

Applied Linguistics Project for the Ed.M. Degree

The Effect of Environmental Factors on Bilingualism Among Chinese and Korean Americans

Lisa L. Shum

Teachers College, Columbia University

For parents of immigrant children in the United States, the desire for their children to assimilate into the American culture and to learn English as quickly as possible is often mingled later with the frustration of not being able to communicate with their own children in the heritage or native language. While some immigrant children lose almost all ability to communicate in the heritage language, others grow up to be bilingual adults who are able to successfully maneuver between the two cultures. This paper will aim to explore some of the factors which have led some first and second generation Asian Americans to maintain the use of their heritage language and interest in their heritage culture. Specifically, factors such as exposure to the heritage language, personal motivation and family attitudes will be discussed.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the United States, newly arrived immigrant parents who speak a native language other than English often worry about whether their children will be able to learn English fast enough to catch up to their native English-speaking peers. At some point, however, these same immigrant parents will also worry about whether their children will learn English so well that they will not be able to speak the first language (L1) or the heritage language when they grow up. To these parents, while success for their children in the U.S. means adopting the English language, they also hope that their children will not forget their heritage culture or language.

According to Krashen (1998), however, heritage languages are notoriously difficult to maintain even for young first generation immigrants. For second generation immigrants, the odds of maintaining their parents' first language appears to be an uphill battle. There are many barriers to language maintenance including "assimilative forces that work against the retention of ethnic languages in society" (Wong Fillmore, 1991, p. 334). For example, in the United States, because English is considered to be the prestige language, children who arrive at school not knowing English realize quite quickly that English is the key to acceptance in school. The power of English as the prestige language also sends out a more subtle message that the heritage language is not useful and perhaps even second-class. As a result, limited English proficient children often struggle to learn English quickly and do not find importance in maintaining a heritage language. By the third generation, it is no surprise that it is higher heritage language unlikely that these descendants will be able to communicate in the heritage language at all.

Sadly, according to Lambert and Taylor (1990), "the hyphenated American child, like the French-Canadian, embarks on a subtractive bilingual route as soon as he/she enters school where a high prestige, socially powerful, dominant language such as English is introduced as the exclusive language of instructions" (p. 19). While this observation may be true, it is also true that there are many cases where first and second generation immigrant children become successful bilinguals. This paper will aim to explore some of the factors which have led some first and second generation Asian Americans to maintain the use of their heritage language and interest in their heritage culture. Specifically, factors such as exposure to the heritage language, personal motivation and family attitudes will be discussed.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Baker (1995), there are numerous factors which affect bilingual development including:

the child's personality, the child's ability and aptitude for language learning, the child's social development, the quality and quantity of interaction with parents and peers, neighbors and extended family, the variety of language inputs and a stimulating environment for language development, the perceived attitudes of significant other people around the family and the child's own attitudes about bilingualism. The child's own priorities, the family language balance sheet, and the place of languages in the child's community life are also important (p. 39)

While Baker's list of factors seems extensive and comprehensive, multiple factors can be combined into more general terms which will be used for the purposes of this project. It should be noted that while it is not within the scope of this project to discuss the subjects' ability or aptitude for language learning, these factors along with the age of the initial second language (L2) exposure are considered to be significant factors. This paper will specifically address three general factors including the *exposure to the heritage language* factor which includes "interaction with parents and peers" as well as the "variety of language inputs." Secondly, there is the *personal motivation* factor which includes the child's social development and the child's attitudes toward bilingualism. Finally, the *family attitude* factor includes the "perceived attitudes of significant other people around the family" It is to a discussion of these three factors that we now turn.

A. Exposure to the Heritage Language

Exposure to the heritage language involves the amount of quality input that a language learner is exposed to as well as the breadth of opportunities that the learner has to use the heritage language. A language learner who is exposed to the heritage language at home and in the community will obviously have the best chance in maintaining the heritage language. While parents may expect that speaking the heritage language to their children should guarantee some level of bilingualism, it is not unusual that a "child sometimes acquires only a receptive competence in one of the languages, acquires limited comprehension and speaking in one (or even both) language(s), or fails to acquire one of the languages at all" (Pulvermuller & Schumann, 1994, p. 685). In a situation where the prestige language of English dominates, a school-aged child will face increasing exposure to English from peers and siblings to the point that "the more frequent language somehow 'overwhelms' or inhibits the language in which there is less input in a bilingual situation" (Pulvermuller & Schumann, 1994, p. 685). In cases where parents make a concerted effort to enforce the use of the heritage language in the home by only speaking the heritage language, children who do not have heritage language speaking peers may still not maintain the heritage language because "the completely acquired language will be the one frequently used in interactions that are socially more significant for them, whereas the socially less significant language will not be acquired properly" (Pulvermuller & Schumann, 1994, p. 689). For school-aged children, the more "socially significant" language is the one that they use with their peers or siblings since the majority of their time is spent with them.

Exposure to the heritage language can also be found through the availability of heritage language in after school or weekend programs and the availability of heritage language books and media. As Hornby (1977) states, the "amount of opportunity for communication...social function, literary and cultural value" are important factors in the maintenance of the two or more languages (p. 4). Furthermore, children

who want to become literate in the heritage language must also have exposure not just to speaking and hearing the language but also reading and writing it. As such, children's books in the heritage language play an important role in aiding heritage language maintenance. According to Lambert (1991), "what has to be done, apparently, is to keep the L1 (the heritage language) alive and active at home and/or through Heritage Culture programs. However, the family and community have to push this to the point that the children also develop skills in reading and writing in L1" (p. 229).

Another significant form of exposure to language maintenance is related to the parents' level of English proficiency and whether the child assumed responsibilities of interpreting and translating for the family. Parents who are not fluent in English are more likely to rely on their children who are more fluent in English as "brokers" to the outside world. Children who broker may be responsible for "challenging tasks including completing governmental forms, translating bank statements, writing school and business-related correspondence, and providing interpretation between educators, customers, relatives, and other agents" (Tse, 1996, p. 487). As a result, children who are exposed to the heritage language may be more likely to retain their heritage language due to adult familial responsibilities of translating, interpreting and making family decisions. In recent studies, researchers (Tse, 1998; Tse & McQuillan, 1996) reported that "some brokers stated that their brokering experience was crucial to the maintenance of their native language" (Tse & McQuillan, 1996, p. 206). In other words, children in the study who had brokered for their parents found that one of the positive effects of brokering was that it helped them retain their heritage language. Furthermore, Tse (1998) found that some brokers believed that the experience may have also helped them acquire their second language of English. Because they often translated materials which were far above their grade level such as "mortgage documents, tax forms, and letters and notes intended for their parents....brokers develop high levels of language proficiency in order to perform interpretation and translation tasks. It could be that the acquisition of English is being achieved at a more rapid pace than generally believed" (Tse, 1996, p. 493). In effect, "what is essential in the maintenance of the weaker (often the minority) language and hence in the development of bilingualism is that the child feels the need to use two languages in everyday life." (Grosjean, 1982, p. 175).

B. Personal Motivation: Ethnic Identity

Children who are motivated to learn or maintain the heritage language will obviously attain higher success than children who are unmotivated. The role of attitudes and motivation has been discussed extensively in second language acquisition research (Gardner, 1985; Schumann, 1978). Related to motivation and attitude is the role of ethnic identity in heritage language maintenance. Specifically, the attitudes that a language learner holds towards the target language/culture and their own ethnic identity are important. According to Ellis (1994), the "key concept here is that of 'distance' between the cultures of the native and target languages, the idea being that the more distant the two cultures are, the more difficult L2 learning is and, therefore, the lower the achievement levels" (p. 207).

When a learner does not identify with the target culture, they may become what Lambert (1977) called "subtractive bilinguals" which are defined as "ethnic minority groups who because of national educational policies and social pressure of various sorts are forced to put aside their ethnic language for a national language" (p.19). "Additive bilinguals" are those whose "L1 is dominant and prestigious and in no danger of replacement by L2...the resulting form of bilingualism is termed 'additive' in that the bilingual is adding another socially relevant language to his repertoire of skills at no cost to his L1 competence" (Cummins & Swain, 1986, p.18). In other words, additive bilinguals are regarded as the positive outcome of learning an L2 while subtractive bilinguals are the negative outcome of learning an L2. In many cases, subtractive bilinguals who fail to gain full competency in their mother tongue or in some cases, actually lose already acquired competence, do so because of their "low estimation of their own ethnic identity and wish to assimilate into the target-language culture" (Ellis, 1994, p. 208). In other words, language learners who have negative views of their heritage language and the heritage language culture and positive

views toward the prestigious target language/culture will not continue to develop their heritage language competency.

This heritage language competency is not often valued by an immigrant child immersed in a dominant American culture until they reach college age. Tse's theory (1998) on ethnic identity formation describes this process in four stages: *Unawareness, Ethnic Ambivalence/Evasion, Ethnic Emergence, and Ethnic Identity Incorporation*. Tse finds that the "entrance into stage three (Ethnic Emergence) appears to occur gradually...and many move into Ethnic Emergence when they find themselves in settings where issues of ethnicity are more prominent and more openly addressed, such as in a university or a racially diverse city" (p. 23). It is this exposure to other ethnic minorities which may motivate groups such as Asian Americans to express an interest in learning the heritage language formally or want to study the heritage language culture. And while Tse concedes that not every ethnic minority will move through all four stages or any stage at all, there does seem to be a connection between heritage language maintenance and ethnic identity. According to Baker (1995), "ethnic identity begins around three to five years of age, and by the age of seven or eight is well established but continues to develop. In the teenage years, ethnic differences may become increasingly conscious and considered" (p. 87). Also, ethnic minorities who are not raised in settings where there is a strong ethnic minority presence (suburbs or rural areas) will not likely appreciate their heritage culture or language until they reach Tse's Ethnic Emergence stage where they will begin to struggle to form an ethnic identity.

C. Family Attitudes

In developing a child's attitude towards the heritage language and culture, the role of parental attitudes, encouragement and interest cannot be overemphasized. In the case

when the child speaks a minority language, encouraging use of that minority language may need to be more rather than less. When there is discouragement in the street, little reinforcement on the screen and in the school playground for minority language usage, parents are often pivotal in fostering favorability of attitude among the children to that minority language... The balance of language experience needs tilting in favor of the minority language (Baker, p. 36)

As will be discussed later through the subjects of this study, parents who encouraged their children to use the heritage language by speaking only in the heritage language and who took time to reinforce heritage language cultural values were successful in raising bilingual children.

According to Baker (1995), "bilingual language development is aided when parents have a child-oriented conversation strategy. Some parents' language seems to focus on orders and messages, control and discipline. A conversation strategy ensures parent language: is not too complex...values the child's contribution..[and] is attentive to the child" (p. 15). It seems clear that parents who have encouraging attitudes towards their children's attempts at heritage language maintenance and develop clear language priorities will help secure their children's bilingual future.

III. METHODS

For this project, a survey was conducted to obtain background and language-use information from 13 Asian Americans who the researcher knows personally. All of the participants were college-educated first and second generation immigrants in their mid twenties to

early thirties. Three were male and ten were female. Five of the subjects were Chinese American whose parents were born in and around the Shanghai area and now consider Taiwan to be the connection to the heritage culture. The other eight subjects were Korean Americans whose parents were born in either North or South Korea. All participants grew up in or near major metropolitan cities such as New York, Buffalo, Boston, Philadelphia, and Washington D.C. All of the participants in the study speak some level of Mandarin or Korean and most of their parents of the participants speak the heritage language fluently. Except for one participant, the majority of the participants reported that their first language was the heritage language and that they began to learn English in kindergarten or when they first arrived in the United States. One subject believed she learned Korean and English at the same time. Four of the subjects reported no use or limited use of the heritage language at home. Seven of the 13 participants described themselves as *Dominant Bilingual* (a person who is more proficient in one of the two languages -in most cases native-like). One participant described herself as somewhere between a *Passive/Receptive Bilingual* (a person who is a native speaker in one language and is capable of understanding but not speaking another language) and a *Dominant Bilingual*. Four of the participants considered themselves to be between a *Dominant Bilingual* and a *Balanced Bilingual* (a person who is more or less equally proficient in both languages, but will not necessarily pass for a native speaker in both languages). Finally, one participant described himself as a Dominant Bilingual in writing but an Equilingual (a person who passes in any situation as a native speaker) in speaking.

Most subjects (11 of 13) had studied the heritage language formally in either Chinese/Korean weekend school as a child or as a college student. Nine of the subjects reported being able to read and write in the heritage language but most gave limiting qualifications to their abilities such as “at the second grade level” or “I can read but it doesn’t mean I understand what I read.” Nine of the subjects also reported to broker for their families. Finally, 12 of the 13 reported experiencing some ethnic identity conflict at some point. A summary of this background information of the study participants is presented in Table 1.

The survey used (see Appendix A) consisted of approximately 26 questions and was sent by email to the participants. Follow-up questions were asked to clarify answers when needed. The survey sought to elicit information on the participants’ use of the heritage language during their childhood and in their daily lives today. The questions focused on the participants’ background, the primary language spoken at home, the parents’ level of English proficiency and access to the heritage language through peers, Chinese schools and books. The survey also explored the participants’ level of bilingualism, their attitudes towards their heritage language, the participants’ interest in the heritage language/culture and attitudes towards bilingualism. In addition, questions related to ethnic identity formation were used in order to explore how it may relate to heritage language loss or maintenance.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Bilingualism

As stated above, most participants reported themselves as dominant bilinguals. In examining the results of this question, however, it must be noted that the bilingual question is a somewhat tricky one because speakers often have a different view of their own bilingualism than an outsider would. Participants may be more conscious of what they cannot do in their heritage language rather than what they can do and may also be answering modestly. In addition, some participants reported different levels of bilingualism depending on whether the category was conversational speaking or literacy (reading and writing). For example, Curtis reported himself to be an Equilingual in speaking but a Dominant Bilingual in writing. In general, it seems that most bilinguals tend to underreport their level of bilingualism and a

more specific and sophisticated set of questions would be needed in order to define the exact level of bilingualism.

Of the 13 subjects, all participants reported some level of bilingualism and also reported feeling “proud” of their ability to speak two or more languages. In general, the Chinese Americans reported a higher percentage of high-level bilingualism (three DB/BB out of five participants) versus Korean Americans (One DB/EQ and one DB/BB out of eight participants). Theories on the reasoning behind these numbers will be discussed later.

TABLE 1
Background Information of the Study Participants
(N=13)

Name	Age	Sex	Hometown	First Language	Heritage Language Use at Home	Bilingualism (Self-Report)	Formal Heritage Study	Read/Write Heritage Language	Brokering	Ethnic Identity Conflict
Bert	30	M	Suburban DC	Mandarin	No	DB	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Robert	32	M	Sub. Boston	Mandarin	Limited	DB	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Charity	28	F	DC	Mandarin	Yes	DB/BB	No	No	Yes	Yes
Anne	28	F	Sub. Long Island	Mandarin	Yes	DB/BB	Yes	Limited	Yes	No
Tanya	28	F	Sub. CT	Mandarin	Limited	DB/BB	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Curtis	28	M	Queens, NY	Korean	Yes	DB/EQ	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ellen	25	F	Sub. NJ	Korean	Yes	DB	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Renee	27	F	Queens, NY & Sub. NY	Korean	Yes	DB/BB	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes/No
Katy	29	F	Sub. Buffalo	Korean	Limited	PB/DB	Some	Limited	No	Yes/No
Gina	31	F	Manhattan & Sub. NJ	Korean	Yes	DB	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sally	27	F	Philadelphia	Korean	Yes	DB	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Julie	27	F	Sub. NJ	Korean	Yes	DB	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Emma	25	F	Sub. NJ	Korean	Yes	DB	Yes	Limited	Yes	Yes

DB=Dominant Bilingual

BB=Balanced Bilingual

EQ=Equilingual

Of the whole group of Asian Americans, Charity, Anne, Tanya, Curtis, and Renee seemed the most confident in expressing their ability to speak the heritage language. Katy who said she was between a Passive Bilingual and Dominant Bilingual seemed to be the least confident in her Korean ability. As may be expected her answers to the survey pointed to a background which reflects her lower level of bilingualism as compared to the rest of the group. First, she had not brokered as a child and there was very little need for her to use the heritage language at home. Also, she had only studied Korean as a child in weekend school and therefore could not read or write much in Korean. Interestingly, she also reported that she had not really felt much ethnic conflict while growing up which may suggest either a very balanced Asian American identity or a very American one.

B. Exposure to the Heritage Language

The majority of the participants (12 of 13) reported that their parents spoke some heritage language to them at home. A larger portion of Korean Americans (seven of eight), however, had access to the heritage language than the Chinese Americans (two of five). This data, however, seems to contradict the higher levels of reported bilingualism among the Chinese Americans. It would seem that Korean Americans should have reported higher levels of bilingualism if they had higher usage of the heritage language at home. Upon inspection of the data, it was observed that four of the five Chinese Americans had spent extensive time in the heritage language country working and had studied the heritage language at the college level while most of the Korean Americans had not. In addition, it is puzzling why Tanya, a Chinese American, is considered to be one of the highest level bilinguals even though she did not broker or use the heritage language at home. The crucial factor for her bilingualism, however, is the fact that she had lived and worked in China for more than five years and had studied at the graduate level there with Mandarin as the medium of instruction.

In terms of exposure to the heritage language and culture, only Curtis and Ellen reported having access to any heritage language books or media beyond workbooks in weekend school or their parents' heritage language newspapers. It is uncertain whether the lack of heritage language books and media had any effect on the participants' level of heritage language. The fact that Korean is a relatively easy language to learn since there is a phonetic alphabet may account for the higher number of Korean American participants who reported they could read and write in Korean (seven of eight). Only three of five Chinese American participants claimed they could read and write Chinese, a notoriously difficult language to read or write.

All of the Chinese American participants reported use of Chinese in Chinese Saturday school while six of nine Korean American participants reported using Korean in Korean School, church or both. It should be noted that five of these six Korean Americans reported speaking and hearing Korean in church and this characteristic seems to distinguish them from the Chinese American group. The role of the use of the heritage language in religion for Korean Americans appears to be a very important and common factor in their maintenance of the heritage language.

Brokering

The majority (9 of 13) of the participants brokered for their parents while growing up and many continue to broker currently. With the exception of Tanya, the majority of the highest-level bilinguals (Charity, Anne, Curtis, and Renee) brokered for their parents while growing

up. Curtis stated that “brokering forces your mind to develop from translating to actually thinking in two different languages.” The answers to the brokering questions were some of the most interesting because there was a wide mix of positive and negative feelings towards brokering. As expected, at least one participant (Renee) reported that brokering “improved my L1.” Ellen, who arrived in the U.S. at a relatively older age, described that “brokering had an effect on my English” in that brokering helped her learn it faster. Anne reported that brokering made her feel important and that “translating and helping my parents express themselves in English on paper has expanded my Chinese vocabulary.”

On the other hand, brokering seemed to create some frustration and subtle changes in traditional family structure for the participants. Gina was the most vocal in stating her negative feelings towards brokering by saying that “they relied on me for many things” and I “felt responsible, adult-like.” While Gina noted how “undutiful” it sounded, she also resented her parents for their “helplessness” and for her feelings of a “lost childhood.” In effect, Gina, like many children of immigrants, had taken on adult responsibilities and was frustrated by the added burden. Sadly, Gina “remembered wanting to be able to talk to my parents about current events at the dinner table” like the rest of her friends and how “it seemed easier not to deal with ESL parents.” Emma echoed Gina’s sentiments by saying that that brokering “made the relationship between my parents and me more ‘casual’ in the sense that they were dependent on me for information. When that happened, I think I saw them less as an authority.” These words highlight one of the more serious problems with immigrant parents and their children when there is not a shared heritage language. Families that cannot communicate to each other through a common language can face problems of weakened parental authority which may lead to breakdown in the family structure and even child delinquency.

C. Personal Motivation: Ethnic Identity Formation

Of the 13 participants, all but one expressed that they had struggled with their ethnic identity while growing up and only began to develop a cross cultural identity in their early twenties. In expressing the conflict she felt growing up, Charity explained that “I felt nervous about being thought of as different. I didn’t like anyone to ask me about being Chinese—I just hoped no one would notice or care.” Tanya expressed that “being Chinese made me different and made me feel awkward...during this time of awkwardness with my identity I had not only no interest in Chinese culture but very much wanted to deny it.” Robert succinctly answered that “I was trying my best to be American.” Bert also felt a conflict and admitted that he “really didn’t have much of a Chinese American identity until I went to Taiwan where I had Chinese American friends for the first time...it was in Taiwan that I really felt that I had a lot in common with other Chinese American kids.”

Most participants expressed that they believe that there was a connection between heritage language and ethnic identity. Specifically, Curtis explained that “if you speak your heritage language well, your ethnic identity becomes stronger and if your need for ethnic identity is strong, you will develop better language skills.” Julie made a personal connection to her own situation by saying that “[Because] I don’t speak Korean that often or that well...I feel less connected to the Korean culture in general and identify with them less.” Similarly, despite the many opportunities she had to use Chinese with her family and friends, Charity regrets that “if I had been secure in my identity I wouldn’t have tried so hard to speak only English.”

As noted in the literature review, entrance into college is the most often cited time for exploration of language and culture. Curtis recalled that “in college, I began to emphasize being Korean-American more than just being American. Although I am an American citizen, I realized that I was different from others. There was definitely a conflict about who I was. Was I American? Was I Korean?” Some of the participants cited their interest in the heritage culture as the motivating factor heritage language maintenance. Specifically, Julie recalled

that “in college, I took two semesters of Korean out of desire to improve my speaking and writing”

Only one participant, Anne, did not report any identity conflict while growing up and expressed her appreciation for her parents’ role in instilling confidence in her and helping her feel proud to be Chinese American. Anne explained that “I knew what and who I was and am. My parents were extremely open-minded and helpful in my process of growing up and realizing how I fit in at school and with Americans.” Also, “I have always identified myself as different from my white friends at school. I liked it.” Unlike the other participants, Anne found that her difference made her a unique individual rather than as an outsider. Anne also did not believe there is anything more than a minimal link between identity and language maintenance. To her, Chinese was merely a vehicle to communicate with non-native English speakers while her identity was formed separately and not related to her heritage language maintenance. It seems, however, that one could also interpret the situation quite differently by pointing out that it was her strong identity as a Chinese-American which aided her in maintaining her heritage language.

Within the group, all participants, with the exception of Julie, had visited the heritage country one or more times. Five participants (Bert, Robert, Anne, Tanya, Curtis, and Katy) had worked in the heritage country for an extended period of time ranging from six months (Katy) to seven years (Robert). It should be noted that while there were few visible differences between the Chinese American and Korean American groups, the fact that four of the six that worked in the heritage country were Chinese Americans may highlight a need that this group of Chinese Americans (three of five reported limited to no heritage language use at home) felt to find their “roots” in the heritage country. It may suggest that, unlike the Korean Americans in this study who did use the heritage language at home (seven of eight), these four Chinese Americans felt that they needed to spend an extended period of time in the heritage country as a way of exploring their ethnic identity. This interest in the heritage culture for Robert and the other participants seems to fit in well with Tse’s (1998) theory of ethnic identity formation and its four stages. The desire to spend an extended period of time in the heritage culture seems indicative of the third stage of Tse’s stages, Ethnic Emergence. As such, for these participants, there is a strong link between ethnic identity and heritage language maintenance.

D. Family Attitudes

Families that actively encouraged maintenance of the heritage language and interest in the heritage language culture seemed to produce very successful bilinguals in the study. According to Curtis, the highest self-reported level bilingual in the study, “[my parents] emphasized that a Korean person that does not speak Korean is not really Korean and that preserving Korean culture was very important.” Participants also cited reminders of cultural heritage as a way towards heritage language maintenance. Sally believed that “brokering was not the only factor in my development of the Korean language. I believe that it was my mother and grandparents that instilled the idea that one should not forget one’s language. Although I was born in the States, they never once let me forget where I came from.” Similarly, Katy recalled that “in middle school, when I started becoming very social and neglecting my studies, my mother told me, ‘Remember, you’re not white. You’re Korean and that’s what everyone sees.’” In this way, families that emphasized the heritage culture seemed to be somewhat successful in creating competent bilinguals.

Parents who held a strict “no English” policy also seemed to have some success with their bilingual children. Curtis’ parents “refused to speak to [him] in English.” Charity’s parents did not allow her to use English at home and would say “Jiang zhongwen” (Speak Chinese.) whenever she or her sister tried to speak to them in English. At least one participant, Renee, expressed appreciation for her parents’ strict language policy by reporting that “I was not allowed to speak English at home. [My parents] spoke Korean to me. In college I was glad that

my parents had forced me to learn to speak Korean as I met Korean-Americans in college that could not speak the language and wanted to learn.” Interestingly, Sally, whose parents reminded her often of her heritage reported that “[her parents] made me keep a daily journal in Korean.” Unfortunately, due to the nature of long hours that immigrants often work, some participants did not receive the same type of constant encouragement. Gina who made the most honest and negative comments about brokering for her parents reported that “[my parents] were never at home so my Korean never really developed past a certain point. I and they regret that today.” Julie who resented brokering and has never been to Korea described that “my parents worked long hours so I didn’t get to use my Korean with them...They did ask me to practice speaking Korean more often but I just never did.”

While some parents were not at home enough to provide steady reinforcement of values and heritage language encouragement, one participant’s parents actively discouraged the use of the heritage language at home. Robert, explained in the survey that once his sister’s “first grade teacher called [his] parents and told them her English was terrible, [they] decided that we should only speak English at home.” Tanya reported that her parents who were sensitive to the struggle of a minority language child “began speaking to me in English at home because that was the language I was most comfortable with. I was too embarrassed to use Chinese at home because it seemed unnatural and it was more efficient to express myself in English.” It should be noted that although one would assume that these two participants would have remained less monolingual than the participants who were actively encouraged to speak the heritage language, both Robert and Tanya are both dominant to balanced bilinguals today. Interestingly, these two same participants have lived and worked the longest in their heritage countries, seven and five years, respectively. While they probably struggled more with learning the language at first, the fact that they were able to overcome the lack of heritage language encouragement during childhood expresses positively it is not any one factor which predicts heritage language maintenance. Parents who are not able to communicate fully with their children in the heritage language during their childhood may someday be able to do so as adults.

V. LIMITATIONS

As with most data collection studies, there are certain limitations to this study. First, the group of participants chosen to answer the survey were not necessarily representative of all Asian Americans. In fact, all of the Korean American subjects are graduate students in the Applied Linguistics or TESOL department at Teachers College, Columbia University. Any generalizations to be made about their heritage language abilities should be made knowing that they may be atypical language learners due to their interest in languages. In addition, while the researcher tried to make the survey as comprehensive yet short as possible, the use of face to face taped interviews could have been more conducive to this type of study and would have made it easier to ask follow-up questions. Also it would have been helpful if a more specific and sophisticated set of questions was used to define the participants’ level of bilingualism. As it is, self-report may not be the most reliable form of assessment.

Furthermore, future studies may want to explore further the role of brokering in heritage language maintenance. For example, the fact that there seemed to be stronger heritage language maintenance among subjects who were the oldest siblings versus younger siblings points to a difference in heritage language interaction between parents and their older and younger children. Also, the role of religion and heritage language use for Korean Americans appears to be a very important factor for heritage language maintenance and one which could be explored further.

VI. CONCLUSION

All of the participants of the study seem to have formed a type of cross-cultural identity which Tong (1997) defines as “maintaining their own identity while adapting socially to the majority culture” (p. 43). While some of these first and second generation immigrants seem to have developed a cross-cultural identity somewhat naturally, others struggle to find and affirm the culture of their heritage language. Most of the Chinese American participants of this study found that they needed to immerse themselves in the heritage culture by living in Asia for an extended period of time in order to form this ethnic identity and to maintain/learn their heritage language. In addition, the importance of family attitude and the fact that most of the participants’ parents made it a point to speak to their children in the heritage language further increased the subjects’ ability to speak the heritage language. The effects of brokering and access to heritage language books and media also provided additional opportunities for heritage language exposure.

Unfortunately, many parents tend to blame themselves when children do not maintain the heritage language. They need to understand that many outside factors may contribute to the lack of heritage language maintenance. Immigrants who need to work long hours outside the home and families whose parents are separated (going back and forth from homeland) will find it very difficult to provide consistent encouragement to their children. It should be remembered though that, while

family, community and education circumstances sometimes mean that the journey halts at passive bilingualism...such a halt is a temporary resting stop. Partial or passive bilingualism is not a finishing line. Given a need to become an active bilingual (e.g. by visiting the country where the hitherto passive language is dominate, the journey can be continued to be more complete bilingualism (Baker, 1995, p. 38)

REFERENCES

- Baker, C. (1995). *A parents' and teachers' guide to bilingualism*. Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters.
- Cummins, J., & Swain, M. (1986). *Bilingualism in education: Aspects of theory, research and practice*. New York: Longman.
- Ellis, R. (1994). *The study of second language acquisition*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Gardner, R. (1985). *Social psychology and second language learning: The role of attitude and motivation*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Gardner, R. C., & Lambert, W. E. (1972). *Attitudes and motivation in second-language learning*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Grosjean, F. (1982). *Life with two languages: An introduction to bilingualism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hornby, P. (1977). Bilingualism: An introduction and overview. In P. Hornby (Ed.), *Bilingualism:*

Psychological, social and educational implications (pp. 1-13). New York: Academic Press, Inc.

Krashen, S. (1998). Heritage language development: Some practical arguments. In S. Krashen, J.

McQuillan & L. Tse (Eds.), *Heritage Language Development* (pp. 3-13). Culver City, CA: Language Education.

Lambert, W. E. (1977). The effects of bilingualism on the individual: cognitive and sociocultural

consequences. In P. Hornby (Ed.), *Bilingualism: Psychological, social and educational implications* (pp. 1-13). New York: Academic Press..

Lambert, W. E. (1991). And then add your two cents' worth. In A. Reynolds (Ed.), *Bilingualism,*

multiculturalism and second language learning: The McGill conference in honour of Wallace E. Lambert (pp. 217-249). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Lambert, W. E., & Taylor, D. M. (1990). *Coping with cultural and racial diversity in urban America*. New

York: Praeger Publishers.

Lambert, W. E., & Tucker, G. R. (1972). *Bilingual education in children: The St. Lambert experiment*.

Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

McQuillan, J., & Tse, L. (1995). Child language brokering in linguistic minority communities: Effects on

cultural interaction, cognition, and literacy. *Language and Education*, 9, 195-215.

Pulvermuller, N., & Schumann, J. (1994). Neurobiological mechanisms of language acquisition. *Language*

Learning, 44, 681-734.

Schumann, J. (1978). Social and psychological factors in second language acquisition. In J. Richards (Ed.),

Understanding second and foreign language learning: Issues and approaches (pp. 163-78). Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Tong, V. (1997). The relationship between first and second languages and culture: Finding across-cultural

identity. *NYSABE Journal*, 12, 43-61.

Tse, L. (1996). Language brokering in linguistic minority communities: The case of Chinese- and

Vietnamese-American students. *The Bilingual Research Journal*, 20, 485-498.

Tse, L. (1998). Ethnic identity formation and its implications for heritage language development. In S.

Krashen, J. McQuillan & L.Tse (Eds.), *Heritage Language Development* (pp. 15-29). Culver City, CA: Language Education.

Tse, L. & McQuillan, J. (1996). Culture, language and literacy: The effects of child brokering on language

minority education. Paper presented at the 1996 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York, NY.

Wong Fillmore, L. (1991). When learning a second language means losing the first. *Early Childhood*

Research Quarterly, 6, 323-346.

APPENDIX A

Heritage Language Survey

Past Use of the Heritage Language

1. Where were you born?
2. Where were your parents born?
3. Where did you grow up (city or town)?
4. What was your first language (L1)?
5. If English was **not** your first language, do you remember when you began to learn English?
6. Do you remember a time when you could not speak English? When?
7. Did you speak your heritage language while growing up? With whom? (e.g. parents, siblings, friends)
8. Did your parents encourage you to speak the heritage language? If so, how?
9. If you spoke the heritage language growing up, in what *situations* did you use it? (e.g. with parents, at Saturday school, in church, etc.)
10. Did you have access to heritage language books, comic books or media (movies/music) while growing up?
11. Were there times when you helped your parents by “brokering” (translating or interpreting) in English? Please explain.
 - 11A. If Yes, did your other siblings also broker for your parents?
 - 11B. Are your siblings bilingual today?
 - 11C. Do you think brokering had any effect on the development of your heritage language?
 - 11D. In general, how did brokering for your parents affect you?
12. Did you have an interest in the heritage language or heritage culture while growing up?
13. Did you identify with your heritage culture while growing up? Was there any conflict of status?
14. At what age did you express an interest in learning more about your heritage culture? Please explain.
15. Have you ever visited or lived in the county of your family’s origin? If so, for how long and for what purpose?

Current Use of the Heritage Language

16. Please classify your level of bilingualism. You may circle one or more

(A) **Passive/Receptive Bilingual**-A person who is a native speaker in one and is capable of understanding but not speaking another language

(B) **Dominant Bilingual**-A person being more proficient in one of the two languages (in most cases native-like)

(C) **Balanced Bilingual**-Someone who is more or less equally proficient in both languages, but will not necessarily pass for a native speaker in both languages

(D) **Equilingual**-Someone who passes in any situation as a native speaker

17. How do you feel about being bilingual or being able to use both your heritage language and English?

18. Can you read or write in your heritage language?

19. Currently, do you use your heritage language in your daily life? When or Where?

20. Do you feel comfortable speaking your heritage language? When/where do you feel most comfortable?

21. What factors do you believe may have contributed to your ability to maintain or develop your heritage language ability?

22. Do you believe there is a relationship between heritage language abilities and ethnic identity?

Lisa Shum is currently an ESOL teacher at Ellen Glasgow Middle School in Fairfax County, Virginia. She is a recent graduate of the TESOL/Applied Linguistics programs at Teachers College, Columbia University. Her research interests include bilingualism and teacher education.