

Sink or Swim

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This study investigates how five non-heritage language learners manage themselves in a heritage learner dominant classroom. It looks at mainly the interactions among the students from a sociocultural perspective in terms of their attitude, socialization, and using strategies. The results indicate that most of subject students struggle but successfully manage to keep up with their heritage peers and sometimes put a counter-impact on them and facilitate an affirmative learning atmosphere. Cooperation is the main strategy the students mainly rely on. They seek help from either their heritage peers or the same group peers. One unsuccessful case is found, but it has nothing to do with the heritage learner dominant context. Not being motivated turn out to be the reason.

Key Words: Korean language, scaffolding, i+1, heritage learners, non-heritage learners,

1 Introduction

This study pays attention to the social context in the classroom and the interactions among learners in it. Basically, this study aims to look at how a certain group of students in the classroom show learning behavior as they interact with each other and with other peers in a special classroom context: their peers already have more advanced target language proficiency. Since this study focuses on outcomes from the classroom in which learners show a variety of learning behaviors, this study will be done with a theoretical framework of phenomenology from a sociocultural perspective because phenomenology requires us to engage with phenomena in our world and make sense of them directly and immediately (Crotty, 1998). Phenomena happening in the classroom through learners' interaction are considered critical to language acquisition.

The psycholinguistic perspective, which interprets language learning as triggering an innate linguistic system by input from outside, has dominated the language acquisition field for a long time. Lately, a new perspective, the sociocultural perspective, has appeared. Unlike the psycholinguistic perspective, this has put more emphasis on the relevance of social context and interpersonal relationships in the development of individual cognition in terms of language acquisition. Many scholars have started to look at language

learning from this new perspective. Recent studies of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), or Foreign Language Acquisition (FLA) in the classroom reveal the important role classroom environment play in influencing language learners. Because so much of language learning occurs in the classroom, SLA or FLA researchers have focused on the role of interaction in the classroom event (Hall & Verplaetse, 2000). Learners in the classroom acquire their target language not only through traditional ways of learning, such as rote memorization, repeating, and using mnemonic devices, but also through social interaction with their peers and teachers. This sociocultural perspective assumes that learning is shaped by the social and cultural context in which it occurs and by the mediational means learners utilize (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertch, 1991).

This study is intended to illuminate a unique classroom context which possibly has significant impact on language learners in learning a foreign language. Subject students may “sink” as they feel overwhelmed by the classroom atmosphere which is forged by their advanced peers, or they may “swim” and even excel because of their advanced peers. Then, more specific, in-depth factors which make students sink or swim will be found mostly based on interviews. In the case of the “swimmers,” it is expected that subject students get peer scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978), which means helping, as they interact with their advanced peers and teacher. However, this $i + 1$ situation (slightly higher level) can be $i +$ more than 1 (much higher level), then they will be overwhelmed and learning will not occur (Krashen, 1982).

2 Background of Study

The label *heritage* is given to a language based principally on the social status of its speakers and not necessarily on any linguistic property (Valdés, 2005). As an example, Spanish typically comes in second in terms of native speakers worldwide and has official status in a number of countries. Thus, it is considered a heritage language in the English-dominant United States. The most widely used definition of heritage speakers is from Valdés's (2000). She defines heritage speakers as individuals raised in homes where a language other than English is spoken and who are to some degree bilingual in English and the heritage language. Speakers of the same heritage language raised in the same community may differ significantly in terms of their language abilities, yet be considered heritage speakers under this definition. As Polinsky and Kagan say (2007), some heritage speakers may be highly proficient in the language, possessing several registers, while other heritage speakers may be able to understand the language but not produce it. When less proficient heritage learners learn their heritage language, we call them heritage language learners (HLLs).

As heritage language learning has gained ground in the U.S. since 1990s (Valdes, 2001), many “less commonly taught” foreign/immigrant languages, such as Korean, Chinese, and Japanese, are also getting attention. Especially, Korean is now being taught at more than 100 colleges and universities in the U. S. With this tangible growth, there has been an issue around the fact that heritage language learners are enrolled in foreign language classrooms together with non-heritage learners who don’t have any back ground or prior knowledge of the target language¹. Things are getting complicated when Korean teaching is conducted in this mixed classroom, because the presence of heritage language learners may make the target language learning more intimidating for non-heritage learners. From opposite angle, if the teacher set the level of teaching with more consideration for non-heritage learners, the other heritage learners might lose their enthusiasm.

Regarding this issue, a number of studies have been conducted, but most of them focus on heritage learners and their motivation for their heritage language learning (Comanaru et al., 2009; Condo-Brown, 2005; Kim, 2006) or identity issues (Jo, 2001; Xiao, 2006). It is still possible to find some similar studies where SL or FL learners struggle in English dominant classroom (Willett, 1995) or the students in their language or other classroom situations (Chang, 2008; 2009; Friedman, 2009; Ha, 2010; Kim, 2007). However, non-heritage learners in heritage learner dominant atmosphere have rarely been paid attention to. So, this study can be considered original in that it looks at how the target language learning occurs from a perspective of non-heritage learners in a heritage learner dominant classroom.

3 Study

3.1 Research Questions

Here are three research questions this study throws.

- 1) How does an “advanced” atmosphere work in the language learning of subject students in terms of their learning attitude?
- 2) How does subject students’ interaction and socialization (if any) with each other or with other advanced students facilitate, or frustrate language learning?
- 3) What kind of strategies do subject students employ in language learning in this unique classroom context?

3.2 Participants and Context

¹ Almost every “less commonly taught” language in the U.S. is involved with this issue.

The study takes place at a large research university located in a small town in the southeastern United States. Korean language classes are offered by the university for undergraduate students as one kind of foreign language requirement course. Like other foreign language classes, Korean classes are offered five hours a week, every weekday. There are two elementary level classes, including one intermediate and one advanced level classes. For the elementary level, among total two classes, one class is offered for the students who don't have any Korean background (non-heritage students), and the other is for the students who have a Korean background more or less. Since there are students who already have the Korean proficiency relatively more advanced than that of usual elementary Korean students, the teacher (the researcher of this study) tries to use more Korean in this class than the other teacher does in the other elementary class (non-heritage). This heritage classroom is the place where the research is conducted. As a researcher of this study, the teacher of this class may anticipate a certain type of outcomes based on her prior experiences. To prevent this tendency, research assistants will be involved in this research to make more objective observation.

There are 29 students in this classroom, including five non-heritage students in the classroom. They are not supposed to be in this class, but they insisted that they be in the class because of their schedule conflicts, or their willingness to be in a more-Korean speaking atmosphere: they want to expose themselves to a more Korean speaking environment. These five students are selected as subjects for this study. Four of them are female students, two white American students, one student who has a Korean mother and an American father, one Japanese student who came to the university as an exchange student, and one Vietnamese male student. 24 heritage students are all freshmen except one female Korean-American student who is a sophomore, but only one non-heritage student is freshman. Details about subject (focal) students are in Table 1.

The subject students are chosen by a criterion, the level of Korean proficiency, which is enough to make them be considered non-heritage students. Specifically, they have non-Korean ethnicity or don't have communicable Korean proficiency even if they have Korean parents. Actually, the latter case is rare and avoided. A controversy can be aroused over a female student who has Korean mother, but she just can understand a couple of simple words since her mother has rarely used Korean at home. Each subject student is asked to voluntarily join this study one by one. The students might be too much aware of being observed and uncomfortable with the fact that their scores and behaviors will be used for this study. So, they are informed of some possible benefits, such as that they can contribute SLA field in terms of helping language learners with the application of the data from them, and that each of them can be analyzed as a certain type of language learner, having a chance to look at oneself and do self-improvement

as a language learner. They are also informed of researcher's individual interview plan before the study is conducted.

Table 1. Participants

No.	Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Year	Age
1	Megan	Female	Ko-Am (half-half)	Sophomore	19
2	Peggy	Female	Am-Am (White)	Sophomore	18
3	Cass	Female	Am-Am (White)	Freshman	17
4	Asako	Female	Japanese (Exchange)	Junior	19
5	Victor	Male	Viet-Am	Sophomore	1

3.3 Data Collection

As is the case in most ethnographical studies, this study uses three main data sources in order to enhance internal validity. These sources are interviews, observations with thorough field notes, and written documents. This group of five students is observed with participant-observation approach during regular class hours, four times a week, for one whole semester (15 weeks). Since the main emphasis in this study is to see how the classroom context impacts on language learners who learn Korean as their foreign language, five subject students are thoroughly observed as they manage language learning in this unique classroom atmosphere. The prime observer is the instructor of the class. Since the instructor has to pay more attention to teaching, there is the possibility that she may miss students' classroom interactions or learning incidents that can be significant to this research. To overcome this potential problem, as it is mentioned already above, two assistants are asked to volunteer to make observations and take notes. Each of them attends two sessions every week by taking turns. Assistant observers and the prime observer observe the overall classroom atmosphere to get information that might be important to figure out possible contextual impact on subject language learners. Observations are conducted with several criteria, such as how the subject students actively answer questions or participate in classroom activities, how they react when their teacher or their advanced peers utter things, and whether there is any interaction among student during the class.

Subject students are interviewed one by one for about less than an hour at the place where they feel comfortable. Like observation, interviewing is another method of getting prime data from subjects. Considering this important fact, the interviewer uses open-ended questions to get various answers, and more questions are developed based on students' answers. If the interview does not go well, the protocol is used as guide to bring the conversation back to the foci of the study. Open-ended questions are which interviewees can freely answer to, however, in many cases, the subject

students are not able to answer to the questions in the way that the researcher wanted, maybe because they are too young to develop their stream of thoughts. A list of a couple of possible specific questions is prepared. The questions are first, “what made you take Korean class?; second, tell me about your way of studying Korean; third, how about being in the classroom where there are your peers who already have a certain degree of advanced proficiency?; and tell me about good things and bad things of being in this kind of unique atmosphere.” For the third question, the students are requested to talk about specific strategies to keep up with their heritage peers in the classroom. All the contents of interviews are audio-taped, and interview time is no more than an hour.

Written documents mainly contain subject students’ test results. All tests, such as quizzes, midterm, and final exam, are conducted and scored according to the university rules. The record of attendance is also included in the documents. The attendance record is a good source for measuring students’ participation during the class. These documents are usually important in analyzing students’ degree of achievement, but they are used as a reference in this study².

4 Data Story (Findings)

Unlike the traditional research writing, the result of this study is written in a different way, writing data story. Frankly speaking, it is more difficult to write this way than doing the traditional way. Since “diary” is chosen as the way for this data story, actual characteristic of each student is shown as his/her way of talking is reflected. However, there have been constant worries, such as ‘what if anything is missing?’ ‘Is this form of writing good enough to be considered an academic writing?’ Even though there is some limitation in creating unique discourse style of each person, it would be worthwhile to see that a new way of writing style is incorporated into the formal academic writing.

The inspiration of choosing this way is from a book³ written by Sizer (2004). This piece was written as a story of a teacher, who was made up by the writer, based on the data collected from multiple numbers of teachers. There are some more studies written in the form of story. Lather and Smithies (1997) described HIV positive patients’ daily lives in a series of stories, and Behar (2003) portrayed an oppressed woman’s life in a narrative. These books are all nonfiction stories made of results based on ethnographical studies. The data considered relevant from interviews and field notes are

² Students test scores are not tabled. Overall development of the students are shown in the story which is mainly based on the field notes and interviews.

³ Sizer, T. R. (2004) *Horace’s compromise: The dilemma of the American high school*.

interpreted and synthesized. Even test results are melted into the form of data story.

4.1 Teacher's View

<September 8, 0000>

After a couple of weeks have passed since this semester started, students seem to be getting along well each other. Interestingly, I noticed that students are divided into two groups. One group is sitting on the front side of the classroom and the other is sitting on the backside. All subject students, except for Victor, were sitting on the front with some other heritage students. Victor was sitting on the back with his girlfriend, Rebecca. Today when I talked about some additional contents other than those in the text, subject students seemed to be nervous, and try to comprehend what I said. Peggy tried to ask Cass about it. I repeated what I said to help them....

<September 11, 0000>

It's been a couple of days since we started real contents of the Korean language after finishing basic lessons, such as pronunciations, sound recognitions, and writing alphabets and basic words. Most students didn't seem to have lots of problems following my lessons. All subject students looked O.K. following lessons, except for Victor. Victor must be really lost. His quiz scores are evidence. I noticed from time to time that he gets some help from his girlfriend, Rebecca. Today, Rebecca was absent and he came to another girl, Nancy, to get help. Victor is hardly able to read. Peggy always has been enthusiastic learning new contents. She has kept doing note-taking whenever I introduce some additional points. Today was not the exception. I talked about Korean etiquette and manner in terms of greeting. She was busy jotting down what I said. The students on the backside didn't show any interest when I talked about them. No wonder! There is nothing new for them. I'm sure they don't know all about them but they think they know them all. I finished the class a bit earlier than usual, considering that students seemed to be tired today.

<September 15, 0000>

Today was a little bit strange. But it turned out that it was better for me to teach. Maybe because today is Friday, almost a half of students were absent. Interestingly, the students who used to sitting on the front, including four subject students, except for Victor, were all present. Since they were enthusiastic about learning, I was also motivated to teach more. I had more time for each of students, giving them more opportunities to speak out sentence patterns. Today, I gave them a writing practice session. They seemed to be happy about it. Cass did really well. She did really quickly. I'm wondering if she had any experience of learning Korean before. Magan has

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shown a lot of interest, saying that she really wants to learn her mother's language. She, in fact, didn't know much about Korean before starting this class, even though her mother is Korean. Victor didn't show up again today. I really worry about him. He still doesn't know how to read and make sounds.

<September 18, 0000>

Asako officially joined our class from today. Her arrival has been delayed because of flight schedule. The university gave her a special permission to register classes even after add-and-drop period. I gave her a few pre-class tutoring sessions before she joined the class today and extra help after the class. She was O.K. However, I was worried a bit about her since we already finished lesson 8, which is the last basic lesson, and are about to finish lesson 9. Surprisingly, she was totally okay. Today, I gave students a written quiz based on lesson 9. Even though I said to Asako that I was going to count her score from next quiz, she did this quiz and showed a moderate performance. Since her native language, Japanese, is structurally and lexically (for some Chinese character-based vocabularies) similar with the Korean language, she might be taking advantages of that. I hope she would be fine for the rest of this semester. Today's class was not different from other days'. Victor still has problems. Some students on the backside annoyed me by chatting one another. I warned them several times, but it didn't seem to work well. Their attitude might have disturbed other students, not to mention of subject students.

<October 5, 0000>

Rebecca, Victor's girl friend showed me a class withdrawal form, saying that Victor couldn't be in this class anymore. This class was too hard for him, she said. I asked her why she didn't help him (she has the best Korean proficiency among students of this class). She answered that she didn't have time. That explains why she has frequently missed classes. I guessed that it must have been hard to teach and learn each other between a girlfriend and a boyfriend. Asako is doing fine, catching up with lessons she has missed. Peggy, so far, has never missed even an hour. She is never late for class. She seems to be most-motivated student. Oral part of midterm started from today.

<October 16, 0000>

Today, I severely scolded the whole class because of many students' habitual tardiness and distracting behaviors during the class. It looked like I was talking to everybody, in fact, I targeted the students sitting back, mostly heritage learners. I said that I was not going to give them any make-up quiz unless they were absent because of serious sickness. Since every quiz has been conducted as soon as the class starts, if they come even a bit late, they miss the quiz. Many of them asked me to give them a chance to make it up. I have allowed them to do it with the sympathetic mind. However, I decided

not to do it anymore, as I noticed that they have taken advantage of my good intention. The students sitting on the backside looked surprised by my sudden announcement. The students on the front didn't show any different reaction. Today's class was more under control.

<October 20, 0000>

Today, I gave my students another written quiz. All of them came right on time. The extreme treatment I gave them the other day worked. Today, I had a really hard time eliciting responses from students. I asked them to answer to my questions: I made questions based on patterns in the lesson, but they were almost quiet. Only Peggy and Cass answered. Others seemed to show their resistance to my extreme action I took the other day. The class is still divided into two groups, front and back. Each student sits on the same chair every time. It is very interesting.

<October 31, 0000>

All of sudden, I noticed some salient cooperation among subject students, and some heritage students. Megan frequently gets help from Hee, who is one of the best students even among heritage students. They work together when I give oral quizzes: they have to do dialogues. Hee always looks happy to help her out. During the class, whenever there are new confusing learning points, Megan asks Hee about it. Of course, she asks me a lot, too. I also noticed that all the questions I got so far have been from the students on the front. They must be more motivated than the ones on the backside. As I noticed already, Peggy and Cass do many things together. They help each other. Cass helps Peggy more. Asako, only Japanese student, is doing great. She never failed to answer to my questions. She gets help from Judy, who is always next to her. Judy is also a heritage student who has a very advanced proficiency. What I noticed today must have been under way for a while, however, I fully noticed it today.

<November 7, 0000>

I saw one interesting thing today in the class. Tom, who has always sat on the back side of the classroom with his heritage friends, deliberately has sat on the front for a couple of days, right next to Asako. He used to be pointed out by me because of his frequent noisy behaviors with his peers on the back side during the class. He seemed to change his slacking attitude. He showed some enthusiasm during the class. He often worked together with Asako when I gave whole class a pair-work time. Even though he is one of heritage students, he actually got some help from Asako today. Interesting!! He might have been motivated by the attitude of the students on the front side.

<November 14, 0000>

Today, I showed two episodes of “Let’s learn Korean” video program. They are highly related to what we’ve covered lately. Heritage students made fun of the narrator of the program. Frankly, she doesn’t look natural at all. Even non-heritage students giggled. Anyway, I tried to make students practice as we saw each episode. The contents of episodes seem to be relevant in that they have a variety of cultural elements. When I explained some Korean food and customs shown in the episodes, students showed lots of interests. The students on the front seemed to have more interest. New important verbs were introduced today. These verbs are still easy for heritage students, but hard for non-heritage students. I explained one by one, and subject students were all busy jotting down what I said. Only a couple of weeks left. Peggy has shown perfect attendance.

<November 30, 0000>

In a couple of weeks, this semester will be over. I have spent unusually more time preparing class. Teaching distinctively different levels of students is really challenging. I didn’t know what and how to teach. Gratefully, non-heritage students have managed themselves and followed the class well. They seem to find their ways to survive. Sometimes, they even performed better than heritage students did. They are good inspiration to the heritage students. I never expected this much. I still feel sorry for Victor. He could have made it if he had been motivated even a bit. Getting motivated is more important than getting good help in learning.

4.2 Students’ View

First Day

<Megan>

Today, I got up early and prepared for my first morning class of this semester, Korean 101. I was excited. It was not hard to find JB hall. The building seemed to be very old. The classroom on the second floor was already filled with students even five minutes before the class started. I took a front chair and waited for the teacher to come. Many of students looked like freshmen, yes they are... They seemed to be already very close one another. Have they known each other? I don’t know... Finally the teacher came in and gave us syllabus and explained about it. She looks very pretty. All Korean women are pretty anyway. Syllabus... Lots of homework, lots of requirements... However, I thought I would be fine. I have made straight “A”s in every subject so far. I’m sure I can do it no matter how difficult it is. I thought about mom. She is really happy for me. Maybe she thinks that taking Korean classes for me will compensate her mistake. She is always sorry for me since

she didn't teach me Korean. Anyway, it was nice day. Now I have to do my Korean homework for tomorrow.

<Peggy>

It was a quite nervous experience. Wow, lots of Korean-Americans. Are there any Caucasian people like me? "Oh, there is one." Her name is Cass. There was another girl next to me, Megan. She said she is half-half. I wondered why there were only a few American-Americans in the classroom. I was advised to go to the first period class which is the one for the students like me. Hmm...what if I stay here? I don't know. There were tons of things to do on the syllabus. My friends must be right. Taking Korean? I must have been too brave. All I know about Korean is just alphabets and a few words I learned during the summer. Will I be fine with this course?

<Cass>

I went to Korean 101 class as my first college class. Textbook looked very easy. I felt pretty sure right away that I'm going to be fine in this class. Most of basic stuff was nothing new. I suddenly thought of my high school days in Daegu, South Korea. I miss Korean friends there I hang out with. Bunch of people are clustered back. I met Peggy, a sophomore. She seemed to be nervous. The teacher looked at me and Peggy, and talked about the other class which is for those having little Korean background or experience. 'Well, I will stay here Ms. Chang' I turned down her suggestion. "David, you lied. She doesn't seem to be strict as you said, big brother!" I called my brother this evening.

<Victor>

Rebecca was not up yet when I called her this morning. She must be sick again. We were late for Korean class. We failed to go to many first classes this week. I felt we had to go this time. She finally called me back and left for the class together. I sat right next to Rebecca. The shape of classroom was weird, but packed. Anyway, I was comfortable in back area with Rebecca and her pals. After the class, Rebecca asked the teacher to let me be in this class because I am supposed to be in the other class since I'm not Korean-American. It wouldn't make any difference because I'm not American-American either. I'm the only Vietnamese student, no wonder! The teacher gave me the permission with a condition: Rebecca should help me. I said yes but I was not sure if she can help me. She is always busy or sick.

September

<Megan>

Korean language is easier than I thought. Mom was right. However, I envy some people in the class. They are just quick. They might be able to

understand all additional information the teacher says. I kept asking Hee who sat next to me about it. She must be the best student. I'm really grateful for her help. Today I was scared when the teacher made me speak out using a pattern. Fortunately, I took advantage of what other people said earlier before I did. They always do well, especially people in back. The teacher seemed to be satisfied by my answer. Ooops... I forgot.. oral quiz tomorrow! I have to call Hee. What dialogue do I have to memorize?

<Peggy>

I think I did make a right decision. Yes, I'm in rich Korean environment here. The students sitting back are pretty annoying, but sometimes, I get some help from them, especially when they pronounce words, I learn how to make sounds correct. So, I can live with that. Cass is really great. She even missed classes a couple of times, but she never looked behind. I've frequently been lost during the lesson even though I didn't miss even a single class. Am I slow? I heard that Cass had lived in Korea for many years. This fact explains her "good Korean." She said that she sometimes identifies herself as a Korean just with western appearance. What an interesting girl. I like to have her here next to me. She helps me a lot.

<Cass>

I'm realizing more and more that the Korean language is very systematic. English is the hardest language to learn I guess. Now I think I learn some real Korean stuff. It's been a bit boring since we dealt with very basic lessons. I should have learned more when I was in Korea. My understanding is pretty good but I still feel awkward when I talk. I feel so sorry about my recent procrastination. I just couldn't get up in the morning. I'm so sorry to Ms. Chang, too.

<Victor>

Korean is so hard. I don't know even how to make sounds. The teacher asked Rebecca to help me from time to time, but she doesn't even come to the class these days. She never actually helped my Korean. It is not easy to teach and learn between girlfriend and boyfriend. I got only 2 points out of 10 on Lesson 6 vocabulary quiz. Now I'm worried.

<Asako>

I wondered if I could catch up with others who already moved forward. Ms. Chang said I could follow the lesson after she saw my performance during my trial class participation. The contents don't seem to be too hard. I wish my Japanese will help me learn Korean. I'm surprised with the structural similarity between two languages and lexical similarity in terms of Chinese characters used in both languages. One thing interesting I found in this class is that the students are divided into two groups: front and back. I felt that I

had to sit somewhere in front. I think I have to ask teacher to give me any extra help.

October/November

<Megan>

It was very quiet today. Something happened yesterday? I don't know since I missed the class yesterday. Because of this time of the semester I've been stressed out. I'm not sure if I can get through all this. Korean class is getting difficult. I ask help from Hee more than ever, in and out of classroom. I'm grateful but also feel sorry for bothering her as well. Ms. Chang must have been disappointed in me because of my poor classroom performance.

<Peggy>

Today, I was the only one student answering teacher's questions. The teacher looked frustrated by students' uncooperative behavior. Yesterday, the teacher was really mad. She severely scolded the students especially sitting behind, who have been habitually tardy with lots of excuses. Actually no one was late today. Her extreme treatment worked but it might have muted them.

<Cass>

Peggy and I did a pair performance today. The teacher said that she would give us some extra credits if we did that. So we did. It was fun. There were more voluntary pair performances. A Japanese girl, Asako, is doing great. She joined us a couple of weeks later, but her Korean is getting better and better. I'm amazed. She never learned Korean before she came to this class, she said. It is unbelievable. She must be very smart.

<Victor>

I decided to drop this class. I have to get teacher's signature as soon as possible. I still have hard time in making sound. I don't have any interest in learning Korean any more. Rebecca and I broke up. I don't have any reason to learn Korean. No fun for me. I shouldn't have registered this class. I shouldn't have met Rebecca in the first place.

<Asako>

It is really interesting. I love Korean. It doesn't have many basic alphabets like those of Japanese. I still remember when I diligently memorized Kana and Kanji. Just 24 alphabets for a language? Amazing. I'm happy with that I can follow the whole lesson with almost no difficulty. A guy has been sitting next to me for a couple of days. He used to be sitting back with noisy guys. He also sat front today and tried to catch what teacher's said, sometimes asking me about what he didn't understand. He asked me about Korean! He is Korean-American. I feel great.

5 Discussions

All five non-heritage focal students were trying to find the way to survive in this unique classroom setting, where the heritage students are the majority of the whole classroom population. One of their interesting behavior patterns was sitting together (except one student) in front seats. Because of this classroom's peculiar physical formation, all the students in it were divided into two groups, front and back. Four focal students have sat on front throughout the whole semester. As they clustered in front area of the classroom, they interacted with each other and helped each other. Each student showed one's own strategies to survive in this classroom.

<Megan>

Even though her mother is Korean, she never has spoken Korean other than some simple words. She started this Korean class almost from the scratch. She followed the lessons without having much trouble during the earlier semester, but as major contents were taught she seemed to be in need of help: she didn't do well on her quizzes for a certain period. During the class, she frequently asked questions to Hee, who was always sitting behind her. Hee is a Korean-American speaking relatively fluent Korean. Whenever I gave oral quizzes or pair works, Megan did with Hee. She showed a pattern when she did oral performance as an answer to my practice questions: she copied the structure that other peers used. She gave me better answers when I asked about some lesson contents after a couple of other students answered than when I asked her first. Later in the interview, she said that she actually took advantage of other heritage peers' answers as models she referred to. She successfully went through some difficult time with mostly Hee's help.

<Peggy>

Peggy is a Caucasian girl who doesn't have any previous experience of Korean except some brief learning of basic alphabets. When I advised five focal students to move to the other class for the students like them, she insisted remaining in this class, saying that she wanted to expose herself to more Korean atmosphere. She had shown this spirit throughout the semester. For example, she wrote down everything considered new to her, regardless whether it was the main contents or additional references. Since heritage students tended to answer with additional vocabularies or structures they already have known, I usually explained those additional elements for non-heritage students. Peggy hardly missed my explanation and wrote down what I said in her little memo book which seems to be prepared for this kind of case. As sitting on very first row, she enthusiastically responded to my questions. Whenever she felt confused, she asked Cass, another Caucasian sitting next to her. Cass was almost always Peggy's partner for conversation drills.

<Cass>

This student showed a certain degree of Korean proficiency from the first. I found that she had lived in Korea for about four years. However, she doesn't speak Korean well since she went to English-speaking school in Korea. So she is hard to be considered heritage student. Anyway she seemed to be getting along well in this classroom. The overall course, especially in early stage, she didn't show much elaboration as I expected. She missed class quite a lot. She thought that the course was easy enough to follow without lots of efforts. She said that she could understand almost all things spoken by heritage peers. However she acknowledged that she had a chance to sort out her prior Korean knowledge as she listened what other peers said and cooperated with Peggy. Surprisingly, she got the highest score among five focal students, even with relatively less effort and absence penalty.

<Asako>

She joined this course after about three weeks later since the semester started. I worried about her a lot, considering her no Korean experience. However, she decided to jump into this course with the thought that her Japanese would help her Korean in that the two languages are structurally similar and share some common elements. As she expected, with the help from her first language, she did catch-up so quickly that she landed on the normal stage of the lesson in two weeks and took the midterm without any serious problem. She kept copying the sound made by other peers and me. However, she didn't show any visible consistent cooperation with certain peers: she just did pair work and oral practice with anyone near her. According to her, she used to rely on her Japanese knowledge when she had to answer to my questions rather than using other peers' answers. I also noticed a lot that she murmured Japanese in figuring out the structure of the sentence. She successfully finished this course with an outstanding grade.

<Victor>

This Vietnamese-American student struggled from the start. Even if he registered this course with a thought that he could get some help from Rebecca, his girlfriend and also a student of this class, his plan was not working as he expected. Because Rebecca sat in back area, he also sat there by her: he was the only one focal student sitting back. Rebecca's frequent absences directly put the influence on his Korean learning. He couldn't follow the lesson and didn't learn even how to make sounds until the midpoint. He didn't get any help from Rebecca out of classroom, either. He was really mingled well with students in the back, unlike other four students, but that didn't mean anything to him in terms of getting help in learning Korean. He did really poor job on almost all quizzes. During the lessons, I never noticed any action of getting help from his advanced peers. In a word, he didn't know how to take advantage of his advanced peers, not to mention

of his girlfriend. As a result, he withdrew the course around midpoint of the semester.

<Others>

One interesting thing found is that one day, a heritage student, who used to sitting behind, came forward and sat with four focal students and a couple of students in front. He usually sat back and didn't participate in the activities a lot. As he started sitting front, he tried to concentrate on the lessons: he tried to answer to my questions from time to time. He was not that much responsive student.

6 Conclusions and Implications

The results of this study above give us the answers to three research questions. An "advanced" atmosphere worked in the language learning of subject students in terms of their learning attitude. Non-heritage learners were intimidated but tried to cope with the situation by finding helping hands and working hard.

Most of them successfully socialized themselves with their advanced peers, but one student failed to find the right one. From time to time, they directly asked help from their heritage peers, or got indirect help as they receive authentic input from heritage peers during the class. Overall, heritage learners with advanced level voluntarily or involuntarily facilitated non-heritage learners' Korean learning, even though they were considered intimidating force in the classroom. Their advanced level proficiency sometimes frustrated non-heritage students' enthusiasm but eventually stimulated them.

One notable strategy found among non-heritage students is cooperation. Thankfully, most of them found good partners. The types of cooperation were various. Megan felt more comfortable with a heritage student, Hee, maybe because Megan's half Korean identity was attracted to her. However, Peggy liked to work with Cass in the same non-heritage group. Interestingly, Cass, even though she is a non-heritage learner, played a role as a heritage peer to Peggy, thanks to her several years of experience in Korea. Heritage elements in a non-heritage learner created somewhat different dynamics in the cooperation. A Vietnamese student, Victor's case is rather ironic. He came to the class with a well-planned strategy, the cooperation with his Korean-American girl friend. But it went wrong mainly due to his partner's negligence. But, he should have looked for alternatives but he was not motivated at all and consequently he dropped the class.

Basically non-heritage learners took advantage of being exposed to advanced atmosphere. Interestingly Japanese exchange student, Asako's case was different. She even gave some help to a Korean heritage student. She

didn't seem to use a certain strategy, but it can be considered that she took advantage of positive language transfer between Japanese and Korean.

A couple of aspects are noticed in this classroom. They should be considered for the future implications. Some points mentioned above are repeated here to support the ideas.

The first is the contextual impact. Because the majority member of this classroom were Korean-Americans relatively having advanced level of Korean proficiency, most of subject students sat together and tried to find the ways to survive in this intimidating classroom atmosphere. An interesting behavior, done by a heritage student briefly mentioned above, also indicates a kind of contextual impact that made the student moved to the front which was considered "learning area".

The second is scaffolding. Even though there was no vivid interaction between them and their advanced heritage peers, we can see a type of scaffolding between those two different groups of students (non-heritage and heritage). Virtually, it was almost uni-directional scaffolding from the heritages to non-heritages. Four subject students took advantage of their advanced peers in figuring out what they were supposed to do when they had to perform during the class. However, scaffolding didn't work all the time. Victor, a Vietnamese student failed to continue his Korean learning. He was not voluntarily motivated and not able to follow the classes at all, either. As his girl friend stopped showing he also dropped the course. This might be considered counter-scaffolding.

The cooperative working is the last one. To be in line with other advanced peers, most of subject students looked for their help from either heritage peers or non-heritage peers in the form of cooperation. As they worked together, they could manage themselves in the intimidating atmosphere. It is meaningful because this cooperative working tendency was not initiated by the teacher. It naturally grew out of the students. They found the way to float on the intimidating sea of being heritage.

As concluded above, it is explicit that non-heritage Korean learners in this study mostly survived as they swim around not to sink in this unique class environment, even though a student failed to swim. So, dividing Korean language class exclusively into heritage and non-heritage might not be the effective way of teaching. Some more specific studies with more number of subject students may validate this pilot study.

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