

The Roles of Attitude, Motivation, and Identity in Heritage Language Learning Among Korean Americans

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INTRODUCTION

Much research has been conducted on learning English as an additional language both in the United States and around the world. However, there have been fewer studies focused on heritage language learners (HLLs) who have already acquired English as their native tongue and are learning their heritage language as an L2, or second language (Joo, 2009). The rapidly growing number of language minority individuals who have turned their attention towards learning their heritage languages have led both secondary schools and universities to restructure their foreign language classes in order to better address the needs of HLLs (Jensen & Llosa, 2007). Who exactly are HLLs and what defines them as such? What makes HLLs different from L2 learners? This paper will take a sociolinguistic and socio-psychological approach on HLLs with a particular focus on Korean Americans in the United States. How do attitude, motivation, and identity play a role in heritage language acquisition among Korean American learners? Do these socio-psychological factors affect one another in the learning process? What are the pedagogical implications for teachers and students?

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HERITAGE LANGUAGE LEARNER DEFINED

Defining an HLL is complex and challenging at best. In recent years, several definitions have been proposed. Fishman (2001) described HLLs as those who possessed a historical connection to the language independent of the speakers' level of heritage language proficiency. However, Lee (2005) suggested that heritage learners "have achieved some degree of proficiency in the home language and/or have been raised with strong cultural connections" (p. 555). Cho, Cho, and Tse (1997) referred to the heritage learner as one whose heritage language "associated with one's cultural background and it may or may not be spoken in the home" (p. 106). Conversely, Valdés (2005) claimed that the heritage learner's home environment *did* involve the use of the spoken heritage language. The individuals were actually "raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken" (p. 412). The learners themselves did not necessarily have to know how to speak the language, however. Valdés suggested that heritage language learners could speak the language or at least understand it.

Despite the various propositions put forth, the broad and underlying definition of HLLs are those who possess some kind of relationship with the language and/or culture of their ancestry. This is what sets them apart from second language learners who have "no previous exposure to the foreign language and culture" (Lee, 2005, p. 555). What remains in question in defining an HLL is the learner's degree of proficiency of or familiarity with that language. While HLLs and L2 learners certainly share similarities, including identity formation with language learning and a need for motivation to facilitate acquisition, (Montrul, 2010) there are characteristics about each that do not overlap. Whereas a large number of HLLs desire to learn their heritage language to (re)connect with their history, L2 learners study a language for

purposes other than this; they have no historical relationship with the L2 with which to connect. Additionally, many HLLs have already been exposed to the heritage language at home, giving them an advantage particularly in the phonological facet of acquisition. From this vantage point, it may appear that HLLs typically have a firmer grasp of the heritage language than L2 learners do of their desired second language. However, from a literary perspective, Montrul asserted that

L2 acquisition typically occurs in a classroom setting, with heavy emphasis on reading and writing, and grammatical explanations, practice, feedback, and assessment of the developing L2 skills. If instructed, L2 learners are very literate in the L2 and have highly developed metalinguistic awareness of the language, while heritage language learners can be illiterate or have less developed literacy skills in the heritage language than in the majority language. (p. 12)

While HLLs may have a phonological advantage over their L2 counterparts, L2 learners may in fact have a deeper linguistic understanding of the second language. These descriptions shed much light into the HLL's composition, but they still remain less than a comprehensive depiction of the learner. Additionally, HLLs themselves have their own varying perceptions of heritage learners and provide reasons as to why they believe they are different from non-heritage learners. Two central factors of identification lie within the contexts of ethnolinguistic affiliation and linguistic proficiency (Lee, 2005; Wiley & Valdés, 2000). Do HLLs more readily define themselves as such because of their ethnolinguistic affiliation to the heritage language or linguistic proficiency of it – or both?

HERITAGE LANGUAGE LEARNERS AND ETHNOLINGUISTIC AFFILIATION

Ethnolinguistic identity derives from an individual's personal and subjective view of possessing a sense of belonging to an ethnic group of people and how he or she identifies with that specific language community (Park, 2008). Lee (2005) conducted a study of 530 university language learners of various less commonly taught languages such as Arabic, Hindi, Korean, and Swahili. All the participants were enrolled in classes that combined both heritage and non-heritage learners. The purpose of his study was to obtain information on the students' perceptions of themselves as either a heritage or non-heritage language learner and examine the reasons behind their responses. Did ethnolinguistics or linguistic proficiency play a more substantial role in determining HLL status?

The students took a survey consisting of 34 items that included questions of motivation towards language acquisition, home language use, demographics, learner needs, and previous language learning practices. The learners were to self-identify themselves as either a heritage or non-heritage learner, but were not provided any definitions for the terms. Lee's (2005) purpose for the intentional omission was to prevent students from generating answers from a biased perspective. Aside from three participants who asked what an HLL was, most of the students' responses indicated some general understanding of the term, commenting on factors including culture and language identification, language proficiency, parental language, and exposure to the country in which the language was natively spoken. The findings seemed almost as diverse as the participants. For instance:

A Taiwanese learner of Mandarin claimed to be a heritage language learner despite his lack of proficiency. A Pakistani student who learned to read Arabic through her religious

studies claimed to be a heritage language learner, while a U.S.-born student of Arab descent claimed to be a non-heritage learner. (p. 557)

Of the 344 learners who actually had an ethnic affiliation to a language (e.g. learner ethnicity, parents' language, country of immigration), 214 students identified themselves as heritage language learners. In other words, only 62.2% of the learners in this category considered themselves to be HLLs based on their ethnic affiliation alone. Lee confirmed one such learner's perspective in support of this view. The student declared, "I am a heritage learner because I grew up as a Jew and my family is Jewish so there is a strong tie to the language" (p. 558). This particular student identified herself as a heritage learner associated with an ethnolinguistic connection to her cultural background. According to this study, determination of HLL status based solely on ethnolinguistic affiliation did not suffice. A pivotal reason why the remaining students believed they could not be categorized as an HLL was due to the fact that their language proficiencies were lacking, not necessarily in relation to native speakers, but rather in comparison to the more proficient heritage speakers in the class.

HERITAGE LANGUAGE LEARNERS AND LINGUISTIC PROFICIENCY

Lee's (2005) study suggested that students' linguistic proficiency had greater salience on determining HLL status than did their ethnolinguistic affiliation to the language. Linguistic proficiency was assessed on five proficiency levels ranging from not proficient to native-like. The assessment was based on a Likert scale and included speaking, listening, reading, writing, and cultural knowledge. Students who identified themselves as HLLs professed to have the greatest proficiency in listening, speaking, and cultural knowledge, and the lowest in

reading and writing. There was a high correlation between linguistic proficiency and HLL identification. Non-heritage learners classified their heritage learner classmates as those who possessed greater language proficiencies than they. One Korean student remarked, “compared to students in the class, I don’t consider myself a heritage language learner of Korean” (p. 557). Another student stated, “although I speak Hindi fluently at home, I don’t read/write it like the others in class” (p. 557). It appears that the students’ self-assessment of HLL identification was subjectively dependent on a comparison to their peers who possessed higher linguistic proficiencies than that of their own. There was no indication in this study of Lee’s asking these students how they felt in comparison to those who were less proficient than they. Assessing how learners identified themselves in relation to students of both higher and lower proficiency levels may have produced varied results.

The linguistic standard that students place on themselves to attain HLL standing may be largely influenced by the standards set by societies around them. In a study on Spanish American HLLs, Carreira (2004) noted that the perception of language proficiency depended heavily on the community. “Communities with large numbers of Spanish speakers, a high density of foreign-born Latinos, and where Spanish enjoys commercial, social, and professional sway, may set fairly high linguistic requirements for HLL status” (p. 10). Upon requesting thirteen high school teachers from different parts of the U.S. to define “heritage language learner,” Carreira noted that every teacher mentioned heritage language proficiency as a central determining factor. The only variance among their definitions was the HLL’s level of needed proficiency.

To further investigate the influence of the community on heritage language proficiency, Carreira surveyed 65 teachers in the Chicago vicinity to obtain their views on HLL status based on Spanish language proficiency. The study involved five fictitious student profiles for possible placement into heritage language classes. Of the five profiles (all of whom were of Latino descent and had a strong connection to their heritage culture), two students had basic levels of Spanish and did not speak it regularly at home. The remaining three spoke Spanish at home above the basic level. Most of the teachers concluded that the two students with limited Spanish proficiency were not considered HLLs. Carreira proposed that the standard for HLL status in Chicago were “set somewhere above a basic level of competency and include, at minimum, communicative fluency and some literacy skills in Spanish. These requirements reflect the vital linguistic and economic presence of Spanish in this area” (p. 12). Carreira also observed that at the time of her research, the Latino population in Chicago ranked third in size in the nation. Naturally, the Spanish language would also have a strong and indelible impact on its members in the community. Carreira suggested that the two hypothetical students in her study who were deemed non-heritage language learners would likely be considered HLLs in any language program but Spanish. Though it may be insightful to discover what Carreira’s research would reveal in a less Latino-populated region, it is worthy to note that linguistic proficiency as related to the community of a specific language suggests a crucial determinant of a learner’s HLL status.

The definition of an HLL is neither straightforward nor concrete. As demonstrated in the research conducted by Lee (2005) and Carreira (2004), it is subject to bias from students’ personal views of language proficiency and ethnolinguistic affiliation. Wiley (2001) also asserted that establishing a clear definition of heritage language posed its challenges:

As with any attempt to apply a single label to a complex situation, defining heritage language is problematic. Moreover, perceptions of language educators and linguists do not always coincide with those of various language communities to be served or with those of the public at large. (p. 29)

Because of the varying sociolinguistic complexities involved, an accurate definition of an HLL cannot be fully determined. However, it is unmistakable that both ethnolinguistic affiliation and language proficiency have considerable bearing on identifying them. The views that educators have on HLLs and the perceptions that the learners have of themselves have significant implications for learning. Teachers who do not consider low proficiency speakers as HLLs might not realize their needs or how to address them. Learners who assess their HLL status by standards of their classmates or members of their community might document their progress only in relation to those in their environment. It is important for both teachers and learners to have an understanding of how they view HLLs and take into consideration the setting in which learning takes place. Realizing this will help teachers and students understand one another, recognize needs, and facilitate language acquisition. The focus of this paper will now turn to Korean American HLLs and the roles in which the socio-psychological factors of attitude, motivation, and identity play in heritage language acquisition.

SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS AFFECTING KOREAN HERITAGE LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Research has shown that much like L2 acquisition, the learner's attitude, motivation, and identity have significant influences on heritage language learning (Cho et al., 1997; Kim, 1992;

Yang, 2003). These intertwined factors, while separate in their roles by nature, can hardly be seen as independent features affecting language acquisition. Each one affects another and plays an important role in the learning process. Learners' attitudes towards ethnic groups and its members who speak the language have great influence on the learners. If, for example, HLLs held a negative perception of a certain ethnic group, it is likely that they would be less motivated to attain that language. Additionally, an identification with the language group would be lacking as well. The negative attitudes, decreased motivation, and absence of ethnic identity would thereby result in greater challenges of language acquisition. It has already been noted that although a difference between heritage language and second language exists, (largely dependent on the relationship of learner and target language) they are similar in that neither are the learner's dominant language. Kim posited that, "the common sociolinguistic factors underlying heritage language learning and second language learning enable heritage language learning to be explained in a second language context" (p. 20). It is therefore reasonable to deduce that attitude, motivation, and identity play somewhat similar roles in heritage language learning as they do in L2 acquisition.

To help better understand the socio-psychological factors as they relate to Korean American HLLs, it is worthy to mention a brief, historical overview of this people group. The Korean population in the United States has risen dramatically over the past 50 years, numbering more than one million today (Joo, 2009; Lee, 2008; Shin, 2005). In earlier years, many Koreans immigrated to the U.S. for better economic opportunities and freedom from political oppression. More recently however, the vast majority of Koreans settled in the States to seek better education for their children. Thousands of Korean parents who stay in Korea send their children to

English-speaking countries for the sole purpose of having them obtain an English education (Jeon, 2008; Lee, 2008). Shin remarked that, “second-generation Korean Americans often tell astonishing stories of their parents’ obsession with the Ivy League” (p. 49). Many parents value English and education with utmost regard, believing both to be necessary means for success in America, but they also desire their children to maintain Korean language skills. However, it is common for second-generation Korean Americans (U.S.-born children of Korean immigrant parents) to have only a basic knowledge of Korean and excel instead in English. Lee discovered the following:

The majority of Korean learners . . . are children of first-generation Korean immigrants who grow up hearing and speaking Korean to varying degrees in the home and community. As young children, they are often bilingual in Korean and English although many become English-dominant once they begin school. (p. 2)

Crawford (1992) discovered that the rates of anglicization, a significant shift from the native tongue to English, differed among immigrant groups. Koreans had a high anglicization rate (69.3%) behind the Japanese (78.8%). The Chinese, however, were less likely to assume English as their dominant language and had a rate of only 26.3%. Crawford posited that influential factors behind anglicization rates were of economic and social natures, including possibilities for advancement, level of education, and a relationship with the native country. Likewise, Lee (2008) reported that among Asian Americans, second-generation Koreans had one of the highest heritage language attrition rates. One reason for this may be due to parents’ extreme emphasis on attaining English, sometimes at the cost of losing Korean skills. Like many minority groups, Korean Americans face the dual pressure of acculturating into American society while

maintaining their Korean heritage. Parents encourage their children to simultaneously adopt American traits that will help them succeed in society and maintain practices that preserve Korean culture. As a result, their identity is challenged, which has effects on their attitudes and motivation towards learning the heritage language. “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” (Lee, 2002, p. 118). Clearly, the learners’ socio-psychological needs play an important role in Korean language acquisition.

The Role of Attitude

Jensen and Llosa (2007) stated that in recent years, “the United States has witnessed an important shift in attitudes toward heritage language learners in both the private and public sectors” (p. 98). Language minority groups are expressing an increasing concern to maintain their heritage language. This growing trend is evident in universities that have observed a rise in HLL enrollment in foreign language courses. Private schools, public schools, and community programs have also witnessed an influx of HLLs, particularly of those whose languages, such as Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese, were previously regarded as less common (Cho et al., 1997; Jensen & Llosa, 2007; Peyton, Carreira, Wang, & Wiley, 2008). Research suggests that one of the contributing reasons for HLLs’ increased enrollment in foreign language classes is due to an association of positive attitudes toward the heritage language (Cho et al., 1997; Yang, 2003). As more and more minority individuals become members of an ethnic group, the community beings

to grow, and members share a sense of belonging to a greater, collective organization. Learning the language implies that they will be able to foster deeper relationships with other members of the community who share the same language because they can communicate and relate with one another. As positive attitudes and greater appreciation for minority languages rise, so will the communities that comprise them. Consequently, the desire to learn heritage languages will also increase. Peyton et al. recognized this shift and voiced a “need to focus attention and resources on the specific languages that are spoken by large segments of the U.S. population” (p. 178).

Park’s (1995) study of 207 Korean American students ranging from elementary to collegiate levels indicated that those who expressed a positive image of themselves in connection with Korean culture likewise demonstrated interest in learning more about the language. Cho et al.’s (1997) research further supported congruence of Korean Americans’ positive views of themselves and heritage language learning. Cho et al. examined the attitudes of 24 Korean American HLLs towards the Korean language, implementing an open-ended survey that prompted students to explain their interests for learning Korean. The results showed that several of the learners shared an identity and bond with the culture. They felt proud of their heritage and therefore wanted to maintain their ties with it through the language. A desire to deepen relationships with family members was another prominent reason for interest. One student expressed, “I believe it is up to me to learn Korean to be able to strengthen my relationships with my parents, aunts, uncles, and other relatives” (p. 108). There was a strong correlation between students’ positive attitudes towards the Korean culture and interest in learning the language.

The role of parental attitude may be the driving influence behind students’ attitude of heritage language learning and therefore must be given due attention (Kim, 1992; Shum, 2001;

Sung & Padilla, 1998). Although university students have more autonomy than children in making independent decisions to enroll in heritage language courses, it is likely that the influences of parents' attitudes towards heritage languages had an impact on learners' attitudes. Many parents of heritage learners demonstrate a positive attitude to heritage learning. "Language-minority parents . . . are increasingly vocal about desires for their children to maintain their first language and more assertive about educational rights and opportunities to do so" (King & Fogle, 2006, p. 696).

Studies of heritage children and their parents have shown a positive correlation of students' enrollment in heritage language classes and parental attitude. Joo (2009) surveyed four Korean American middle school students who were attending the same Korean community school. In each case, the parents expressed a high value on their child's learning and maintenance of the heritage language in order to preserve ethnic identity. One mother reported, "Koreans who cannot speak their language seem to have no value" (p. 91). Joo stated that another mother believed that if her child lost her heritage language, it would diminish her daughter's Korean ethnicity and consequently damage her self-identity. Joo's findings revealed a distinct correlation between parental attitude and child belief:

The parents therefore emphasized their children's continuous learning of the heritage language to maintain their ethnicity as Koreans. Their belief in the relationship between language maintenance and identity led to the participants' [children's] strong emphasis on learning the heritage language. (p. 92)

Shin (2005) also observed parental attitudes towards the Korean language and noted an alarming number of parents with strong beliefs in language preservation. Of the 251 parents surveyed, all

of whom were Korean immigrants with varying ages and years of U.S. residency, 82.4% declared that the idea of having Koreans in the U.S. who could not speak Korean was “bad, shameful, or unacceptable” (p. 135). As previously mentioned, Korean parents place an enormous value on English; the desire to maintain Korean does not negate the importance of attaining English proficiency. Ideally, Korean parents wish their children to be equally proficient in both languages. In Shin’s study, the parents commented that their children’s learning of Korean would provide cultural values for them. Alternatively, the parents’ attitudes towards learning English stemmed more out of practicality than desirability, more out of an essential need to live and succeed in the country rather than a means for acculturation, identity, or cultural value. Because many parents believe in Korean preservation, they enroll their children in Korean language programs and/or teach Korean to them in the home. Shin’s research revealed that 82% of the parents taught Korean to their children. An explicit relationship between parental attitude and its impact on children’s views of heritage language acquisition simply cannot be overlooked.

The Role of Motivation

Motivation is significantly intertwined with attitude since the views that learners have towards language acquisition will largely determine their motivation for, or lack thereof, language learning. Studies have shown that learners’ motivation plays a key role in language acquisition (Gardner, 1991; Dörnyei, 2003). Likewise, HLLs’ motivation for language attainment greatly affects their learning. The motivating factors, however, may differ from L2 learners. Yang (2003) researched 341 college students of diverse backgrounds in university

classes to examine their motivational orientations for learning a foreign language. These motivational orientations were divided into seven sub-categories which were labeled as, “integrative, instrumental, heritage-related, travel, interest, school-related, and language use” (p. 44). Students responded to a series of questions related to their demographics, language-related background, motivational orientations, and language proficiency in the target language. Learner variables included gender, language of study, heritage learner identification, language requirement, and proficiency. The results showed that though all learner variables had noticeable effects on the seven motivational orientations, the most significant variable was that of the heritage learner. “Heritage students were significantly more motivated than nonheritage students were” (p. 49). It is probable that because the heritage learners already had a connection with the language, by virtue of definition as previously proposed, their motivation for learning was naturally higher than those in whom the connection was nonexistent.

As discussed in the aforementioned study by Cho et al. (1997), the students’ reasons for Korean language acquisition ranged from building relationships within families to reaffirming identities. Other motivational grounds for learning included: desires of belonging in Korean communities, better job opportunities, and career advancements. Learners believed their bilingual skills would prove more marketable in both English and Korean sectors. A study by Jo (2001) who researched Korean HLLs for one year at the University of Illinois indicated yet another motivating factor for heritage language learning. Some students reported that they wanted to learn Korean in order that native Korean speakers would not discriminate against them. A student shared of her experience in Korea:

If you were Korean American, it's even worse, right? Because I couldn't speak Korean, [and] I was a Korean American, a lot of people make jokes at me . . . I thought it would be great. You know, like, I would fit in somewhere . . . That's my homeland, my native home and finally when I went there, even Koreans who are my, you know, same people as me didn't accept me either . . . You know, a lot of discrimination. (p. 31)

This student was acutely aware that her ethnic identity as a Korean was at stake. As a result, fears of losing her identity and becoming socially outcast from her own ethnic community motivated her to learn her heritage language.

From a macro perspective, Sung and Padilla (1998) postulated that another cause for motivation derived from the “prominence of Asian countries in the economic and political sphere of influence in the world . . . a growing number of Asian American students see learning an Asian language as more meaningful than studying an Indo-European language” (p. 205). Korean HLLs are motivated to learn Korean when it is socially accepted and perceived as an asset. Motivations of heritage learning include an array of cultural, social, and economic incentives. Attitude and motivation are so closely connected that overlap between the two is inevitable. Furthermore, as indicated by participant responses, self-identity also affects one's attitude and motivation for learning, and ultimately heritage language acquisition.

The Role of Identity

The role of identity and heritage language learning might possibly have the greatest association among the factors presented thus far. Language learning is so closely tied with ethnic identity that it is virtually impossible to separate the two. Jo (2001) claimed that HLLs'

“self-evaluation of their own language performance interacts with their sense of ethnic identity” (p. 39). Furthermore, “several theories illustrate how individuals’ identities and senses of self and community belonging are affected by the acquisition of a new language” (Feuer, 2008, p. 15). He (2010) also confirmed evidence of studies proposing that along with attitude and motivation, ethnic identity also played a key role in heritage language acquisition. However, not all are in agreement with this belief. Guitart (1981) suggested that it was possible for language proficiency and identity to operate separately:

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 . . . Unfortunately for language maintenance, ethnic cultural recovery did not automatically imply mother tongue recovery. (p. 31-32)

While it appears that language proficiency is not an absolute necessity for ethnic identification, studies in favor of a close relationship between language acquisition and cultural identification are in abundance. As previously reported, some of the studied HLLs desired to learn Korean because they wished to be perceived a certain way (Jo, 2001) or wanted to identify with a particular ethnic community (Cho et al., 1997). Jo also examined Korean HLLs’ sentence structures to determine the degree to which they identified themselves as Koreans. Some of the less proficient Korean speakers indicated feelings of embarrassment because they did not articulate the appropriate structure of the Korean language. Jo suggested that, “learning ‘authentic’ Korean language expressions is a struggle for the Korean-American students, who always think they are less legitimate and less authentic compared to ‘native’-like Korean

language speakers” (p. 38). The learners felt less valued and less Korean simply because they lacked Korean language skills.

The earlier discussed study by Joo (2009) of the four Korean American HLLs also purported a strong relationship between ethnic identity and heritage language learning. Said one student, “I learn Korean because I am Korean. I need to stick to my culture” (p. 93). Lee (2002) surveyed 40 Korean American university students to research the role of heritage language maintenance and cultural identity. One portion of the study involved questions regarding cultural identity, asking participants to rate statements about American and Korean culture on a five-point Likert scale. This would measure their degree of biculturalism, acculturation, and Korean orientation. Another portion contained questions about Korean language proficiency and the participants’ frequency of use in all four areas of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Students also rated their proficiency on a five-point Likert scale. Lee analyzed the students’ scores on the bicultural, Korean orientation, and American orientation scales by their Korean proficiency levels. The results indicated that Korean proficiency scores and Korean orientation scores had considerable bearings on each other. “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” (p. 129).

Another study by Shum (2001) reviewed 13 Asian American, HLL university students. On responding to questions of identity construction and heritage language, the participants’ claims of a prominent relationship between heritage language skills and ethnic identity also supported a positive correlation between the two factors. One participant stated that an HLL’s ethnic identity strengthens if he or she speaks the heritage language well. Another respondent of

Korean descent felt that she identified less with Koreans and the Korean culture because she did not speak the language very well. It is clear that HLLs closely connect language proficiency with culture identification. Shum successfully encapsulated the integration of attitude, motivation, and identity. She asserted that, “related to motivation and attitude is the role of ethnic identity in heritage language maintenance. Specifically, the attitudes that a language learner holds towards the target language/culture and their own ethnic identity are important” (p. 3). The belief that attitude, motivation, and identity have substantial effects on heritage language acquisition is unequivocal. Furthermore, these socio-psychological factors do not play isolated roles; rather, the effects they have on heritage language learning and one another suggest a continuous interplay that demands implementation of a broad assessment of these factors when exploring their implications on students and heritage language learning.

IMPLICATIONS OF HERITAGE LANGUAGE LEARNING

Heritage language learning results in positive cultural, social, and economic outcomes. However, it does not come without its challenges. Students may hold negative attitudes towards their culture. Some may have no interest in identifying with their ethnic background, while others may not see a need to learn the language to succeed in America. Apathetic or negative perceptions decrease motivation in learning the language. Even those possessing high motivation and optimism for acquiring the language face obstacles (Cho et al., 1997). Some barriers to acquisition reside in the learners themselves while others derive from external factors, independent and uncontrollable by the students. In the past, heritage languages have been left largely unnoticed, probably due to a strong emphasis on English. Although heritage language

classes, teachers, books, and programs have increased over the years, resources still fall short of the growing needs of HLLs. Lee (2008) stated that families were generally responsible for the maintenance of heritage languages and “public school support for the development of Korean (as for other less commonly taught languages) at the K-12 level is still rare” (p. 8). Additionally, because this interest in preserving heritage languages is relatively new, a lack of understanding is common among communities, learners, and educators. As research develops and HLL awareness increases, addressing learner needs is also well-anticipated.

Outcomes

How do learner attitudes, motivation, and sense of identity contribute to the HLL outcome? These factors can place obstacles in HLLs’ attempts in achieving higher levels of proficiency. The earlier mentioned study of the 24 Korean American students by Cho et al. (1997) revealed some of the challenges in heritage language acquisition. There was an overwhelming emersion of learners’ poor self-confidence regardless of heritage language proficiency:

Nearly all of the respondents – from those with ‘very poor’ to ‘good’ self-reported proficiency – showed a lack of confidence in their own language ability. ‘Frustration,’ ‘shame,’ and ‘embarrassment’ were all words that many respondents used to describe their own ability. (p. 109)

This may partly be due to unrealistic expectations set by parents and other native speakers who believe all Koreans should know the language, or created by the learners themselves. High and unrealistic standards can eclipse the learners’ recognition of progress and discourage them from

being motivated to learn more. Negative feelings about oneself rarely motivate the learner to succeed with ease.

Some learners' expectations also affected their learning. Jo (2001) discovered that many students expected that learning their heritage language would be easier than learning a foreign one. On the contrary, it proved more difficult because as the students oftentimes compared themselves with other Korean native speakers, their self-evaluation of language proficiency rated low. This self-assessment affected their ethnic identity, as they identified less with Koreans due to their low proficiency level. Furthermore, the learners' knowledge of Korean was largely built from that of their parents. The parents originated from various regions of Korea and therefore had a myriad of linguistic variations. The students believed that their parents had taught them 'standard Korean'. This created some confusion since the 'standard Korean' of the teacher, and sometimes of their classmates, clashed with their own. "As such, the students' knowledge of Korean language, which comes from their parents' Korean speech, is deconstructed or confirmed" (p. 35). Some learners felt they were less Korean depending on how the language they learned at home measured against the standard.

Lee (2002) discovered that though many of the participants in his study had attended a supplementary Korean language school as a child, more than 90% expressed that they did not learn much. Some stated that they did not understand the value of learning Korean and did it simply out of force. They reported feeling a lack of motivation in an environment that was not required for academic or societal success. Lee asked the students if they would have taken the opportunity to take Korean classes had they been offered at primary or secondary schools.

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’ . . . ‘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’. (p. 123)

It is evident that the students’ attitudes and identification with the Korean language affected their motivation for language learning. Had the Korean language been more recognized and desired by the wider society, the students would have expressed a more positive attitude, thereby facilitating language acquisition.

Attitude, motivation, and identity certainly play positive and beneficial roles in language learning. There are several motivating factors for learning Korean that students have reported, including connecting with their culture, communicating with Korean-speaking relatives, advancing in careers, and forming an identity by belonging to an ethnic community. Some learners’ desires to speak Korean proficiently, so as to be identified more as a Korean, have also led them to achieve higher speaking levels. Positive attitudes toward the culture and motivating factors undoubtedly aid the language acquisition process.

Pedagogical Implications

Because of the recent upward trend in heritage language learning, schools are realizing the growing needs of their HLLs and becoming more aware of supplying them with resources, such as high-interest books written in heritage languages. Some researchers further suggested offering separate courses solely for heritage learners (Yang, 2003), multi-level classes within

heritage language courses (Cho et al., 1997), and differentiated instruction tailored specifically to students' backgrounds, needs, and interests (Peyton, Carreira, Wang, & Wiley, 2008). Moreover, Lee (2005) asserted that socio-psychological needs, in addition to linguistic development, should be addressed. Yang further supported this suggestion and stated that teachers need to set realistic goals for their students, encourage them, and create instruction that helps decrease frustration and intimidation. King and Fogle (2006) also proposed that parents have realistic expectations for their children. Lee (2002) asked the students in his study to provide their input on creating an ideal Korean language program. Most of them suggested that the instructors be bilingual and understand what it is like to be Korean American, as opposed to being only Korean. Additionally, they requested that learning materials resonate with the culture of Korean Americans. Many of their textbooks originated from Korea and were unfamiliar to their learning styles. They also recommended workshops that taught parents techniques for helping children understand the significance of Korean preservation.

A key reason for the lack of Korean heritage language maintenance may stem from its general unimportance in the eyes of society as a whole. The Korean language is neither a domestic nor global necessity. Naturally, schools – especially public schools – do not see a need to offer Korean classes. Lee (2008) proposed that heritage language communities and public schools cooperate in creating opportunities for students to take heritage language classes at the schools. Lee also suggested that administrators and teachers be informed of the value of heritage languages for HLLs. Offering Korean as a foreign language is another method of maintaining the language. Korean/English dual language programs can greatly benefit HLLs as learners are continuously exposed to both languages at school. Lee noted that these programs have already

been implemented in Los Angeles, and students enrolled in these classes generally excel over their monolingual peers. Universities have also begun offering Korean heritage language courses in recent years (Lee 2002; Yang, 2003). HLLs' acquisition of higher levels of language proficiency is well projected as schools turn their focus towards these students and restructure the curriculum according to their needs.

CONCLUSION

Although a clear definition of an HLL is still developing, it is suggested that having some form of relationship with the heritage language is what primarily sets them apart from L2 learners. The growing trend of HLLs in learning their heritage language has caused a substantial shift in the U.S. and has pedagogical implications on public schools and universities alike. Educators are realizing the importance of heritage language preservation and are seeking further resources for learners. Although other ethnic groups may have varying outcomes, the attitude, motivation, and identity of Korean HLLs are interconnected with one another and play significant roles in their language acquisition. Parental attitudes have also shown to have considerable impact on their children's attitude and motivation towards heritage language acquisition. In order to help facilitate Korean heritage language learning, there needs to be a concentrated effort by schools and communities to promote the value and appreciation of the language and culture. The Korean community can greatly aid in the cultivation of HLLs' identity by encouraging the learners' Korean language endeavors regardless of their proficiency levels. Schools can restructure their curriculum and create heritage language courses that help address the academic and socio-psychological needs of these students. Interesting, effective, and

relevant instruction that promotes positive attitudes and interest in the Korean language can also encourage motivation and language learning. While there is a need for continued research in the development of more effective Korean heritage language courses in the future, raising awareness and increasing collaboration among HLLs, parents, schools, and communities today will help preserve Korean as a heritage language and recognize its value as a national resource.

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