In recent years, the number of asylum seekers has been surging globally and South Korea is no exception. Every year, around 1,000-3,000 North Koreans defect to South Korea. North and South Korea have been divided since the Korean War (1950-1953), a fact that has not only made them two radically different societies in the political and cultural sense, but also has left its marks on language so that the northern and southern varieties of Korean now differ considerably. In that regard, North Koreans defectors face various challenges in learning South Korean dialects and other foreign languages in new life settings. During the process of language adaptation, many young defectors aged between 13-24yrs experience an identity crisis.

This paper aims at analysing the experience of multilingualism in this particular context. By taking a socio-cognitive approach the following research questions will be addressed: how multimodal data can be utilized in exploring multilingualism in young North Korean refugees living in South Korea, 2) how the research participants describe the development trajectory of their identity as multilinguals in the data, and 3) the influences of social ideologies on the choice and use of language in research participants.

The research participants are three female university students, originally from North Korea, now living in South Korea. In order to obtain an in-depth and holistic understanding of different dimensions of multilingualism, a combination of verbal in-depth interviews with visual artworks depicting language learning timeline and language self-portrait are used. The interviews and the visual representations are analyzed using qualitative content analysis, particularly informed by research on visual representations. Findings will provide insights into understanding multilingualism in young asylum seekers and their language adaptation more broadly.

Keywords: Refugees, Multimodal narratives, Multilingualism.