Korean Heritage Language Education in Philadelphia

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ABSTRACT

This study will investigate the state of Korean heritage language education in Philadelphia through a case study of a Korean heritage language school based out of a church in West Philadelphia. In order to better comprehend the issue of heritage language education in an immigrant community, sociolinguistic literatures that review the concept of heritage language maintenance as well as the Korean American community in the U.S. are examined to provide background context. Then, an ethnographic study that includes classroom observations and interviews is analyzed in order to find the patterns that challenge the teachers and administrators and how the school could be improved in the future.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“This is America. Speak English.” That phrase that has haunted many immigrants living in the U.S., including me and my family. The United States is a strange country where affluent and middle-class families pour money into rearing their monolingual children as bilinguals or multilinguals, while children from immigrant families are stigmatized for speaking in their mother tongue. Although the interest in bilingual education is rising, many migrant communities in the U.S. struggle with the issue of heritage language loss.

This research paper focuses on the efforts of heritage language preservation in Korean American communities in Philadelphia. In studying the linguistic change that happens in a community over generations, Korean Americans are an especially interesting group to look at because they are relatively recent immigrants to the U.S. who are under pressure to assimilate to English speech norms. Although some migrants choose to live in fairly isolated enclaves in metropolitan areas of the U.S. (e.g. Little Korea in Los Angeles), institutional support for development of Korean language such as bilingual programs or heritage language classes offered in primary and secondary schools is especially rare since the immigrant population size is relatively small. Unlike Spanish, which has traditionally been offered in bilingual educational programs in elementary school and as a foreign language subject in high schools in the U.S., Korean is typically offered formally for the first time at the university level. Therefore, Korean American children have limited opportunities to develop bilingualism in the current U.S. educational system. As a result, the responsibility to preserve the heritage language often
falls entirely on the members of the migrant group to educate the next generations of Korean Americans (Tse 2001).

As a 1.5 generation Korean immigrant who moved to the U.S. nine years ago, I was naturally interested in the topic of language shift on individual and societal level. What are the factors that would lead to some Korean Americans being monolingual in English and others being completely bilingual in English and Korean? The answer is obviously a very complex one since the factors would include parental involvement, peer pressure, social networks, language ideologies of a greater society and many more. However, I want to focus on examining the role that heritage language schools play in heritage language maintenance. My personal experience with heritage language schools stems from my mother teaching the Korean language classes to second graders every weekend at a Korean church in our neighborhood. I volunteered to be an assistant in her classroom when I was in 9th grade because I thought it would be a fun way to meet other Korean Americans in the community and practice my Korean. Contrary to my expectation, most children in my mother’s classroom could not speak much Korean at all and I was surprised to find so many students being so embarrassed or even ashamed to speak Korean. Although being able to speak Korean was a source of pride for me, I found that attending a Korean language school was not an enjoyable experience for many students.

Through an ethnographic study of a weekend language school in a Korean church in Philadelphia, this paper investigates in what ways the school contributes to language maintenance of the Korean American community in Philadelphia and how the school can improve in the future. Conceptual framework utilizing several sociolinguistic concepts
regarding heritage language maintenance will be laid out in the beginning, followed by a brief immigration history and a description of characteristics of Korean migrant community in the U.S. and Philadelphia. Then, a case study that includes classroom observations and interviews conducted in a Korean heritage language school in West Philadelphia are described in detail and analyzed in order to lay out the challenges that the teachers and administrators often face and their recommendations for the future.
Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In the following section, the concept of language maintenance and language shift is discussed in order to better comprehend the issue of heritage language education in an immigrant community. Then, the terminology including heritage language, heritage language speakers, and heritage language school is reviewed in order to clarify the definitions of the terms. Next, general characteristics of the Korean American community in the U.S., and more specifically information about the Korean American community in Philadelphia are examined to provide background context. Finally, the state of Korean heritage language schools in the U.S. is addressed.

Language maintenance and language shift

In the U.S. all immigrants experience language maintenance or language shift. Some immigrant groups seem to be more successful in maintaining their heritage language, while other groups experience heritage language loss over the years. Before we move on, we must define the terms language maintenance and language shift. Language maintenance means “relative language stability in number and distribution of its speakers, its proficient usage by children and adults, and its retention in specific domains (e.g. home, school, religion)” (Baker 2001). For example, language maintenance can cover a broad range of activities including casual, restricted use at home, informal instruction in church or other ethnic community settings, bilingual education programs within the official school system, university courses, etc. (King 1998). In contrast, language shift refers to a process of downward language movement. In other words, it indicates “a reduction in the number of speakers of a language, a decreasing saturation of language
speakers in the population, a loss in language proficiency, or a decreasing use of that language in different domains” (Baker 2001).

These definitions of language maintenance and language shift are not confined to only intergenerational shift. They include the number of speakers of a language, the saturation of language speakers in the population, the level of language proficiency, or the amount of usage of that language in different domains. For example, in the U.S. “the 1960 to 1980 growth rate for heritage language schools was 228%, compared to a growth rate of 63% for public schools and 24% for Catholic schools as a whole” (Fishman 2001). It is clear that as the number of immigrants grew, the ethnolinguistic vitality increased as well. Despite of loss of proficiency that occurs within an individual and between generations, it can be assumed that the language maintenance of Korean community will be aided by the influx of new immigrants.

According to Fishman, who conducted extensive research regarding language maintenance and shift in immigrant communities over time, ethnolinguistic minority groups were loyal to their heritage language maintenance, with general shift toward English over time (1966). He explains, “the cultural and linguistic self-maintenance efforts of American minority groups are surrounded by towering mountains of ignorance and vast oceans of apathy” (Fishman 1966). He pointed out that since the Americanizing process itself takes on a central role in the formation of national identity, the Americanizing process causes de-ethnization, and the de-ethnization affects language maintenance in the U.S. (Fishman 1966)

Regarding the factors affecting language maintenance and shift, Wiley (2005) claimed that they include political, economic, physiological, sociolinguistic and personal
phenomena, such as the group’s immigration history in the U.S., geographic distribution and pattern of settlement, the social structure of the immigrant group, educational attainment and socioeconomic mobility, the role of religion, and the degree of ideological mobilization in the group. Baker (2001) argues that while such factors help clarify what affects language shift, all of these factors interact and intermingle in a complicated equation. Thus it is difficult to predict which languages are more likely to decline and which are more likely to continue (Baker 2001). Since it is almost impossible to take into account all of the factors affecting language maintenance and shift, “depending on which factors, one chooses to single out and elaborate upon, theories attempting to explain the same language maintenance and shift phenomena may look very different” (Molesky 1988). This paper is focused mainly on cultural factors in that the ethnographic research investigates the role of Korean heritage language schools in language maintenance of Korean American communities in Philadelphia.

Heritage language, heritage speakers, and heritage language schools

Heritage language and heritage speakers

In talking about heritage languages in the U.S., scholars refer to three different types of heritage languages: indigenous heritage languages, colonial heritage languages, and immigrant heritage languages (Fishman 2001). The definition of immigrant heritage language will be explained since it is the focus of this paper. Immigrant heritage languages are those “spoken by groups entering the United States after the nation had been established” (Molesky 1988). In U.S. history, immigrant heritage languages generally have not been considered as a national resource, and consequently seemed to be
in a state of language decline and later language death (Baker 2001). However, immigrant ethnic minorities’ efforts including the founding of heritage language schools, have allowed these languages to survive.

A heritage language speaker is someone who has been “raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken” and “who speaks or merely understands the heritage language, and who is to some degree bilingual in English and the heritage language” (Valdés 2001) Wiley points out that while heritage language speakers have frequently been students in foreign language and bilingual classroom, they have only in recent times been recognized as persons with needs that are different from those of other students. This new recognition led to the development of separate programs and separate classes within programs “for learners who have been labeled native speakers, fluent speakers, and heritage speakers” (2001).

Critiques of the term “heritage”

Although the terms heritage language and heritage speakers are gaining popularity, Wiley (2001) claimed that the meaning of heritage might undermine the role of heritage language as a community language that is currently being used. Wiley (2001) pointed out the problem and quoted as follows:

The danger of the term “heritage language” is that, relative to powerful majority languages, it points more to the past and less to the future, to traditions rather than to the contemporary. The danger is that the heritage language becomes associated with ancient cultures, past traditions and more “primitive times.” This is also true of the terms “ethnic” (used in the
U.S.) and “ancestral.” These terms may fail to give the impression of a modern, international language that is of value in a technological society (p. 29-30).”

Some scholars like Wiley and You prefer the term community language or the composite term heritage/community language (HL-CL) because Korean as an immigrant language is both a heritage language of the ancestors and a community language that is actually being used in the communities (You 2009). I agree and support Wiley’s argument. However, I cannot also ignore the fact that the term heritage language is the most widely used term in sociolinguistic literature in the U.S., including Fisherman’s work. I also feel that the term heritage language does a better job of capturing the tie between one’s ethnic identity and one’s language or the way that individuals’ sense of self might be derived from the emotional attachment to their mother tongue. As a result, the terms heritage language, heritage speaker and heritage language school are used in this paper.

*Heritage language schools in the U.S.*

Heritage language schools have a long history in the U.S., however “inquiries and discussions dealing with education in the United States rarely mention the continued educational efforts of almost all immigrant-based ethnic groups on American shores” (Fishman & Nahiry 1964). The heritage language schools “must be recognized as filling an important identity-forming and identity-providing function for millions of Americans. As such they deserve not only to be studied but to be understood and appreciated” (Fishman 1980).
Koreans and Korean Americans in the U.S.

Immigration history

In 1882, Korea established diplomatic relations with the U.S. by signing the Treaty of Amity and Commerce, also known as the Chemulpo Treaty. After that, a small number of political dissidents, students, and merchants started arriving in the U.S. (Kim 2004). United States Immigration Office records revealed that approximately 168 Koreans were admitted into the United States between 1899 and 1902 (Choy, 1979). The period from 1883 to 1900 is called the pre-emigration period.

In general, excluding the pre-emigration period, there were three major waves of Korean immigration to the U.S. The first wave of the Korean immigration began in 1903. Between 1903 and 1905, the first full-scale immigration of Koreans to the U.S. took place, which refers to about 7,000 Korean laborers to Hawaii to work on sugar plantations and about 1,000 picture brides (Portes & Rumbaut 1996). American missionaries played a decisive role in choosing who could immigrate prior to 1965 and chose those with a religious inclination (Park 1997). However, in 1905 the Korean migration to Hawaii was officially terminated by the Korean government as a result of Japanese pressure. In 1910, Japan compulsorily annexed Korea, making it a colony of Imperial Japan, and by then the number of Koreans admitted into the U.S. totaled 7,622 (Kim, 2004). Among the Korean immigrants to Hawaii, approximately 1,300 moved on to the U.S. mainland (primarily California), while about 1,100 returned to Korea between 1900 and 1915 (Kim, 2004). The Immigration Act of 1924 enacted a national origins quota and therefore severely restricted the number of immigrants from Asia as well as
other parts of the world (Park 1997). Between 1924 and 1952, that is, between the Oriental Exclusion Act and the McCarran-Walker Act, only about 900 Korean students, as non-immigrants, were allowed into the U.S. (Kim 2004).

The second wave of the Korean immigration started with the enactment of the McCarran-Walker Act in 1952, which removed the ban against Asian immigration while maintaining the discriminatory quota system based on national origins (Kim 2004). Between 1951 and 1964, approximately 14,000 Korean immigrants arrived in the U.S. (Kim 2004). The second wave consisted of three large groups. The first group included the war brides who married American soldiers. The total number of war brides reached 53,000 by the end of 1980 (Kim 2004). Unfortunately, many of them had difficulties in adjusting to American life due to culture shock and lack of education and technical skills needed for employment (Cheo, Kim & Han, n.d.). The second group included Korean orphans who were adopted into American families, whose number reached 6,200 from 1955 to 1966 (Kim 2004). Most Korean orphans were adopted by White Protestant families living in small rural communities, and many of them faced problems of national identity as they grew up (Kim 2004). The third group consisted of 27,000 people that included students, visitors, businessmen, and many others engaged in trade (Kim 2004). Many in the group were professionals such as medical doctors, college professors, and lawyers.

The third wave of the Korean immigration began with the enactment of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 that abolished the national origin quota system and instilled a graded system which gave preference to family members of US citizens, resident aliens, and workers with needed skills (Goode & Schneider 1994). This
bill resulted in the majority of immigrants entering through family reunion visas. This tendency triggered what is called ‘chain migration’ which refers to immigrants sponsoring the immigration of family and friends to a country (Goode & Schneider 1994). From 1970 to 1980, the Korean population in the U.S. increased by 412 percent (Kim 2004). Since the enactment of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Act, the number of Korean immigrants admitted to the U.S. grew steadily and reached the maximum annual number of 32,000 in 1987. However, the number of Korean immigrants has decreased steadily since 1987, a phenomenon due mainly to the improved conditions in Korean economy and politics since the 1980s (Shin 2005).

Koreans in this wave immigrated to the U.S. to seek new economic and educational opportunities and a better quality of life. Many of them settled in metropolitan areas such as Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Houston, Boston, and Washington D.C. Many of them were educated, college-trained professionals who came from the urban middle class of Korean society (Shin 2005). However, they generally had to begin at the lowest sector of American society because of their unfamiliarity with American culture and limited English speaking ability (Choe et al., n.d.).

Demographic statistics and Settlement patterns/Geographic distribution

According to the 2010 U.S. Census data, the total population of Korean Americans is 1,725,771. These are persons who identified themselves as Korean alone as well as Korean in combination with other Asian or other race. This cumulative figure was used because Korean heritage language schools are also attended by mixed race
Korean Americans so the figure should be as inclusive as possible. The Korean American community is the 5th largest minority language group in the Asian and Pacific Islander Populations. Among the Korean Americans in the 2000 U.S. Census, 36.7% are native, 35.3% are foreign born, naturalized citizens, and 28.0% are foreign born, non-citizens (U.S. Census 2010). Yu et al. (2002) noted:

The U.S. born together with naturalized citizens now comprise two-thirds of the total Korean populations in the United States. “Koreans in America” may have been an appropriate term for the 1990s and before, but now the more appropriate term would be “Korean Americans” (p.1).

Until the 1950s, a great majority of Korean Americans resided in Hawaii and California. However, since the 1960s, the pattern of geographic distribution has changed, and cities such as Los Angeles and New York City serve as entry points for Koreans (Yu et al., 1982). California and New York together house about 43% of Korean Americans in the U.S. (Yu et al. 2002). Many Korean immigrants are urban middle-class professionals or skilled blue collar workers indicating an urban-to-urban migration pattern (Kim 1981).

**Educational attainment and Work**

Korean Americans on average hold a high level of educational attainment mainly due to the fact that the majority of the immigrants who arrived since the passage of the Immigration and Naturalization Act in 1965 received higher education in Korea and belonged to middle class Korean society (Shin 2005). The educational attainment of the second generation of Korean immigrants is also very high. For instance, 52.1% of Korean
Americans received a bachelor’s degree or higher, compared to a national average of 28.2% (U.S. Census 2010). However, it is difficult for Korean immigrants to find professions to match their education and work experience, partly due to language difficulties and unfamiliarity with American culture. As a result, their migration to the U.S. has resulted in ‘displacement’ or ‘downward mobility’ in terms of social class placement which forced many Koreans into retail and service businesses that do not require high levels of English proficiency (Yu et al. 2002).

**Korean churches**

Another distinctive characteristic of Korean immigrants is a Christian identity greater than that of other Asian immigrants (Kim 2004). About 75% of Korean immigrants in the U.S. are affiliated with Korean immigrant churches (Min 2000). Currently, there are more than three thousand Korean Churches in the U.S. (Kim 2004). To understand these statistics, the history of Korean immigration needs to be understood. More than half of the Korean laborers and picture brides that arrived prior to 1924 were associated with Korean churches because Christian missionaries in Korea played a prominent part in recruiting them to immigrate to Hawaii (Kim 2004). Furthermore, many Koreans Christians did not consider Christianity to be linked with Westernization because American Protestant missionaries supported the Korean independence movement against Japanese colonialism. “Far from being perceived as it was in much of Asia as an adjunct of Western imperialism, Christianity was thus viewed by many Koreans as a force for national liberation and progressive modernization” (K. Kim, Warner, and Kwon, 2001).
The Christian church is the single largest organization in any Korean community as a principal place for worship as well as other secular socialization activities. The church has become a bilingual as well as bicultural organization which reflects Korean American society. The 1st and 1.5 generation attend Korean language services while the 2nd generation attends English services. Even many Korean Buddhists or atheists tend to attend Christian churches in the U.S. because the churches play an important role in terms of not only maintaining Korean heritage language but also promoting Korean cultural traditions, ethics, and values (Min 2000). At church, a different social class and status are present among the Koreans from the mainstream American society. The church is the largest manifestation of Korean nationalism and culture and is even seen as a pseudo extended family (Kim 1981). Majority of the Korean language classes for the children of immigrants are offered a the church. Dearman (1982) states that "Korean churches are centers where the attempt to preserve language, social bonds, and customs central to Korean identity is very visible."

*Korean community in Philadelphia*

Koreans were the largest group of immigrants in Philadelphia in 1985 (Goode & Schneider 1994). Large-scale movement of Korean immigrants began only after the passage of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, which abolished the national origins quota system. Although a majority of Korean immigrants settled in large metropolitan areas, such as Los Angeles, New York, Chicago and Washington D.C., a substantial flow of immigration to Philadelphia began in the 19070s. The Koreans who came then were well-educated middle class professionals who entered through
occupational preference. However, most could not engage in the original line of work they did in Korea and instead brought over capital to start small businesses such as retail stores or dry cleaners. One of the first businesses to expand to Philadelphia was the wig industry in the early 1960s. In subsequent years, the businesses grew more diverse to include groceries, dry cleaning plants, and restaurants, which mirrored those in New York City (Toll & Gillman 1995). Koreans have played a significant role, in addition to other immigrant groups, in revitalizing shopping strips and abandoned neighborhoods (Lee 2000).

In terms of linguistic cohesiveness, of the 5,561 Koreans in Philadelphia, 74.5% indicate that the language spoken at home is Korean (US Census 2010). The dominance of the home language is seen in one of the most significant incidents in the Philadelphia Korean community, called the “sign incident” (Good & Schneider 1994). In 1986, Korean merchants in Olney proposed to install Korean-language signs under the regular street signs of their stores. Olney is more of a business concentration of Koreans than a residential one and serves as an entry point for newly arrived Korean immigrants. The Korean Civic Association explained that this was to help elderly Koreans in the area and also to encourage Korean retailers from mid-Atlantic regions find their way to the Korean sector of Philadelphia (Lee 2000). However, the non-Korean residents of Olney became enraged that there was no prior discussion and consensus in the community over the signs. Many angrily denounced the Korean signs as divisive and “un-American,” in that they suggested that Olney was becoming an exclusively Korean neighborhood (Lee 2000). On July 24th, 1986, twenty-five Korean-language signs were destroyed shortly after a nearby community protest (Kaufman, 1986). Although the signs had received all
the appropriate city approvals, which cost the Korean Civic Association about $3,000, this major retaliation by the non-Korean Olney residents resulted in the removal of the Korean signs by the Koreans (Lee 2000). Portes & Rumbaut (1996) attribute this to nativist hostility due to cultural and linguistic differences between the native population and immigrant business owners. In Philadelphia, although there is no visible English Only movement, which is aimed at declaring English the official language of the US, the working-class at large is said to support one (Goode & Schneider 1994).

It is clear that Korean Americans in Philadelphia form a community in terms of ethnicity and language. However, there is little research on the rapid linguistic shift happening in Philadelphia Korean community due to heritage language loss. For that reason, this paper investigates the pattern of heritage language preservation and loss specific to Korean community in Philadelphia, as well as the role that Korean language schools play in the face of ongoing linguistic shift. The following section investigates the general language attitudes of the Korean speech community and the state of Korean heritage language education in the U.S.

Korean speech community and Korean heritage language education

Korean speech community

Labov stated that “language is not a property of the individual, but of the community” (1989b), which means that the Korean language is a property of the Korean speech community. The speech community consists of several overlapping sub speech communities so that an individual can belong to more than one sub community but still be a part of the larger speech community (Labov 1989a). For instance, in the case of the
Korean Americans in Philadelphia, an individual can be part of a bilingual Korean English speech community which in turn is part of the ethnic Asian speech community which is part of the Philadelphia speech community. The thread that weaves the speech communities together is ‘interaction’ within each speech community and across speech communities. Interaction is the means for linguistic transmission and for the acquisition and maintenance of community speech norms (Lee 2000).

For migrant communities, English is seen as a prerequisite to social acceptance and integration in the U.S. because language is the "principal initial barrier confronting recent immigrants" (Portes & Rumbaut 1996). A general historical pattern is that the first generation naturally retains their native language, while the second generation acquires English as the language used in schooling and the society at large. The third generation then acquires English as their native language having parents who are almost native English speakers (Portes & Rumbaut 1996). In the recent years, bilingualism has not been considered a virtue, but rather as an unstable and transitional stage, thus hindering complete assimilation and Americanization (Portes & Rumbaut 1996).

The 1st generationers are native speakers of Korean with limited proficiency in English. The 1.5 generationers are also native Korean speakers but have varying degrees of English proficiency which depends widely on what age they came to the U.S. The 2nd generationers are native English speakers, usually with limited proficiency in Korean. They are often “passive” or “receptive” bilinguals, which means their passive skills of listening and reading are better than their active skills of speaking and writing (Romaine 1989). There is often communication breakdown because the grandparent generation speaks only Korean while the children usually only speak English. The elderly are more
or less confined at home or at Korean senior centers which are usually run by local Korean churches or organizations.

Most parents consider English the key to the success of their children in society (Kim & Yu 1994). The parents also linguistically rely on their children as they navigate through English dominant settings in society. Because the parents rely on their children, there is a tendency for the parents to lose authority over and respect from their children (Park 1997). However, the fear of “linguistic racism” (Park 1997) is real because, as previously mentioned, the language barrier does hinder the job prospects of newly arrived Korean immigrants. On the other hand, the use of the immigrant’s native language is a sign of ethnic and emotional solidarity. It is an identification marker for Koreans. Korean language sources are easily accessible by the Korean American community. The big cities have their own broadcasting stations which provide local news services and TV programming from Korea. There are also Korean radio stations, newspapers, and magazines. The internet has also made available direct access to Korean websites and Korea in general (Lee 2000).

*Korean heritage language schools in the U.S.*

Although the number of Korean Americans has steadily increased, there are only 49 high schools offering Korean language classes in only nine states: California (28), New York (10), Washington (3), Illinois (2), Maryland (1), Virginia (1), Michigan (1), Connecticut (1), and New Jersey (1) (NAKS, 2010). Only 3,842 students take Korean language classes in the U.S. (Foundation for SAT II Korean, n.d.). There are also only six two-way Korean-English immersion programs in California (Shin 2005).
In comparison to the public sector, Korean heritage language schools based in local Korean communities, first established in 1906, have over 100 years of history in the United States. There are approximately 1,200 Korean heritage language schools in the United States, and the total student enrollment is about 60,000 (Lee & Shin 2008). The number of schools may be higher, because many small schools are not officially registered in the database of the U.S. Korean Embassy. Wiley acknowledges that “although not widely recognized in the United States, a great deal of heritage language education takes place outside the formal school system, in afterschool and weekend programs” (2001).
Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodology adopted in this study, including description of the setting and data collection and analysis procedures. The bulk of the ethnographic research is based on the fieldwork that I conducted during a Sociology and Anthropology class that I took in the spring of 2012 called Migration, Transnationalism, Transborder circulation with professor Elizabeth Falconi.

Description of the setting

The study took place in Philadelphia was done at a Korean heritage language school called Sejong school located in West Philadelphia. The school is based in the second floor of Bethlehem church. Most Korean heritage language schools are operated by Korean Christian churches and are staffed by volunteers from the community because ready access to space and resources as well as the existing network makes it easy to hold heritage language classes. (Lee 2008) As one of the first major Korean churches in the Philadelphia area, Bethlehem church arrived in West Philadelphia during the 1960s. It began with a small congregation housed in various different buildings over the years. Bethlehem church has served not only as a place of worship but also as a social hub for many Korean immigrants and Korean Americans.

Sejong school offered not only Korean language classes, but also other cultural activities such as Korean dance, music, art, and Tae Kwon Do. The age of students ranged from pre-kindergartners to middle schoolers. Most students were second generation Koreans who were born in the U.S. except for one girl who moved from Seoul when she was seven. Several students did not belong to the traditionally defined second-
generation category because a few had one Korean parent and one non-Korean parent and one student was of Korean ethnicity but adopted by Caucasian parents. The scope of this research was not extensive enough to compare Korean proficiency of these students to that of the second-generation Koreans with two Korean parents, but it would be interesting to look at the similarities and differences resulting from household circumstances.

Data Collection and Analysis

After talking at length with the director of Sejong school, I was permitted to come and observe different classes and informally interview the teachers if they agreed. Korean language classes and other cultural activities were held in various classrooms on the second floor of the church every Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. every Saturday morning. So I went every Saturday between February 11th and May 19th 2012 and spent two to three hours observing Korean language, music and art classes. I took extensive field notes during my observation, which were compiled, coded for themes and analyzed afterwards.

After acquainting some of the teachers, they started inviting me to come and eat lunch with them, which is offered by the church in the basement of the building. I took this opportunity to listen to the conversations among the teachers and to get to know them better. This made it easier to ask them for informal interviews later on. I also had a chance to interview the principal of the school. The interview questions aimed to assess the their evaluation of strengths and weaknesses of Sejong school, motivation for why
they decided to teach at a Korean heritage language school and the effectiveness of
Korean heritage language education.
Chapter 4: FINDINGS

Over the course of my observation, I noticed recurring themes in the interactions between the teachers and the students, including language barrier, language negotiation and resistance from students. The themes that came up during the interviews were the benefits of learning Korean as a heritage language, major challenges the teachers and administrators faced, and recommendations for the future.

Analysis of the observations

The language barrier that exists many teachers and students was very apparent even from the first class that I attended. It was a music class with students in second grade and the students were reviewing a song they had learned previously called *Dorajiggot* (meaning Bellflower). After the teacher led the class through a vocal warm-up, she instructed the class to stand up. However, she had to repeat her request three times in the following manner.

Teacher: “*Ileona*… *Ileonajuseyo*… Stand up!”

The first phrase *Ileona* is an informal order to “stand up.” However, most students did not understand this and there was no reaction from the students. The teacher then proceeded to repeat the same order in Korean but in an honorific form of *Ileonajuseyo*, which is a more polite way of saying “stand up, please.” At this point the communication breakdown was apparent because most students still did not understand this order in Korean and nobody was standing up. The teacher had to switch her language to English for students to finally follow the request and stand up. Throughout the class, the teacher
continued to talk mostly in Korean, while the majority of the student-student interaction was in English. Another example that happened in this music classroom involved a row of boys who usually sat in the back of classroom. Some of them refused to even open their mouths when the teacher instructed the class to sing. I think the reasons for not participating can be complex and individual, including shyness and inability to read Korean script and follow along. However, when the teacher walked to the back of the classroom to ask one boy to sing, he quickly said, “I don’t want to do it. It’s boring.” The student, however, received no repercussion for his comment because the teacher did not understand what the boy had said in English. This clearly demonstrates a problem that happens when the first-generation teacher who is not fluent in English teaches a roomful of second-generation students who are not fluent in Korean. It was interesting to see how the language barrier played out in a classroom setting because it modeled very well how communication breakdown between generations happen in many migrant families where the parents are not fluent in the dominant language of the society and the children are not fluent in their heritage language.

Although it was frustrating to see how the language barrier impeded the communication between a teacher and her students, it was also encouraging to see many different ways that both students and teachers negotiated the differences in language proficiencies by accommodating to each other’s language ability. The first example occurred most frequently in cases of communication breakdown as mentioned in the previous paragraph. When the teacher is not fluent in English and most students are not proficient in Korean and the language barrier hindered communication, a few students who had high proficiency in both languages played the key role of interpreter. For
example, two boys in the beginning of music class had switched seats to chat with their friends and the teacher instructed them in Korean to return to their own seats. She said “Jagijari,” meaning “one’s own seats,” but the boys did not understand and only exchanged blank stares. Only after a girl turned around to tell the boys in English, “Go back to your seats,” were the boys able to follow the teacher’s order. In most cases, these students who relayed the message back and forth between the teacher and other students were 1.5 generation Korean Americans who spent part of their life in Korea and part of their life in the U.S. These 1.5 generation students had the crucial bilingual capacity to ‘go between’ the Korean-speaking first generation and the English-speaking second generation to help facilitate the flow of the classroom.

The second example of language negotiation is code-switching. For instance, while most students used English with their peers inside and outside the classroom, their use of Korean increased when talking directly to the teachers or other adults, perhaps because the teachers encouraged them to speak in Korean as much as possible. The students always referred to their teacher as Seonsaengnim, which is a respectful way to refer to one’s teacher. So students often mixed the use of Korean and English in one sentence like “Seonsaengnim, eraser pilyohaeyo” (Teacher, I need an eraser please) or “Seonsaengnim, answer juseyo” (Teacher, give me the answer please). A few students who did have higher proficiency in Korean incorporated more Korean words into their sentences, only defaulting to English when they did not know the word in Korean.

Thirdly, a teacher who was capable in speaking both Korean and English could easily accommodate for different levels of proficiencies in her classroom by speaking both languages. In a Korean language classroom for first graders, I saw that the teacher
always reinforced her orders in Korean followed with a translation in English. For example, she would say, “Moon dadajuseyo. Please close the door” or “Irum sseuseyo. Write your names.” This way, students still had an exposure to correct sentence structure in Korean but the teacher could still communicate the meaning of her request even if the students did not entirely understand the order in Korean. The teacher’s habit to repeat herself in Korean and English probably rose out of necessity in order to prevent cases of communication breakdown that happened in the music classroom. Although this requires the teacher to be proficient in both languages and puts a bit more burden on her, it definitely made the facilitation of class easier. All three examples above outline the benefits of being a bilingual in immigrant community setting where they have the capacity to adapt and cater to different audiences.

The last theme is students’ resistance to learning heritage language. This was sadly a very common and expected behavior that I observed, especially from the boys. Students would either passively resist the lesson by not participating or remaining silent as was the case mentioned previously in the music classroom, or they would verbally express unwillingness to follow the teacher’s order. For example, in a Korean language classroom for students in middle school, the teacher was fluent in both Korean and English and two 7th grade students were learning advanced Korean. Despite his high level of Korean, one boy seemed uninterested and apathetic towards the lesson. Following is the interaction between the resistant student and the teacher when she was trying to motivate him to write an essay in Korean.

Teacher: Do you want to go to Korea? Your grandparents are there.

Student: I’ve already been there.
T: Do you want to go again?
S: No.
T: Do you want to learn Korean so you can talk to your mom?
S: I can already do that.
T: Don’t you want to learn more Korean?
S: No.

Many students resist learning for different reasons, but the biggest reason seems to be that they do not see the value in maintaining their heritage language. Since Korean as a minority language is not seen as being amongst the most prestigious or useful in the U.S. (compared to Mandarin Chinese or Spanish), second generation Korean American students often grow up disregarding the importance of heritage language maintenance. Although the students are often sent to Korean heritage language schools when they are young by their parents, in most cases they start to feel resentful towards their families about making them attend school on weekends when their other American peers get to sleep in or do other activities that are perceived as more fun or relevant. This resistance causes most students to drop out of Korean heritage language schools as they reach middle school and high school age.

Analysis of the interviews

During my interviews with the teachers and administrators of Sejong school, they were quick to point out the benefits of learning Korean as a heritage language, and they often identified the importance of heritage language maintenance in Korean American communities as their main motivation for being involved with Sejong school. Most
thought that Sejong school played a crucial role of teaching Korean language and culture to second-generation Korean immigrants who would not have a formal setting to be consistently exposed to their heritage language and culture otherwise. The benefits of learning Korean mentioned by the teachers and administrators included improving communication among family members, improving self-esteem, and improving Korean communication ability leading to personal satisfaction. The principal mentioned that some parents envision Sejong school as an opportunity for their child to meet other Korean American children and build community. These benefits are demonstrated by many recent studies on the role and function of heritage language schools. For example, a case study of a Japanese heritage language school showed that the heritage language schools are important in terms of not only teaching a heritage language but also maintaining students’ ethnic value and identity (Shibata 2000). Similarly, a study of Korean schools in southern California found that the roles of the Korean heritage language schools are to teach Korean language and culture, help Korean American children develop a positive Korean identity, and inculcate an appreciation for Korean heritage (C. Kim 1992). Some teachers also said that being a bilingual would be valued more and more in the globalized society. According to Ms. Cho, South Korea’s rising status in the global stage has given more legitimacy to maintaining Korean as one’s heritage language and current trends such as K-pop or Korean dramas have increased the relevance of Korean culture to young students. As the cases of return migration are increasing, she emphasized the importance of Korean proficiency for those students whose families are contemplating moving back to South Korea, so that the problems of (re)integrating into Korean society are mitigated.
Even though they acknowledged many positive roles that heritage language maintenance played in students’ lives, they did not deny that Korean heritage language schools often face internal and external challenges. The internal challenges included financial difficulties leading to inadequate facilities and a lack of adequate professional training for teachers, difficulty in hiring qualified and experienced teachers, high teacher turnover, and a lack of creative and interesting lessons. Although most teachers in Korean heritage language schools are first-generation immigrants, Shin (2005) cautioned about teaching styles of many first-generation teachers.

Most teachers in Korean HL schools have been educated in Korea and teach in the way in which they have been taught - a great deal of instructional time is spent on rote learning, drills and memorization. As a result, most heritage language learners, who are accustomed to an instructional method that encourages student participation and creative thinking, find much of the instruction in Korean schools tedious and unproductive (p. 157).

Some external challenges included a lack of texts written especially for heritage learners of Korea, a shortage of age-appropriate texts for older beginners, parental apathy or opposition, and students losing interest as they grow older. During one of my interviews with the principal of Sejong school, she commented that most students have a fairly good understanding of Korean when they are very little because they grow up hearing their parents speaking Korean. However, once they enter kindergarten and school, they start losing heritage language proficiency because now their main role model are their peers and they see the prestige in acquiring proficiency in the dominant language, but not in
heritage language. She said that by the time that a student is in their teens, many have already rejected the home language from feelings of embarrassment, frustration over widening cultural gap with parents and cultural isolation in schools. The rate of heritage language attrition among second generation Koreans is one of the highest among Asian Americans. In Los Angeles, only 4% of parents reportedly spoke English at home while 78% of American-born ethnic Koreans reported speaking English at home (Lopez 1996).

Addressing these challenges, the teachers and administrators of Sejong school also offered some recommendations to improve Korean heritage language education for the future. On the classroom level, Ms. Cho who previously mentioned the relevance of K-pop and Korean dramas in adolescents’ lives suggested that teachers could make their lessons more interesting and creative by incorporating multimedia such as video clips and songs to engage their students. In terms of school-wide changes, some suggested that administrators could offer more competitive compensation in order to decrease teacher turnover and to recruit and retain qualified and experienced teachers. Also more training and professional development opportunities for heritage language teachers are necessary because many teachers do not have any teacher experience or education before they start. Since more funding is required to implement these recommendations, heritage schools must reach out to host churches, the Korean American communities that they are serving and the Korean government for financial support. If the schools could do more community outreach so that parents and family members of the students are more aware about the benefits of heritage language maintenance and the drawbacks of heritage language loss, teachers and administrators can more effectively cooperate with families in
terms of asking parents to volunteer in the classroom or contributing to their children’s heritage language development even when they are out of the classroom.
Chapter 5: CONCLUSION

Patterns of language shift in the Korean American community are alarming. 80.8% of Korean Americans spoke Korean at home in 1990, but 74.5% of Korean Americans in 2010 reported that Korean was their home language. Although 6.3% decrease in twenty years might not seem huge, but the decrease in the number of Korean speakers combined with the downward trend in number of people migrating from South Korea and the increase in return migration to Korea signifies that the future of Korean language is not bright. As mentioned previously, Korean as a minority language does not have a high status in the U.S. and public school support for the development of Korean is especially rare due to the small immigrant population size. Although Korean heritage language schools have been established for decades, community language programs in general have had little prestige and visibility in the society.

Since the responsibility for maintenance and development of the heritage language is usually left to the migrant community itself, this paper examined the role of heritage language schools in language maintenance and its strengths and weaknesses. Since the research was limited to a case study of only one school, the findings must not be generalized as if they were true for all Korean heritage language school. However, hopefully the recommendation given by the teachers and administrators of Sejong school could be extended to other schools in similar situations to help improve their programs.

One of the curious things I discovered since I have been at Swarthmore College is that many of Korean Americans friends wish that they spoke better Korean. Most of them have attended Korean heritage language schools when they were young but stopped going once they reached adolescence. As a result, many second-generation Korean
Americans have a limited proficiency in Korean, but most wish their proficiency was higher and some of them have even decided to enroll in Korean language classes at University of Pennsylvania. In fact, the majority of students who take Korean language classes (especially the advanced classes) at the university level are second generation Korean Americans. I do not know why some adolescents to their families’ dismay resist attending Korean heritage language schools but realize its importance later in life. However, I postulate that the desire to learn one’s heritage language comes from not only the realization of its utility in a globalized society but also the development of one’s ethnic identity and the wish to (re)connect with one’s roots. For future research, it would be interesting to investigate how college-aged students’ ethnic identity development affects one’s relationship with heritage language.

As already mentioned before, heritage language maintenance cannot happen only through heritage language schools run by immigrant communities. The United States as a whole is losing precious resources by not recognizing the value of many heritage languages already possessed by its people. Why do so many people recognize the importance of multilingualism but do not care about heritage language loss happening in most immigrant communities? In order for the Korean language to survive in future generations of Korean migrants in the U.S., changes need to happen both in terms of language policy on a national level, and also in each community at the grass-root level. Many forms of institutional support from the U.S. government and Korean government to foster heritage language maintenance and development as well as a push from the Korean American community to create the necessary resources for improving Korean heritage
language schools are needed if future generation of migrants are to retain the ties to their families and cultural identity.
REFERENCES


