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Lee 29, 1967). In comparison to most middle-class white Americans, Henry would have a more highly-developed sense of *nunch'i*, having been brought up by parents who communicated so much through silences. Henry's resultant *nunch'i* has undoubtedly served him in the field of spying, "enabling him to read more easily than his ethnic cohorts the subtly evasive gestures of his subjects" (Engles 44, 1997). Yet Henry seems oblivious to these sides of his personality and how he inherited them.

There is a moment when Chang-rae Lee seems to subtly poke fun at Henry's ignorance. Having just received Lelia's list, Henry goes to a bar in East New York and shows it to "some hard grunge types, to their even harder women, to red-faced professionals" (C. Lee 14, 1995) They look at the list, and one item in particular catches their attention: "Yellow Peril." Refracted through their mocking voices, it morphs into "Yerrow Pelir" (C. Lee 14, 1995). They decide to name a drink "Yerrow Pelir." The narrator, without a hint of irony, tells us that the drink is "some emetic concoction of Galliano and white wine" (C. Lee 14, 1995). We can sense Lee's authorial voice—perhaps authorial *gesture* is the more appropriate term, suggestive as it is of Lee's own *nunch'i*—interjecting with a subtle commentary: Language has been repackaged here. It has been disfigured. Yellow Peril, itself an unsavory definition, has become "Yerrow Pelir," yet Henry is complicit. He did not write the list, but he brought it to the bar. An ingredient of the new concoction is *white* wine, further emphasizing that for all his resistance of definition, part of Henry's dilemma is that he approaches his sense of identity from a white viewpoint. In order to escape being erroneously defined, Henry must first take care not to define himself in problematic terms.

When Henry discusses his "ugly immigrant's truth" (C. Lee 319, 1995), that of exploiting his own and those others who can be exploited, he speaks in a "deliberately Whitmanesque voice" (Moraru 82, 2009). He confesses:

This is my burden to bear. But I and my kind . . . will learn every lesson of accent and idiom, we will dismantle every last pretense and practice you hold, notable as well as ruinous. You can keep nothing safe from our eyes and ears. This is your own history. We are your most perilous and dutiful brethren, the song of our hearts at once furious and sad. For only you could grant me these

lyrical modes. I call them back to you. Here is the sole talent I ever dared nurture. Here is all my American education" (C. Lee 320, 1995).

And yet, despite the fact that Henry can indeed produce "perfect" language, despite the fact that he can speak in lyrical modes which, at times, reflect a luminous beauty, he has unraveled. He speaks with great difficulty, deliberately, in a voice not his own. And so, in his mask, a speech monster, he turns, confused, a past-reading, another, but with darkness yet. Undefined.

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We talk baseball, the opening of the new season. The Yankees finally have some pitching. The Mets are sliding fast. We hate, hate Boston and St. Louis. Out of respect he tries to speak as much Korean as he can, and I don't let him know his rapid speech is variously lost on me. I listen and keep nodding, and ask in English what position he likes to play (C. Lee 267, 1995).

In his role as narrator, Henry also controls what information the reader receives about him. At the beginning of *Native Speaker*, we know that Henry Park is a Korean-American. During her first encounter with Henry, Lelia suggests that he is not a native speaker, despite the fact that he speaks "perfectly," because his speech has a deliberate and careful quality to it (C. Lee 12, 1995). Aside from focusing on Lelia's position as the de facto "pure" speaker which this definition implies (Corley 70, 2006), the reader may begin to wonder about Henry's proficiency in Korean: If, as Lelia says, he really isn't a native speaker in English, is he a native speaker in Korean? Henry, as narrator, avoids giving any explicit answer to this question for a couple of hundred pages. It isn't until psychoanalyst Emile Luzan asks him why he didn't give his "invisible brother" a name that Henry reveals "I told him how I didn't know the subtle nuances or meanings of Korean names" (C. Lee 200, 1995). This is the first instance in which the narrator admits to being anything less than fluent in Korean. Leading up to this confession, there is only a single, subtle hint that Henry is not fluent. It occurs when his father urges him to recite "some Shakespeare words" (C. Lee 53, 1995) to their customers. This is Henry's response: "I, his princely Hal. Instead, and only in part to spite him, I grunted my best Korean to the other men" (C. Lee 53, 1995). Yet it is still only a subtle hint. He mentions that he had conversations with his parents in Korean (C. Lee 75, 1995), and that he understood when Ahjuhma called out to him "in her dialect" (C. Lee 78, 1995), yet he never explicitly mentions that he is not fluent in Korean until much later in the novel, initially leaving the reader free to imagine that he actually is.

Bakhtin states that the novel is a "diversity of social speech types (sometimes even a diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized" (Bakhtin *Dialogic Imagination* 262, 1981). This is especially evident in *Native Speaker*. Henry's voice itself takes on more than one register. Tina Y. Chen observes that Henry's "lyricism and eloquence falter into strange silences, broken narratives, cryptic phrases" (Chen 250, 2005). The key to understating this shift from eloquence to reticence is context. As Chang-rae-Lee states, Henry is "not completely aligned with the context or culture that he inhabits" (Daniel Lee, 60). In the novel, there are two subplots, one that involves Henry Park's family life, and another that involves his career as a spy for Glimmer, a private intelligence agency. The narrator uses a different kind of language in each sub-plot. In the sub-plot which delves into his family life, he uses a lyrical language: "We moved as mutely and as deftly as we could bear, muffling ourselves in one another's hair and neck so as not to wake him, but then, too, of course, so we could hear the sound of his sleeping, his breathing, ours, that strange conspiring" (C. Lee 67, 1995). In the other, which deals with his life as a spy, he uses a more halting, choppy language:

I will simply know character. Identity. This is the all. I am to follow like a starved dog the entrails of any personal affect. I will uncover and invoke inclinations and aversions. Mannerisms of mind. Tics of his life. His opinions, prejudices, insecurities, vanities... (C. Lee 204, 1995).

Henry, marked by his own wife as someone who is not a "native speaker," sees in this lyrical language the authenticity he craves, but which is perpetually out of reach. It is an eloquence he produces, but with great difficulty. The second "language," characterized by its "choppy" nature, represents the way Henry sees himself. Stew, Lelia's father, tells Henry that the thought of his daughter marrying an Asian American did not initially please him, and that he had formed a pre-conceived notion of who Henry was, but that Stew had come to change his formulation of Henry's true identity:

I can see you now, and that makes all the difference. Before that you were just a bad idea. I can see now why Lelia chose you. She's always been a little too unsteady. I like to say she's a Mack truck on Pinto tires. She needs someone like you. You're ambitious and serious. You think before you speak. I can see that now. There's so much that's admirable in the Oriental culture and mind. You've been raised to be circumspect and careful (C. Lee 121, 1995).

While Stew's voice still carries with it the inflection of prejudice (reflected in his use of the term "Oriental," for example), he at least is able to view Henry from a viewpoint that begins to approach neutrality. But for all his resistance to definition by the language of others, Henry is ultimately ignorant of his own identity. Henry agrees with Lelia's assessment of him as an "emotional alien." He tries to explain to her at one point that the way his parents raised him has caused him to become emotionally distant:

'When I was a teenager,' I said, 'I so wanted to be familiar and friendly with my parents like my white friends were with theirs.... I wanted just once for my mother and father to relax a little bit with me. Not treat me so much like a son, like a figure in a long line of figures. They treated each other like that, too. Like it was their duty and not their love' (C. Lee 221, 1995).

As Tim Engles points out, however, Henry is critical of this aspect of his Korean heritage because he is approaching it from a white middle-class sensibility in which he adopts "an oversimplifying tendency to judge decontextualized bits of apparent cultural evidence" (Engles 42, 1997). In the process, Henry's perspective on certain features of his Korean heritage becomes skewed, and he loses sight of aspects that he would otherwise view in a different light, such as the emphasis placed in his family on silent but meaningful gestures.

*Nunch'i* is a Korean term which resists translation. Literally "eye-measure" (O. Lee 28, 1967), it is a kind of increased sensitivity acquired through the reading of subtle facial gestures. It is a type of intuition through which a person is able to grasp signs. Lee O-Young explains that Koreans "are a people with a developed sense of *nunch'i*" (O. Lee 28, 1967). This is a sense that comes into play because in certain social situations, one has to fathom what is in another's mind without being able to ask openly (O.

### Introduction:

This paper explores the links between language and self in Chang-rae Lee's *Native Speaker*. Utilizing Mikhail Bakhtin's insights on the linkages between speech and context in constructing relations between the self and others, especially his concept of "heteroglossia," I will argue that Lee deploys discursive strategies that illustrate the narrator's failed attempts to define his identity through language. Although the narrator resists attempts by others to define him, he unwittingly falls into various forms of self-essentializing before arriving at the conclusion that the self is ultimately unknowable.

At the beginning of *Native Speaker*, Henry Park is presented with what he thinks is a love poem written by his wife, Lelia. It turns out to be a list of his supposed characteristics: "You are surreptitious/ B+ student of life/ first thing hummer of Wagner and Strauss/ illegal alien/ emotional alien/ genre bug/ Yellow peril: neo-American/ great in bed/ overrated/ poppa's boy/ sentimentalist/ anti-romantic/ stranger/ follower/ traitor/ spy" (C. Lee 5, 1995). Later, he finds one last addition to the list: "I found a scrap of paper beneath our bed while I was cleaning. Her signature, again: *False speaker of language*" (C. Lee 6, 1995). As Tyler Kessler argues, the rest of the novel may be read as "an unfolding and explicating of that list. In other words, the question 'Who is Henry Park?' drives the narrative more than the ostensible spy plot" (201). This essay will explore moments during the novel where Henry Park's sense of self is disrupted by the conflicting types of speech he generates in different contexts.

In Lee's novel, people and things are constantly being defined by language. Who is speaking, when, and to whom, affects perceptions of truth, and controls what is revealed and what is concealed. Lee deploys different voices among the narrator, characters and quoted texts throughout the novel to construct multiple discourses. I will demonstrate how Henry Park navigates these discourses in order to resist being defined. I will argue, moreover, that Park's constant shifting from context to context in order to escape definition results in the unraveling of his sense of self, which is ultimately unknowable.

The first voice we hear in Lee's novel is Walt Whitman's. The epigraph which opens *Native Speaker* is:

I turn but do not extricate myself,  
Confused, a past-reading, another,  
but with darkness yet.

The passage is from Whitman's "The Sleepers," a poem which "speaks obliquely to the self-exploration and 'past-reading' that Lee's narrator undertakes" (Coward 116, 2006). While this sets the tone for Henry Park's odyssey of self-exploration and search for self, one would do well to also take note of one of Whitman's most famous lines of verse: "Do I contradict myself? Very well then.... I contradict myself; I am large.... I contain multitudes" (Whitman 65, 2000). This notion of contradicting multitudes brings to mind Bakhtin's characterization of the concept of truth. According to Bakhtin, truth requires a multitude of voices (Booth xxii, 1984). For Bakhtin, one

truth does not necessarily compete with another or contradict it. The fact that Whitman, to quote Ezra Pound, "is America" (Pound 112, 1998), suggests that Lee is laying the groundwork for his project: one in which there is space for multiple discourses, in which there isn't a single definition of, or for, "America." In these two cadences of Whitman, one that is explicit and one which is begging to be voiced, we find Henry's image of America, which "combines his sense of estrangement from its promise with his understanding of the nation as a cultural struggle, dire yet beautiful" (Chu 2, 2000). This is the landscape in which Henry Park searches for his identity.

The aforementioned example, in which the narrator's voice distorts the meaning of Lelia's phrase "false speaker of language," is an example of Bakhtin's "heteroglossia." For Bakhtin, every utterance carries the signature of the speaker, and "at any given time, in any given place, there is a set of powerful but highly unstable conditions at work that will give a word uttered then and there a meaning that is different from what it would be at other times and in other places" (Holquist 69-70, 1990). A further episode later on in *Native Speaker* demonstrates how Henry Park fears that his identity can be manipulated by language. In preparing the politician John Kwang for a television spot, Janice

tried to measure all his talking and stops... so if they ran a clip of him on the news they'd be pressed to play the whole thing. If she let him talk for minutes and minutes whenever he wanted they'd just pick and choose quotes to suit their story, and not necessarily his. She made him speak in lines that were difficult to sound-bite, discrete units of ideas, notions. You have to control the raw material, she said, or they'll make you into a clown (C. Lee 87, 1995).

In commenting on this passage in the novel, Chang-rae Lee himself, reflecting on his days as an employee in Senator John Heinz's office on Capitol Hill, reveals that he had to

package [language] in such a way that it can't be repackaged. It's an ongoing battle for who will tell the story. [Janice] is talking politically, but Henry's interested because he's telling other people's stories and defining them. And he's begun to realize that he doesn't want to be defined by other people either (Johnson 111, 2006).

The political analogy here is a useful one. John Kwang's political narrative can be distorted to suit the needs of his enemies. Similarly, Henry fears that his own identity may be redefined. This is why he constantly puts on some kind of identity performance.

Henry is wary of how much Korean he speaks, which is connected to how the language he utilizes influences his sense of self. He frequents a Korean noodle shop near 41<sup>st</sup> and Parsons. The woman who serves him has a "kindly face" (C. Lee 315, 1995). He eats there enough that she recognizes him, but she thinks he's Chinese or Japanese because he "always order[s] in English or by pointing to what [he] want[s] on another table" (C. Lee 315, 1995). Elsewhere in the novel, Henry masks his ignorance of the Korean language:

## المسخ الخطابي: اللغة والهوية في رواية "المتحدث القومي" لتشانج راي لي

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الكلمات المفتاحية: تسانج-راي لي، هوية، لغة، هيتروغلوسيا.

ملخص البحث: يستكشف هذا البحث الروابط بين اللغة والذات في رواية "المتحدث الأصلي" للروائي الكوري-الأمريكي تشانج راي لي. عن طريق توظيف أطروحات الناقد ميخائيل باختين حول الروابط بين الخطاب والسياق في بناء العلاقات بين الذات والآخرين، إضافة إلى مفاهيم باختين (هيتروغلوسيا، بوليفوني)، سوف يقدم الباحث الحجج الآتية: يقدم تشانج راي لي إستراتيجيات خطابية لتوضيح محاولات السارد الفاشلة لتحديد هويته عن طريق اللغة. رغم أن سارد الرواية يقاوم محاولات الآخرين لتحديد هويته، فإنه - من حيث لا يدري - يقع في فخ تحديدات نمطية لذاته، قبل أن يتوصل إلى استنتاج أن الذات يستحيل معرفتها حقيقة.

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### Speech Monster, Language and Identity in Chang-rae Lee's Native Speaker

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**Keywords:** Chang-rae Lee, identity, language, heteroglossia.

**Abstract:** This paper explores the links between language and self in Chang-rae Lee's Native Speaker. Utilizing Mikhail Bakhtin's insights on the linkages between speech and context in constructing relations between the self and others, as well as concepts such as polyphony and heteroglossia, I will argue that Lee deploys discursive strategies that illustrate the narrator's failed attempts to define his identity through language. Although the narrator resists attempts by others to define him, he unwittingly falls into various forms of self-essentializing before arriving at the conclusion that the self is ultimately unknowable.