

Commentary

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I was invited to write this commentary as a “researcher/practitioner” of Korean language teaching. While my language teaching and research endeavors enrich and inspire each other, I sometimes find the roles of the researcher and the teacher not necessarily in alignment with each other, since empirical research with its emphasis on rigor of inquiry tends to have a focus that is too narrow to have immediate or direct relevance for teaching practice. Thus interpreting and evaluating a study for its implications for teaching has to be done in light of its research goals and in the context of a cumulative body of research. I will comment on the articles first and foremost as research studies, to establish the basis for their application to the teaching of Korean as a heritage language.

The articles in this issue spring from diverse disciplinary orientations, research methods and foci. Each article makes a unique contribution to the growing body of heritage language research, and together they provide a chronology of heritage language development from childhood to adolescence to young adulthood, and of a map of the social sphere of heritage language use that expands from home to school to society at large.

Intergenerational Transmission

Park’s study (*Intergenerational Transmission of Cultural Values in Korean American Families: An analysis of the verb suffix –ta*) examines the role of intergenerational transmission in heritage language development. Park examines the way children incorporate into their speech a morphological marker that adult family members use. The excerpts of family conversation shows that engaged social interaction is a powerful source of heritage language learning; moreover, as Fishman (1991) argues, intergenerational communication within an adult minority language speech community is essential to prevent language shift to the majority language.

The family's role is central for intergenerational transmission of the minority language and culture where contact with the culture of origin is limited by the lack of ethnic enclaves/ communities or visits to the homeland. In such circumstances, ‘all of the cultural lessons fall upon the shoulders of the parents to teach (Suárez-Orozco, 2004: p. 179).’ Park’s (2006) earlier study of Korean-American families showed how the multi-generational family can partially offset the lack of a residential concentration of Korean speakers and community institutions, but that the lack of broader social relationships and speech contexts restrict language learning to speech styles and registers used by the immediate family. Describing the teaching of table manners, greeting and leave-taking, for example, Park demonstrated how presence or involvement of grandparents is crucial for imparting Korean cultural values and norms of respect and deference for the elderly.

Based on that earlier work, Park examines the relationship between one grammatical form and its function in interaction and indexing of social relationships in multi-generational Korean-American families. The form *-ta* is one of many modal suffixes in Korean (including *-ci*, *-ne*, *-kun*, and *-nke*). (Park's Excerpt 1 shows how ubiquitous these suffixes are; in that short interaction, the verb *mantulta* ('make') occurs with a *-ne* (#11), *-ci* (#19) and *-nke* (#21), as well as *-ta*.) Many of these suffixes function not only as epistemic markers, but also as markers of intersubjectivity. An epistemic, or *event-oriented* marker, (Kim & Horie, 2006), indicates the status of information for the *speaker* at the time of speech (i.e., whether it is newly perceived, unexpected, based on inference, etc.; Lee, 1993). An intersubjective, or *addressee-oriented* marker, is concerned with the status of information for the *addressee* (i.e., whether it is important, noteworthy, or already known; Kim & Horie, 2006). Historically, the intersubjective meaning of a form develops after the epistemic meaning (Traugott, 2003), and children's language development seems to follow the same order (e.g. Choi, 1995).

Given these markers' complexity, learning them takes a long time. Park presents detailed analyses of several ways *-ta* is used by parents or grandparents to influence children's behavior. Adults can use the marker to express approval or disapproval of the child's conduct or to encourage or discourage certain actions. Park's examples and analyses show how the functions of *-ta* are manifested or constructed in family interactions. Park's excerpts show children's correct use of the *-ta* marker, based on modeling by adults. However, whereas Park attributes children's infrequent use of the form *-ta* to their understanding of both the its meaning (i.e. to praise or to warn) and their inferior status in relation to adults, her data do not demonstrate that children have fully mastered the *-ta* form. Instead, it may well be that their lack of mastery prevents them from using it inappropriately.

Nonetheless, mastery of a language form like *-ta* requires the sort of sustained engagement in meaningful interaction that is difficult to sustain in a classroom environment. Enough exposure to input and opportunities to practice the form through continuous interaction in the language at home and at other venues are necessary for acquisition.

This kind of input and interaction is not always a given. The child is an active agent in the process of language socialization, and a language-minority child, under competing pressures (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1986, Park, this issue), becomes aware of the unequal status of the home language in relation to the socially dominant language. Park's earlier study (2006) and here presents examples of a child refusing to comply with her parent's or grandparent's repeated exhortations to speak in Korean (see also Shin, 2005: Ch. 4, for competing language choices resulting in English prevailing among young school children). Ultimately, acquisition of HL grammatical features depends greatly on the speaker's conscious language choice, and an inclination to use English over Korean might handicap learning about markers that transmit dominance relations. As in her previous study, Park underscores the advantage of the three-generational family structure for learning the linguistic features and cultural values and norms of Korean social hierarchy,

which is governed largely by age and generation level. However, this depiction overlooks an important aspect of linguistic marking: linguistic politeness in contemporary Korean is not only a function of the vertical power relations of age, status and rank, but is also function of the horizontal relation of perceived social distance and intimacy. Due to societal changes in contemporary Korea, younger generations use exalted speech styles less often and have adopted more egalitarian speech styles (Choo, 1999: pp. 84-85). In this way, honorifics are increasingly used as markers of formality and respect rather than of social rank and status (Shinn, 1990; M.-R. Park, 1990).

In my own observation, heritage speakers who have developed their fluency in the home tend to under-use politeness markers. Indeed, Park notes that the children in her study hardly use the polite style sentence ender *-yo*. Moreover, and their parents and grandparents seldom require children to use *-yo* with them, likely because the polite style would mean distance or reduced intimacy of their relationship with their children. The use of *-yo* would be called for when the child has to interact with Korean speakers outside the family. Thus, while a three-generational family provides contexts for more varied style and register choices than a nuclear family, a wider speech community is needed for a child to develop the full range of politeness markings. To facilitate children's interaction with native Korean speakers, sociolinguistic norms marking distance and respect should be explicitly taught and emphasized.

Peer Group Networking

Yi's article (*Voluntary writing in the heritage language: A study of biliterate Korean-heritage adolescents in the U.S.*) examines online peer networking. The study documents two teenagers' participation in social networking websites using Korean and highlights the potential for online literacy to promote heritage language maintenance at the ages when HL attrition usually accelerates.

In Yi's case study, two high school students used the internet to socialize with co-ethnic peers and pursue their interest in contemporary Korean popular culture, similar to the college-age youths in Lee's (2006) study. Yi's informants participated in instant messaging, online discussion clubs, postings in online communities, and web browsing. She characterizes on-line communication as "response-provoking" literacy activities, which generate meaningful interaction that leads to sustained engagement and increased fluency in the language. Yi recommends that parents and teachers promote online literacy activities among young people for heritage language learning and retention, and suggests that frequent practice in constructing and responding to meaningful texts in an online environment will increase the chances of developing advanced literacy.

However, it is important to distinguish between the types of interaction and texts exchanged by online community members. For example, instant messaging is structured so that the users write and send one line at a time and engage in highly interactive, fast-paced and sequential communicative exchanges. A social networking website such as *Cyworld* allows longer messages and also exhibits characteristics of oral communications in terms of textual organization and colloquialisms. For example, Mike's message (Yi,

Figure 2) about a Korean national holiday, is a short paragraph with distinctively colloquial vocabulary and conversational modal suffixes. Elizabeth's lengthier message (Yi, Figure 3) quickly jumps from one topic to another; only a few strings of words are complete sentences, and the rest lack a main predicate. Choice of colloquial lexical items, (e.g. *mwuci* 'very') as well as modal markers and sentence enders (e.g., *-ne* and *-useyo*) are also distinctively conversational.

Although such text organization and lexical and grammatical choices could be the norm for online social networking, they are not features of standard written or academic texts. Moreover, the spelling rules, morphological modifications and lexical coinage of internet communication are so different from conventional writing that users familiar with one have difficulty with the other (Lee, 2006). Online communities can be viewed in terms of opportunities they provide to explore and maintain ties to heritage language and culture and as a complement to or, where necessary, substitute for the speech community for person-to-person oral interactions. However, it is doubtful that online chatting or posting on social networking websites can be the sole source of advancing literacy in heritage language.

Indeed, a language user with advanced literacy must be aware of the lexical and grammatical features that constitute forms of social action besides daily spoken interactions; in particular, he or she must effectively use lexical and grammatical patterns that are associated with various written genres (Halliday, 1987). From the examples given and the author's own statements, Mike's and Elizabeth's literacy activities are personal and recreational. Although they both read and write on line in Korean, they both choose to write in English when Yi asks them to write an essay, thus revealing their own HL literacy as "informal." If heritage language learners aspire to participate in literacy practices and communities beyond social networking, explicit teaching of academic language structures will be necessary (Colombi & Schleppegrell, 2002). How electronic literacy communities can be used as part of explicit instruction in advanced literacy may be a topic of future research.

Another question that could be considered is the relationship between electronic literacy and heritage learners' proficiency and sense of identity. Of Yi's two informants, Mike engages in electronic communication activities far more extensively and frequently than Elizabeth. Mike may be compensating for the absence of Korean friends at school, whereas Elizabeth has a sizeable number of Korean friends. Gender may also influence ways of practicing literacy (e.g., Elizabeth enjoys note-exchanging at school, which Mike sees as "girlish") and so may proficiency perceptions of proficiency in the heritage language (both the author and Mike assess Mike's Korean proficiency to be higher than Elizabeth's). Similarly, in Lee (2006), Lizzy, who has lower proficiency than her older sister Jendy, feels insecure about her language abilities and thus is less active in the *Cyworld* community. Lee (2006) also argues that a learner's sense of identity, or "how central 'Koreanness' is positioned as a marker of one's identity" (p. 103) plays a part in determining the types and extent of participation in on-line literacy activities. She notes that using *Cyworld* is viewed as "Fobby" behavior by some Korean-American students

and involves embracing a Korean identity over an American identity. Furthermore, Lee's (2006) study subjects are transnational students and Yi's are 1.5 generation students. Whether U.S.-born Korean youths practice electronic literacy activities in Korean has yet to be documented.

Language Attitudes and Ideology

Jeon's article ("Korean heritage language maintenance and language ideology") examines language attitude and ideology as they relate to speakers' experience with immigration and in American society.

Jeon makes three sets of findings. First, she confirms other research (e.g., Shin, 2005; Lee & Kim, 2007) that Korean-American students often renew their interest in their heritage language in college. Second, she finds examples of a strong assimilationist stance among some parents of pre-college heritage speakers. For example, more than half Jeon's adult interviewees actively discourage their children from speaking Korean, in contrast with Shin (2005), and Lee and Kim (2007), who found that parents' failure to support their children's Korean development reflected resignation to language attrition rather than active efforts to assimilate.

Jeon's study suggests that a family's immigration history, including children's age and language skills at the time of immigration, are major determinants of language ideology. Most new immigrants, preoccupied with adapting to the new country, place English in an exalted position as a symbol and the means to success. Many of Jeon's respondents had children who had fully acquired Korean but lacked English proficiency, and these parents often want their children to focus on learning English. In comparison, the majority of parents in Shin's (2005) study were long-time U.S. residents with U.S.-born children, while students interviewed in Lee and Kim (2007) grew up speaking Korean, were U.S. born or moved to the U.S. before the age of three. Depending on their child's Korean language abilities, these parents were either interested in Korean language preservation or resigned to the likelihood of attrition.

Place of settlement in the United States also plays a role in shaping language ideology. Residential concentration and community institutions provide opportunities and motivation to maintain heritage language. In co-ethnic communities, immigrant parents also create and participate in their ethnic networks for socialization, survival and success (Lew, 2006), and these networks reinforce cultural norms and values parents want to impart to their children. Similarly, their children network with their co-ethnic peers to access resources and knowledge that their immigrant parents lack, and for solidarity in resisting the racial marginalization they frequently experience (Ngai, 2004, and Lew (2006). Both parents and children in these dense communal settings may value the heritage language more highly than those outside them.

A third factor in heritage language ideology is the symbolic status of English in Korea. Even though English is not spoken for communication in Korea, English proficiency has important gatekeeping implications for college admissions and prestigious jobs. The

importance of English as cultural capital in South Korea increased significantly since the 1997 Asian financial crisis, and more Koreans now take the TOEFL than students from any other country ('English is a golden tongue for S. Koreans,' *The Washington Post*, July 2, 2007). Recent immigrants are likely to have been socialized to want to learn English while still in Korea.

Jeon's recruitment methods may have resulted in her respondents having a different profile from Shin's (2005) and Lee and Kim's (2007) studies. Shin's respondents, who express more favorable attitudes toward heritage language maintenance, were recruited through church and heritage school networks, institutions whose members are interested by definition in heritage and cultural preservation. Jeon recruited her subjects from among her students and their families as well as from Korean ESL learners, many of whom saw learning English as a priority.

Jeon argues that social factors and personal beliefs about language work together to locate individuals on a continuum between assimilationist and pluralist ideologies. She also notes that language ideologies may change over time, as she observed among assimilationist parents once their children were enrolled in a college where Korean is offered as an academic subject. Becoming a sanctioned object of study in the formal education system lends legitimacy and standing to the heritage language in the eyes of heritage language learners (Tse, 2001).

If cultural identity formation can be described in terms of contexts rather than stages (Suárez-Orozco, 2004), perhaps fluidity of language ideologies can be understood better when contexts, opportunity costs, and the consequences of choices are made part of the equation.

Conclusions

The studies in this issue suggest other directions for future research, including the following:

- The range of profiles covered signal the diverse and changing patterns of immigration among Korean speakers. Research is called for that focuses on speakers with profiles not included here. For example, some Koreans in the U.S. were born and at least partially brought up in Latin America, and others have been sent to the U.S. to attend school while one or both of their parents remain in Korea. Still others have attended school in a country other than Korea before arriving in the U.S. Studying these students will give educators a better idea of their needs and enrich the understanding of Korean heritage speakers.
- Little is known about interactional and linguistic routines that are taught and used in Korean weekend language schools (but see He, 2000; 2004 for Mandarin Chinese), although these schools are the most widespread venues for pre-college heritage language learning.
- Few studies detail Korean language acquisition or socialization processes in the classroom. H. Jo (2002) and Kim (2005) present ideational or rough-grained

analyses of teacher-student interactions, but no research has been done on language learning and use during extra-curricular activities or study abroad programs. Information about the kinds of linguistic, social, and cultural processes that take place at these various sites is necessary to improve programs for HL learning and maintenance.

- Language identities and ideologies, which affect HL learners at all ages, need to be investigated in more contexts and sites. . Children's resistance to the minority language is widely evident at home and in weekend Korean schools (Shin, 2005; Lo, 2006). We also need to understand physical and virtual inter-group dynamics to provide better learning environments.
- The potentials and constraints of electronic communication for heritage language development and maintenance, including the development of advanced proficiency and literacy among older students, will be understood more clearly when the social networks created and patterns of interaction in online communities are investigated more closely. Another important question is whether a network is confined to a single group (e.g. transnational, 1.5 generation, or U.S. born 2nd generation) or is used by members of other groups.

Pursuing studies such as these will contribute to a fuller understanding of Korean heritage language development and maintenance which will, in turn, help educators and researchers make more a convincing case to parents and children to cultivate multi-lingual, multi-cultural, and trans-cultural potential.

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Notes

1. *-ci* primarily marks the speaker's commitment to the conveyed message and can also express supposition, request for confirmation, and suggestions (Lee, 1999). *-ta*, *-ne* and *-kun* all express the speaker's newly perceived information but are different from each other in terms of types of information and degrees of expectedness (Lee, 1993). The suffix *-nke* encodes the speaker's realization or sudden awareness of a state of affairs, sometimes with emotive reaction such as surprise, displeasure or blame (Kim and Horie, 2006).