



## A LONGITUDINAL STUDY: EMERGENT BILINGUALS' HERITAGE LANGUAGE USE AND LEARNING OVER TIME

Chaehyun LEE

Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Southeastern Oklahoma State University

Department of Educational Instruction and Leadership, United States

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4670-4519>

[clee@se.edu](mailto:clee@se.edu)

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### Abstract

This article discusses a comparison of the two focal primary school third-grade Korean bilingual students' language use with their previous language use when they were first-graders by examining their heritage language (HL) use at a Korean language school. For children of immigrant families in the U.S., there has been a pervasive hypothesis that their heritage language (HL) might be jeopardized due to their minimum exposure to it and its reduced status in the U.S., which can easily lead them to experience HL shift or loss (Montrul, 2018; Valdés, 2014). However, the present study shows that the focal third graders who were attending all-English schools during the week did not appear to lose their HL. Instead, the comparison of findings indicated that they had developed a certain degree of oral proficiency in their HL, including vocabulary knowledge, thanks to the parents' involvement and practices towards their children's HL learning as well as other socio-cultural influences on the students' HL language use and development over the years.

**Keywords:** Heritage language, Korean students, immigrant family, bilingualism, biliteracy.

### INTRODUCTION

Since the Immigration Act of 1965, the number of immigrants to the United States has proliferated. Throughout the 1980s, approximately 18 million immigrants resided in the U.S., and the number has continued to increase (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Today, among approximately 44 million immigrants in the U.S., the second-generation U.S.-born children of immigrants represent 38 million, consisting of almost 15 percent of the population. The influx of immigrant children in the U.S. brings scholars' and researchers' attention to heritage language (HL) maintenance and development. However, research to date has paid more attention to immigrant children's English development than their HL learning (August & Shanahan, 2010; Goldenberg, 2011). For example, a number of researchers investigated how immigrant children developed their English language proficiency and literacy skills (e.g., Golberg, Paradis, & Crago, 2008; Rodriguez-Mojica, 2017; Yang, Fox, & Jacewicz, 2015).

Yet, comparatively, little attention has been given to immigrant children's language and literacy development in their HL (Goldenberg, 2011; Seals & Peyton, 2017; Szilagyí & Szecsi, 2020). Furthermore, the majority of HL studies have focused on adolescent or adult HL learners by emphasizing the HL shift or loss phenomenon (Elabbas, Montrul, & Polinsky, 2013; Scontras, Fuchs, & Polinsky, 2015; Valdés, 2014). Limited studies are devoted to the issue of HL maintenance and development in early childhood; thus, we know less about second-generation immigrant children's HL learning trajectory. As Montrul (2018) suggested, investigating bilingual children's longitudinal language use and development can explain what is happening to their HL learning and bilingualism during their school years.

Since HLs are regarded as minority and under-representative languages in the host country (U.S.), they are less recognized, unacknowledged, or even unappreciated by the society of origin (Polinsky & Kagan, 2007). Thus, HL maintenance is often endangered and threatened as the use of the dominant



language (English) is favored in mainstream society (Valdés, 2014). Several researchers reported that when emergent bilingual children attended U.S. classrooms taught only in English, they often lost or did not continue developing their HL (Montrul, 2018; Ro & Cheatham, 2009; Shin, 2005; Polinsky, 2011, 2018). Researchers in HL studies reported that HL shift or loss had largely occurred not only with Latinx students (Beaudrie, Ducar, & Potowski, 2014; Gandara & Hopkins, 2010; Potowski, 2016) but also with Korean children in the U.S. (Lee & Wright, 2014; Shin & Lee, 2013).

In terms of Korean immigrant families in the U.S., Korean immigrant parents often decline bilingual education services (Lee & Jeong, 2013; Shin, 2005) because many of them believe that their children's Korean literacy skills have little direct relevance to their U.S. school performance, while the mastery of English directly impacts their children's success in school (Shin, 2014). The parents' desire for their children to have educational success and prestigious careers in the future leads them to immerse their children in English-only instruction (Kim & Pyun, 2014; McCabe, 2016). Although Korean parents may not support their children's enrollment in bilingual education, they often hold positive attitudes toward their children's HL development and consider the role of HL schools to be critical for their children's HL learning (Lee & Jeong, 2013; Shin, 2005). Hence, many Korean parents financially support Korean HL schools and send their child(ren) to the Korean HL, which their children attend on weekends (Lee & Wright, 2014; Shin & Lee, 2013).

Despite the support by parents and community for Korean children's HL learning, previous studies reported that among Asian ethnic groups in the U.S., Korean children were less likely to maintain their HL at home than other Asian ethnic groups (Kondo-Brown, 2011; López, 1996). Murphy (2014) correspondingly reported that Korean children's HL loss is a natural process among Korean immigrants in the U.S. because of the exposure to the English language in American schools and the mainstream culture. Other studies further discovered that Korean immigrant children became more resistant to acquiring their HLs and are more likely to experience the challenge of preserving their HL as they get older because they were more likely to expose to the societal language (i.e., English) than their HL (Cho, 2015; Shin, 2014).

Given the HL attrition phenomenon among Korean children of immigrants in the U.S., the current study investigates two third-grade Korean emergent bilingual students' longitudinal language use. By comparing the focal students' current language use to their previous language use when they were younger, the study explores whether and to what extent the Korean bilingual learners experience any HL attrition, or they were able to develop their HL as they become older. To further identify the elements for the students' HL shift or maintenance, the study also examines the parents' practices and involvement in their children's HL learning and the role of socio-cultural influences on the students' bilingual language use over the years.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Sociocultural perspective on language use and learning**

Many literacy scholars' work reflects sociocultural perspectives (Gee, 2012; Halliday, 1985; Street, 2001). By emphasizing the social environment, Halliday (1985) claimed that language is not independent of the social world. According to him, language occurs within a cultural context; thus, culture is generated through language. Halliday viewed children's language development as a function of their participation in a social world because language could not be separated from the culture. Hence, Halliday considered language and communication to be social semiotics and multiple-meaning systems that involved varied modes of representation or multimodality, such as oral and written language, gestures, drawings, signs, and symbols. Researchers who studied Halliday's systemic functional linguistics reported that he was interested in the functions or purposes of humans' use of semiotic resources to interact with each other and create oral and written texts (Moro, Mortimer, & Tiberghien, 2019). Similarly, Gee's (2012) Discourses (with the capital "D") as an "identity kit" also illustrated how language is connected with social and cultural contexts. According to Gee's notion of



language, language instantiates culture because the speaker's language use varies according to social and cultural contexts.

Street (2001) pointed out that to understand literacy practices, researchers need “detailed, in-depth accounts of actual practice in different cultural settings” (p. 430). According to him, a sociocultural view of literacy emphasizes literacies that are situated in and created by participants. Street argued that literacy emerges from social and cultural practices because it involves “thinking about, doing, and reading in cultural contexts” (p. 11). Street (1984, p. 1) employed the phrase “literacy practices” by focusing on “the social practices and conceptions of reading and writing” to emphasize the social models of literacy in which participants negotiate and make meanings when they read and write in specific cultural contexts. Street (1984) distinguished between an autonomous model and an ideological model of literacy. The autonomous model of literacy is a traditional psychological approach, which views literacy as a mental or cognitive phenomenon; thus, reading and writing are treated as things people do inside their heads as technical skills. In opposition to the autonomous model of literacy, Street proposed an ideological model. The ideological model of literacy challenges the traditional model since it offers a more culturally sensitive view of literacy practices by insisting that people engage in literacy practices in society, not just inside their heads.

Since the present study is conducted in classroom settings, where the participants negotiate and make meanings during their literacy practices in certain cultural contexts, the study is consistent with Street's social view of literacies. Considering Street's argument that literacy should be studied in an integrated way by looking at social, cultural, and historical aspects beyond cognitive facets, I considered the cultural contexts and social practices when investigating the participating students' language use, performance, and development.

## **Literature Review**

### **Understanding the phenomenon of HL attrition in the U.S.**

According to Montrul (2010), HL loss occurs when an individual's primary language shifts to a new language or second language (L2) when the individual lives in an L2 environment as a result of immigration (Tse, 2001). Schmid (2010) pointed out that immigrant children are susceptible to losing their HLs if they have not fully mastered their HLs before being exposed to a new language. Most young immigrant children in the U.S. are identified as potential linguistic emigrants (Veltman, 1983) who could lose their HLs when surrounded by the English language rather than their HLs. Several researchers pointed out that when immigrant children want to be accepted into the mainstream culture (Murphy, 2014), they are more likely to engage in English practices, which consequently leads them to experience a language shift from HL to English and/or language loss in their HLs (Polinsky & Kagan, 2007; Valdés, 2014).

It is important to note that language shift and loss are related to power relations between languages. When people immigrate to a new country, the language used in the country is regarded as a dominant language, which has privilege and supremacy, and the immigrants' HLs are often regarded as minority or less privileged languages (Schmid, 2010; Veltman, 1983). For this reason, some immigrants want to assimilate into the majority culture by actively participating in the majority language group using the majority language only (Shin, 2005). Veltman (1983) explained this phenomenon as linguistic emigration. It applies to language minority groups who immigrate to a country where the majority language is considered a high prestige language since they are more likely to assimilate to the majority culture by losing their HLs and ceasing to participate in the communities of origin.

Veltman (1983) considered language minority children in the U.S. as potential linguistic emigrants who have the potential to lose their HLs. Many of them are not only massively exposed to and frequently use the societal language (English in the U.S.) but also want to be accepted into the mainstream culture to avoid alienation (Murphy, 2014; Tse, 2001). These practices are likely to lead them to shift their dominant language from HL to English and eventually experience HL attrition or loss (Polinsky, 2011; Valdés, 2014). Researchers reported that language minority students in the U.S.



often undergo a language shift by mainly interacting with interlocutors of the majority language (English), which results in them failing to gain native-like proficiency in their HLs (Carreira & Kagan, 2017; Seals & Peyton, 2017).

### **Immigrant parents' practices and involvement in their children's HL development**

Since HL education is given less attention and support than the societal language (English in the U.S.) outside the home, immigrant parents' role prominently plays a pivotal role in their children's HL learning and development in the home context. A number of researchers reported that immigrant parents' practices and involvement were the most significant factor in sustaining their children's HL and that parents' support was a critical element in the children's HL development (Guardado, 2010; Liang, 2018; Lü & Koda, 2011; McCabe, 2016). For example, in their quantitative literacy assessment studies with 37 first- and second-grade Chinese-English bilingual children, Lü and Koda (2011) showed that Chinese immigrant parents' HL use and literacy support at home influenced their children's language and literacy skills in Chinese (i.e., oral vocabulary knowledge, phonological awareness, and decoding skill). Similarly, in his case study involving Hispanic families in Canada, Guardado (2010) revealed the importance of parental involvement in their children's HL development by showing that the children who advanced their HL had received positive support of learning HL from their parents. The studies discovered that the parents' home literacy practices facilitated their children's HL development in the long term.

Multiple studies showed how "family language policy (FLP)" that forces the use of HL exclusively at home (Spolsky, 2012) played an instrumental role in children's HL learning and development in immigrant households (e.g., Fogle & King, 2013; Guardado & Becker, 2015; Yazan & Ali, 2018). For example, in a study with an Arabic-speaking Muslim family, Yazan and Ali (2018) showed that the parents' language ideologies and policy regarding their daughter's maintenance of Arabic in the U.S. influenced the emergence and enactment of the daughter's Arabic HL development. The major findings in the FLP studies indicate that the exclusive and consistent use of HLs by immigrant families encouraged the children to not only practice their HLs but also construct their cultural identity since heritage language-only rules at home are "tied to the families' and individuals' sense of belonging" (Hua & Wei, 2016: 65).

A considerable number of studies explored HL maintenance or loss among immigrant families from different ethnic origins. The previous studies suggested that family context, including parents' attitudes, perceptions, and home practices, played an instrumental role in their children's HL maintenance and fundamentally influenced their children's HL outcomes (Liang, 2018). The findings indicate that immigrant parents should provide adequate support for their children to develop their HL in the home setting to raise them as bilingual. The following research questions guided the inquiry:

- ✓ How did the two focal third-grade emergent bilingual students' oral language use differ from their earlier use as first graders?
- ✓ What was the role of parents' practices and sociocultural influences on the two emergent bilingual students' longitudinal language use?

### **METHOD**

I employed qualitative discourse analysis (Gee, 2012) methodology to document, analyze, and interpret what the selected Korean American students used languages within specific events (Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, & Shuart-Faris, 2004) by analyzing their ways of thinking, interacting, and speaking in the HL classroom. The study aims to examine two focal HL learners' bilingual language use over the years by comparing their current language performance to when they were in first grade. Thus, I employed a constant comparative analysis method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to identify patterns and functions of consistencies and differences in the focal students' language use and performance.





## **Research Context**

This study primarily took place in a Korean HL school in a university town in the Midwest where 200,000 people reside. Approximately, 63% of the town population identified as non-Latinx white, 13% as Asian, and 15% as foreign-born. There were no Korean-English bilingual education programs in the local school districts. Korean parents who wanted to develop their children's HL in the town funded the Korean HL school. Thus, the school was private and designed for Korean students in the town to help their HL learning by providing formal instruction in Korean at each grade level. Most of the enrolled students were second-generation Korean Americans who were born in the U.S. after their parents had immigrated to the U.S. The school provided classes for Korean students in preschool-grade 5. The classes at all grade levels met three hours per week on Saturdays, from 10:20 a.m. to 1:20 p.m. The data collection for this article occurred during the spring semester in first-grade class in 2014 and third-grade class in 2016 at the Korean HL school.

## **Participants**

This paper focused on two focal third graders who attended the third-grade HL class at the Korean HL school. The two students (Toni and Suji – pseudonyms are used) were purposely selected as the focal participants for this article since they were former participants as first graders in the pilot study conducted in the first-grade classroom in the same Korean HL school in Spring 2014. Both Toni and Suji were born in the U.S. and attended all-English schools during the school week and the Korean HL school on Saturdays. They had attended the Korean HL school since kindergarten. The students reported that they used English during the school week and Korean with their parents at home. Both Toni and Julie spent one month each year visiting relatives in Korea with their families.

The parents of the students participated in this study. They were first-generation Korean immigrants who came to the U.S. during their twenties. The two mothers of students agreed to participate in interviews with me and to keep journals about their children's language use at home. The third-grade teacher (Mrs. Joen) participated in the study. Mrs. Joen was a female native Korean speaker. She came to the U.S. three years before the data collection of this study with her husband. It was her second year as a third-grade teacher at the HL school. I was the first-grade teacher in the same Korean HL school during the data collection of the pilot study when Toni and Julie enrolled as first graders in 2014, and it was my fourth year of teaching as a first-grade teacher. I referred to myself Ms. Lee in this paper when I analyzed the findings.

## **Data Collection Sources and Procedures**

### **Instruction and language use in the first- and third-grade classrooms**

Instruction in both the first- and third-grade classrooms was divided into three parts. For the first 50 minutes, the teachers (Mrs. Joen and me) in each grade focused on teaching speaking and listening comprehension of the Korean language using a government-designated Korean textbook, entitled *Kuk-uh* [the Korean language]. Then, the students in each class participated in Korean book reading and in-class writing for 50 minutes each. During the reading sessions each week, both teachers brought a Korean picture book (e.g., folktale, fables). The teachers did a picture walk by showing and discussing book illustrations before reading a book, had the class take turns reading the book aloud, and then held a book discussion as a whole group. The primary language of instruction was Korean in both first- and third-grade classrooms. Although the teachers mainly spoke Korean in their classrooms, the students in both grades were allowed to use English when they raised questions or communicated with their peers.

### **Audio-recording of students' talk**

The audio recordings of Toni and Julies' spoken language use when they were in the first-grade classroom had previously been collected for the pilot study. I had audio-recorded the students' talk when they participated in class discussions based on the books that the class had read together. Similarly, the audio-recordings of Toni's and Julies' current oral language use in Mrs. Joen's class occurred during Korean book reading time for 30-40 minutes each week for 14 weeks, resulting in



about 500 minutes of audio-recording from each classroom. Then, I purposefully selected Toni's and Julie's oral language use when they provided their responses and engaged in the book discussions.

### **Student interviews**

The interviews with the two students took place twice after school at the beginning and end of the Spring semester. For the first interview, I asked approximately ten interview questions about their language use at home (with parents, siblings, peers, etc.), language preferences in different contexts (e.g., at home, school, other public places), and different language domains (e.g., reading, speaking, writing). For the second interview, both Toni and Julie received interview questions based on his/her language use from the audio recordings in a retrospective way. In other words, I used a preliminary analysis of their classroom language use data to discuss their language use and choice at that time of speaking. During the interviews, the students were allowed to provide their responses either in English or Korean based on their preference.

### **Mothers' interviews and journals**

The mothers of Toni and Julie participated in a semi-structured and open-ended interview with me. The interview with each mother was conducted after I completed analyzing the students' first- and third-grade language use data. For the interviews with the mothers, I brought the analysis of their children's first-grade oral language use. I then shared with them their children's third-grade language use data to show any shift in their language use over the years and to discuss their HL learning trajectory. By sharing the longitudinal data during the interviews, I was able to further learn about the mothers' perspectives and philosophies on their children's Korean language and literacy learning while living in the U.S. The mothers kept their journals on two to three different days per week to record their child's language use at home when s/he participated in activities with his/her family members. I gave the mothers several examples of events/activities that could capture the child's Korean language use (e.g., when their child talked with their grandparents in Korea via Skype, when they watched Korean TV programs or movies with their child, or when their child invited their Korean friends to their house). I collected the mothers' journals at the end of the semester and had 30 journal entries from each mother.

### **Data Analysis**

The transcripts of audio recordings were the main resources for this qualitative study to examine the students' oral language use over the years. The transcripts of the mothers' interviews and their journals were analyzed to corroborate the students' language use findings and to further learn about the parents' practices and attitudes toward their children's HL learning.

To seek the answer for Research Question 1 – the comparison of the two focal third-graders' oral language use to their earlier use as first graders – the transcripts of their oral discourses during book discussions both from first- and third-grade class were analyzed. The students' oral language use was examined based on whether they used Korean, English, or “translanguaging,” which describes bilingual learners' strategy to utilize their *integrated* and *entire* language repertoires (García, 2009). Then, their language data when they were in my first-grade class was analyzed and compared to their current language use as third graders to document the pattern of their HL use over time. Comparing their language use in the past to their current language use as a longitudinal study helped me explore any observed different language use patterns over time.

For Research Question 2 – the parents' practices and sociocultural influences on the students' longitudinal language use – the mothers' interviews and their journals were analyzed to identify any regular practices that the parents performed at home with their children. The interview results provided additional information about the families' home language use and relevant language and literacy practices that could influence their children's longitudinal language use.



## RESULTS

### Comparison of Focal Students’ Oral Language Use between First and Third Grade

Table 1 compares Toni and Julie’s language use during classroom interactions when they were first and third graders. The table displays how often Toni and Julie used Korean, English, and translanguaging when they spoke in both grades.

**Table 1.** Comparison of Toni and Julie’s oral language use between first and third grade

		Only Korean	Only English	Word-level translanguaging <sup>a</sup> (English words in Korean speech)	Word-level translanguaging <sup>b</sup> (Korean words in English speech)	Frequency of TL at sentence-level <sup>c</sup> (Korean to English and vice versa)
<b>1<sup>st</sup> grade (Spring 2014)</b>	Toni	36 (12%)	122 (41%)	138 (46%)	4 (1%)	91 times
	Julie	41 (13%)	98 (32%)	163 (53%)	6 (2%)	87 times
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> grade (Spring 2016)</b>	Toni	182 (51%)	32 (9%)	138 (38%)	8 (2%)	30 times
	Julie	196 (49%)	38 (8%)	170 (41%)	9 (2%)	26 times

Note. <sup>a</sup> Intra-sentential switching within a single utterance when the students inserted English words as they spoke in Korean.

<sup>b</sup> Intra-sentential switching within a single utterance when the students inserted Korean words as they spoke in English.

<sup>c</sup> Inter-sentential switching between the utterances (Korean to English and vice versa).

### Increased use of Korean when speaking in third grade

As shown in Table 1, when Toni and Julie were in first grade, they both spoke more in English than in Korean (41% in English vs. 12% in Korean for Toni; 32% in English vs. 13% in Korean for Julie). Conversely, their third-grade language use revealed that they spoke more in Korean than in English (51% in Korean vs. 9% in English for Toni; 49% in Korean vs. 8% in English for Julie). Both Toni and Julie still engaged in word-level translanguaging when they were in third grade, but the frequency of inserting English words when they spoke in Korean decreased (from 46% to 38% for Toni; from 53% to 41% for Julie). The frequency of their sentence-level switching (from Korean to English and vice-versa) was also less observed in their third-grade classroom (from 91 to 30 times for Toni; from 87 to 26 times for Julie). In other words, there was increased use of Korean and a decrease in their use of English when they were in third grade compared to when they were in first grade.

### Development of vocabulary knowledge in Korean

The focal students’ increased vocabulary knowledge in Korean appeared to play a role in their increased use of Korean as third graders. Comparing Toni’s language use in Figure 1 (in first grade) and Figure 2 (in third grade) shows evidence of his vocabulary gain in Korean. As shown in Figure 1, Toni (first grader) translanguaged into English for the words “favorite part” (turn 2) when he responded to my question about the book that the class read. When Toni was asked how to say the words in Korean, he stated that he knew how to say “like” but did not know the word “favorite” in Korean. In other words, Toni (as a first grader) translanguaged into English for unknown words to complete his response, which performed as a communicative purpose. (English translations are provided within the brackets. Translanguaged words are underlined in the English translation.)

- Ms. Lee: 너네 은혜 반 친구들이 이름이 담긴 병 만든 거 기억해?  
[Do you all remember the part when the classmates created the name jar for Unhei?]
- Toni: 네, 그거 내 favorite part 에요.  
[Yes, that was my favorite part.]

**Figure 1.** Toni’s (first grade) translanguaging for unknown Korean words



Analysis of Toni’s third-grade language use in Figure 2 demonstrated that he had acquired the word (“favorite”) in Korean. Toni’s response to Julie’s question included the Korean word (the bold and italicized Korean word; turn 2) for “favorite” (turn 2). Yet, Toni later incorporated the word “favorite” in English in his Korean utterance (turn 4). It seemed that Toni spoke the word in English instinctively (turn 4) as he responded to Julie’s praise (turn 3). In the interview, Toni explained that he sometimes used English because speaking in English is natural behavior as a bilingual. He stated that “I used English because sometimes I naturally spoke in English without knowing or realizing because I speak both Korean and English when talking to other bilinguals.” Toni’s third-grade language use example indicates that he had developed his Korean vocabulary knowledge but drew from his dual lexicon (bilingual vocabulary) to communicate with his bilingual audience. Toni’s third-grade language use example displays not only his Korean vocabulary gain but also his flexible use of dual lexicon through translanguaging as a bilingual speaker’s communicative strategy.

1. Julie: 누가 이거 할래?  
[Who wants to do this game?]
2. Toni: 나 할래. 이거 내가 ***제일 좋아하는*** 게임이야.  
[I will do it. That is my favorite game.]
3. Julie: 엄청 잘한다  
[You are so good at this.]
4. Toni: 내가 말했지? 내 favorite 이라고!  
[I told you that it was my favorite!]

**Figure 2.** Toni’s (third grade) demonstration of Korean vocabulary gain and flexible use of dual lexicon

Figure 3 shows a similar pattern when comparing Julie’s language use between the first and third grades. In Figure 3, Julie translanguaged into English for the words “shy” and “nervous” (turn 2) when responding to my question (turn 1). When she was asked how to say the words in Korean, she described the characteristics of being shy and nervous by using the English words (“face red” and “heartbeat” for the word “shy” and “worry” for the word “nervous”). However, she stated that she did not know the corresponding words in Korean (turn 4). Julie’s response in turn 4 indicates that she could explain the definitions of the unknown Korean words using English. In other words, Julie employed the vocabulary knowledge from English for the unknown Korean words to complete her response.

1. Ms. Lee: 처음 미국학교 갔을 때 어땠어?  
[How did you feel when you went to the school for the first time?]
2. Julie: 저 학교 처음 갔을 때 많이 shy 하고 nervous 했어요.  
[When I went to the school for the first time, I was very shy and nervous.]
3. Ms. Lee: shy 랑 nervous 한 거 어떻게 한국말로 할 수 있지?  
[How can you describe being shy and nervous in Korean?]
4. Julie: shy 는 face red 하는 거고, nervous 는 heart beat 돼요  
왜냐면 worry 많이 해서. Korean 으로는 잘 몰라요.  
[Being shy is when someone’s face becomes red, and if you feel nervous, your heart is beating because you worry a lot. I do not know them in Korean.]

**Figure 3.** Julie’s (first grade) translanguaging to sustain communication





Contrariwise, Julie's third-grade language use in Figure 4 demonstrated that she had acquired the Korean words that she had not known in first grade. Julie's answer to Mrs. Joen's question included the Korean words for "shy" and "nervous" (the bold and italicized Korean words; turn 2). However, although Julie demonstrated her vocabulary gain in Korean, she still incorporated the English word "nervous" in her Korean discourse (turn 4). Close analysis revealed that she uttered the word in Korean first and then translanguaged to repeat the word in English. In the interview, Julie explained that she repeated the word in English to emphasize its meaning in her response. Julie stated, "I said the word "nervous" again in English because I wanted to emphasize how much Erevan (the character in the book) was nervous." Her translanguaging in this example was to emphasize her intended meaning by repeating the word in English. Julie's translanguaging is similar to the concept of bilingual re-voicing. Similar to what Toni did in the earlier excerpt, Julie as a bilingual speaker was able to move across the languages flexibly by selecting her dual lexicon from her bilingual resources.

1. Julie:       에르반이 **부끄러워서** 귀가 빨개졌어요. **떨리고** 겁이 났어요 실수할까봐  
[Erevan's ears became red because he was shy. And he felt nervous and anxious.]
2. Julie:       왜냐면 수학문제 푸는데 실수할까봐 **떨렸어요** nervous 했어요.  
[Erevan was nervous nervous (repeated the word); he was afraid of making mistakes when he solved the mathematics problem.]

**Figure 4.** Julie's (third grade) employment of translanguaging to emphasize

## Parents' Practices and Socio-cultural Influences on the Focal Students' HL Development

### Home language policy in the family

When Toni and Julie were first graders, they stated that they were more likely to use English than Korean at home, even when interacting with their parents. Although their parents asked them questions in Korean, Toni and Julie mostly replied in English. In other words, when Toni and Julie were first graders, their primary language at home was English, according to their first-grade interview results.

Nevertheless, it was interesting to find that their language use at home in third grade had shifted. Toni, as a third grader, stated that he was required to speak in Korean at home upon his father's request, explaining:

I have to speak in Korean with my parents. My dad gets mad when I reply in English during our conversation. He really wants me to use Korean all the time at home. When my dad is not at home, I can use English for my mom. But when there is my dad, I always have to use Korean.

Toni's mother provided a more concrete answer to explain why her husband became strict about Toni's language use. The mother indicated that they (her and her husband) were generous about Toni's English use at home when he was in first grade. However, when they observed that Toni exclusively used English with them, the father began to force Toni to use Korean when speaking to them:

When Toni was in the first grade, we did not push him to use Korean at home because we believed that it was a transition time for him from using more Korean to more English. But, after a certain period, we witnessed that Toni used English predominantly even with us at home. Thus, my husband strictly told Toni that he had to speak in Korean whenever he says something to us.

Similarly, Julie stated that it was acceptable for her to use English at home when she was a first grader, but by the time she became a third grader, her parents made a Korean-speaking only rule at home. She shared:



Korean is the language that my family has to use at home. It was okay to use English when I was younger, and I used English all the time. But nowadays my parents keep asking me to speak Korean only at home. We have a Korean-speaking only rule at home.

Julie's mother shared that Julie used to be outgoing and talkative when she interacted with others in Korean, which had led her to learn Korean quickly. Yet, once Julie entered kindergarten, she had difficulty interacting with peers in her American school because of her limited English proficiency. Therefore, her parents considered learning English to be an essential issue for Julie at that time. Her mother explained:

When we saw that Julie often felt depressed, we thought that teaching English should be the first step for Julie so that she would feel confident in her American school. That is why there had been a time when we provided educational resources more in English than in Korean. For instance, we provided English songs, videos, and books at home.

As Julie became proficient enough in English, the parents observed that she tended to speak only in English and rarely used Korean. The mother explained that this was the reason why they initiated a Korean-only rule at home, stating, "We were concerned about Julie not using Korean, so we decided to make a Korean-language-only rule at home."

### **Parents' instructional focus on reading in Korean**

Both the mothers' interview results and journal reports showed that they spent Korean book reading time with their children on a regular basis at home. The mothers indicated that they were concerned about their children's literacy development in Korean because of the limited opportunities and resources for HL literacy learning. Thus, both Toni and Julie's parents had engaged in their children's literacy learning regularly by providing instruction for Korean reading at home.

Julie's mother pointed out that she felt Julie was a slow reader when she read Korean books, compared to when she read English books in first grade. Once the mother noticed that Julie was a slower reader in Korean than in English, she had held a Korean book reading time with Julie every day until now. She asked Julie to read a Korean picture book aloud every night, and the mother helped her with difficult Korean words or phrases, along with their pronunciations and meanings. According to the mother, although Julie sometimes asked her mother for help when she found unknown Korean words, she became an independent reader when reading Korean books by the time she became a third grader.

In Toni's case, his mother stated that Toni was an avid reader in the fantasy fiction genre. According to the mother, Toni began to read the Harry Potter series in English in second grade. When Toni's grandparents from Korea visited his home during the summer break between second and third grade, they brought the Harry Potter series written in Korean. Toni began to read the Korean version of the books independently in third grade. Toni often told his mother that there were many unknown Korean words, which she usually explained by providing synonyms or example sentences. The mother believed that this practice (his independent reading with her assistance) had helped Toni improve his oral and reading fluency in Korean and develop his Korean vocabulary.

Both mothers acknowledged that they had focused on their children's Korean reading comprehension beyond their decoding skills in Korean. Toni's mother stated that although Toni read Korean books relatively fast, he sometimes did not understand the books he read. The mother reported that she usually checked Toni's reading comprehension by asking Toni to retell the stories when he finished reading Korean books, explaining:

Whenever Toni told me he was done reading Korean books, I asked him to retell the story of the books, but he often did not remember the plot or story of the book in detail; thus, I usually provided a few guiding questions about the character or scene so that he could tell me about the story.



Similarly, Julie's mother mentioned that she often asked Julie to retell the story of Korean books that she had finished reading. According to the mother, Julie sometimes provided the retelling of Korean storybooks using English, but her English retelling indicated that she comprehended the stories accurately. The mother shared that she usually asked Julie to retell the story in Korean again, which might have helped Julie improve her oral speech in Korean by making up her own sentences using Korean. She explained:

Julie sometimes told me her retelling story in English although she read the book in Korean. But I was able to see that she understood the story from the book. After she told the story in English, I encouraged her to retell the story in Korean again.

### **The influence of relatives**

The focal mothers' journals showed that their relatives also had influenced their children's Korean language learning. In Toni's case, his grandparents from Korea visited Toni's home in the U.S. and stayed with them for a month during the data collection. Because Toni's grandparents did not speak any English, Toni had to use Korean, which eventually resulted in Toni practicing more Korean. One of the mother's journal reports indicated that Toni had learned how to play a Korean traditional game "Yutnori" from his grandparents. The mother believed that learning a traditional game from the grandparents had not only provided a good opportunity for Toni to learn about the Korean culture from the traditional game but also helped him improve his listening and speaking in Korean because Korean is the only language that Toni could use with his grandparents. The mother observed that Toni always paid close attention to his grandparents to understand what they said, explaining:

When we explained something to Toni in Korean, but he did not get it, he often asked us to repeat it in English because he knew that we could speak in English. However, during the conversation with his grandparents, Toni tried to understand their Korean without asking them to restate what they said because he knew that his grandparents spoke Korean only. Thus, we believe that the grandparents' visits had played a significant role in Toni's Korean language use and learning.

Toni's mother further stated that having a regular conversation with his grandparents during phone calls or via Skype had helped Toni acquire Korean words and expressions. She stated:

When Toni heard Korean words or expressions that he did not know from his grandparents over the phone or via Skype, he often asked me the equivalent words in English or the meaning of those unfamiliar expressions. I believe that the regular practice of communicating with his grandparents helped Toni acquire many Korean words and expressions that are not commonly used in the U.S. context.

Similarly, the journal entries by Julie's mother also showed the influence of Korean relatives on Julie's language use and learning. During the data collection of the study, Julie's aunt, who lived in Korea and barely understood English, visited Julie's house. Julie's mother observed that Julie spoke Korean exclusively when she talked to her aunt. The mother once recorded Julie's language use when the family played the board game "monopoly." Julie was familiar with instructions of the game in English but tried to explain to her aunt how to play it using Korean only as she knew that her aunt would not understand if the rules were explained in English. Julie's mother believed that the presence of Julie's aunt provided a good opportunity for Julie to be immersed in Korean as she tried to use Korean all the time with her aunt, who only spoke Korean:

I noticed that when Julie explained the instructions to her aunt, her speech was a little bit clumsy and awkward since she explained everything in Korean. I know that she could have explained more fluently if she used English, but I saw that she stayed in Korean because Julie knew that her aunt would not understand if she used English. Also, since her aunt knew Julie's imperfect Korean language proficiency as a Korean American child, her aunt did not



concern or criticize Julie's somewhat limited Korean expressions or awkward pronunciations. I think this led Julie to freely use her Korean without hesitation or reluctance.

The mothers' interviews and journal reports showed that both Toni and Julie's language use with their relatives promoted their Korean language use and learning. Toni's and Julie's language use examples illustrate that they flexibly chose their languages according to their interlocutors' language use and proficiencies.

### **The influence of media**

Korean media also seemed to play a pivotal role in Toni and Julie's Korean language learning. The journal entries kept by Toni's mother reported that Toni watched one of his favorite Korean television programs, "Running Man," on every Sunday evening with his father. In this program, there were many Korean entertainers, and they were engaged in diverse activities that included funny episodes. According to the mother's journal, Toni knew the entertainers' names, the nicknames they used in the program, and their hilarious characteristics. However, because many of the conversations among the entertainers were not always straightforward (e.g., using exaggerated expressions to make jokes, adding humorous language with jargon), it was difficult for Toni to understand the conversation completely. His mother observed that Toni sometimes asked his father about words or expressions that the characters used in certain situations. Although Toni did not know the meanings of every word, the mother believed that he mostly appeared to grasp the intended messages in certain situations because he knew the overall context and circumstances. Toni's mother stated:

Although Toni could not get all the dialogues among the entertainers, he seemed to understand what was going on in certain situations. I think Toni's incomplete Korean communicative skills did not hinder him from understanding or enjoying watching the program; rather, the exposure to the Korean program accelerated Toni's Korean communicative skills.

The journal entries by Julie's mother also showed how Korean media positively influenced Julie's Korean learning. According to the mother's journal, Julie watched a Korean program in which many famous Korean singers appeared in a competition to select a top singer. The mother often recorded when Julie repeated the Korean songs as she listened to them. During the mother's interview, it was revealed that Julie knew many Korean singers and memorized their songs by listening to them repeatedly. The mother shared that Julie occasionally asked her mother to print out the lyrics of her favorite Korean songs so that she could sing them by looking at the lyrics. This eventually led her to memorize the lyrics although sometimes she did not know all the meanings of the phrases. The mother believed that listening to Korean songs and reading the Korean lyrics had assisted Julie to gain Korean vocabulary and to improve her Korean pronunciation:

I have seen Julie singing Korean songs many times at home. I think singing Korean songs helped Julie learn Korean easily since it provided Julie a good opportunity to learn about Korean vocabulary in context and acquire more native-like pronunciation.

### **Developed courtesy manners appropriate for their heritage culture**

During the data collection of this study, Toni's and Julie's nonverbal performances along with their verbal communication were observed, which demonstrated their understanding of Korean courtesy and manners. The comparison of their spoken and behavioral performances between first and third grades showed that they had developed how to use polite speech patterns in Korean (i.e., honorifics) and learned the required body gesture when greeting (i.e., bowing) to older Korean people.

### **Appropriate use of Korean honorifics**

A comparison of Toni and Julie's oral language use between first and third grade showed that their use of honorifics (a polite form of speaking) has been firmly established. It is important to note that using honorifics is a required practice in the Korean language, which is a formal and humble form of speaking in Korean. This indicates that hierarchical social status of speakers plays an essential role in





social interaction as it conveys esteem, courtesy, or respect when addressing or referring to a person (Brown, 2011). Although young Korean children seldom use it with their parents in the home setting to express intimacy and affection, most Korean parents teach their children how to properly conjugate Korean honorifics when communicating with others in the polite form.

When Toni and Julie were in first-grade, Julie was the student who did not use honorifics when communicating with me (her first-grade teacher). On the other hand, analysis of the students' oral language use in third grade showed that Julie used honorifics appropriately whenever she responded to Mrs. Joen. In addition, Julie also appropriately used honorifics during the interviews with me during the data collection of this study as well as when she met other Korean teachers in the school building. According to Julie's mother, her parents had not asked her to use honorifics when speaking to them. However, when Julie was in second grade, there was an occasion when her mother saw Julie not using honorifics when she met a Korean adult neighbor. Since then, the mother had tried to teach Julie how to use honorifics to other Korean adults in a proper manner.

For Toni's case, although he was more likely to use Korean honorifics to address me in his first-grade class, he did not always use them properly. There are different levels of Korean honorifics depending on the level of politeness. For instance, to make honorifics, Korean speakers not only have to add a suffix to the end of verbs but also switch the verbs to suppletive forms to connote being humble. In first grade, Toni often correctly added suffixes to the end of verbs but rarely used the polite form of verbs. However, his third-grade speech displayed that he had learned how to use appropriate honorifics during the conversation with Mrs. Joen and me. According to Toni's mother, when he became a second grader, his father constantly asked him to use honorifics to address his parents. The mother also said that Toni had a lot of opportunities to practice Korean honorifics when his family visited Korea every summer. Thanks to the parents' lesson on the humble and polite form of using honorifics, both Toni and Julie appeared to use Korean honorifics appropriately throughout their third-grade language use data.

### **Bowing when greeting**

When Koreans greet older people, they use not only honorifics (Brown, 2011) but also a specified body gesture (i.e., bowing). Bowing is the act of lowering the torso and head as a social gesture towards older people (Brown & Winter, 2018). Since I was not the teacher for Toni and Julie when they were third graders, the students did not regularly see me in the classroom. However, I met them occasionally in the hallway in the school building during the semester of data collection. Whenever the students greeted me, they bowed to me while using honorifics (the formal form of "hi" in Korean). Their actions indicated that they had learned how to bow when greeting an adult.

During the interview with Toni's mother, the mother revealed that she and her husband had taught Toni how to greet his grandparents politely by bowing. The mother stated that since Toni regularly saw his grandparents, he often practiced bowing when greeting them, which led him to use the body gesture when he met other Korean adults. In Julie's case, her mother shared that when Julie visited Korea once a year, she and her husband showed Julie how others bowed when they greeted adults and taught her the proper way to greet older people. After that, the mother observed that Julie began to bow when she greeted older Korean people.

## **DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION**

This article presented two focal third-grade Korean bilingual students' language use over time by examining different patterns between their first- and third-grade spoken language use. For the Korean students in the U.S., like Toni and Julie, there has been a pervasive hypothesis that their Korean might be jeopardized due to their minimum exposure to Korean and its reduced status in the U.S. as well as their rapid increase in English usage (Carreira & Kagan, 2017; Murphy, 2014; Polinsky, 2018). Indeed, previous literature revealed that when emergent bilinguals attended all-English schools taught only in English, the students tended to experience HL shift or loss because they did not have much



exposure and opportunity to develop their HL (Montrul, 2018; Shin, 2014). However, the present study showed that the focal third graders who were attending all-English schools during the week did not lose their HL since they continued to use their HL at home and improved Korean proficiency by interacting with other Korean speakers at the Korean HL school.

The comparison of findings indicated an increase in Korean and a decrease in English in the students' oral language use over the two years. It was further revealed that the patterns and functions of their translanguaging when speaking in the two grades were different. As first graders, Toni and Julie frequently employed oral translanguaging into English because they did not know the corresponding words in Korean. That is, their translanguaging in first grade was often found when they borrowed their language repertoires from English for the unknown or unsure Korean words, which consequently helped them complete their talk.

In third grade, however, it displays that the students had learned about most of the Korean words that they had not known in first grade. In other words, Toni's and Julie's translanguaging in third grade occurred not because they did not know the correspondences in Korean but because they were flexibly employing their bilingual resources from both languages. Their translanguaging in third grade implies that they were sociolinguistic competent in both languages. In other words, although Toni and Julie engaged in translanguaging as a bilingual's natural practice in both first and third grades, their translanguaging practices in third grade appeared to be more strategic and purposeful (e.g., to highlight) than in first grade. In the same sense, analysis of their language use in third grade displayed that they decisively and intuitively translanguaged (e.g., bilingual re-voicing; Gort & Sembiante, 2015), which suggests that their translanguaging practices in third grade met a metalinguistic function.

The parents' Korean-language-only rule at home appears to play a pivotal role in the students' longitudinal language use between first and third grades. It was discovered that the parents focused on their children's literacy learning in Korean at home by providing Korean book reading time, which assisted their children to improve their Korean communicative skills. Frequent communication with their Korean relatives helped Toni and Julie practice Korean as much as possible by considering their interlocutors' different language preferences/proficiencies. In addition, exposure to Korean media (television programs and songs) also seemed to influence their increased Korean language use over the years. Overall, the findings showed that the focal third graders did not experience HL shift or loss; rather, they were able to improve their communicative skills gradually and becoming competent Korean speakers both sociolinguistically and socioculturally as they have developed Korean courtesy manners in their heritage culture, such as appropriate use of formal Korean (i.e., honorifics) and required body gestures (e.g., bowing). Accordingly, their third-grade Korean language use further demonstrates their understanding and knowledge of cultural values and manners beyond their sociolinguistic competence in their HL.

### **Implications and directions for future research**

When researchers pay close attention to bilingual children's complex and rich linguistic experiences and resources at home as well as immigrant families' efforts to support their children's HL development, they can advocate and empower bilingual families' and their children's linguistic and cultural resources as valuable assets (Cummins & Persad, 2014; Shin & Viruru, 2021). By focusing on how bilingual children participate in the home- and community-based discourses, researchers can contribute to constructing the practices and pedagogies to expand emergent bilingual children's language and literacy repertoires for their HL development. These directions for future research will help us understand how to support HL bilingual children's overall language learning and development.

Given the socio-political contexts surrounding HL and bilingual education (Leija & Fránquiz, 2021; Melo-Pfeifer, 2015), teachers of bilingual learners of HL need to realize that pedagogies based on language separation could easily marginalize students' HLs. As shown in this study, although the language of instruction was primarily in Korean both in the first and third-grade classrooms, the



students utilized their entire language resources through translanguaging when needed to engage in class discussions. This finding suggests that HL teachers should allow bilingual learners of HL to engage in translanguaging practices by utilizing their entire language repertoires flexibly when they verbally communicate. By doing so, teachers of HL learners can motivate their students to actively learn and participate in the classroom, and the classroom can become a vibrant bilingual space where the students and teachers can display dynamic bilingualism while developing their HLs.

Immigrant parents whose children are emergent bilinguals of HL learners should acknowledge that they play a vital role in their children's HL maintenance and development (Lee, 2021; Liang, 2018; Yazan & Ali, 2018). This study showed that parental involvement and practices at home helped their children's HL use and learning over the years. Hence, parents of emergent bilingual children should encourage the use of HL at home and provide diverse opportunities for their children to make use of it. As shown from the findings, immigrant parents should understand that communicating with other family relatives can provide an opportunity for their children to learn and practice their HL. Parents can also promote their children's literacy skills in HL by providing various reading materials and spending reading time with their children together. In addition, as the study exhibited the positive impact of media in HL learning, parents can provide songs, television programs, or video resources in HL so that their children are more likely to be motivated in developing HL from their positive learning experiences.

### **The limitations of the research**

This study had a number of limitations. First of all, although it was a longitudinal study, the focal student sample size (n=2) was still small. Secondly, since I was the teacher in the first-grade classroom but was not the teacher for the third-grade students, it was difficult to capture data on their inner speech from the audio-recordings of their class interactions. Thus, there was a limited number of third-graders' translanguaging findings that served as their sociolinguistic and metalinguistic functions in their oral language use. Although I asked Mrs. Joen (the third-grade teacher) to audio-record the student talk in the third-grade classroom, I (as a researcher) was not present in the research setting; thus, I might not be familiar with the classroom context in detail, and I might not have understood some of the data accurately. For instance, I was able to hear the students' voices but could not see their non-verbal language (e.g., body gestures, facial expressions), which might have led to a more precise analysis. Thirdly, I hold positions as an insider (the classroom teacher) and an outsider (the researcher in this study). My dual role and positionality in this study might impact the study's credibility. For example, the mothers might have considered me as their child's teacher rather than a researcher during the interviews; thus, their answers might have been overly influenced by my own stance and viewpoint (i.e., valuing HL learning and supporting bilingualism rather than favoring of English-only education and monolingualism).

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