

The Korean Language in America: The Role of Cultural Identity in Heritage Language Learning

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The paper examines the role of cultural identity and heritage language maintenance among the lives of 40 second-generation Korean-American university students in the United States. The study focuses on three questions: (1) what is the level of heritage language proficiency and language use among second generation Korean-American youths?; (2) which culture(s) do these youths identify themselves with, Korean or American, and to what extent?; and (3) is there a relationship between cultural identity and heritage language proficiency? Qualitative and quantitative analyses of the questionnaire data showed that most second-generation Korean-Americans achieve some level of Korean proficiency, but they overwhelmingly agree that it is not enough. They acknowledge the importance of knowing their heritage language, but feel that the existing language courses in the community-based language schools are not meeting their needs. The informants stated that the absence of societal recognition of the importance in maintaining their heritage language was the most significant factor in their lack of motivation to maintain their heritage language. However, they appear to have formed a unique bicultural identity composed of characteristics from both Korean and American cultures. A regression analysis showed that heritage language proficiency was related to strength of bicultural identification.

Immigrants in the United States have long been faced with the difficult task of preserving their heritage languages for their children. Generally, parents wish their children to attain a high level of English proficiency and adapt to the American culture at a rapid pace, but they also want them to maintain their heritage language. More often than not, however, as the children's proficiency in English improves, fluency in the heritage language declines (Hinton, 1999). In the past, the maintenance of heritage languages has mainly been left up to the individual families or communities. However, more recently, language educators have emphasised the importance and value of heritage language maintenance not only as a personal resource, but also as a societal and national resource (Brecht & Ingold, 1998; Brecht & Walton, 1993). Thus, in order to preserve this resource, we need to better understand the factors and conditions that lead to the loss or maintenance of heritage languages.

This paper chooses to examine the interrelationship between cultural identity and language choice among members of the second-generation Korean ethnic group in the United States. The growth of the Korean community within the last two decades has been very impressive, making it the fifth largest Asian/Pacific Islander immigrant group with an estimated population of 1.3 million, according to the US Census Bureau survey (2000). Despite this increased contact and exposure to the Korean people and community, there are still many questions left

unanswered about them and their lives in the United States. With the appearance of second- and third-generation Korean-Americans into societal roles now becoming more visible, it is important to understand the acculturation process, ethnicity, lifestyle, language, and culture of second-generation Korean-Americans in order to promote the psychological and social well-being of such ethnic groups. Thus, this study attempts to provide a snapshot of second-generation Korean-Americans dealing with the problems of cultural identity and the current status of Korean as a heritage language of America.

Formation of Cultural Identity

Cultural identity is formed by the complex configuration of one's awareness of one's own culture and a recognition of the social group to which one belongs in practice. According to Veltman (1988), virtually all ethnic groups follow the 'two generation model of anglicization'. In other words, a shift to English accompanied by a substantial loss of the mother tongue begins with the children of the immigrants. Crawford (1992) notes that the Anglicisation rates and process vary among different ethnic groups, but in general he states that Koreans have a high rate of Anglicisation at 69.3% (shift to English in the second generation) closely following the Japanese at 78.8%. By comparison, the rate for Chinese is only 26.3%.

Lambert (1975) proposes four possible modes of adjustment by minority-language children to the demands of the wider society: (1) the child may reject his or her heritage language and culture; (2) he or she may reject the language and culture of the wider/dominant society; (3) he or she may become an anomic individual without affiliation either to his or her own culture or that of the wider/dominant society; and finally, or (4) he or she may become comfortably bilingual and bicultural and capable of participating fully in both cultures. However, because all children, especially adolescents, have a strong need to belong to a group, and when they feel that friends, teachers, and the wider society around them do not accept their language and culture, they will try to hide it (Cummins, 1984). To this end, all adolescents go through the difficult process of choosing an identity, and for minority-language students this process is further complicated by the fact that they are under the influence of two cultural systems whose values may be bipolar.

For second-generation immigrants, the ideal alternative will be to integrate the two cultures to form one unique bicultural identity (Hamers & Blanc, 1993). From a bilingual-bicultural base, the minority group children 'can enhance their sense of personal well being, their sense of social justice and their tolerance and appreciation of human diversity' (Lambert, 1975: 79). According to LaFromboise *et al.* (1993), biculturalism assumes that it is possible for an individual to know and understand two different cultures. It also supposes that an individual can alter his or her behaviour to fit a particular social context. Moreover, it infers that it is possible for an individual to have a sense of belonging in two cultures without compromising his or her sense of cultural identity.

Acculturation versus biculturality

This conceptual framework differs from the acculturation framework in two

significant ways. First, it posits a bi-directional and orthogonal relationship between the individual's native culture and the host culture, rather than the linear and unidirectional relationship in the acculturation model. Second, the concept of biculturalism does not assume a hierarchical relationship between the two cultures. It is possible for the individual to assign equal status to the two cultures even if he or she does not value or prefer them equally. In other words, an individual may differ in the degree and manner to which he or she will affiliate with either the second culture or the native culture. For example, an individual might fully possess the behavioural competencies necessary to fit and be accepted into the American environment (e.g. job, school, residence), yet still retain the identity of being Korean.

LaFromboise *et al.* (1993) claim that ethnic minorities who develop bicultural competence will have higher self-concept, self-esteem, and confidence as well as better physical and psychological health than those who do not. They also predict that the people who develop these skills will outperform their monocultural counterparts in vocational and academic endeavours. Thus, in addition to the societal and psychological benefits that can be achieved by fostering biculturalism, according to LaFromboise *et al.* (1993: 409), 'a vital step in the development of an effective partnership among minorities and the majority group involves moving away from the assumptions of the linear model of cultural acquisition to a clearer understanding of the process of developing cultural competence as a two-way street'.

The Relationship between Cultural Identity and Language

Culture is a complex entity, which holds a set of symbolic systems, including knowledge of norms, values, beliefs, language, art, and customs, as well as habits and skills learned by individuals as members of a given society. Language has been noted as one of the most prominent factors in the competency of a culture since it is always used within a cultural environment, acts as a salient indicator of a group's identity that is transmitted from generation to generation, and serves as the main tool to internalise culture (Fishman, 1977; Giles & Coupland, 1991).

However, others argue that language and culture exist independently of one another and bear no intrinsic relation to each other. Edwards (1985, in Giles & Coupland, 1991: 44) strongly questions the fundamental association between language and identity, at least to the extent that language loss does not inevitably lead to a lessening of identity. Moreover, Guitart (1981) proposes that the disassociation between ethnic loyalty and language loyalty is possible. He states

it is not true that language shift is always a manifestation of ethnic self-rejection. In the United States there are many individuals who identify themselves as members of an ethnic group whose cultural patterns are those of that group, but who have little or no proficiency in the ethnic mother tongue. More importantly, they have little or no motivation to speak that tongue. (1981: 31)

Similarly, Hoffman (1991) states that proficiency in a language does not necessarily imply knowledge of the culture of the language and vice versa. She sees bilingualism and biculturalism to exist in varying degrees along the continuum.

However, Baetens Beardsmore (1982: 20; in Hoffman, 1991: 31) claims that 'the further one progresses in bilingual ability, the more important the bicultural element becomes, since higher proficiency increases expectancy rate of sensitivity towards the cultural implications of language use'.

Furthermore, Pandharipande (1992) defines 'cultural identity' as an umbrella term that is comprised of several factors. These factors can be broadly characterised as (1) linguistic (2) regional/geographic (3) religious and (4) racial/ethnic. All identity markers of a social group together constitute the 'culture' or 'cultural identity' of the social group. The loss of one marker does not automatically entail the loss of cultural identity and secondly, the loss of one or more identity markers tends to reinforce the remaining identity markers. Hence, it is yet unclear what the defining relationship is between cultural identity and language for second-generation immigrants whose lives are complicated by the need to be loyal to their home culture and the need to belong to the host culture.

In an attempt to understand the identity and language choices that second-generation immigrants must make and the realities that they are faced with, this study focuses on the lives of second-generation Korean-Americans. The purpose of the study is three-fold: (1) to assess Korean proficiency and patterns of language use among second-generation Korean-Americans; (2) to investigate how second-generation Korean-Americans identify themselves; and (3) to examine the relationship between cultural identity and heritage language maintenance.

The Study

The informants were 40 second-generation Korean-American college undergraduate and graduate students. Twenty students were recruited from a university on the east coast and 20 students were recruited from a university on the west coast. There were 25 (62.5%) males and 15 (37.5%) females among the informants. The age of the informants ranged from 17 to 26 years, the average age being 21.4 years. The majority of the informants were born in the US ($n = 23, 57.5\%$), some came to the US between the ages of one and five ($n = 11, 27.5\%$), and only a few of the informants immigrated to the US between the ages of six and ten ($n=6, 15\%$). The informants were all native-like speakers of English.

Procedures

The informants were recruited on a voluntary basis through personal contacts. The questionnaire took about one hour to complete. Before distributing the questionnaires, the informants were asked three questions: (1) whether they were Korean-American; (2) whether they had parents who were first-generation immigrants in the US; and (3) whether they had had at least ten years of education in the US prior to entering college. Only the informants who answered affirmatively to all three questions participated in the study.

Materials

A self-administered in-depth questionnaire consisting of four parts (demographic characteristics, Korean language proficiency and language use, cultural

identity scale and open-ended questions) was employed. There were 76 questions in all, and the breakdown of each section of the questionnaire is as follows.

Part A contained 20 questions about the personal history of the informant.

Part B consisted of 17 questions about Korean-language proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, listening and pragmatic skills and the frequency and domain of Korean-language use. Individuals self-assessed their proficiency on a five-point Likert scale in terms of how strongly the individual agreed or disagreed with each of the functional statements. Seven multiple-choice questions were asked on language choice.

Part C contained 29 statements about cultural identity. Individuals rated each item on a five-point Likert scale in terms of how strongly they disagreed or agreed with each statement. The scale was made up of parallel statements in regards to the American and Korean cultures. It is proposed that the bi-directionality of this scale allows the measurement of the degree of acculturation, which can be assessed by American-culture-related items; degree of ethnic vitality, which can be assessed by the Korean-culture-related items; and degree of biculturalism, which can be measured by the overall total score. Many of the items in this scale were modified from the Suinn-Lew Asian Self-Identity Acculturation Scale to fit the sample population.

Part D consisted of 10 open-ended questions about the informants' attitudes towards cultural identity and heritage language maintenance.

Results and Discussion

The data were analysed in three stages. Heritage language proficiency and language use, cultural identity, and the relation between heritage language proficiency and cultural identity were examined separately to address the three research questions.

Heritage language proficiency and use

The respondents were asked to self-assess their Korean proficiency on ten functional statements dealing with reading, writing, speaking, understanding, and pragmatic skills. The results show, unsurprisingly, that respondents claim higher levels of proficiency in the receptive skills of listening comprehension and reading, and lower levels for the skills of speaking and writing. More significantly, claimed proficiencies are not high on the average, and were widely distributed along the full range of the continuum, indicating that heritage language maintenance is an individual process that varies from individual to individual depending on one's environment, experience, and attitudes.

A series of *t*-tests were used to see if there were any statistically significant differences stemming from gender or place of birth on language proficiency. There were no statistically significant differences between males and females and US-born informants and non-US-born respondents on any items. However, when frequencies and percentages of the informants who responded 'strongly agree' or 'agree' to items such as 'I am able to read a Korean newspaper or book without any difficulty understanding it' or 'I speak Korean fluently' were tabulated, there was a clear tendency for males to agree more with such items than females, except on the items that read 'I feel that I can use Korean in socially

appropriate context' (e.g. honorifics) and 'native Koreans cannot tell that I am Korean-American when they hear me speak in Korean' on which females rated themselves higher. In other words, males seemed to rate themselves more highly in their ability to read, write, and speak Korean; whereas females seemed to be stronger in their pronunciation and their ability to use Korean appropriately.

In order to identify some characteristics that were common to those that rated themselves to be high in their proficiency and those that rated themselves to be low, a median split was done at the total score point of 31. Thus, the newly created heritage language proficiency groups consisted of 19 (47.5%) in the high proficiency group and 21 (52.5%) in the low proficiency group.

Two-way frequency tabulations were done with the independent variable of the two language proficiency groups. Among second-generation Korean-Americans, those who were either born in the US or had come between the ages of one and five were more likely to rate themselves to have low Korean proficiency than those that came between the ages of six and ten who rated themselves to have high proficiency (see Table 1). A Chi-square test of the differences between the ages that the informants had entered the US and their Korean-language proficiency rendered a significant difference at the 0.02 level of probability. The statistically significant difference indicated that, despite the fact that all the informants are clearly English-dominant speakers, those who came to the US after the initial formation of their L1 were more likely to have a stronger foundation in the language, and to have maintained their proficiency, than the informants who came at an earlier age.

Table 1 Frequency distribution of age of entrance to US by two levels of heritage language proficiency

<i>Korean language proficiency</i>	<i>Age in years of entry into US</i>	
	0–5	6–10
High	13 (10.0%)	6 (37.5%)
Low	21 (52.5%)	0 (0.0%)

In addition, their responses to whether or not they had any intention of returning to Korea, or had family members who did, showed that those who replied 'yes' were significantly more likely to have higher Korean proficiency than those who replied 'no' ($p < 0.01$) (see Table 2). Thus, having a purpose for the use of language seems to be a major factor that can motivate individuals to maintain Korean. Furthermore, 70% of the informants commented that they needed to be taught about the benefits and usefulness of learning Korean, instead of just being forced to learn it because 'it is your parent's old language'. Similarly, the results showed that the frequency of visits to Korea had a positive effect on the level of Korean proficiency. Those informants who had visited more than four times rated themselves as having higher Korean proficiency. Thus, it may prove to be beneficial for second-generation Korean-Americans to have more opportunities to visit Korea (i.e. study abroad programmes, 'Summer in Korea' programme) and also to establish a solid purpose to learn Korean in order to help facilitate the maintenance of the heritage language.

Moreover, it was interesting to find that the majority of those people who attended supplementary Korean language school ($n = 26, 65\%$) such as Saturday

Table 2 Frequency of responses distributed as yes/no on return to Korea by two levels of heritage language proficiency

<i>Korean language proficiency</i>	<i>Return to Korea</i>	
	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
High	11 (27.5%)	3 (7.5%)
Low	3 (7.5%)	10 (25.0%)

Heritage Language School rated themselves as having low proficiency in Korean whereas amongst those who did not attend supplementary Korean, school ($n = 14, 35\%$), the majority rated themselves to be higher in their Korean proficiency (see Table 3). Of those who did attend supplementary Korean school, the majority had attended it between one year and three years or more ($n = 20, 77\%$) and over 90% had the opinion that they did not learn very much from those lessons.

Table 3 Distribution of attendance of Korean language school by two levels of language proficiency

<i>Korean language school</i>	<i>Korean language proficiency</i>	
	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
High	9 (22.5%)	10 (25%)
Low	17 (42.5%)	4 (10%)

The results cast doubts on the effectiveness of such supplementary language courses. The programme design or instructional methods may be problematic, and there may be a lack of student motivation. Informants commented that they are not as motivated to learn in an environment labelled ‘supplementary’, because they feel it is not a necessary requirement to succeed in society or school. Forty per cent of the informants said that they did not learn because it was something that they were forced to do without realising why it was important to do so.

When asked if they would have enrolled in a Korean class if it had been offered in their primary or secondary school, and how it would have affected their proficiency and attitude toward Korean, 34 (85%) said that they would have enrolled. The informants replied that it would have made a tremendous difference in their attitudes towards Korean study and their proficiency. Some other informants mentioned that ‘knowing that the subject is offered may make me feel a greater respect for the language and culture’, ‘my Korean will be good because I always try to do well in school’, ‘it would have shown me that Korean as a heritage is much more accepted’, and ‘[it would have] given me incentive and motivation to learn Korean at an earlier age’.

Thus, it is evident that these second-generation Korean-Americans want an opportunity to learn their heritage language, but want to do so in a socially accepted and supported way, instead of having to learn it as an extracurricular subject. Moreover, having to learn Korean in a supplementary environment usually entails attending Saturday heritage language schools where instruction is mostly limited to students of Korean ethnic background. This may be problematic for children in the adolescent stage who want to participate in activities with their ‘American’ friends. Activities that are foreign to their American friends set them off as being different, which is psychologically very stressful for children at

this age. If the study of heritage languages and cultures were to be included in the school curriculum, it would give children the opportunity to maintain their heritage language and also provide non-heritage learners opportunities to learn about other cultures and languages. In light of multicultural education, this will provide the spirit of acceptance that our society is seeking and also reinforce the value of diversity.

An examination of the language use patterns revealed that the informants reported using more Korean than English to parents and other Korean adults, and more English than Korean to siblings and Korean-American friends. A series of *t*-tests were conducted to observe if there were any effects of gender or place of birth effects on language usage. The only statistically significant results were that females used more English to Korean-American friends ($t = -2.412$; $df = 38$; $p < 0.02$) and siblings ($t = -1.355$; $df = 38$; $p < 0.05$) than males. In general, females reported using more English than males regardless of the interlocutors and location of speech. Hence, males seem to display a stronger ethnic attachment through the use of language markers. Furthermore, the non-US born group used significantly more Korean than the US-born group when speaking to parents ($p < 0.01$), which consistently shows their attachment to the language of their country of birth.

In addition, *t*-tests were used to analyse whether there were any significant differences in language choice/use and Korean language proficiency (see Table 4). Despite the fact that all these informants are English-dominant speakers, those informants who rated themselves to have a high level of Korean proficiency opted to use more Korean with other Korean interlocutors. Thus, by using more Korean, these informants are also gaining opportunities to practice their Korean, which in turn improves their Korean. T-test results also showed a signifi-

Table 4 Results of *t*-tests use items with the independent variable of Korean language proficiency

<i>Language-use items</i>	<i>Korean language proficiency</i>	
	<i>High</i>	<i>Low</i>
Language use before school age ($t = -2.617$; $p < 0.01$)	1.947	2.952
Language use to father ($t = -3.438$; $p < 0.001$)	1.947	3.333
Language use to mother ($t = -3.310$; $p < 0.002$)	1.842	3.095
Language use to sibling ($t = -2.936$; $p < 0.006$)	3.579	4.619
Language use to Korean adults ($t = -2.147$; $p < 0.03$)	1.789	2.571
Language use with friends at school ($t = -2.178$; $p < 0.03$)	4.158	4.571
Language use with friends away from school ($t = -2.570$; $p < 0.01$)	3.947	4.619

Note: The higher the mean score indicates that more English was used and the lower the mean indicates that more Korean was used.

cant difference between the ethnic backgrounds of friends with whom the two language proficiency groups associate. Although the main language of communication is English, the group with the higher Korean level of proficiency associated more with Koreans or Korean-Americans than the group with lower Korean proficiency ($t = 3.248$; $df = 38$; $p < 0.002$). This finding was reiterated in Cho's (2000) study, which found that those who develop their heritage language have a strong ethnic identity and have greater interactions with heritage language speakers. Thus, these findings reinforce the belief that language is an essential marker of one's identity.

Regardless of the level of Korean proficiency, the majority of the informants said that they rarely use Korean only. They reported using a mixture of Korean and English in varying degrees when speaking with other Koreans. Thus, the degree of identification with the heritage language is reflected in the degrees of code-switching between Korean and English.

Cultural identity

The informants were asked to respond to a cultural identity scale, which consisted of 12 Korean culture orientation items, and 12 American culture orientation items. First, the total score of these items was calculated for each informant to get a general sense of their level of biculturality. The possible score range for these 24 items was 24 meaning 'high biculturality' to 120 meaning 'low biculturality'. Actual scores of the informants ranged from 37 to 85 in a continuous distributed fashion. Thus, biculturalism also seems to be a developmental process that varies from individual to individual.

The Korean orientation items were designed to show the extent to which the informants identified with Korean culture; similarly the American items indicated the extent to which respondents were acculturated. *t*-tests were conducted on the total bicultural score, the Korean score, and the American score to see if there were any significant differences between gender and place of birth on these independent variables. The results showed that the non-US-born informants rated themselves to be significantly more bicultural than the US-born informants ($t = 2.358$; $df = 38$; $p < 0.02$). The fact that the non-US born informants identified themselves more with both the American and Korean orientation items may be a result of their need to remain loyal to their country of birth as well as their need to overtly express their attachment to the American culture in order to compensate for the time they were not in the United States. Non-US born informants showed a significantly greater attachment to the Korean culture orientation items than the US-born informants ($t = -3.124$; $df = 38$; $p < 0.004$), whereas with the American culture orientation items there was no significant difference. Moreover, males identified more strongly with the Korean orientation items than females ($t = -2.119$; $df = 38$; $p < 0.04$). Again this finding lends support to the fact that males seem to display stronger ethnic identities than females (see Table 5).

Males appear to have a greater tendency than females to agree with the Korean cultural statements as well as the American cultural statements except for three American items that deal with 'the person's ethnicity being not important', 'feeling insulted when Americans are put down', and having 'American names'. It was also interesting to observe that those who were US-born seemed to agree more strongly than those who were non-US born with items that repre-

Table 5 Percentage of people who agreed or strongly agreed with the Korean and American orientation items by gender and place of birth

<i>Korean orientation items</i>	<i>Gender</i>		<i>Place of birth</i>	
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>US</i>	<i>Non-US</i>
Knowing Korean will help me become successful	43	25	28	40
I enjoy Korean music	55	20	28	38
I like watching Korean videos and movies	25	22	22	35
I am proud to be Korean	55	22	38	40
I feel insulted ... put down 'Korean' people	55	30	45	40
Korean background people in high places	55	35	48	43
My family and I celebrate most Korean traditions	55	15	35	35
I like to be called by my Korean name	25	8	18	8
I like to eat Korean food	63	30	47	45
I believe strongly in Korean values	50	13	15	25
I fit in well with other Koreans	50	30	40	40
Koreans should live with other Koreans	55	16	5	25
<i>American orientation items</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>US</i>	<i>Non-US</i>
English ... will help me become successful	50	35	43	43
I enjoy American music	53	33	43	43
I like watching American videos and movies	48	25	48	45
I am proud of the American culture	30	25	48	23
I feel insulted ... put down 'Americans'	8	20	30	15
I feel that a person's ethnicity is not important	15	40	23	28
My family celebrates most American Holidays	50	53	53	43
I think Koreans ... should have an American name	8	25	18	23
I like to eat American food	30	20	28	23
I believe in American values	35	25	45	25
I fit in well with Americans who are non-Asian	30	28	28	25
... live in diverse communities	20	15	30	23

sented loyalty to the Korean cultural identity such as 'I feel insulted when people put down Koreans', 'I would like to see more Korean in high places', or 'I like to be called by my Korean name', and 'I like Korean food'. Although they may not have been born in Korea, their responses show that they do acknowledge their Korean heritage and still maintain ties to the heritage culture.

The respondents' answers to their description of self-cultural identity centred on the concept of being both Korean and American (80%) (see Table 6). However, what was interesting was that many of the respondents seemed to put more emphasis on the Korean end of their identity (42.5%). Of the respondents who said, 'I consider myself Korean-American although deep down I always know I am a Korean' there were more males (30%) than females (12.5%) and more non-US-born (25%) than US-born informants (17.5%). There were considerably more males (15%) than females (2.5%) who said 'I am basically a Korean person' and more US-born informants (35%) who saw themselves as an equal blend of both

Korean and American characteristics than the non-US-born informants (7.5%). The only informants who identify themselves as American were the US-born informants (see Table 7).

Table 6 Distribution of description of cultural identity

<i>Descriptions</i>	<i>Number of informants</i>
(1) I consider myself basically a Korean person even though I live in America; I still view myself as a Korean.	7 (17.5%)
(2) I consider myself Korean-American although deep down I always know I am a Korean	17 (42.5%)
(3) I consider myself Korean-American. I have both Korean and American characteristics and I view myself as a blend of both.	14 (35%)
(4) I consider myself Korean-American, although deep down I consider myself as an American first.	1 (2.5%)
(5) I consider myself basically as an American. Even though I have a Korean background and characteristics I still view myself as an American	1 (2.5%)

Table 7 Distribution of description of self-cultural identity by gender and place of birth

<i>Items</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>US born</i>	<i>Non-US born</i>
(1)	6 (15%)	1 (2.5%)	2 (5%)	5 (12.5%)
(2)	12 (30%)	5 (12.5%)	7 (17.5%)	10 (25%)
(3)	6 (15%)	8 (20%)	11 (35%)	3 (7.5%)
(4)	0	1 (2.5%)	0	0
(5)	1 (2.5%)	0	1 (2.5%)	0

When respondents were asked how they would like to be identified by others, a similar finding was found. The majority of the informants (67.5%) wanted to be identified as a Korean-American. More males (25%) wanted to be perceived as Korean than females (5%) and more non-US-born respondents (20%) wanted to be identified as Korean than the US-born informants (10%), who preferred to be identified as a Korean-American (42.5%) (see Table 8).

Table 8 Distribution of answers on 'How would you like other people to regard you' by gender and place of birth

<i>Description</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>US born</i>	<i>Non-US born</i>
Korean	12 (30%)	10 (25%)	2 (5%)	4 (10%)	8 (20%)
Korean-American	27 (67.5%)	14 (35%)	13 (33%)	17 (43%)	10 (25%)
American	1 (2.5%)	1 (3%)	0	1 (3%)	0

It is clear that the majority of the respondents view themselves as both Korean and American. They also want other people to recognise their Korean as well as their American roots. However, the degree to which the informants identified

with each culture varied from individual to individual. This can be expected since the creation of an identity is such a personal endeavour.

As one respondent said, 'Sometimes I feel like I don't completely belong here, but when I go to Korea, I don't feel completely 'at home' either'. Because of feelings like these, immigrant children are forming their own distinct 'hyphenated American' identities. They will never be able to assimilate completely as an 'American', in part due to their visibly different physical appearance, and they will never be like native Koreans.

It is interesting to find that many of the informants made a clear distinction between being Korean and being Korean-American. When asked about the ethnic preference of their future spouse and friends, many specified that they preferred a Korean-American to a Korean. There was also a pattern in the ethnicity of friends. The informants claimed that when they were young, the ethnicity of their friends did not really matter; however, as they started to form their identities there was a tendency to associate more with Korean-Americans (30%) or other Asian-Americans (52.5%). Some commented that they felt more comfortable around Korean-American friends because they could share their ethnic traits, such as language and food, without having to explain or be ashamed. Others commented that Korean-American friends were more understanding.

Finally, through the words of the informants we are able to see how they are coping with the two worlds:

- 'I maintain the best of the two cultures.'
- 'There is no conflict, the two are not separate entities, but make up the whole.'
- 'People are able to find compromising points or make a decision to choose one that is better.'
- 'It's inevitable to have conflicts, you have to act one way in front of parents and another way in front of Americans.'
- 'When young, you feel a lot of internal/external conflict because of your peers, but at this age, I know who I am.'
- 'I never agreed with the idea of assimilation. Some say it's a melting pot, I think it's Anglo-conformity. I don't think that you can take a group of ethnicities, mix them up and come out a new pan-ethnic culture. Each one independent of itself and mixture would be a new culture in itself.'

Thus, it appears that second-generation Korean-Americans realise that it is difficult to be 'completely Korean' or 'completely American'. They cope with this conflict by finding a balance, as a Korean-American; that is, adjusting to the American ways without turning their backs completely on their ethnic background. For such an ideal identity to succeed, the wider society must recognise the presence and needs of such culturally mixed identities, and encourage the maintenance of ethnic identity instead of enforcing conformity to the American ways. The processes of ethnic identity retention and acculturation do not have to be mutually exclusive, but may stand side by side in the form of biculturalism.

Heritage language proficiency and cultural identity

In order to examine whether the level of heritage language proficiency had an effect on the formation of cultural identity, a regression analysis was performed.

The total individual scores on the bicultural scale, Korean orientation scale, and American orientation scale were analysed by the level of Korean-language proficiency respectively. The results showed that the Korean orientation score and the Korean language proficiency score had a significant effect on each other at the probability level of 0.006 (multiple $R = 0.437$; $F = 8.522$). Thus, the stronger the identification with the Korean orientation items, the higher the Korean-language proficiency. The results support the argument that language is a salient part of culture and cultural identification and that knowledge of a culture entails knowledge of the language that is representative of that culture.

However, the results also showed that those who had high Korean proficiency also identified strongly with the American orientation items (multiple $R = 0.347$; $F = 5.058$; $p < 0.03$). This may be explained by Lambert's (1975) argument that those who are likely to have maintained their heritage language and culture are more likely to be better adjusters in this American society, because they are 'comfortable with themselves'. He maintains that you cannot take away a part of their being such as their ethnic heritage and expect people to be well acculturated in the society.

In addition, those who had a higher level of Korean proficiency identified themselves to be more bicultural (multiple $R = 0.393$; $F = 6.955$; $p < 0.01$). Thus, the data show that those who are more proficient in the heritage language are also more successfully balancing the two cultures. This finding indicates that in order to promote biculturalism, maintenance of the heritage language must also be supported, which in turn fosters bilingualism. Therefore, the results of this study lend support to Fishman's arguments that language and culture are indeed inter-related and the maintenance of one needs to be followed by the maintenance of the other. For these second-generation immigrants, language is a representative marker of their cultural identity.

When the informants were asked how they feel about Korean-Americans rejecting or ignoring their heritage culture and language, some responded, 'I feel sorry for them because they are denying a part of themselves. I see many of my peers who do not value Korean going through an identity crisis because they try to deny an essential part of themselves', 'they are living a lie', 'they should realise that they will never be American and will be labelled as something other', and 'they should act and talk like they're Korean to complement their looks'. Thus, 72.5% replied along the lines that it is very important for second-generation Korean-Americans to value and know their heritage language and culture. However, others had differing opinions 'I don't think anybody should be looked down upon for not knowing Korean', 'we are in America and if they were never taught and see no need for it, it is their choice'. Nevertheless, the general feelings of the informants centred around the idea that there was no way to hide the fact of their Korean heritage due to their physical appearance and so they should make every effort to remain loyal to their heritage. As one informant stated, 'One must face up to being Korean and be proud of it and the only way to do so is to know and value what it means to be Korean'. However, the informants qualified their views by mentioning that Koreans should not be secluded and act only Korean. Rather, they strongly felt that it was their responsibility to acquire a unique sense of cultural identity that represents both their lives in the US and their ethnic heritage.

There were mixed feelings in response to the question, 'How do you feel about Koreans who do not try to assimilate into American society?' Some said, 'totally understandable, because 'Americans' make it difficult for them to assimilate', or, 'to an extent they should assimilate, but I don't believe Koreans should live in America for their lifetime. Get what you want and go back because Koreans will never fit comfortably in America', or again, 'Some say if they're in the US, they should learn English. Why English? They just want them to conform to their ways'. However, the majority of respondents (67.5%) commented along the lines of 'they are not being intelligent and are socially inept', or 'they should learn the language of the country they live in', 'they are limiting their possibilities', or 'they should at least get the American experience otherwise it breeds ethnocentrism'.

The following statement by one student summarises the general sentiment about balancing the two cultures and languages:

I don't think one should assimilate to become white and forget one's own heritage nor disregard, devalue Korean communities. I think to promote a greater American society, of which they are technically a part, a certain degree of assimilation and outreach/interaction should be maintained.

Thus, it is clear that at least for this group of second-generation Korean-Americans, the majority value both the need to retain their heritage as well as the need to adapt to the new culture of the dominant society. It is evident that bicultural identities are desired.

Implications for Heritage Language Maintenance Programmes

Despite obvious advantages of maintaining the heritage language and culture, it has been fairly difficult for second-generation Korean-Americans to achieve a high level of proficiency in their heritage language. The most significant reason is the lack of importance the wider society places on the maintenance of heritage languages. This societal attitude implies to the immigrant individual that there is no need to make the extra effort to maintain or develop his or her heritage language. Rather, messages conveyed by movements such as the English Only Initiative lead ethnic minority individuals to believe that the maintenance of their heritage culture will only prevent them from being socially assimilated into mainstream society. It usually requires psychological maturation on the part of the individual to realise the true value and benefit of knowing one's heritage language and culture, which often comes at a later age.

Informants were asked why they thought it was important to teach or learn Korean and its culture to second-generation Korean-Americans. The top response ($n = 17$, 42.5%) was that 'it is important to know one's roots, to know where you come from, who you are'. Other responses included, 'it is important because otherwise you will not understand the behaviour of other Koreans causing you to feel ashamed of who you are', 'interest in the language and culture of their ancestors will lead to a strong self-identity', 'not all Asians should be seen to be the same ... should know their backgrounds because when you look at the Japanese and Chinese they are much more knowledgeable about their heritage', 'one can never become purely American', 'it lessens the cultural and generational

gap between the first and second generation', and 'it is important for the successful integration of an immigrant group'. These second-generation Korean-American youths have realised the importance of knowing their heritage language and culture. They value their ancestor's traditions that define a part of their identities. However, their difficulty is finding opportunities to explore their heritage in greater depth.

When asked how the informants would go about designing a Korean language programme that would be beneficial for second-generation Korean-Americans, the majority mentioned that the instruction should be adapted to Korean-Americans. For example, bilingual teachers, and teachers who understand what it is like to be Korean-American, are a necessity. As one informant commented, 'Korean teachers were very Korean and it was hard to learn from them'. In most Korean language schools, teachers are generally parents of the students who have had the majority of their education in Korea. Their teaching practices are based on the ways they learned Korean as their first language. The students have a difficult time learning effectively from these teachers because of their lack of familiarity with teaching techniques.

Also, the informants commented that instructional materials that are of relevance to their Korean-American lifestyle are needed. One informant said that we need to 'incorporate a programme that would not take away the American style, and enhance the Korean'. However, in many cases the teaching materials are donated from Korean embassies and are formatted for Korean learning styles and lifestyles that are foreign to these students. Some of the informants also felt that a stronger academic orientation to the teaching of the language might have been beneficial. For example, one informant stated, 'ideally taking Korean in [regular] schools would probably lend greater importance to knowing Korean and its culture ... kids would take it more seriously' and another informant responded, 'I would put more structure and academic inclination, so it would seem like a legitimate language education as any other language classes, rather than making it seem like 'here is your parent's old language, learn it' type of an effort!'

Other suggestions included having programmes that allowed more visits to Korea, which would provide more immersion in Korean culture and language. Also, the vast majority (82.5%) said that parent involvement is extremely important for children to be able to maintain Korean. Many of the informants suggested workshops that could help parents learn some valuable pointers of effective methods to help their children understand the importance and value of maintaining Korean.

The Korean community's organised efforts to promulgate the maintenance of the Korean language and culture are increasing rapidly. For example, in addition to Korean heritage language schools across the United States and Canada, there are rapidly growing numbers of Korean ethnic associations, publications, and churches that promote Korean language and culture. More recently, the incorporation of the Korean language as one of the SAT II elective subjects, which are tests to assess students' knowledge of a particular subject for college admission and/or placement in the US, has aroused interest and motivation for learning Korean, especially among young Korean-Americans. With renewed interest in incorporating foreign-language studies early in the curricula, and greater support from educational agencies for the study of foreign languages, this is a

perfect opportunity to advocate the learning of heritage languages. However, in order for such language-teaching and learning efforts to succeed, more energy needs to be directed towards creating appropriate language teaching materials and curricula for Korean-American learners, recruiting more bilingual teachers, and promoting greater acceptance of the learning of Korean to the wider society.

Conclusion

The focus of the study was to provide a descriptive analysis of (1) the general level of Korean proficiency among second-generation Korean-Americans, (2) the cultural identity of second generation Korean-Americans, and (3) the relationship between cultural identity and heritage language proficiency. In general, second-generation Korean-Americans still maintain the heritage language in varying degrees. However, in spite of their varying levels of proficiency, the majority of the informants displayed a strong will to learn and improve their skills in the language. Second, an emergence of varying degrees of bicultural identities was found among second-generation Korean-Americans. Males and non-US-born informants were more likely to have a stronger ethnic attachment than females and those who were born in the United States. Finally, the analysis showed that cultural identity and heritage language proficiency were strongly interrelated; the higher the heritage language proficiency, the stronger one identified with both the Korean culture and the American culture. In other words, those who were more proficient in the heritage language tended to be more bicultural. Thus, in order to enable individuals to experience the benefits of their bicultural identities, it is imperative that we also make provisions to promote the teaching of heritage languages.

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