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## **HERITAGE LANGUAGE USE AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION: A STUDY OF TWO KOREAN- AMERICAN BILINGUAL ADOLESCENTS**

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**Annotation.** This study examines heritage language use and identity construction of two Korean-American bilingual adolescents who have acquired a high level of proficiency in the heritage language. An analysis of the interview narratives showed that the high level of their heritage language proficiency played a crucial role in understanding the heritage culture and its people, developing a strong sense of self, and building social relationships with members of the heritage language and mainstream communities. In addition, it was found that their ethnic identities were co-constructed and reshaped over time not only by their individual choices but also by various sociocultural factors — the environment, their surroundings, and their relationships with others. However, although both participants agreed that their heritage language and culture were fundamental parts of their identities, the forces and processes that shaped each participant's identities were different. One participant developed his dual identities by maintaining cultural boundaries and group differentiation whereas the other participant tried to combine two cultural characteristics in creating a new self, having invested in dual identities — Korean and American — which she would assume in the private and public spheres of her life, respectively. The findings shed light on the complex process of bilingual adolescents' identity construction.

**Keywords:** Heritage language; identity; hybridity; Korean-American bilingual adolescents; Korean language.

### **Introduction**

Because of the increasing immigrant population in the United States (U.S.), researchers and educators have been paying increasing attention to the topic of heritage language (HL) use and learning. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2018), almost 67.3 million residents are foreign-born, and nearly 21.9% of the population aged five and over speaks a language other than English at home. In response to HL speakers' desire to learn the languages of their parents and ancestors, American universities have offered a growing number of "less widely taught language" courses, such as Korean, Chinese, Tagalog, and Vietnamese (Duesen-Scholl, 2003). In this study, HL learners are

referred to as people who have an ethnolinguistic affiliation with the HL at varying levels of language proficiency (Valdés, 2001; Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003). One of the primary reasons for university HL students' enrolling in HL courses is to get back to their roots and discover their ethnic identities (e.g., Kim, 2006; Lee & Kim, 2008).

Identity is closely related to HL use and development, and this relationship is bound to specific sociocultural contexts (Choi, 2015). A number of Korean HL studies suggest that identity and HL proficiency are strongly interrelated, meaning those who are more proficient in their HL tend to embrace and incorporate more elements of their cultural and ethnic backgrounds as an essential part of their identity (e.g., Cho, 2000; Choi, 2015; Kang & Kim, 2012; Kim, 2006; Lee, 2002; Lee & Kim, 2008). Prior research has also shown that many HL students tend to explore their ethnic identities while at university through studying their HL (e.g., Kim, 2020; Park & Choi, 2022; Park & Chung, 2022). Communication with their parents or other family members and ethnic identity were frequently reported as the motive to learn and maintain their HL. For example, Lee and Kim's (2008) study of university students enrolled in a Korean language class at American universities showed that, regardless of their HL proficiency levels, integrative orientation played a more important role than instrumental orientation in their desire to learn the HL. The participants identified most strongly with heritage-related motivational reasons and least strongly with school-related motivational reasons. For the majority of the participants, the Korean language was "the main connector to their roots and their family and an expresser of who they are as a cultural being" (Lee & Kim, 2008, p. 168). Recent studies (e.g., Choi & Yi, 2012; Park, 2022) have also identified K-music and K-drama as motivators for HL learning and maintenance, making the role of Korean popular culture in HL learning an area of further interest and study.

HLs can play a significant role in HL speakers' performance of ethnic identity. One manifestation of ethnic identity is the use of the HL as a marker of ethnic identity. For example, HL speakers express their fluid ethnic identities by drawing on and combining both sides of their linguistic repertoires. A number of studies of Korean-American HL speakers (e.g., Jo, 2001; Kang, 2013) have observed code-switching and language mixing in different contexts.

Moreover, Kim (2020) reported that her Korean-American participants expressed their ethnic identities even when speaking in English by integrating the HL into their English via the use of contemporary Korean slang words. Similarly, Park's (2021) study of 1.5-generation Korean HL speakers in New Zealand illustrated that they mixed Korean and English with siblings and friends, inserting Korean words (e.g., *taptaphay* 'frustrated, stuffy, restricted, repressed') that do not have exact equivalents in English to express specific personal feelings and a shared "Kowi" (Korean-Kiwi) identity.

Although ethnic identity has been investigated in the field of Korean HL education, the majority of this research was carried out with adult learners, including university students. Research conducted on Korean-American adults has primarily focused on the correlation between the degree of ethnic belonging and its effects on HL learning, motivational orientation for HL learning, and language practices (e.g., Cho, 2000; Jo, 2001; Kang, 2013; Kim, 2007; Lee, 2002; Lee & Kim, 2008; Kim, 2020). Little attention has been paid to the experiences of Korean-American adolescents. Although immigrant parents may strive to help their children maintain connections to their HL and heritage culture, the children may experience challenges in the process of learning the HL due to both environmental factors (e.g., an English-dominant environment) and complicated internal identity factors (e.g., a sense of belonging and acceptance by the mainstream and HL groups). Immigrant children, who are raised with influences from both minority and majority cultures and from heritage and dominant languages, face immense pressure to shift to the dominant language of the host society (English in this case), especially after starting school. The shift from the immigrants' HL to English takes place over a number of years, demonstrating a complete language shift within two generations (Wiley, 2001). The shift to the dominant language was documented in research on Korean Americans (e.g., Choi, 2015; Shin, 2005). It is crucial to understand the factors and conditions that contribute to both the maintenance and development of immigrant adolescents' HL and their identity construction.

Using the data collected through narrative interviews, this study seeks to understand the role of HL in adolescents' lives and how they construct their identities, living as they do at the intersection of two cultures and languages.

It focuses on the personal narratives of two Korean-American bilingual adolescents who have developed a high proficiency in their HL, including literacy skills. This study aims to address the following research questions:

1. What roles has the HL played in the Korean-American bilingual adolescents' lives?
2. How do they construct their identities in relation to their HL and culture?

### **Ethnic Identity Development and Hybridity**

The term "identity" refers to our sense of who we are and our relationship to the social world. Identity is not singular and static, but rather multiple, complex, and evolving over time (Kanno, 2003; Norton, 2013). Within the umbrella term "identity," I have focused on ethnic identity because it has particular relevance for adolescents from immigrant backgrounds (Phinney et al., 2001) and is closely related to HL development (Kim, 2007; Lee & Kim, 2008). In this study, I have adopted Phinney's concept of ethnic identity as "a subjective sense of belonging to an ethnic group and the feelings and attitudes that accompany this sense of group membership" (Phinney et al., 2001, p. 136). Although the search for ethnic identity is a complex journey for all, it can be particularly difficult for the offspring of immigrant families who are living in two cultures—the home culture and the mainstream American culture.

A question that has remained unanswered is whether it is possible for bilingual adolescents to hold membership of different cultural groups without being socially or psychologically marginalized. Bhabha (1994) refers to "third spaces" as the places where a process of embracing "hybridity" can take place. Dardner (1995) provides the following definition of "hybridity":

Hybridity here does not represent a relativist notion of culture, but instead challenges the global structures of domination which shape the lives of subordinate groups and creates a space for new formations of cultural identity to take hold (p. 13).

The notion of the “third space” and “hybridity” opens up possibilities for bilingual children of reaching a point in their lives where they can take on multiple, complex and fluid identities while drawing on different discourses and engaging in hybrid linguistic, cultural and social practices.

In discussing how Korean-American bilingual adolescents develop and negotiate their ethnic identity, I have adopted Tse’s (1999) model of ethnic identity development. She examined narratives of Asian-Americans regarding their attitudes and perceptions towards their heritage and majority languages. Tse (1999) proposed that Asian-Americans tend to undergo four major stages of identity development, transitioning from assimilative to additive modes over time. In Stage 1, ethnic unawareness, ethnic minorities are unconscious of their minority status due to limited contact with other ethnic groups. As they enter school and have subsequent involvement with various ethnic groups, they move into Stage 2, ethnic ambivalence/evasion. In this stage, they recognize their minority status and develop ambivalent or negative attitudes towards their own ethnic group. For this reason, they reject being identified with their own ethnic group and prefer to adopt the norms and behaviors of the dominant group. Stage 3, ethnic emergence, begins in adolescence or early adulthood, when ethnic minorities realize that it is difficult to fully become part of the dominant group. Finally, ethnic minorities undergo Stage 4, ethnic identity incorporation, in which they join the appropriate ethnic American group (e.g., Asian-Americans) and embrace themselves as part of their ethnic group. This model does not suggest that every bilingual adolescent undergoes all stages sequentially; rather, it outlines the general steps of ethnic identity development among children from dual cultural backgrounds.

### **The Study**

The participants are two Korean-American bilingual high school students whose parents immigrated to the U.S. from South Korea. I have referred to the participants as Hana and Junsoo (pseudonyms). Hana was born and raised in Honolulu, Hawaii. At the time of data collection, Hana was in the tenth grade. Junsoo was born and raised in Oakland, California, and was in his last year of high school. Both Hana and Junsoo speak in Korean with their

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parents who have very limited English proficiency. Hana acquired Korean literacy skills through attending a Korean community school for approximately ten years. Junsoo has studied the Korean language formally for over three years as part of the regular curriculum during his high school years. At the time of data collection, he was enrolled in a fourth-year (advanced level) Korean language course.

In terms of participant recruitment, I used a purposeful sampling approach (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) to recruit participants who had attained an advanced level of HL proficiency and could engage in an open conversation with me about HL- and identity-related issues. I first became acquainted with Hana at a Korean community school in Hawaii where I taught an intermediate-level Korean language course for American-born Korean students. She was a student of my colleague who taught an advanced-level Korean language course. I occasionally helped Hana when she had Korea-related questions and talked to her about her daily life at the HL school, which helped build friendly, trusting relationships with her prior to conducting an interview. I met Junsoo in a high school in San Francisco, California, which I visited for a week for classroom observations. He was one of the most active students in his advanced-level Korean language class, and he had a background of Korean heritage, which motivated me to learn more about his experiences in learning his HL. Junsoo was a very friendly and polite Korean student who showed me around his school and shared information on his interests, family, and San Francisco during my visit. As a migrant whose mother tongue is Korean, I also shared prior to the interview my personal background and experiences teaching Korean to HL students at an HL school and how these experiences motivated me to study HL learners' identity. Through these interactions, we thus got to know each other and built rapport, making it easier for Junsoo to share his experiences openly in the subsequent interview.

In this study, narrative inquiry was used to understand what conditions and factors made it possible for bilingual individuals to develop their HL skills and how they incorporated their bilingual and bicultural abilities into their sense of who they are. According to Pavlenko (2002), personal narratives are important for the field of language education, as they enable learners' and teachers' voices to be heard. She further claimed that, through narratives,

researchers could gain unique insights into “learners’ motivations, investments, struggles, losses and gains as well as into language ideologies that guide their learning trajectories” (Pavlenko, 2002, p. 214). As Pavlenko (2002) points out, narratives are largely influenced by social, cultural and historical factors as well as by the relationship between the storyteller and the interlocutor. Before the interviews were conducted, the researcher engaged in informal conversations with each participant about their life in general; this helped to build a rapport, thus making it easier for participants to openly share their experiences with me. Interviews were conducted with each participant for approximately two hours, the aim being to elicit information about their childhood experiences, HL maintenance and development, language use, attitudes towards the HL and the English language, experiences with social networks, community involvement, and identities. During the interviews, the participants were allowed to speak in both Korean and English.

The interview data were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed qualitatively using an inductive thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The procedure started with initial coding, which involved becoming familiar with the dataset’s content and coding the data line-by-line by searching for specific data segments deemed relevant to the research questions. The second step entailed categorizing the codes which were related to each other in order to create larger categories. These categories were then organized into broader themes. A brief summary of the preliminary findings was given to the participants, who checked it for accuracy (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

## **Findings**

In this section, I discuss the participants’ HL-related experiences, including their reasons for HL maintenance, the role of HL in their lives and factors that contributed to their HL development. The participants were found to have positive attitudes towards HL use, maintenance and development which were largely influenced by their attitudes to the language of their parents, and they perceived the HL to be naturally connected to their cultural and ethnic identity. Attaining a level of competence in the HL, having grown up with sufficient opportunities for HL use both inside and outside the home, had a positive

impact on participants' communication and relationships with their families, their social interactions with other HL speakers, and their construction of positive bicultural identities.

### **The Role of HL in Korean-American Adolescents' Lives**

When asked to describe the reasons for their maintenance of the HL and its importance in their lives, Hana and Junsoo responded that they have learned the Korean language because it is part of their heritage. They reported that they have always spoken in Korean with their parents at home and in public. Hana viewed Korean as a vital part of herself; developing HL skills gave her a sense of completeness. Hana stated:

Knowing and speaking the Korean language is so important to me, because it is my background, it is my culture. It is important to know about my own culture. If I don't, it's like I don't know a part of myself. I don't get to fully understand who I am and where I am from.

The HL played a significant role in enabling Hana to be connected to her roots and to learn about her cultural heritage.

An analysis of the participants' narratives showed that the HL was associated with family values and cultural affiliations. Hana mentioned that improving her ability to speak the HL was particularly important because of her strong desires for communicating effectively and building a solid relationship with her parents. Despite her high proficiency in the HL, Hana's effort to improve her Korean was never-ending as she increasingly encountered challenges in communicating with her parents, as she got older, such as expressing her emotions more deeply. Hana reported:

My parents are first generation, so they don't speak English. So, in order to communicate with them, I need to use Korean ... I'm very attached to my mom. I talk to her a lot. I tell her almost everything that's going on in my life. It's hard to communicate if you don't know Korean, right? That's why I want to continue improving my Korean, 'cause right now, it is very hard for me to communicate with my mom, about my feelings and stuff. So, I would like to learn more about [how to



express my feelings] so that I can hopefully have an easier time communicating with my parents.

Hana made an effort to practice Korean with her parents at home:

It is important to practice what you have learned in school. What you are learning in school is usage—how to say things. Some kids learn Korean at Saturday school, but when they go home, they speak English to their parents. They don't practice. They may know a lot, but they don't apply it to real life. Their ability to speak Korean is different from that of people who practice it every day. I always speak Korean at home, and I make sure I practice what I learn with my parents.

Hana stressed the importance of utilizing what she has learned in class to develop a high level of proficiency in the HL.

In discussing the reasons for learning Korean, Junsoo also emphasized the crucial role of his HL in strengthening a bond with his parents. According to him, speaking the language of his parents is an inherent responsibility. Through communicating with his mother in Korean, Junsoo transmitted a sense of family intimacy and felt a high sense of self-esteem and satisfaction, as evidenced below.

My parents are from Korea. I'm their son. Of course, I should speak Korean. It's very important to communicate with your parents, right? I communicate a lot with my mom because I can speak Korean. I express my feelings to her by saying 'I love you, mom' in Korean. I feel good about myself.

Junsoo's mother's strong desire for preserving her HL and passing it down to her son and future generations also contributed to Junsoo's positive attitudes towards maintaining and improving his HL.

My mom said 'Junsoo, you're Korean. You have to carry the Korean language with you until you die.' My mom also stressed that I must teach Korean to my own children in the future. I think the reason is because, based on her experiences living in the U.S., a lot of children in my generation cannot speak Korean.

The HL serves not only as a tool that connects the Korean–American bilingual adolescents to their parents, but also as a bridge between English-speaking society and their parents. Hana and Junsoo mentioned that their immigrant parents have often worked long hours and have not had the same time and opportunities as themselves to learn English. Thus, both Hana and Junsoo have had much experience of translating and interpreting written and face-to-face communication from English to Korean for their parents, in a variety of contexts, including when dealing with bills, attending doctor’s visits, and communicating with their teachers and the teachers of their siblings. According to Cho (2000), Korean–American bilingual adolescents can build a trusting relationship with their parents through the process of “language brokering”, which is “an act of interpreting or translating a language for another” (p. 346). Hana acknowledged the equal importance of her English and Korean abilities in her life, because she needed to speak two languages fluently in order to help her parents interact with English-speaking individuals. She reflected on her experience:

Sometimes in everyday life, there are problems; like when something’s wrong with the bills, I have to help my mom. Usually it’s about my sister. I have a younger sister, and when there are parent-teacher conferences, and the teacher has to tell my mom how my sister is doing [in school], I need to translate for her. That’s why it is important to learn both [Korean and English]. Both are equally important to me.

Junsoo attributed his success in attaining a high level of proficiency in Korean to his translating and interpreting experiences. Playing the role of a language broker to his parents provided him with opportunities to utilize his bilingual skills in a variety of social contexts beyond his comfort zone and helped him to further improve his HL skills, such as expanding his Korean vocabulary and range of expressions. He stated:

My parents cannot speak English at all. My father knows a little though. Since I was very little, I have had to translate things for my parents. When my mom visited the doctor, even if I was five years old, I had to explain to my mom what the doctor was saying in Korean. That’s how I improved my Korean. If there were documents that my mom couldn’t understand, like tax forms, I had to help her with that. Looking back, translating for

my parents played an important role. It helped me to become better at Korean.

The eldest children in immigrant families tend to experience more of the burdens—as well as the potential benefits—of language brokering. While their experiences of language brokering might have given Junsoo and Hana a sense of being heavily burdened (since language brokering involves high stress situations), it is evident that the same experiences resulted in increased levels of competence in their HL, closeness to the family, and responsibility as cultural and linguistic mediators.

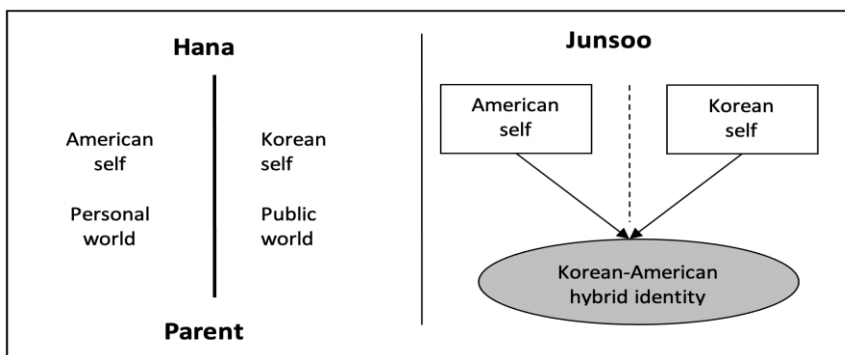
## Identity Construction

In this section, I discuss how the participants constructed their identities in relation to their HL and culture. I particularly focus on the participants' identity development by describing the different processes by which Hana and Junsoo developed their ethnic identities, and the specific ways in which they made sense of their HL and cultural learning as integral elements of their identities. The narratives demonstrate that their identity is not static but rather dynamic, ever-changing and complex, and that identity development is a process resulting from interactions with others and the environment.

### *Hana: Dual Identities.*

**Figure 1**

*Different Processes of Identity Construction*



The HL and culture played a crucial role in both participants' identity construction; however, the processes of their identity formation were different. As seen in Figure 1 above, Hana formed her dual cultural identities by creating and maintaining a cultural boundary, whereas Junsoo tried to integrate two cultural characteristics into building his sense of self. For example, while Hana reported speaking exclusively in Korean with her parents and Korean community members, she used English with her friends, peers and schoolteachers. She elaborates on her dual identities below:

I have both American and Korean styles. For example, when I'm in school or when I hang out with my friends, I'm mostly American, but when I'm at home, when I'm with my parents and other family members, I'm very Korean.

My friends are very Americanized. I am as well when I'm around them... I'm more Korean than they are, but I'm no less American. It does not make me become less American. People see me as both. Maybe, when it comes to style and culture, I'm more American. More like dress sense and personality—how I act towards others.

Based on Hana's interview data, the reason why she tried to maintain separate facets of her identity and delineate the two different social contexts was to avoid having a clash of identities.

Hana reported having experienced communication problems with her mother because of different cultural values between her parents and herself. Hana stated:

Most of the problems I have with my parents arise from cultural differences. I think Korean parents are not aware of American culture. For example, all of my friends wear flip-flops. But, my mom said Korean people don't like me wearing them. In Hawaii, everyone wears them, right? All of our cultural problems are about small things and my parents don't understand that.

As shown by Hana's interview extract, HL learners living in two different cultures can encounter conflicting beliefs and assumptions about who they are and where they belong to. They may harbor inner tensions due to different expectations of linguistic competence, identities, and their cultural and linguistic preferences, as well as struggles with issues of membership in both

the HL and the host societies. In the case of Hana, her parents' cultural values and background conflicted with her cultural orientation. Developing dual identities was one way for Hana to deal with these issues.

***Junsoo: Hybrid Identity.*** The notion of fluid and evolving identities is substantiated by Junsoo's case. He transitioned from ethnic ambivalence to ethnic emergence as he reached adolescence. According to Junsoo, during his childhood, he had negative feelings towards using and learning his HL due to his parents' foreign accents and Korean regional dialects. Junsoo's HL learning process revealed "confusion and struggle with language authorities such as standard forms of speaking and writing" (Jo, 2001, p. 39). This negative perception towards his HL prevented him from developing a positive Korean ethnic identity.

When I was very young, my mom used to emphasize that I'm Korean. However, I replied to her 'I'm not Korean, I'm American'. At that time, I didn't like the Korean language. When my mom spoke Korean to me, she pronounced things in a funny way, in a Korean way. For example, she says 'copi' instead of 'coffee'. I hated hearing that sound. I told my mom 'it's not COPI. Say COFFEE'. I guess that was the reason why I didn't like the Korean language.

My mom is from Busan, Korea. She spoke Busan dialect to me. When I was young, I also spoke Busan dialect ... Back then, I hated Korean because it sounded very awkward. My dad is from a different place. Somewhere on Jeju Island. The mixture of my mom's and my dad's dialects sounded very confusing. The sounds were inconsistent and the vocabulary was different too. So, I asked my dad 'can you please speak normal Korean?'

However, Junsoo's attitude towards the Korean language changed dramatically after he entered a high school located in the culturally diverse community of San Francisco, away from his original hometown of Oakland. His positive view of his HL was influenced by several significant social factors, such as moving to an ethnically diverse community with a higher number of Asian ethnic groups, having sufficient interaction with peers of the same ethnicity, and taking Korean language courses with other ethnic peers in school. Junsoo related how he developed his Korean identity during adolescence:

Before I moved to San Francisco, I used to go to school in Oakland. The majority of students in my elementary and middle schools were African-American students. I didn't see many Korean students there. I had only one Korean friend whose name was Se-jin. Then I came to this high school. I was recruited by this school. Since moving here, I have felt comfortable attending school. I have many Korean friends now as well as other Asian friends. By interacting with them, I have come to realize that I'm Korean.

There were not many places teaching Korean where I grew up. There were no Korean courses in my elementary and middle schools. This school is the only one I know. If you go to church, you can learn Korean, but I don't go to church often. After entering this high school, I was told to choose a foreign language to learn. There were many options, including Japanese and Chinese, but I decided to take Korean so that I can learn how to write and read and to enhance my vocabulary.

While Hana seemed to construct binary Korean and American identities, Junsoo created a third space where his Korean and American cultures and languages can be merged and interwoven. Hana's Korean language use and identity development were highly dependent on her interaction with her parents; however, Junsoo developed his unique ethnic identity by interacting with both Korean and non-Korean peers.

For example, Junsoo has been learning the HL with a large group of non-Korean students in the classroom setting for over three years. Socializing with non-Korean peers while learning the Korean language has helped Junsoo improve and appreciate his HL skills. Junsoo stated that his non-Korean ethnic peers consider him a language resource and have asked him for help on many occasions. These experiences have inspired him to volunteer to tutor Korean to non-Korean students regularly in his school. By teaching non-Korean friends his HL, Junsoo has become an expert in the language and gained a sense of pride and empowerment. Teaching his HL to non-Korean students has created a unique place for him to embrace hybrid language practices (e.g., Kang, 2013; Jo, 2001). Junsoo explained:

It's good to practice Korean with others. I think it's better than learning alone. I have several friends who come to ask me for help. I tutor several people. You know the boy who just came by and said hello? He is Chinese, and I help him with his Korean.

When I tutor, I try to explain things in a simple and creative way using my knowledge of English. It's hard to teach Korean letters, but, for example, if I tell my friends the Korean letter 'ㄱ' has an equivalent sound to the English 'g', then they just get it right away. Also, the Korean letter "ㅏ" is very tricky, it's easy to misspell it. So, I tell my friend to remember it as an English "H". By helping others, I learn a lot. I get to find out areas of my knowledge which are lacking. I can study more about them.

In addition, Junsoo reported that he has actively participated in the Korean club in his high school. This Korean club was established by parents, staff and students who were interested in promoting the study of Korean language and culture through various academic and social activities. Junsoo mentioned that he has participated in Korean cultural activities with other members and has regularly attended the meetings in order to keep up to date with information on Korean cultural and social issues. Therefore, the Korean club has played a significant role in affirming the uniqueness of his own culture and shaping his positive opinions towards his HL and culture. The Korean club creates a comfortable environment for both Korean and non-Korean members to co-participate and promote mutual understanding and cultural exchange, as he describes below:

We have a Korean club in our school. This Korean club has unique characteristics. We have many Korean members, but the majority of our members are from non-Korean ethnic backgrounds, and the president of our club is a student of Chinese decent. We meet once every other week. We learn about the Korean language, history and culture. For example, we watch Korean movies and have follow-up discussions. We also do a lot of cultural activities to celebrate Korean food, games and traditional holidays. Last week, several Korean parents came to our school to teach us how to make the Korean dish Kimbap [Korean seaweed rice rolls]. Many parents, teachers and students participated. There was no extra room in the classroom. It was a really fun and meaningful experience.

## **Discussion**

This study examined HL use and identity construction among two Korean-American bilingual adolescents who have acquired a high level of

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proficiency in the HL. There have been a number of studies in the field of HL education investigating Korean-American bilinguals' reasons for studying the HL, many of which relate to communication with family and community (e.g., Cho, 2000; Kang, 2013; Kim, 2006; Kim, 2020; Lee, 2002; Lee & Kim, 2008; Park & Choi, 2022; Park & Chung, 2022; Shin, 2005). Similarly, the participants in this study have learned their HL in order to more effectively communicate with their families and to maintain their cultural heritage and construct their identities as Korean. Several factors have contributed to the participants' successful HL development. These factors include (1) the Korean-American adolescents' strong desires for building a solid relationship with their parents, (2) their long-term experiences of translating and interpreting for their parents, (3) their extensive use of their HL in various social settings, including formal contexts (e.g., Korean language classrooms), and (4) their parents' ongoing support and positive attitude towards preserving their HL and passing it down to their children.

An analysis of the interview narratives highlighted several key features in the identity development of the two Korean-American bilingual adolescents. First, they experienced emerging and multiple identities as they moved from childhood to adolescence (Kanno, 2003; Shin, 2005). Their ethnic identities were co-constructed and reshaped over time not only by their individual choices but also by various sociocultural factors—the environment, their surroundings, and their relationships with others. Second, the participants' HL and culture were core elements of their identities (Lee, 2002). The high level of HL proficiency of one of the participants played a crucial role in understanding the heritage culture and its people, developing a strong sense of self, and building social relationships with members of the HL and mainstream communities (Cho, 2000). Third, the participants' narratives have given insights into cultural conflicts that HL learners may experience with their parents due to different expectations and cultural values between the home environment and mainstream society.

The findings demonstrated that although both participants agreed that their HL and culture were fundamental parts of their identities, the process of forming an identity was different. As seen in the participants' narratives, Hana developed her dual cultural identities by maintaining cultural boundaries and



group differentiation whereas Junsoo tried to combine two cultural characteristics in creating a new self. Junsoo's case is similar to other young Korean-American adults in Kim's (2020) study who recreated new and fluid ethnic identities and were engaged with their "possible selves" through drawing on their HL. Hana seemed to have invested in dual identities—Korean and American—which she would assume in the private and public spheres of her life, respectively. She seemed to have clear ideas regarding when, where and with whom she can use and practice her two languages and cultures. For her, Korean and American languages and cultures were mutually exclusive and served different roles and functions. On the other hand, Junsoo constructed a hybrid identity by creating and using unique "third space" (Bhabha, 1994) for him to connect with his heritage and embrace hybrid language and cultural practices.

The findings offer practical implications. As previous research (e.g., Kim, 2020) and this study have shown, the HL plays a critical role in HL speakers' identity construction and allows for the construction of the third space and positive and hybrid ethnic identities, thereby suggesting the importance of bi/multilingual approaches to HL speakers' identity. In order to facilitate their own identity formation and lessen the inner conflicts and tensions in searching for a comfortable sense of self, bilingual adolescents should be encouraged and supported to take ownership of their bicultural and bilingual knowledge and become active agents in reinventing their sense of self. Providing spaces for creating a hybrid identity (Jo, 2001; Kang, 2013; Kim, 2021) in educational settings can be a first step towards achieving this goal. In order to assist students in this process, it is important for immigrant parents and teachers to value children's bilingual and bicultural knowledge and to provide room for more creative and inclusive hybrid language and cultural practices (Davis et al., 2005). For instance, teachers can allow students to discover different genres of writing wherein bilingual children's two languages can be utilized to create a hybrid text. Exposing students to Asian-American works of literature which present role models of Asian-American descent for children and offer a forum for open discussion could also be helpful. In addition, teachers and school administrators may consider incorporating students' diverse cultures into the school curriculum by integrating Asian-American

diasporic experiences and identities into cultural studies courses. This would help not only Asian-American students but also non-Asian mainstream students to improve their understanding of the historical and contemporary experiences of Asian Americans who make up a large share of the overall population.

### **Conclusion**

The study focused on the processes of identity development and role of HL in the lives of two Korean-American bilingual adolescents who have acquired a high level of proficiency in the HL. In the light of the study, future studies may consider HL learning and identity among diverse HL learner groups. The two participants described in this study are exceptional learners who have achieved a high degree of proficiency in the HL through utilizing various resources available in the diasporic environments where they grew up. Hawaii and San Francisco, where Korean and Asian-American communities are well established, served as uniquely effective environments for HL learning and identity development. The participants had relatively easy access to the Korean communities, peer social networks, and informal and formal Korean language instruction at home and in community-based schools and mainstream schools. All of these resources helped each participant construct and re-construct their identities in relation to their HL and heritage culture. As the experiences discussed here may not be representative of HL learners' lives in general, future studies should extend this line of narrative research by focusing on HL learners with different backgrounds, language abilities and language attitudes. Such efforts will contribute to offering a more in-depth analysis of the complex connection between HL and identity, and a more nuanced understanding of HL learners' identity formation.

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**PAVELDĖTOSIOS KALBOS VARTOJIMAS IR TAPATYBĖS  
KŪRIMAS: DVIEJŲ DVGUBOS PILIETYBĖS DVIKALBIŲ  
KORĖJIEČIŲ–AMERIKIEČIŲ PAAUGLIŲ TYRIMAS**

**Anotacija.** Šiame tyrime nagrinėjamas dviejų dvgubą pilietybę turinčių dvikalbių korėjiečių–amerikiečių paauglių, įgijusių aukštą kalbų mokėjimo lygį, paveldėtosios kalbos vartojimas ir tapatybės kūrimas. Interviu pasakojimų analizė parodė, kad aukštas jų paveldėtosios kalbos mokėjimo lygis atliko lemiamą vaidmenį suprantant paveldo kultūrą ir jos žmones, kuriant stiprų savęs suvokimą ir užmezgant socialinius santykius su paveldėtosios kalbos ir pagrindinės bendruomenės nariais. Be to, nustatyta, kad jų etninės tapatybės kaitai ir perkūrimui ilgainiui įtakos turėjo ne tik asmeniniai pasirinkimai, bet ir įvairūs sociokultūriniai veiksniai – aplinka, gyvenamoji vieta ir santykiai su kitais asmenimis. Tačiau nors abi tyrimo dalyvės sutiko, kad jų paveldėtoji kalba ir kultūra yra esminės jų tapatybės dalys, kiekvienos dalyvės tapatybę formavusios jėgos ir procesai buvo skirtingi. Viena tyrimo dalyvė savo dvgubą tapatybę kūrė išlaikydama kultūrinės ribas ir grupinę diferenciaciją. Kita tyrimo dalyvė, kurdama naująjį „aš“, stengėsi sujungti abiejų šalių kultūrinės charakteristikas: kurdama savo dvgubą tapatybę – išlaikyti korėjietės tapatybę privataus gyvenimo sferoje, o amerikietės tapatybę – viešojoje gyvenimo sferoje. Gauti rezultatai atskleidžia sudėtingą dvikalbių paauglių tapatybės kūrimo procesą.

**Pagrindinės sąvokos:** korėjiečių ir amerikiečių dvikalbiai paaugliai; korėjiečių kalba; identitetas; hibridiškumas.