

# **‘Heritage’ Language Learning and Ethnic Identity: Korean Americans’ Struggle with Language Authorities**

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This study investigates how second-generation Korean-American students form and transform their senses of ethnicity through their participation in Korean language classes. I did a one-year ethnographic study of the Korean language classes (basic and intermediate levels) at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, which were largely populated by second- and 1.5-generation Korean Americans. From these Korean-American college students, who have ‘successfully’ negotiated through the American educational system, I learned that becoming an English speaker does not necessarily mean the loss of ethnic identity, and that learning Korean (a ‘heritage’ language) does not necessarily lead to homogeneous ethnic identity formation. Although the classroom is certainly a place in which language knowledge is imparted, much classroom activity utilises words and grammatical points as semantic mediators of culture, history, and even politics; in short, the stakes are high. My ethnography focuses on the micro-practices of language teaching and learning in order to explore these interactions, and thereby take up identity formation and transformation. Participants’ personal language repertoire and use reflect diverse social worlds and locations (including time of immigration, place of residence, and relationship to the homeland) through which their transnational lived histories have been constituted.

## **Language and Culture in the Diaspora**

In this paper, I show how the forms of Korean-American students’ language expressions reveal hybridity, displacement, and rupture – which are the characteristics of diasporic cultural identities. I also discuss what their unique forms of language expression mean to their Korean-American ethnic identity formation, focusing on the forms of language performance<sup>1</sup> students carry and construct in their classrooms. Unlike typical foreign language classes, in which students often face a new language, Korean-American language learners bring some Korean language habits and expressions familiarised within informal environments, although the degree of language proficiency is diverse. In the class context, their informal versions of language are reminded, contested, and negotiated against the ‘standard’ Korean language as the institutionalised and superposed register of superiority (Silverstein, 1996).<sup>2</sup> This process contributes to the structuring of diasporic lived life and identity.

The notion of cultural hybridity rejects the notion of ethnic identity formation as a simple assimilation to the host society or as retaining the ‘original’ ethnic traits (Bhabha 1990; Hall, 1996; Lavie & Swedenburg, 1996; Lowe, 1991, 1996; Ong, 1996). By focusing on the ways in which diverse diasporic experiences are signified and structured by the Korean language, I critique the research on heritage language learning that assumes a simple correlation between ethnicity and

heritage language learning and proficiency (Feuerverger, 1989a, 1989b, 1991; Imbens-Bailey, 1995; Peck, 1996; Peltz, 1991). This can imply a separatist idea about multiculturalism, as the term 'heritage' connotes mastery of a tradition or culture rather than the language acquisition for other practical purposes (Cummins, 1995).

How are diasporic experiences structured in personal versions of Korean language, which often deconstruct 'standard' rules and pragmatics? 'Standard' Korean language, representing 'native' hegemony and authority from the homeland, intervenes and conflicts with students' personal forms of Korean in classroom interactions. In this process, Korean-American students' language expressions are 'marginalised' by 'native' Korean language expressions.

## **Ethnographic Studies**

Farnell and Graham (1998) point out that many ethnographers tend to overlook the forms of discourse in which contents and knowledge are packed. Discursive forms are considered to be 'unique cultural forms' (Farnell & Graham, 1998: 414). Not only what is said, but how something is said is considered as a constitutive part of culture (Ryang, 1997). Thus, the ways that Korean language is spoken and written by Korean-American students in the classroom context are an expressive and constitutive part of 'Koreanness' possessed by the Korean-American students. In addition to social meanings negotiated through classroom discourse, the ways of speaking, such as language mixes, accents, and errors also play an indexical role (Duranti, 1997; Urciuoli, 1995, 1996) for understanding Korean-American students' location and identity. For example, more breaking of the rules of 'native' 'standard' Korean language would index Korean-American students' location (including hybridity, struggle, confusion, creativity, etc.) on the landscape of 'Koreanness' and 'Americanness'.

Korean-American students' personal forms of language expression more or less conflict with 'standard' or 'authentic' language expressions, as shown in the textbooks and taught by the teachers. In this process, the students might perceive and evaluate their own ways of speaking Korean compared with more fluent speakers (e.g. their classmates or teachers). That is, performance always involves evaluation (Duranti, 1997). Students will recognise the styles of Korean speech in relation to 'Koreanness' carried by 'standard' Korean.

Although Korean-American students' experiences with language might have been 'marginalised' by the native 'standard' language – especially in the class context – their own language expressions reveal the process of deconstructing rules, crossing language boundaries, and mixing different codes. Korean-American students' process of struggle in acquiring 'standard' Korean language proficiency produces itself as a kind of language performance, which signifies Korean-American lived experiences and identities, not dissolved into the Korean native nor assimilated into the American identity.

Through the sections in this paper I will show the patterns of students' language expressions: how students mix Korean and English; struggle with authorised language rules (especially Korean honorifics and spellings); displace language codes (informal as formal, oral as written forms); and negotiate with native 'standards'. In this process, the students' diasporic life conditions are

captured and expressed through their own forms and contents of languages. Such language expressions, constructed while meandering through and struggling between different codes carrying different native language authorities (English and Korean), are paralleled with the identity formation processes of these students, thus constituting 'the third' or 'new' space emerged and hybridised from these different worlds (Chow, 1992).

### The Third Space

Rey Chow (1992:155) provides a good analogy for the self-expressions of people with hyphenated identities through her discussion of Hong Kong's self-writing and its vitalisation of the city's unique language. She writes as follows:

What would it mean for Hong Kong to write itself in its own language? If that language is not English, it is not standard Chinese either. It would be the 'vulgar' language in practical daily use – a combination of Cantonese, broken English, and written Chinese, a language that is often enunciated with jovial irony and cynicism.

By using Hong Kong as a symbol of the 'third space', which cannot simply be collapsed into the dominant culture (Chinese) nor that of the coloniser (British), Rey Chow (1992) elicits further thoughts on hybrid, creative language expressions developed through lived histories woven with different categories of language. Similarly, as a useful means of shedding light on the characteristics of Asian-American identity, Lisa Lowe (1996) refers hybridity to the formation of cultural objects and practices produced by the histories of uneven and unsynthetic power relations. She takes the example of racial and linguistic mixings in the Philippines and among Filipinos in the US, who are a material trace of the history of Spanish colonialism, US colonisation, and US neocolonialism.

While being educated in English, which has been the main vehicle of communication outside the home, Korean language students often inject English vocabulary into Korean sentences because their Korean repertoire is rather limited. Most teachers in the programme allow students to use English words within a Korean grammar structure when they cannot find equivalent Korean expressions. Thus, students will use English words and expressions during their speech presentations and other class conversations. This is allowed as it is thought that the students' lack of Korean vocabulary might discourage their class participation. A teaching assistant (TA), Su-nam says that the more important thing is that students should be able to continuously use Korean sentence patterns, even if they have to insert English vocabularies into Korean sentence structures. He says that this is a better way than simply memorising pages of Korean vocabulary. Consequently, students' speech reflects this mixed language. In the '103 class' (intermediate level class) taught by Su-nam, Ji-eun spoke about her junior high school years as follows:

[A]lgebra *nûn pre-algebra e dûrô kassûnikkayo. Ijenûn irôk'e* foreign language *kat'assôyo. Kûrôn-de, nae sôn-saengnim ûn choûn sôn-saengnim inikka karûch'yôjul ttae* visually thinking harago *kûraessôyo ...* (For algebra, I took the

pre-algebra course. It felt like a foreign language class. Fortunately, my teacher was very nice and when he was teaching, he asked us to try visually thinking ...)

In her speech, some important key words (e.g. algebra, visually thinking) are expressed in English within a Korean structure. Generally, since students' Korean repertoire has grown in informal contexts, they are limited to simple matters such as food, daily routines, family relations, etc. Not only do students' presentations reflect the mixed categories of language, but also class dialogue. In addition to inserting English vocabularies into Korean sentences, students slip Korean vocabularies into English sentence structures and sometimes mix English and Korean sentence structures together.

The following class discourse shows the juxtaposition and displacement of Korean and English language structures. In addition, students' various speech styles, such as informal speech (hardly used in a formal setting), intervene in the class interaction. The teacher (Su-nam) asks his students their opinions on smoking and drinking. This is from the '103 class' (intermediate level class), autumn 1998, and the TA has changed his speaking style from honorific formal to non-honorific informal, saying that he feels more familiarity with his students. This class has eight students and all of them are Korean American. They sit around a big table and this makes the class situation more informal.

- 1     **TA:**       *Sul, tambae hanûn'ge nappûdago saenggak hani? ...Min ûn ôttôk'e saenggak hae?* (Do you think that drinking and smoking are bad? Min, what do you think?)
- 2     **Min:**       *Sul like mani masimyôn...* (Drinking, if you drink too much...)
- 3     **TA:**       *Wae nappa?* (Why is it bad?)
- 4     **Min:**       *Drunk hamyôn an choayo.* (Because drunk is not good.)
- 5     **TA:**       *Drunk hagi ttaemune* (because you might be drunk)... *Pyung-il ûn wae nappûn gô kat'ae?* (Pyung-il, why do you think it's bad?) *Kûrôm drunk an hamyôn annappûn gônæ.* (If you are not drunk, it is not that bad.)
- 6     **Pyung-il:**   *Ûng.* (Yes.)
- 7     **TA:**       *Tambae nûn?* (How about smoking?)
- 8     **Min:**       *Tambae nûn addicting hanikka.* (Smoking can be addicting.)
- 9     **TA:**       *Sul do addicting hajana.* (Drinking is addicting too.)
- 10    **Min:**       *Kûnde, it's different. Smoking sijak hamyôn ...* (But, it's different. If you start smoking...)
- 11    **TA:**       *Kkûnkki ôryôunikka?* (Because is it hard to quit?)
- 12    **Min:**       *Ye.* (Yes.)

In the above dialogue, Min continuously mixes English words (e.g. like, drunk, addicting [2, 4, 8]) into a Korean sentence structure and also uses an English sentence (e.g. it's different [10]). The teacher also communicates with his students in a similar style, inserting English key words into his speech (e.g. drunk, addicting). This seems to happen when communication is topic-oriented, rather than when discussing proper verbal forms and structures. Pyung-il uses Korean affirmative *ûng* (6), part of a very informal and impolite speech style, hardly ever spoken to a teacher by students. Because students have used infor-

mal Korean speech styles at home before going to school, their Korean speech will often reveal such informal and impolite forms if they are not cautious about what they say. Further, students' Korean language repertoire and textbook vocabularies are more or less limited to explaining their thoughts, thus necessitating the use of English words.

Some students (who are more proficient speakers) note that when it comes to dealing with certain expressions – such as vocabularies expressing emotions, family members, and food – they are more comfortable with Korean than English. For example, a student says that certain Korean words expressing his emotional states, such as *taptaphada* (feel stuffy or frustrated) or *chuketta* (the literal meaning is dying, but figuratively it means something closer to desperation), cannot be expressed with English equivalents. As such, the way of channeling (or structuring) personal feelings and emotional states more or less relies on Korean vocabularies, in cases where these students are familiar with these informal Korean words.

The students' language mix can be appreciated as a creative and active construction emerging from the crossing of multiple boundaries, such as home, school, ethnic neighbourhood, nation-states etc., as witnessed by Lowe (1996) in the creative and ground-breaking literary work, *Dictée*, written by a Korean-American writer, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (1995). This literary creation well shows a multilingual expression of subject formation resulting from a Korean immigrant woman's experiences with French Catholic missionisation, Japanese colonialism, and American imperialism.

However, before taken up as something appreciable and creative, mixed language expressions often reflect frustrations and struggles rather than an easy manipulation of different languages. Although most students want to pack their thoughts into Korean language forms, they find that it is not an easy task. In addition, although they can express their thoughts in Korean, they are often not confident about their way of using the language. While frustrated in trying to structure her own experiences and feelings of Korea into Korean, Po-yun expresses them in mixed language. The following excerpt of her speech in class reveals her perception and evaluation of Korean language performance in Korea in relation to her ethnic identity. At the beginning of the class, her TA asks students whether they have visited Korea, and Po-yun talks about her experience during a visit to Korea.

- 1     **TA:**       *Kibun nappûn kiôk issôsô kûgô mwônji tarûn ch'ingu dûl hant'e yaegihae chulsu issôyo?* (You have some bad memories of Korea. Could you tell your classmates about it?)
- 2     **Po-yun:**   Oh, *han'guk mal ûl chal mot haeyo.* (Oh, I cannot describe it in Korean well.)
- 3     **TA:**       *Kûnyang noryôk hamyôn dwaejyo mwô.* (Just try to speak. It's OK)
- 4     **Po-yun:**   ...*Che ga* Korean American (I'm a Korean American), *kôgi kasô* (when I went there [Korea]), *chom* (a little bit), I was just like discriminated.
- 5     **TA:**       *Ani, Han'guk malro chom noryôk ûl...* (No, you can try to speak Korean...)
- 6     **Po-yun:**   *Kûgôsûn chal, han'guk malro mot'aeyo.* (That thing, I cannot say it

in Korean well.) ...Cause you know, *han'guk kamyôn* (when I go to Korea) foreigner *chom an choa haeyo*, right? (Korean people don't like foreigner, right?) Discriminate *kûrigo* (and), 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. *Han'guk kamyôn nômu* (If I go to Korea, too much), I thought it would be great. You know, like, I would fit in somewhere finally something. I don't know. 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. *Nômu isang haessôyo*. (It was too strange.) You know, a lot of discrimination.

- 7 TA: Discrimination *ûn ch'abyôl ira kûraeyo*. (Discrimination is called *ch'abyôl* in Korean.)

As Po-yun says (2), she felt it was too difficult to describe in Korean her experience with a critical social issue she is very interested in. Po-yun is very conscious about ethnic identity, heritage, and homeland (which I had learned from interviews). Her desire to speak fluent Korean is so strong because she would like to connect her family's pre-immigration history to Korean history and further, to know more about herself. However, her Korean language proficiency is not enough to convey her feelings and experiences in her homeland. In Korea, her Korean language proficiency was not sufficient to be perceived as simply the same as other Koreans, who she thinks discriminated against her there. In the Korean class, her opinions on ethnic identity, homeland, and language cannot be lucidly explained in Korean language either, but mostly in English, through which she has developed and articulated her identity consciousness. She is doubly frustrated with her Korean language performance in both the context of Korea and the classroom.

As Korean was their tool of expression before they began formal schooling, this makes students feel that their Korean speaking performance seems 'funny', 'non-academic', or 'child-like'. For these students, Korean was a language in private life. Korean has been developed through *ad hoc* daily conversations, as Urciuoli (1996) characterises Spanish bilingual speakers in New York who do not have many opportunities to develop a 'dictionary-and-grammar awareness' of Spanish to match their awareness of English. With their linguistic backgrounds of students have difficulty in using Korean to compose academic and logical scripts. Thus, the Korean language hardly functions in expressing their thoughts and opinions, which have been developed through an English-speaking schooling environment. It is a major struggle for these students to find the proper words and expressions to carry their thoughts. As diasporic subjects, Korean-American students' mixed language expressions are never easy combinations of both languages, but processes of struggles seeking proper channels for their voices.

The mix of Korean and English in personal speech constitutes unique styles of 'inter-reference', which Fischer (1986: 230) characterises as ethnicity: 'The interweaving of cultural threads from different arenas gives ethnicity its phoenix-like capacities for reinvigoration and reinspiration'. Fischer gives examples of Jewish writers such as Philip Roth and Saul Bellow who work with 'inter-references'

between Yiddish and English. These writers have reworked English and become rich for it. Thus, he insists that 'Jewish ethnicity and other ethnicities have always grown in an interlinguistic context' (Fischer, 1986: 232). Korean classes, as one of the resources for such an interlinguistic context, can be considered a vehicle for future creativity. As a part of cultural hybridity, linguistic hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation (Bhabha, 1990).

### **The Struggle with Honorific Expressions**

As one of the hardest areas of the Korean language, students have great difficulty in learning honorific systems. Korean honorific systems are complicated and hard to get used to. For example, a verb can have diverse styles of ending, which indicate different levels of formality and respect. In addition, a verb can be replaced by a totally different vocabulary to show more respect. Thus, it is one of the hardest parts of the Korean language: learning how to conjugate verb endings and to use these different endings flexibly according to different contexts.

The development of a complicated honorific system is related to the fact that traditional Korean society had a strongly hierarchical structure with associated codes of etiquette which strictly guided interpersonal behaviour. Reflecting this rigid and highly stratified social structure, the Korean language has one of the most complex systems of honorifics in the world. Thus, in order to use honorifics in Korean, it is necessary to make a decision about the social relationship between speaker and addressee, as well as the object spoken about. Then people can express this decision through the choice of appropriate terms of address and other linguistic markers, such as verbal suffixes or enclitics (Mun, 1991). Reflecting diverse social hierarchies and relationships – such as age, social status, intimacy, and kinship levels – the Korean honorific system is even more complex than that of Japanese, so the learners must make a huge mental adjustment. This is one of the most important sociolinguistic skills in Korean (Rhee, 1994).

In order to illustrate how important honorific usage is in Korea, the TA (Su-nam) asked Chris (a white male student), who had stayed in Korea as part of the US Army for more than a year, to talk about his experience with honorific use in the Korean Army. He spoke about his observation of Korean soldiers' honorific speaking. Late-comers had to use honorifics to old-timers, even if they had entered the army just one day earlier, regardless of their real ages, which is normally one of the determining factors for honorific use.

Especially for students who are accustomed to English as their main language, which is far less elaborate in terms of honorific expressions, the problem of learning how to use honorific endings, properly depending on the contexts and characteristics of conversation partners, is a major one. Although there are several rules systemising the various styles of honorific verb endings, speech contexts and various relationships between speakers complicate the 'appropriate' styles of honorific conversation.

Because of this complexity, students often cannot make sense of the level of honorific usage. On one occasion, Ae-kyung, who is quite good with oral Korean, seemed to be confused about how to choose among different levels of honorific

verb endings. She asked how people know that the addressee is older or should get respect from the speaker for the first time. The teacher (Su-nam) said that people could figure this from the context. It is, however, confusing for students attempting to understand the contextual characteristics and decide to what extent they have to show different levels of respect, which changes according to interlocutor, as there are many variations of interpersonal relations. That is, although someone may be speaking with their elders, they need to manipulate honorific verb endings and vocabularies to fit into a more 'natural' context. This is hard to determine, as social trends of speaking are continuously changing and have many individual variations. For example, Chris composed a sentence using honorific expression following the honorific rules very strictly:

\* *Hyông kkesô nûn uyu rûl dûsimnida.*

The above sentence is structured and translated as follows:

\* *Hyông* (elder brother) + *kkesô nûn* (honorific particle and subject case marker) + *uyu* (milk) + *rûl* (objective case marker) + *dûsimnida* (drink, honorific verb form). \* Elder brother drinks milk.

Although Chris follows the honorific rules rigorously, the TA points out that his honorific usage is not quite appropriate. The teacher says that even though *hyông* means elder brother and this should be followed by the age rule of honorific, he does not have to use formal honorific styles for elder brother. Chris's honorific is over-used. For this sentence, it is better to use informal honorific styles, saying that *hyông ûn uyu rûl masimnida*. The TA recommends that it would be better not to use the honorific particle (*kkesô nûn*) for an elder brother (*hyông*). In addition, rather than using the honorific verb (*dûsimnida*), the regular verb (*masimnida*) is preferred. In order to help students with their understanding of the honorific hierarchy among family members, the TA draws a chart. He put grandparents at the top, father and mother on the next level, and self and older siblings on the same level with younger siblings below oneself.

Although the family hierarchy is drawn by generation and age difference, this rule is also flexibly applied depending on the context. The TA gives another example, saying that *Abônim chinji dûsipsio* (Father, eat please) is an ideal honorific expression. Here, every word represents the formal honorific style. However, people usually say *Abôji, siksa haseyo* (Father, eat please), which is less formal and less honorific, although the English translation is the same. This is a confusing and complicated matter for students to understand because these language pragmatics change according to the language situation and time, and further individual variations. That is, although there are some ideals for honorific use, formal honorific expressions are not always used in everyday contexts.

Korean language teachers try to make their students used to speaking honorifics in the class, often emphasising that one of the most important lessons of the Korean course is becoming familiarised with honorific verb-ending use. However, it is not easy for the students to become accustomed to them just through classroom practice. A teacher, who was new in autumn 1998, told me about an embarrassing experience. A student, Po-yun, spoke to her using *nô*, which means 'you' and is used when older people address younger, or between friends. That is, students would not use *nô* to address their teacher. If this word



was used in teacher–student conversation, it would be very rude. Although the TA was embarrassed, she made sense out of her experience realising that this student was using the term not because she was ignoring the teacher, but because she was not familiar with honorific usage. As such, the Korean-American students' language forms, such as the over-use or ignorance of honorific styles, stray from the native language authorities and reflect their background contexts where they have hardly experienced the various levels of honorific systems.

### Personal 'Standard' Korean

As most Korean teaching assistants often mention, childhood language habits, especially those developed in informal contexts, are brought into the formal context of the classroom. The students' language disposition is often bounded to personal, family, or regional dialects that their parents have used at home. On one occasion, a student brought up the Korean word *taerimi* (iron) in class. His TA corrected his pronunciation, saying that *taerimi* is incorrect, and that *tarimi* is the 'standard' Korean pronunciation, to which the student responded, 'My mom always says *taerimi*. For me, my mom is the standard'. As this student argued, the Korean-American students' 'standard' Korean is their parents' or relatives' form of the language. Thus, some linguistic variations which students bring to the class conflict with the 'standard' Korean their teacher carries. Students' informal linguistic variations, especially related to grammar, spelling, and pronunciation, lose their authority as Korean language once the teacher who represents 'native authenticity' declares that their variations are not 'standard' Korean. Saying something in the 'conventional manner' plays an important role in causing the speech acts to have social effects. Speakers can only be authorised if they are recognised by others (Bourdieu, 1991).

The following example shows how a person's knowledge of Korean loses its legitimacy when the figure with authority (the teacher) does not support its legitimacy. While a teacher was explaining the features of Korean phonetics, he said that Korean pronunciation does not have an 'f' sound.

- 1     **So-hee:** You just said there's no sound f in Korean?
- 2     **TA:**     *Ye* (Yes).
- 3     **So-hee:** Why does my mom say *fwang*?
- 4     **TA:**     *Fwang*?
- 5     **PS:**     What's *fwang*?
- 6     **So-hee:** Like last name *fwang*.
- 7     **TA:**     I don't know. I've never heard Korean speakers say *fwang*.  
               Actually they have difficulty in learning that sound when they  
               try to learn English but there is some phenomena called  
               ideolects, which means person's very special language, like,  
               dialect is a special language of the certain area, ideolect is idio-  
               syncratic for particular person. *Fwang irônûngô nûn ômma ûi*  
               *ideolect ilchido mollayo.* (I guess your mom's saying *fwang*, might  
               be your mom's ideolect.)
- 8     **So-hee:** So my mom is, she's just a freak? [*students laugh*]
- 9     **TA:**     *Modûn saram dûl i da ideolect rûl kajigo issôyo.* (Everybody has  
               ideolect.) *Yôgi innûn saram dûl i kôûi Chicago ch'ulsin irasô*

bisût'an dialect *rûl kajigo itchiman, saram mada ta t'ûllyôyo*. (Since you are all from Chicago area, you have a similar dialect, but each person has its own.) *Kûjyo?* (Right?)

A female Korean-American student, So-hee, raised a question to her teacher because her experience with Korean pronunciation conflicted with her TA's explanation, referring to her mother's pronunciation (1, 3). Drawing on his linguistic knowledge, the TA suggested that So-hee's mother's pronunciation might be an 'ideolect', not from the Korean language, but from individual habit. In this interaction, So-hee's knowledge of the Korean language is reconstructed. As such, the students' knowledge of Korean language, which comes from their parents' Korean speech, is deconstructed or confirmed through class interactions. These class interactions, especially with the teacher directly, draw lines between 'standard' and 'non-standard' Korean.

Speech habits which students bring to the class sometimes reflect their parents' life trajectories. During class presentations or conversations, students sometimes use Koreanised Japanese words, which used to be spoken under the influence of Japanese colonialism. In the Japanese colonial period, the colonial government intended to abolish Korean culture and language and replace them with Japanese, even forcing people to change their Korean names into Japanese-style names. Thus, most older people have been exposed to Japanese language in public domains such as school. After liberation, Korea recovered its own language and since then many official institutes and campaigns have tried to erase the remnants of Japanese vocabulary from daily contexts. This was intensified during the 1970s under a military government emphasising strong nationalism.

However, immigrant parents, who for the most part left Korea during the 1960 and 1970s, did not have many chances to correct their habits of using some Japanese terms. In addition, because these parents' Korean language is basically restricted to informal contexts, they did not have to be as consciously aware of their language use. Since Korean-American students have been exposed to their parents' speaking styles, they have naturally taken on their parents' Korean terms without any doubts.

Thus, these students, from time to time, bring parents' Koreanised Japanese vocabularies into the class. On one occasion, a student was doing a one-minute speech presentation, on the topic of cooking. He was illustrating how to cook chicken breast, and during his speech said '*damanegi rûl nônûseyo* (add onion)'. After his presentation, the TA (Chong-min) corrected him, changing the word *damanegi* to *yangp'a*, saying that Korean people in Korea hardly use *damanegi* any more. In a different class, another TA was explaining the word *chaengban*, saying that it meant a tray or plate in English. Interrupting the teacher's explanation, a student asked whether tray was *obong* in Korean. The TA replied that the term was not a Korean but Japanese. This term *obong* is rarely used in contemporary Korea.

In addition, some students' speech reflects their parents' regional dialects from Korea. These variations complicate students' pronunciation. For example, a Korean teacher (Chong-min) told the class that some of the students whose parents were from the *kyôngsang* province in Korea pronounce *ûmsik* (food) as

*ômsik*. The TA asked the students, 'some of you guys, your parents are from *kyôngsang* province?' One of the students then asked, '*kyôngsang* is south?' To which the TA answered, 'east south part of Korea'. The student asked again 'Taegu?' and the TA replied, 'Taegu or Pusan. *Waenyahanyôn Taegu na Pusan saram tulûn ômsik* [instead of *ûmsik*] *kûraeyo* (because people from Taegu or Pusan pronounce *ômsik* [instead of *ûmsik*])'. This makes it hard for the students to recognise what is 'legitimated', 'standard' pronunciation.

In this way, being exposed to 'standard' Korean language has complicated students' previous experiences with the Korean language. Historical, regional, and personal contexts of the Korean language complicate the students' previous conceptions of it. By facing the teacher's contextualisation of students' Korean speech and writing, the students relocate their fragmented versions of Korean language forms, pronunciations, and styles in relation to homeland history and regions; time and context. This process often leads these students to think about their parents' or their own connections to the homeland, although their language performances often frustrate their own desire to speak like 'native' Koreans.

In addition, students' oral Korean often appears literally transcribed in their writing samples. For instance, students have to write their scripts for oral presentation. Often I have seen oral speaking styles and pronunciations written in their papers. Since students have had more exposure to oral versions of Korean they are not good at spelling and grammar. The several kinds of oral variations for one verb ending make students feel especially confused about what is the 'correct' expression. Oral versions have more variations and fluid forms than their written counterparts. Although the oral version does not stick to one fixed form, the written version requires correct spelling. For this training, students are often given spelling tests on their quizzes and exams.

This problem arose when students were learning the *tôragu* verb ending, the meaning of which is to declare something. This verb ending has several variations in pronunciation and even its written form. A student asked which form was the right one, *tôraguyo* or *tûraguyo*. The TA replied 'ah, *ch'ae esô* (in the textbook [he searches for the textbook expression]), *tôraguyo*. *I kyôngu enûn ôttôn gônya hanyôn*, *tôragu* (in this case, what is correct is *tôragu*). We have four different forms, *tôra*, *tôragu*, *tôrago*, or *tôragoyo* (which are the variations of the same word). You know that *yo* means, *yo* is a honorific form, *kûjyo* (right)?' In order to clarify his explanation of this verb ending, the TA points out a textbook sentence. 'Albert *ssi ga han'guk ûmsik chal môktôra* (Mr Albert eats Korean food well). *Moktûra* (eats), *môktôrago* (eats), *môktôragu* (eats). *Ta ttok kat'un kôyeyo* (All of these are the same). *Pyôl ch'ai ga ôpssôyo* (There is no significant difference)'. Taking the example of textbook sentence, he shows that several versions can be used to mean the same thing.

After the TA's explanation, another student asked, 'standard *nûn*? (what is the standard?)' And the TA answered, 'Standard *nûn*, *i chung* standard *ga mwônjinûn yaegi hagiga himdûrôyo*. (It's not easy to say which one is the standard among these.) It's not easy to say which one is standard. I guess both are acceptable'. From one written form (*tôragu*), several kinds of oral versions have been developed (*tôra*, *tôragu*, *tôrago*, *tôragoyo*, *tûra*, *tûrago*, *tûragu*, *tûraguyo*). Since all these oral versions are currently in use in the Korean language, even native

speakers of Korean such as myself or the TA cannot promptly answer what is a 'standard' without checking a dictionary or grammar book.

Students more and more come to notice that there are many discrepancies between the ways of pronouncing and spelling many words. Although personal and regional variations of many spoken words are acceptable and can be communicated, the way of spelling or writing the spoken versions is not very flexible. Thus, students are trained to find incorrect spellings of written words. Students' personal versions of Korean language, especially those developed through oral communication, have been contextualised and situated within a complicated standard/non-standard or acceptable/non-acceptable hierarchy through class interactions, rather than leading to a homogeneous sense of 'Koreanness'.

As Gal and Irvine (1995) note, linguistic practices and images of such practices are often simplified and essentialised, as if people's linguistic behaviours are derived from these people's essences, rather than from historical accumulations. As shown in this section, the Korean language – not as a tangible and ahistorical entity but as an ongoing reflection of contextual and historical changes and variations – and classroom practices with this language, complicate students' diverse oral language experiences and habits in multiple ways (e.g. historical time, region, personal variations) rather than monolithically homogenising them. In the process, personal versions of Korean language are contextualised and often delegitimated or legitimated against 'standard' Korean.

### Koreanised English Words: English Words are More 'Korean'?

As language is an integral component of social life, language reflects changing social worlds. Since more material and cultural flows cross national boundaries, the Korean language has adopted more foreign words, especially from English. These foreign words are often used with their original meanings, but with Koreanised pronunciation. This tendency confuses students about the boundaries defining Korean language. The following class episode reveals the irony of such language use and its authenticity. A Korean-American student's use of a Korean word represents a less 'Korean' expression than one using the English word prevalent in Korea.

- 1     **Jae-won:** *Na chikûm APT e se pangtchak issûmnida.* (I have three roommates in my apartment.)
- 2     **Hee-jun:** *Pangtchak? Pangtchak mwôyo [sic]? (What is pangtchak?) Roommate? Pangtchak? Dangsin (You)? Nô (you)? [sic] Pangtchak dûl ûn han'guk saram iyeyo? (Your roommates are Korean?) Miguk saram iyeyo? (They are American?)*
- 3     **Jae-won:** Two of them [are] Korean.
- 4     **TA:**     *Pangtchak e taehaeso murô bwannûnde, pangtcahk ûl na nûn han bôn do tûrôbon chôk i ômnûnde...* (What about pangtchak, I have never heard the word pangtchak...)
- 5     **Jae-won:** Huh?
- 6     **TA:**     *Pangtchak iranûn mal ûl han pôn do tûrôbon chôk i ôpsôyo.* (I said I have never heard the word called pangtchak.) *Igô mantûrôssôyo?* (Did you make it up?)

7 **Jae-won:** *Hyun-mi ka.* (Hyun-mi did.)

8 **TA:** *Pangtchak i roommate ranûn ttûsijyo?* (*Pangtchak* means roommate, right?) Hyun-mi, *chal mandûngô kat'ayo.* (Hyun-mi, I think that's a good creation.) *Koengjanghi.* (Very good.) *Sasil ûn* roommate *ranûn mal i ôpssôyo.* (In fact, there is no word for roommate.) There's no corresponding word in Korean. *Kûraesô* (So), they use roommate as a Korean word. *Kûrôn-de, pangtchak iraeyo.* (By the way, you said *pangtchak*.) Literal translation *ûro.* (By literal translation.) Kind of cute, sounds cute. I will use. I will buy that.

Jae-won, a male Korean-American student, brings up a word *pangtchak* (1). Hee-jun, another Korean-American student, does not know what this word means but he deduces its meaning from the sentence as a whole. Because Hee-jun is also not sure whether or not the word is commonly used as a Korean word, he asks a question of how many roommates he has, using this word, *pangtchak* (2). Literally, *pang* means room and *tchak* means mate in Korean. These two words are used separately, but the combined expression is not considered Korean *per se*. Instead, 'roommate' is used as a Koreanised word in Korea, pronounced as *rummeit'û*. This Koreanised English word creates an ironic question of Korean authenticity. As the teacher explains above, the English word (roommate) is taken as more Korean than the pure Korean word combination of *pangtchak* (8). In order to encourage the student's efforts, the teacher praises his creativity. (This TA often respects such untypical language creations as 'poetic'.)

As such, students have often faced Koreanised English words, which are words taken from English but pronounced with Korean phonetics. Some Koreanised English words, such as *k'ômp'yut'ô* (computer), *kkeim* (game), and *ssiga* (cigar) make students feel 'funny' because these are familiar English words, but they have to relearn the different ways of pronunciation. They have to recontextualise these English words from the Korean class. Students often ask their teacher whether these words are the same as the English words. The originality and nativity of Korean words often does not have a clear-cut boundary. Learning 'authentic' Korean language expressions is a struggle for the Korean-American students, who always think that they are less legitimate and less authentic compared to 'native'-like Korean language speakers. To know and speak 'standard' Korean is not an easy process, sometimes, even for native Koreans, who show the whole variety of language knowledge and speech habits based on specific domains such as personal, regional, and occupational variations. Further, the official standard itself is under continuous change. As such, Korean language 'authenticity' is not fixed, but in flux. Thus, learning the Korean language does not mean heading towards mastery or hitting a fixed target, but is an interactive process with infinite language components, various forms and various meanings.

## Conclusion

Although some of the students initially thought that taking a Korean class would be easier than some another foreign language, they found that it was much harder than they expected. Because they often face native Korean speak-

ers, such as international students or visitors from various parts of Korea (who bring a greater variety of language forms and contents), their evaluation of their own language proficiency is often much lower than their self-evaluation of other foreign language proficiencies (Cho *et al.*, 1997). For example, Po-yun was taking both Korean and Chinese language classes at the same level. She was more frustrated with her Korean class than her Chinese class. For the Chinese course, she was content with simply being able to follow class procedures. But for the Korean, her expectation was much higher, since she often meets many fluent speakers whose speech extends well beyond class vocabularies.

Korean language learning accompanies many complicated linguistic rules and additional variations, the same as other language learning processes. However, unlike the typical foreign language learning process in which learners often face a new language, the Korean-American language learners' knowledge and habits with informal language expressions were contested and negotiated against the 'standard' Korean language. This process provides them with opportunities to relocate and contextualise their Korean language forms and styles in relation to 'authentic', 'standard' Korean. Students can think about their Korean language performance in relation to more 'native'-like Korean language speakers both in and out of their classes. This self-evaluation of their own language performance interacts with their sense of ethnic identity.

Usually, students who bring more linguistic repertoire and 'native'-like speech styles in the class can be more performative (Farnell & Graham, 1998; Urciuoli, 1995, 1996) in terms of pursuing 'Koreanness'. However, students' self-evaluation of their own language performance is more complicated, relational, and subjective. Although some students seemed proficient to me, their own evaluations of their speech performance were unsatisfactory and incompetent compared to more 'native'-like speakers – considered the 'best' users of the language, or at least, those striving to achieve 'standard' linguistic practice (Silverstein, 1996). Thus, under the 'superior hegemony' associated with the standard (Silverstein, 1996), students might feel that their own utterances are less successful in terms of 'Koreanness'. Their positions are continuously negotiated in relation to more fluent Korean speakers in and out of their classes.

Korean-American students' language leaning process, revealing confusion and struggle with language authorities such as 'standard' forms of speaking and writing, sheds some light on their diasporic lived histories and senses which cannot be easily translated into Korean or English. Although this can mean a dual 'marginalisation' from both 'native' authorities, they have at the same time potentials to take forms and expressions from both and construct 'new' expressions, crossing the boundaries between different categories of language. In the forum on Ethnicity and Education entitled, 'what difference does difference make?' Sonia Nieto (1997: 177) notes her personal meaning of ethnicity in relation to language expression as the following:

On a personal level for me, ethnicity means my language and it means my languages. And how I combine my languages, and how I express myself. And it's a primary part of my identity, but it's only a part. It means my birth family, and my home, and my childhood memories, and the senses and smells of my past and also my present.

As such, diasporic expressions of ethnic identity might take on various personal 'voices and styles' (Fischer, 1986: 210) which have been developed with personal lived experiences and backgrounds interfering with different language boundaries. In the Korean language classroom, the forms and styles of Korean language brought by Korean-American students reflect their diasporic life trajectories and again become newly situated in relation to the 'standard' language authorities, complicating their views of Korean language and 'Koreanness'.

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## Notes

1. In order to focus on the forms of discourse, I rely on a notion of performance which gives more attention to the ways in which communicative acts are executed. This notion of performance emphasises an 'aesthetic dimension' of speaking, understood as an 'attention to the form of what is being said'. The concept of performance is classified under different categories: Chomsky's notion of performance ('use of the linguistic system') in relation to competence, Austin's notion of performance ('doing of things with words'), and a domain of human action developed from folklore studies, poetics, and more generally the arts. This third notion gives a special focus on the ways in which communicative acts are implemented (Duranti, 1997: 14–17).
2. Through the example of American monoglot Standard English, Silverstein (1996) explores how a nation-state has constituted itself as a unified society with a 'uniform public Culture' through linguistic monoglot standardisation, in which institutional maintenance of certain linguistic practices achieves an 'explicitly-recognised hegemony over the definition of the community's norm'. Standard English becomes the unifying emblem of the nation-state.

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