groups to disseminate critical information and promote social support networks. Such collaborative efforts could be instrumental in addressing social inequalities and empowering marginalized communities.

The dynamic and fluid negotiations require a level of mutual alignment among community members, involving meaning-making practices that go beyond the limitations of conventional linguistic use^[18]. Specifically, the findings of this study reveal that translingual practices can function as a valuable resource for both compliance and resistance within marginalized communities, such as the Koryoin communities. The translingual practices empower the communities to participate in the creation and maintenance of social relations and/or political actions, including the challenge of social inequality.

6. Conclusions

Drawing upon translingualism, this study explored Russian-speaking ethnic Koreans’ language and literacy practices in digital environments and how their online

translingual practices play critical roles in their daily lives. Our findings show that the migrants participated in online translingual communication to situate, access, and share resources, to (re)establish and maintain socio-emotional connections with local community members (Koreans and Koryoins), and to challenge social inequality. These findings suggest that their decisions for language choices rely as much on the wider, cultural, and social practices as they do in their daily lives. Additionally, the Koryoin migrants mobilize existing resources available online to orient to or resist the socio-political realities of living as migrants. It indicates that their online interactions and social relations cannot be bounded by either the Korean community/language or the Koryoin community/Russian, but (re)shaped by exploring, appropriating, and making choices in language use which are meaningful to them at the time.

The findings of this study also underscore the significance of online translingual practices in enhancing engagement in a newly migrated space and in expanding and maintaining relationships with local community members. For migrants, especially those recently arrived, who may not always actively participate in local communities, exploring instances of online translingual practices during language education or social integration programs can be particularly beneficial. This perspective also emphasizes the importance of critically examining translingual communications in online contexts, given its potential impact on social relationships and power dynamics among individuals.

Although the findings extend the existing theoretical accounts of translingualism and highlight the importance of online translingual communications among migrants, a few limitations exist in this study. First, data presented in this study was collected from a specific group of Koryoin migrants in Korea, may not fully encapsulate Koryoin individuals’ language and literacy practices in digital environments. Additionally, the study primarily focused on mothers and children, with limited exploration of fathers’ roles in digital spaces, potentially overlooking certain aspects of family dynamics.

Future research could expand on these findings by examining a larger and more diverse sample of Koryoin families, including those from different regions and with

varying levels of digital literacy. In addition, since this study focused on mothers' and children's examples, exploring translanguaging practices among male adults in digital environments merits future investigation due to potential variations in language and literacy practices.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, J.J. and Y.Y.; methodology, J.J.; formal analysis, J.J. and Y.Y.; investigation, J.J. and Y.Y.; data collection, J.J.; writing—original draft preparation, J.J.; writing—review and editing, J.J. and Y.Y.; funding acquisition, J.J. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Columbus and approved by the Institutional Review Board (or Ethics Committee) of Ohio State University (protocol code 2018B0161 and date of approval (30 May 2018)).

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available on request from the first author. The data is not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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