

# Perspectives vs. Reality of Heritage Language Development

## Voices from Second-Generation Korean-American High School Students

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### Introduction

The United States is abundant in human resources and educational opportunities to produce many multicultural and multilingual citizens. The number of individuals who speak a language other than English at home continues to increase significantly. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, the foreign-born population numbered 39.9 million (13% of the total population), an increase of 28.2% from 2000. About 85% of the foreign-born population spoke a language other than English at home and 15% spoke only English at home (U.S. Census, 2010). These astounding statistics reveal great potential to maximize the linguistic and cultural capabilities of immigrant children. To that end the development and maintenance of one's heritage language (HL) is essential.

There is ample evidence that being bilingual (i.e., maintaining one's HL in addition to English) is beneficial and has no negative effects on an individual's ability to function in society (Krashen, 1998a). Peal and Lambert (1962) were among the first researchers to find a positive relationship between bilingualism and cognitive ability. Their study showed that bilingual children have greater cognitive flexibility than do monolingual children and that bilingualism promotes academic achievement, which, in turn, fosters higher academic expectations.

Analyzing national longitudinal data, Fernandez and Nielsen (1986) found a positive correlation between academic achievement and bilingualism among Hispanic- and European-American high school

students. A similar finding was seen in Matute-Bianchi's (1986) ethnographic study of Mexican-American children, which reported that fully bilingual Mexican Americans tended to perform better in school and had a stronger Mexican identity when compared to those who had weak bilingual skills.

Having advanced bilingual skills also was shown to be related to higher grades and standardized test scores (Bankston & Zhou, 1995; Garcia, 1985; Lee, 2002), lower dropout rates (Rumberger & Larson, 1998), greater educational and occupational aspirations (Portes & Schaufli, 1995), and job-related advantages (Fradd & Boswell, 1999; Tienda & Neidert, 1984). Children who are more motivated to develop their HL tend to have higher self-esteem (Phinney, Romero, Nave, & Huang, 2001), a stronger sense of linguistic and cultural identity (Pigott & Karoche, 2005), and positive attitudes toward their own ethnic group (Tse, 2000).

Knowing multiple languages broadens the number of people with whom one can communicate, grants access to supportive networks in the community (Dornbusch & Stanton-Salazar, 1995; Matute-Bianchi, 1991; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Zhou & Bankston, 1994), and facilitates effective communication with parents, elders, and the HL community (Cho, 2000, 2008; Fuligni, 1997). As Krashen (1998a) has noted, HL development allows the HL learner

... to profit from their [parents, extended family members, and HL community members] wisdom and knowledge, promote a healthy sense of multiculturalism, an acceptance not only of both the majority and heritage culture, but a deeper understanding of the human condition. (p. 9)

Society also benefits from bilingualism in terms of business, diplomacy, and national security. The U.S. government recognizes the need for Americans who are proficient in languages other than

English (Peyton, Ranard, & McGinnis, 2001), particularly in terms of national security, diplomacy, and international commerce (Kuenzi & Riddle, 2005) as well as in the private business and service sectors (Wright, 2003).

### Decline in Heritage Language

Despite these benefits, research also shows the difficulty of maintaining or developing one's HL. Research documents a continuing pattern of decline in the use of HL and in HL competence among language minority groups, leading them to eventually lose their HL and become English monolinguals.

The use of the HL begins to decline as children of immigrants move through school. In this regard, Garcia and Diaz (1992) conducted a survey research with Spanish-speaking high school students in Miami, Florida. They found a decline in the percentage of students who reported using mostly or all Spanish. Among these students, HL was used more with parents, less with siblings, and even less with peers. A similar decline was found among Vietnamese-speaking children in elementary and middle school (Nguyen, Shin, & Krashen, 2001) and across a number of language communities (Wong Fillmore, 1991).

HL competence is shown to decline with age as well. Merino (1983) compared HL competence with English competence and found a decline in oral Spanish competence between ages five and seven, measured at two points in time in a test of oral language production. Zhou (2001) conducted a study comparing HL competence of 363 Vietnamese-background teenagers, who were either born in the U.S. or arrived before age six. At a two-year follow-up, 61% reported a decline in HL competence, which was accompanied by an increase in English competence. Espiritu and Wolf's

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(2001) study showed a similar pattern among Filipino-background students.

The most commonly observed pattern among the U.S. immigrant population is the language shift phenomenon (Castillo, 2004; Portes & Schauffler, 1995). A consistent finding in the field of sociology of language is that HLs are lost by the third generation of immigrants (Veltman, 1983). Moreover, the language shift from the immigrants' HL to the dominant language of the host society has accelerated over the years, showing a complete language shift within two generations (Wiley, 2001).

A large-scale study of over 5,000 second-generation adolescents in Florida and California showed that only 30% of these adolescents were fluent in their HL. The majority (72%) reported that they were English dominant and preferred speaking English (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Lopez (1996) found that English monolingualism at home increased from one generation to the next and that the shift was more rapid in the third generation than in the second generation. Such a shift was even more rapid among Asian-Americans as compared to Latino-Americans across generations. The shift to the dominant language was also noted in research on Korean Americans.

### Korean Language Gap

Over one million Koreans live in the U.S., of whom 30% are U.S. born second-generation Korean Americans. Korean immigrants are geographically more dispersed than are other recent Asian immigrants, but the majorities are concentrated in four large metropolitan cities: Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. (Terrazas & Batog, 2010). California has the largest number of Korean immigrants of any state, and one in five Korean immigrants resides in the Los Angeles metropolitan area (Terrazas & Batog, 2010).

Research on language use patterns of Korean immigrants indicates a language gap between parents and children. Studies show that first-generation Korean immigrants speak almost exclusively Korean at home and at work, while most second-generation Korean Americans communicate predominantly in English (Huh & Kim, 1984; Min, 2000; Shin, 2005). Min (2000) reported that 77% of second-generation Korean Americans speak only or mostly English to their parents after the age of five.

Korean immigrants have been actively involved in the maintenance and develop-

ment of their children's HL and culture. Korean ethnic schools, ethnic associations, newspapers, and professional organizations have been established to promote culture and language (Geer, 1981). Lee (2002) found that U.S.-born Korean Americans have a strong desire to keep their language and culture. Regardless of the presence of factors associated with slowing down the rate of shifting to English, however, the pattern of an accelerated shift to English has been documented in Korean immigrant families (Shin, 2005) and has been shown to have negative consequences (Cho & Krashen, 1998).

Little empirical research has examined the cause of language shift or the factors related to the HL development of language minority groups. This study investigates the factors that facilitate or inhibit the HL development of second-generation Korean Americans, with a focus on adolescent HL learners, who go through phases in the development of their identity, ethnic identity, and their attitudes toward HL development and HL speakers, which are shaped during these phases (Erickson, 1968; Tse, 2000).

## Method

### Participants

All participants in this study were

second-generation Korean-American high school students residing in Southern California. The participants were recruited through Korean language classes, Korean weekend schools, Korean churches, and a university, as well as through personal acquaintances. Pseudonyms are used to protect participants' privacy. The study utilized data collected through interviews and derived from a questionnaire.

To obtain a broad perspective, seven Korean-American high school students were interviewed. All respondents were "second-generation" Korean Americans living in the U.S. However, they also had diverse backgrounds in terms of age, HL proficiency, access to HL materials, living in an HL-speaking environment, and experiences learning the HL. The interview data yielded rich first-hand, in-depth perspectives of HL development, including promoting and inhibiting factors for HL development.

A second group of participants consisted of 260 second-generation Korean-American high school students. As seen in Table 1, the sample was balanced by student gender; 133 (51.2%) were female and 127 (48.8%) were male. Age of the students ranged from 14 to 18 years old ( $M=15.9$  years). The criterion of second generation was broadened by including Korean-American youths who came to

**Table 1**  
**Questionnaire Participants' Demographic Data (N = 260)**

Variable	n	%
Age (M= 15.9, SD= 1.35)		
Generation		
U.S.-born second generation	211	81.2
"Almost-second" generation, Age at arrival (M = 3.67, SD = 1.66)	49	18.8
Gender		
Female	133	51.2
Male	127	48.8
Self-identified Ethnicity		
Korean	31	12.0
American	11	4.2
Korean American	217	81.5
Other	6	2.3
Dominant Language		
English	234	90.0
Both Korean and English	24	9.2
Korean	2	0.8
Studied or are Studying the Korean Language		
Yes	180	69.2
No	79	30.4
Length of Time Studying HL (n= 180)		
0-1 year	72	39.1
1-3 years	55	29.9
3-6 years	38	20.7

Note. Valid percentages are used.

the U.S. before school age in addition to those who were born in the U.S. As such, they all grew up and began their formal education in this country. Fifty (19%) were “almost second-generation,” coming to the U.S. when they were young ( $M=3.67$ , age at arrival;  $SD=1.66$ ) and having lived in the U.S. most of their lives ( $M=15.4$  years of residence;  $SD=1.92$ ), and 210 (80.8%) were second-generation Korean Americans who were born in the U.S. Only participants whose parents are Korean speakers were included in the final analysis.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Prior to the interview, each participant in the first group of seven subjects completed a comprehensive questionnaire to provide language proficiency data and demographic information, which were later used to guide the participant’s interview. All interviews were conducted in English, audio-recorded, and transcribed. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes, and extensive notes were taken. As needed, follow-up questions were sent via email for clarification and elaboration of certain responses. Salient quotations were noted and are presented in the findings below .

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the questionnaire data. Qualitative analysis was used for the data from the interview and from the responses to the open-ended questions on the questionnaire. The data were coded and analyzed for emergent themes according to steps outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990).

The interview data were used to develop items for the questionnaire, which was administered to the larger sample of 260 subjects. Questionnaire items included demographic information, language proficiency and use, Korean language learning experience, attitudes toward the Korean language, and possible facilitating and inhibiting factors in developing one’s HL.

**Findings**

The findings of the study include the participants’ language characteristics (e.g., language dominance, preference, use) and their perspectives on HL development, including their perceptions of what promotes or inhibits development of their HL. In addition, mismatches between their perspectives and the reality of how one acquires an HL are presented. The results of the questionnaire are presented, and to give voice to the participants’ perspectives, salient quotes from the interviews and

open-ended comments from the questionnaire are included.

**Participants’ Background**

Becoming dominant in the majority language (i.e., English) seems to be a common phenomenon among second-generation Korean-American youth. As shown in Table 1, most participants reported English to be their dominant language or the language with which they feel the most comfortable. Specifically, 234 (90.0%) of the 260 participants indicated English as their dominant language, 24 (9.2%) felt equally comfortable in both Korean and English, and 2(<1%) felt more comfortable in Korean. Interestingly, the majority of the participants spoke Korean at home, and Korean was their dominant language while growing up in the U.S. Specifically, 164 (63.3%) of the respondents reported having spoken Korean *always or often* while growing up.

The findings appear to demonstrate a shift toward the society’s majority language. Most participants indicated English as the language that they prefer to use in conversing with others. As seen in Table 2, 233 (90.0%) of the participants reported that they speak English *all or mostly* with their siblings, 240 (93.0%) indicated using English *all or mostly* with close friends, and 116 (44.7%) use English *all or mostly*. Additionally, 65 (25.0%) use both languages when speaking with their parents.

These findings demonstrate a shift toward the society’s majority language.

Regardless of whether one is dominant in the majority language or prefers using English to Korean, most of the participants had positive attitudes toward maintaining or developing their HL. As seen in Table 3, a total of 187 (75.1%) of the participants reported that being able to speak, read, and write in Korean is *very important*, 38 (15.3%) of the participants indicated important, and only 24 (9.6%) responded *not important or don’t know*.

Participants also were asked to state their reasons for wanting to maintain their HL. As also seen in Table 3, a large majority ( $n=219$ , 84.2%) indicated a desire to have a closer relationship with their family. This was followed by being able to communicate with Korean speakers ( $n=218$ , 83.8%), to understand the culture ( $n=162$ , 62.3%), and to enhance career opportunities ( $n=156$ , 60.0%).

**Facilitating Factors for Developing One’s Heritage Language**

Participants had similar views in regard to how to improve their Korean language skills. The factors that facilitate HL development are presented in Table 4.

**Being immersed in the Korean language by visiting or living in Korea.** The results indicated that “being immersed” in a Korean-speaking environment, specifically

**Table 2**  
**Language Preference (N = 260)**

Prefer to speak with	Mostly or all in English n (%)	Both languages (bilingual) n (%)	Mostly or all in Korean n (%)
Parents/at home	116 (44.7%)	65 (25.0%)	79 (30.4%)
Siblings	233 (90.0%)	19 (7.3%)	7 (2.7%)
Close friends	240 (93.0%)	14 (5.4%)	4 (1.6%)
Others	236 (90.7%)	20 (7.7%)	4 (1.6%)

**Table 3**  
**Questionnaire Participants’ Perception Data (N = 260)**

Variable	n	%
Importance of Developing Korean language		
Very important	187	75.1
Important	38	15.3
Not important	22	8.8
Don’t Know	2	0.8
Reasons for Developing one’s HL		
Closer relationship with family members	219	84.2
Communicated with Korean natives	218	83.8
Understanding the culture	162	62.3
Career purposes (i.e., enhance career opportunities)	156	60.0

Note. Valid percentages are used.

visiting or living in Korea, was the most frequently reported factor ( $n=226$ , 86.9%). According to the participants, being “immersed” in the target language provided the best means to receive Korean language input as well as to learn or use the target language. Julie stated,

The best way [to learn and use Korean] would be to live in Korea, for like a semester or two, where people would only talk to you in Korean, so you'd be forced to learn or use Korean.

Janet concurred, stating:

The perfect way to do this would be to go and visit Korea. This would give you a chance to put your knowledge to the test and push yourself beyond what you thought you were capable . . . definitely having to constantly hear and see the language is a catalyst and that speeds the entire process up. I strongly recommend that the person trying to improve their Korean speaking skills just keep on practicing and try and keep themselves as submerged in the language and culture as they can.

Similarly, Albert noted:

The best way for anyone to learn any language is to actually live in that country. Since you are forced to learn the language, not by choice, but by necessity, you only have one decision to make. You are left with a very conscious decision. You need to give some effort to learn.

Kerry, a proficient Korean speaker, said that being immersed in the Korean language by visiting Korea and socializing with Koreans makes achieve language proficiency easier.

The best way is to visit Korea, have friends that are Koreans, especially friends straight from Korea, and involve yourself in Korean social activities. This will make it easier to learn the Korean language.

**Engaging in conversation with Korean-proficient speakers.** The second most salient factor that helps one develop a heritage language is to engage in conversation with native language speakers, which was indi-

cated by 222 (85.4%) of the respondents. Sam, a fluent Korean American, stated that the best way to acquire Korean is “continuously using it with native Korean speakers on a daily basis.” He explained:

I have improved my Korean language skills by engaging in conversations with natives of Korea. By making friends, it has forced me into situations where I have to utilize the Korean language. In addition, I can pick up on different vocabulary used in conversational Korean.

Considering that first-generation Koreans are largely Korean-dominant speakers (Kim, Lee, & Kim, 1981), speaking in Korean with one’s parents is the most easily available source of HL input for second-generation Korean Americans. Kerry felt that early exposure to the HL from parents is beneficial, stating,

Ultimately, the best way to learn Korean is from your parents. If your lifestyle is exposed to the Korean language, it will be of much benefit.

**Taking Korean language classes.** As noted above, over half of the participants ( $n=143$ , 55.0%), reported that taking a “good” Korean language class or attending Korean language school would facilitate one’s HL development. Edward, an average Korean speaker, pointed out, “If living in Korea isn’t an option, taking language classes and having language exchange partners are also beneficial.” He added:

Another good method of learning Korean is to attend Korean language schools. In addition, exposing yourself to the Korean community, in general, will provide you with the opportunity to practice and learn how the Korean language is spoken.

He emphasized the need to take the “Korean class seriously and to try practicing it more” as important steps to improving one’s Korean language skills.

**Engaging in language-learning activities.** Engaging in informal language-learning activities, such as watching Korean

television, listening to Korean music, and reading books written in Korean, was considered another facilitator by 122 (46.9%) questionnaire completers. One of the interviewees, Edward, believes that being exposed to Korean entertainment on a daily basis will motivate learning one’s HL. He stated:

Introduce [the Korean language] at an early age, as well as Korean radio, music, TV, or movies, to familiarize [a child] with the culture and the slang. Create an interesting culture to nurture the desire to learn the target language.

Sam mentioned a combination of the factors noted above as well as an additional activity (i.e., reading lighter material in Korean):

I think conversing with native speakers, visiting Korea, watching TV, and listening to Korean music are good ways of improving your Korean skills. But I also learned a lot by reading comic books.

Kerry, a Korean proficient speaker, developed her Korean oral skills by speaking Korean at home and developed her Korean literacy skills and understanding of the culture by reading Korean books. Consequently, she scored high in the Korean SAT II exam and, as a result, was able to waive her high school foreign language requirement.

I did well in Korean SAT II, so I didn’t have to take any foreign language class in school. My parents taught me the Korean alphabet and basic sounds. Being an only child, I grew up only speaking Korean in the house. This helped to develop my speaking abilities tremendously. Since I was always interested in Korean culture and language, I taught myself to read simple sentences in Korean and read Korean books.

**Inhibiting Factors for Developing One’s Heritage Language**

The findings show some environmental or circumstantial factors that inhibit the HL development of Korean-American high school students. From the interview data, a list of obstacles or challenges to learning the Korean language was derived and later used in developing the questionnaire items.

On the questionnaire, participants were instructed to choose only one response from a list of obstacles or challenges, which most likely led to fewer responses than would have been provided had they been given the option to choose more than one or “all” for the inhibiting factors.

**Table 4**  
**Facilitating Factors of HL Development (N = 260)**

Factor	n	%
Visit or live in Korea	226	86.9
Use Korean	222	85.4
Speak Korean with parents	190	73.1
Take Korean language class	143	55.0
Watch Korean television	122	46.9
Recreational Korean reading	74	28.5
Listen to Korean radio, music	39	15.0

Note. Participants were allowed to choose more than one response.

Participants also were directed to reflect on their perspectives in the space provided. Only single-item responses were included in the final analysis. Because 63 responses had more than one answer, only 194 questionnaires were used in the analysis (Table 5).

**Time and access.** Lack of time was identified by 58 (29.9%) of the respondents as their number one inhibiting factor in developing their HL. Their explanations included:

I have no time to attend a structured class to learn Korean language.

I have a busy schedule . . . If I had more time, I would engage in conversation with natives more often and sit down and study independently.

The second obstacle was *lack of access* to the Korean language at home and/or in the community. Over four-fifths of the participants reported that being surrounded by the Korean language, by visiting or living in Korea or by having opportunities to practice speaking Korean with more proficient Korean speakers would help them to acquire the Korean language more quickly. However, as Kerry pointed out, regardless of its benefit, “accessing the Korean language in the U.S. is not an easy task.” She explained:

First, I think it’s very difficult to learn a language without some exposure at an early age. Picking up the tone and vocabulary is difficult without early exposure. Living in America, the bulk of our conversations is in English, so it may be hard to have conversational partners in Korean.

Albert presented a similar view, stating that being in a situation where one can practice or use Korean is important, but that the opportunities to use Korean are very limited in the U.S. as well as in Korea when he was visiting the country. He stated:

Nobody outside my family talks to me in Korean. Even my family does not always talk to me in Korean. So, I never needed to use Korean. Also, when I talk in Korean,

they are not supportive. For an example, when I visited Korea, if they knew that I was from the U.S. and speak English, they would tell me to talk in English so they could practice English instead, that is how it is these days.

Of the questionnaire respondents, 42 (21.6%) indicated a lack of access to the Korean language as one of the obstacles or challenges to learning the Korean language. Several questionnaire respondents provided explanations about their choices:

It is difficult to have opportunities to speak in Korean with others.

Not having Korean-speaking people around is an obstacle.

[An obstacle is] a lack of people to practice Korean with in daily life.

Reading Korean would help, but it is hard to find the materials to read.

Over the past several years, I find myself reading less and less, disheartened by the material available.

**Lack of motivation.** Having *no motivation to learn* the HL was the third obstacle or challenge identified by second-generation Korean Americans. The results indicated that 32 (16.5%) of the respondents felt *no motivation or desire to learn* the Korean language. Some of the reasons were based on the limited practicality of knowing one’s HL, being “self-conscious” about one’s HL skills, and being discouraged by the negative attitudes or comments of proficient Korean speakers.

Some did not feel that it was necessary to know the Korean language when living outside of Korea. Albert stated,

Nobody outside my family talks to me in Korean. Even my family does not always talk to me in Korean. So, I did not feel the need to learn Korean.

Similarly, another interviewee saw the value of knowing more than one language but did not see the value of using it beyond one’s home.

Not being exposed to it enough and

not having an effective use for it. I don’t need to learn Korean to be able to function in society. While knowing Korean is an added value, it presents itself as . . . a burden to learn.

Janet, a low HL-proficient student, grew up speaking mostly in English at home and did not see a reason to enhance her HL skills beyond the beginning level.

It’s due to my ability to scrape by at the level at which I’m at. I was raised in a mostly English-speaking household, so there never was any significant motivation to improve my Korean skills beyond a ‘barely competent’ state.

Lack of motivation to learn one’s HL, based on one’s HL speaking ability, was reflected in the following as well:

I’m self-conscious around native speakers because I feel embarrassed.

When I was a child, I was regularly taunted for having an ‘American’ accent. That can really discourage one from practicing as much as possible.

**Fear of criticism.** Another discouraging factor was concern over criticism by proficient Korean speakers. “There is also fear of being ridiculed if you say things incorrectly by Korean native speakers.” When respondents were grouped by HL proficiency levels, the findings showed that the weak HL speakers were affected more by native Koreans’ negative attitudes and/or critical comments than were fluent or proficient Korean Americans.

Specifically, 47% of the low HL-proficient learners and 18.9% of the fluent or proficient Korean speakers were affected by native Korean speakers’ attitudes. As such, these negative attitudes inhibited the HL development of weak HL speakers.

**Mismatches**

This section presents three mismatches between how the participants view and how they execute or are able to execute their beliefs as related to developing and maintaining one’s HL.

**Mismatch 1: Lack of HL access vs. not utilizing available HL resources.**

As seen earlier, a majority of participants felt that being exposed to the Korean language on a daily basis, by speaking with native Korean speakers (*n*=222, 85.4%) or by speaking Korean with their parents (*n*=190, 73.1%), is an effective way of improving one’s HL skills in the U.S. The

**Table 5**  
**Inhibiting Factors of HL Development (N = 194)**

Factor	n	%
Lack of time	58	29.9
Lack of access to Korean language	42	21.6
Lack of motivation	32	16.5
Lack of a good Korean language class	29	14.9
Native Koreans’ negative attitudes	18	9.3

Note. Participants were instructed to choose only one response. Only those who checked one response were included in the analysis.

findings, however, showed that the Korean language is not widely used by parents in Korean immigrant families. For example, Janet's parents did not want to speak in Korean with her or with her siblings when they were growing up because they felt that speaking to their children in English would help them to succeed academically.

Similarly, Patrick's parents spoke to him in Korean before he entered school but his parents started using less HL at home once he started school. Patrick was proficient in Korean but was a limited English-proficient student at the time that he entered kindergarten. Due to his classroom behaviors (e.g., slow in recognizing English words, heavy accent), his teacher referred him to a speech pathologist. After that incident, his parents started using English at home and, eventually, spoke more in English than in Korean at home.

Currently, Patrick is proficient in English, excels academically, and is a prolific writer; however, in the process of learning English, he lost his Korean skills. According to his self-report, he has low proficiency in all areas of Korean language skills (i.e., speaking, listening, reading, and writing).

There was additional evidence that indicated that Korean is used minimally by second-generation Korean Americans at home. The results showed that only 30.4% of the participants spoke Korean *most or all of the time* with their parents, and only 9.9% spoke Korean with their siblings at home.

### **Mismatch 2: Consequence of "being forced to speak" vs. HL acquisition.**

Participants indicated that "being forced to speak" is beneficial to learning a new language. There were some mismatches, however, between how they viewed the HL facilitating and/or inhibiting factors and how they learned the HL. Clearly, "being forced to speak at an early age" was not helpful for teenagers who were self-conscious about how they spoke or who were less proficient as compared to fluent Korean speakers.

For some, who were average-to-proficient Korean speakers, such stress-provoking situations may have given them motivation to seek out opportunities to engage in conversation and to improve their Korean skills. For instance, Edward, an average HL speaker, stated, "Visiting Korea made me want to improve my knowledge of Korean language and culture."

For non-fluent or weak Korean speakers, however, such a situation created a "high anxiety" environment that inhibited them from acquiring the Korean language

and even lowered their self-esteem. Weak language learners, especially teenagers, who are generally quite self-conscious, were affected by the way that native Korean speakers reacted to them.

The negative responses of native Korean speakers were experienced as a barrier to learning the Korean language. For example, Julie stated that the best way to learn Korean is to live in Korea, where one would be forced to use the language. In reality, however, that environment had a negative effect on the development of Julie's Korean language skills. Julie shared her frustration over her encounters with native Koreans who "shut her down," and as a result, she avoided opportunities to socialize with Koreans, even in the U.S. She stated:

For me, my biggest problem is the fact that I don't want to associate with Korean culture. I avoid Koreans as much as I can, so I can never improve. Korean people, even those who live in the U.S., are very cruel to me for not knowing Korean. I am nice to foreigners, but they [Korean native speakers] are mean to me. That's the reason that I don't want to associate with them. Many times, I pretend that I am Chinese because people think I look Chinese, and I don't want to bother to correct their perception.

She added that, based on her experiences, she would not visit nor live in Korea again. Janet stated that one of the biggest problems in learning Korean was the combination of language and people [attitudes]:

The biggest obstacle is that Koreans don't accept me, even in the U.S., for example, at church and in high school. They would accept me [however] if I spoke Korean or if I knew the Korean culture. They [fluent Korean speakers] are very disrespectful and mean to me for not speaking Korean well.

### **Mismatch 3: Attending HL class: Catalyst for or obstacle to HL development?**

Taking a Korean language class or attending Korean language school was considered to be a facilitator for HL development, but some Korean classes were considered to be obstacles. According to Edward, a "good Korean language class" is one that is "relevant and meaningful." Of the 260 participants, 180 (69.2%) had studied or were studying the Korean language.

Of these participants, 72 (39.1%) had taken Korean classes for less than one year, 55 (29.9%) had studied the language for 1 to 3 years, 38 (20.7%) had studied it for 3 to 6 years, and 19 (10.3%) had taken Korean language classes for more than

six years (Table 1). When asked, on the questionnaire, to comment about their Korean language class experiences, they reported:

Lack of explanation in English.

Not enough time to learn and experience the culture and language.

Teacher's lack of enthusiasm while teaching.

Too much emphasis on grammar.

Not enough interaction to use or practice with Native Korean speakers.

One questionnaire completer explained in more detail:

There is generally too much emphasis on written grammatical form rather than an oral/aural approach. For me, the problem was that memorizing so much grammar proved to be counter-productive and inhibited my ability to speak freely for a long time.

Some respondents blamed themselves for the ineffectiveness of Korean language classes, as seen in the following:

Not studying enough.

No time to attend a structured class.

Not taking the Korean weekend school and class seriously.

Others mentioned alternatives to a formal Korean language class:

Ideally, if I had more time, I would engage in conversation with natives more often and sit down and study independently.

Kerry, who participated in a summer language-learning program, stated that the Korean language class was not effective. She claimed that she learned about Korean culture but not the language.

It was a good opportunity to meet new people from all different areas of the U.S., to learn Korean culture, and to see many famous Korean landmarks.

She did not learn the "language itself" because English was spoken by all her friends, and she did not have enough interaction with native speakers.

## **Discussion**

Overall, the findings from the questionnaire and the interviews complemented each other. Most of the U.S.-born Korean-American high school students who participated in this study were English dominant and preferred to speak in English. The majority had positive attitudes toward

maintaining or developing their HL and wanted to develop their HL to have a closer relationship with their family, to be able to communicate with Korean speakers, to understand Korean culture, and to expand their career opportunities.

Factors identified by the participants as facilitating HL development included receiving HL input by visiting or living in Korea, engaging in conversations with native HL speakers, enrolling in high-quality HL classes, and engaging in informal language learning activities such as watching Korean television, listening to Korean music, and reading books written in Korean.

The findings also showed, however, that HL maintenance or development is a challenging task in the U.S. and that language shift to the dominant language of the country was evident. Even those who live in an area with more available sources of Korean input had difficulty maintaining or developing their HL. Compared to Korean-Americans residing outside of Southern California, our participants had more opportunities to encounter Korean native speakers.

In view of this study's findings, and with a focus on the modifiable inhibiting factors, the following recommendations are presented:

#### **Maximize Comprehensible HL Input**

Parents are perhaps the most significant HL provider for immigrant children and have the ability to compensate for the lack of access to the HL outside of the home. Research has shown that intergenerational transmission of an HL is one of the most effective ways to preserve a language (Fishman, 2001; Park, 2008) and that parental use of the HL is critical to children's HL development (Bayley, Schechter, & Torres-Alaya, 1996; Kondo, 1998; Portes & Hao, 1998).

According to Krashen (1985), to increase competence in a second language, one needs to receive comprehensible input (i.e., understanding of what is heard and read), in a low anxiety-provoking environment, that contains elements that have not yet been acquired. In addition, Au (2008) noted that receiving abundant comprehensible input and having regular and active interaction with HL speakers beyond the preschool years are important for preserving one's HL. Studies have shown that childhood exposure to one's HL helped adult learners to acquire higher levels of native-like pronunciation (Au, 2008) as well as the linguistic terms and

morphemes required by young children to express Korean honorifics (politeness) (Park, 2008).

To ensure that HL input is comprehensible, parents need to tailor their HL speech to their children, to be tolerant of the language developmental errors that are made by their children, and choose interesting, relevant, and meaningful topics in which to engage their children in conversation. In addition, parents as well as school personnel need to be informed that maintaining and developing one's HL is important and to dispel the myth or fear that maintaining one's HL will have a negative effect on developing English proficiency.

#### **Minimize Anxiety**

One of the common beliefs about second language learning is that "forcing oneself to talk in the target language is the effective way" of acquiring the target language. As seen in this study, however, to foster language acquisition, foreign language anxiety (i.e., "fear of speaking" and "fear of not understanding") needs to be minimized. According to Krashen (2008), "Forcing oneself to talk to people when we are not ready often results in incomprehensible input," which can lead to a frustration and discouragement, resulting in less language acquisition (p. 19).

As seen in the findings, the high expectations of native Korean speakers toward less-proficient HL speakers often *inhibits* these less-proficient speakers by making them anxious or discouraged and often turning them off from learning the HL. As such, error correction and criticism can contribute to second-generation Koreans feeling alienated from their own HL group, eventually making them reluctant to learn their HL, a type of "language shyness" (Krashen, 1998b). Therefore, it is important for proficient HL speakers not to ridicule but rather to tolerate weak HL speakers' errors and to encourage further interaction in the HL.

#### **Develop Good HL Programs**

As Valdes (2001) has pointed out, for the most part, HL instruction has not been based on research because there is sparse research on this topic. Many of the available studies concentrate on beginning-level HL students because few second-generation immigrants achieve advanced levels of HL literacy (Kondo, 1998). In developing an HL curriculum, teachers need to bear in mind the inhibiting and facilitating

factors found in this study, to capitalize on HL learners' strengths, and to identify community resources and assets so that they can be included in the development of an HL program. Such an HL program will motivate students to learn and to continue developing their HL skills well enough to advance to higher levels.

#### **Provide a Variety of HL Reading Materials**

HL classes/schools should provide quality reading materials (e.g., fun, interesting, at the right reading level) from which students can choose as well as opportunities for students to read for pleasure (e.g., comic books, magazines). A large number of studies on literacy development have shown that extensive reading and, in particular, reading for pleasure improve HL vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, reading comprehension, writing ability, spelling, and even aural comprehension and oral proficiency (Krashen, 1993).

Additionally, McQuillan (1996) showed that pleasure reading was an excellent way to develop HL vocabulary. Therefore, helping HL learners to establish a reading habit is critical. Moreover, children who are taught to read and write in their HL and who have consistent opportunities to read HL texts have been shown to have more positive attitudes toward and are less likely to lose the language (Fishman, 1991; Vasquez, Pease-Alvarez, & Shannon, 1994).

#### **Maximize Informal Language Learning**

The participants in this study noted the benefits of informal learning activities such as watching Korean television, listening to Korean music, using online HL resources, and engaging in light reading with comic books, magazines, and other materials in which they were interested. Yi's (2008) case study explored the effect on HL of the online writing activities (e.g., instant messaging, online community posting, note exchanging, and diary-writing with peers) of biliterate Korean teenagers.

The study showed how an informal learning activity (i.e., online writing practice) was not just a valuable way of developing one's language fluency and cultural knowledge or a means to socialize with one's own ethnic peer group; it also made the HL learning process enjoyable and purposeful for the HL learners, motivating them to voluntarily continue to engage in HL literacy practice. Although Yi's findings was based on just a few participants, the findings have practical implications for

meeting the needs of today's "techno-savvy" student population and for those HL learners with limited access to their HL or to a HL peer group.

Overall, maximizing informal learning opportunities will motivate students to learn their HL and even encourage HL acquisition and development. HL teachers, students, and their families should take advantage of informal learning activities in the HL classroom and at home. They also should use the HL in their conversations, particularly with HL learners, as well as draw upon Korean movies, music, drama, novels, comics, video clips, games, and popular social networking sites as a way to provide abundant comprehensible input in a low anxiety-provoking environment.

### Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study was conducted in a limited geographic area but one in which the participants had more exposure to their HL than do other second-generation Korean immigrants living in other parts of the country. In addition, due to sampling method, a large percentage of the participants were attending or have taken HL classes; therefore, the results may reflect a more favorable attitude toward HL maintenance. Taken together, these considerations limit the generalizability of the findings.

For the purpose of the study, the age group of the participants and parental ethnicity were controlled. According to Zhou (1997), children of immigrants have become the fastest growing and the most diverse (in terms of ethnicity, socioeconomic circumstances, and settlement patterns) segment of the U.S. children's population since the 1980s. Therefore, to make the study more representative of current societal dynamics, it would be valuable to conduct a similar study with Korean Americans from more diverse backgrounds (e.g., interracial, intercultural immigrant parents, immigrant spouses of different socioeconomic statuses).

We also did not evaluate parents' language abilities, either in English or in the HL, nor did we ask about parental educational background, either of which could potentially affect Korean-American adolescents' attitudes toward HL development as well as their language use and HL acquisition. Thus, in future research, it would be useful to include parents' language abilities and educational backgrounds, as related to HL input.

### Conclusion

Understanding Korean-American perspectives on HL development, particularly maximizing the facilitators and minimizing the inhibitors, should go a long way toward fostering multicultural, multilingual citizens who are well versed with cross-cultural knowledge and well equipped with language skills to meet the demanding challenges of diversified today's world.

It is hoped that the results of this study will be used for planning educational programs that take into account the needs and resources of immigrant families as well for informing the public, preservice teachers, and educators about the value of maintaining and developing one's HL.

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