Korean heritage students and language literacy: A qualitative approach

Julie Damron, Justin Forsyth
(Brigham Young University)

ABSTRACT

This paper is a qualitative study of the experiences of Korean heritage language learners (KHLLs) with literacy (reading and writing), particularly before they enter the college-level heritage language classroom. Previous research, both qualitative and quantitative, has addressed the overall language background of KHLLs, including oral and aural proficiency and writing and reading ability, as well as demographic information (such as when the student immigrated to the United States) in relation to language test scores. This study addresses KHLL experiences in the following six areas as they relate to student perceptions and attitudes toward their own heritage language literacy: language proficiency, motivation for learning, academic preparedness, cultural connectedness, emotional factors, and social factors. Fourteen undergraduate students at a university in the western United States participated in a convenience sample by responding to a 10-question survey. Trends in responses indicated that KHLLs entered the classroom with high integrational motivation and experienced great satisfaction with perceived progress in literacy, but students also expressed regret for having missed childhood learning experiences that would likely have resulted in higher proficiency. These experiences include informal and formal instruction in the home and formal instruction outside of the home.

Key Words
Korean literacy, heritage language literacy, Korean heritage language learners

Introduction

Following the 1965 Hart-Celler Act banning immigration quotas, the number of immigrants from countries around the world to the United States, especially those from East Asia, increased dramatically. Koreans are among the top five largest immigrant populations in the United States. In 2000, the United States population included approximately 1.41 million Korean Americans. According to a 2005 United States Census Bureau survey, over 430,000 of the ethnic Koreans living in the United States were born in this country; another 970,000 were foreign born. Recent increases in enrollment by heritage learners in university Korean language classes are believed to result, at least in part, from the passage of this 1965 legislation (Lee and Kim, 2008, p. 160).

Successfully learning and maintaining their heritage language is a concern for many Korean Americans. Community-based Korean language weekend schools for heritage learners outnumber similar schools for Chinese or Japanese; according to one report, more than 1,000 Korean heritage language (HL) schools exist in the United States, compared to more than 600 Chinese schools and 50 Japanese schools (Kondo-Brown & Brown, 2008, p. 4). Korean heritage language learners (KHLL) also make up the majority of students in most college-level Korean language programs (E. J. Kim, 2006). Despite these facts, as Lee and Kim (2008) point out, "second generation Korean Americans have been found to have one of the lowest rates of HL proficiency in comparison to other Asian American groups in the United States" (p. 160). This is perhaps due, in part, to the low degree of second-language transfer that occurs between such syntactically and grammatically different languages as English and Korean. How to address the needs and goals of these heritage learners is and will continue to be of interest to business organizations and government agencies with international foci, Korean and other heritage language educators, and heritage learners themselves.

As with any heritage language population, the skills of KHLLs vary tremendously based on experiences in the home and opportunities for education and practice in speaking, listening, reading, and writing in the heritage language. The attention college-level Korean language departments give to the study and effective teaching of heritage language learners also varies. In the university where this study was conducted, beginning- to advanced-level heritage learners attended Korean language classes with other students learning Korean. In the beginning and intermediate level classes, many heritage language students come with limited to good proficiency in speaking and listening but sometimes little or no ability in reading or writing in Korean.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of KHLLs with regard to reading and writing. The authors hope that such a study will help educators better understand the needs of their heritage students—and thus that KHLL education practices will be able to better accommodate the needs of the students. Yokoyama (2000), a heritage Russian teacher, wrote of the need for conducting both qualitative and quantitative research in heritage language teaching, saying, "A lack of theoretical knowledge and research on heritage speaker pedagogy appears to be a problem shared by all languages taught at the college level" (2000, p. 467). Valdez (1995) wrote, "research on the expansion of bilingual range, second dialect acquisition, language maintenance and the transfer of reading and writing skills in adult bilinguals is almost nonexistent" (p. 322). Furthermore, Eun Joo Kim (2006) suggested a gap in the research relating to the specific needs of KHLLs and their characteristics that would allow educators and researchers to compile a complete profile of them. This paper seeks to provide a general linguistic background of Korean HLLs with specific attention to reading and writing—thus beginning to address these three calls. Through administering, collecting, and analyzing a 10-question survey about KHLLs' experiences with reading and writing as children and teenagers, the authors of this study sought to discover trends in how

KHLLs feel about reading and writing, what memories they have of learning to read and write, whether those memories are positive or negative, and how their skills and confidence in reading and writing has changed over time.

Literature Review

The definition of HLL that the authors of this study will use is that put forth by Valdés (2000), namely, a "student of the language raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speaks or merely understands the heritage language, and who is to some degree bilingual in English and the heritage language" (p. 375). Valdés also wrote that, "in general, [these students] receive no instruction in the heritage language. They thus become literate only in the majority language." However, as will be shown, many Korean heritage language learners have had some formal instruction outside of the home.

While it is impossible to make a profile of "the" KHLL (Hornberger and Wang, 2008, pp. 5-6), it is useful to consider the varieties of experience that most KHLLs face. According to Webb & Miller (2000, p. 47), six factors have the greatest effect on the success of heritage language learning: linguistic proficiency, motivation, academic preparedness, cultural connectedness, emotional factors, and societal factors. Research on these six factors will help create an effective general profile of KHLLs that can provide a basis for further research and practice.

Linguistic Proficiency

Reading and writing. While KHLLs are sometimes quite proficient in listening and speaking, they frequently lack confidence and skill in writing and speaking. Perplexed by limited register and domain experience,

KHLLs are often unfamiliar or uncomfortable using the Korean alphabet. For example, in one study conducted by Lee and Kim (2008), Korean respondents were asked to self-assess themselves and their ability in various language tasks. The respondents rated "writing sentences in the language" as the most difficult of seven language tasks. One purpose of this study is to explore the area of student perceptions of writing and reading more thoroughly.

Listening and speaking. It is generally believed that KHLLs demonstrate high proficiency in listening and speaking in comparison to their non-heritage counterparts (H. Kim, 2001, 2002). KHLLs vary in the listening and speaking ability (E. J. Kim, 2006); many in undergraduate language programs can understand with at least intermediate proficiency before studying the language formally, and speak with limited proficiency, depending on the vocabulary and syntactic skills they have acquired. Others enter the classroom with almost no knowledge of the heritage language. Those who can understand and speak also have a high degree of internal grammar, but often have taken less advantage of the opportunity to speak than to listen. For example, some KHLLs educated in the United States whose parents speak to them in Korean have, anecdotally, indicated that they respond to their parents and have conversations with their siblings in English.

Furthermore, as with many other languages, Korean is a language with varying degrees of formality attached to various situations, ranging from the least formal (intimate style) used with family and close friends, which is most commonly understood and used by KHLLs, to the most formal and distant, to be used with a person of very high status. For this reason, some KHLLs face challenges when they learn "standard" or "middle" Korean taught in the classroom because students speak only in an informal style in the home (E. J. Kim, 2006). According to Kimi Kondo-Brown (2008), acquisition of the formal variety of Korean is a priority. Regarding

these varying domains for speakers of heritage languages, Chevalier (2004) wrote, "For bilingual speakers in immigration, domain is a key issue."

As described by Chevalier (2004), regular patterns of intergenerational language attrition occur in KHLLs, such as borrowing from, blending with, and interference from English, resulting in a gradual language shift. According to E. J. Kim (2006), most high-proficiency KHLLs can be considered "subtractive" bilinguals, meaning one of their languages (usually English) remains dominant. Furthermore, some KHLLs experience anxiety about the acceptability of the particular dialect of Korean they learned in the home. According to Jo (2001) and E. J. Kim (2006), many KHLLs struggle in Korean language classes more than other foreign languages because they have higher expectations regarding their own proficiency in Korean.

Many of these challenges relating to legitimacy and formality transfer to the spheres of reading and writing. E. J. Kim (2003) collected writing samples from heritage and non-heritage students, and compared each group based on the number of samples and the type of error. She found that while "there was no significant different between the two groups of learners in particle errors…the non-heritage students had greater difficulty in dealing with discourse-related features in Korean" (46-47). Thus, background in the spoken word may impact KHLLs written language.

Motivation for Learning

Motivation is important in HL learning and may be the most important factor to success in obtaining a desired proficiency (Lee & Kim, 2008). Lee and Kim (2008) describe two types of motivation: integrational and instrumental. Integrational motivation describes "the desire to become familiar with or even integrate into the society in which the language is used" (p. 161). This concept involves a person's desire to study a heritage language in order to participate more fully in the ethnic community

in which he or she lives live, to communicate with grandparents and extended family, or to connect more deeply with one's racial, ethnic, or nationalistic identity. Instrumental motivation, on the other hand, describes the desire to use language study as a means to obtaining a better job, more prominent social status, higher pay, or completing requirements for graduation. For KHLLs, integrational motivation is generally stronger than instrumental motivation (E. J. Kim, 2006; J-S. Yang, 2003; H. Kim, 2002), though both types are likely to be present in various degrees in different students. According to Lee and Kim (2008), many KHLLs associate relatively little instrumental motivation in language learning; instead, motivations were "clearly integrative, closely tied with affirmation of their ethnic community" (p. 180).

Academic Preparedness

Proficiency in all aspects of Korean (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) correlates most to the extent to which KHLLs use the language in everyday activities (E. J. Kim, 2006). E. J. Kim wrote (p. 186), "Those who use HL frequently and in various ways of listening, speaking, reading, and writing in the HL are likely to maintain a high level of HL proficiency as well." On the other hand, in the same study, E. J. Kim found that among the factors that do not contribute significantly to language proficiency were participation in Korean language schools in the United States and university Korean classes. For most KHLLs, then, current teaching practices contribute little to their heritage language development.

Cultural Connectedness

Similar to academic preparedness, E. J. Kim (2006) found that cultural identity has some impact on KHLLs' success in improving proficiency, but not as much as heritage language use, length of residence in the United States, or schooling in Korea. However, E. J. Kim wrote, "when

asked to provide their views about HL maintenance, a majority of the participants responded that HL maintenance is critical to their ethnic and cultural identity and communication with parents and relatives" (p. 188). The significance of cultural connectedness as a motivating factor and contributor to high HL proficiency is likely to be higher for KHLLs living in areas with large Korean populations, such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, New York City, New Jersey, and Washington, DC.

Emotional Factors

Emotional and psychological factors also play a role in heritage language development. Many Korean Americans find themselves caught in a generation gap between two cultures, which causes them to experience confusion about their place and role in society. For example, Parker (2000) tells the story of Emily, a Korean American caught between the Confucian, patriarchal cultural background of her parents and the American culture of self-identification and discovery. Of her background, the author writes, "For [Emily], on some level, Korean is the language of domestic disputes, reprimands, and childhood beatings. She has every intention of improving her Korean-language ability, but it is unlikely to happen until she develops a more positive perspective on Korean-ness in general" (p. 59). The author wrote that Emily's negative experiences with her parents likely deplete her motivation to obtain higher proficiency in the language. Some research has been conducted on the role of emotional factors in heritage language learning (Hinton, 1999); additional emotional and psychological research in this area may be quite beneficial to heritage language educators.

Societal Factors

Some immigrants perceive English to be the language of "prestige, success, and assimilation" (Giangreco, 2000, p. 61), and therefore

non-English speakers may feel disempowered when they first enter the United States. This and other societal factors are believed to influence heritage language learners' motivation and success.

Children are perhaps the most influenced by peers to reject their heritage languages. Leanne Hinton (1999; p. 23) wrote, "The most important factor in heritage language loss is language rejection by the children themselves." One Korean-American student said, "It was the Korean language, and 'Koreanness' in general . . . that kept me from being 'normal,' isolated me from my peers, and ate away every opportunity to 'belong' with people my age . . . I saw no reason to speak Korean except to keep my parents content enough to leave me relatively alone" (Hinton, 1999; p. 23).

On the other hand, older second-generation KHLLs (high school and college age) feel that it is important to their identity and education to be proficient in Korean. In fact, Korean Americans who cannot write and speak Korean often are looked down upon by their more proficient peers, and the parents of these children are likewise looked down upon by other parents in the Korean community. To illustrate this point, Hinton (1999; p. 27) again quoted a Korean American student: "Whenever relatives would visit I'd always get the same show; first the initial looks of surprise, second the question (Don't you know how to speak Korean?), and finally reprimands of shame and pity from anyone and everyone, even my younger, Korean-speaking cousins." To what extent cultural expectations in the Korean American community apply to reading and writing remains to be studied.

The Present Study

Research Questions

The purpose of the present study is to better understand the experiences

that KHLLs have with reading and writing in Korean before entering university Korean classrooms. The authors wish to determine trends common to these learners that will help teachers of Korean create lessons better suited to the heritage learners in their classrooms. The study addresses the following questions:

1. What perceptions and attitudes do KHLLs have toward reading and writing when they enter the heritage language classroom?
2. How are KHLL attitudes toward reading and writing shaped by their early experiences in the home and at Korean language weekend schools?
3. What do KHLLs commonly experience with reading and writing as they become adults?

Of course, each KHLL enters the Korean language classroom with a unique set of language experiences, to which the Korean language teacher should pay close attention. The questions outlined here are, however, aimed at compiling a profile of a "typical" KHLL who educators may encounter in their classrooms.

Methods

Participants in the present study include 14 undergraduate students of Korean heritage from Brigham Young University, a large private university in the western United States. A ten-question survey was sent to students via email and returned in the same manner. One of the surveyors was a professor in the Korean Department; the other was an undergraduate research assistant. Surveyors solicited present and former students in their Korean language classes as well as in classes taught by other professors in the department. The students represent a response and convenience sample, and thus, while this study, as far as the authors know, is the first to present as a main focus KHLL experiences with literacy in a

qualitative manner, it calls for more methodical research in the future.

Participants

All research subjects are traditional, college-age students. Students range from beginners to high intermediate. Subjects include male and female students with either one or two Korean parents. All students enrolled in Korean language classes by choice, although completion of two years (four semesters) of a foreign language can be used to fulfill a university core requirement for graduation. Each of the fourteen surveys was arbitrarily assigned a number, and those numbers are indicated in parentheses following each quotation in this paper.

Results and Discussion

While individual responses vary, general trends indicate that KHLL students often enter university-level Korean language classes with similar motivations: both positive and negative experiences learning Korean with their families; often negative or insignificant learning experiences at weekend language schools for heritage speakers; and similar attitudes and perceptions of themselves as adults in Korean language classes.

The experiences of two students illustrate these almost universal trends among the students we surveyed, and will serve as examples preceding a more in-depth analysis of individual trends.

First, the responses of these two students suggest that their primary motivation in learning Korean was to connect with their families and their communities. One said, “I feel like I should know more because it’d be a huge way to be closer to my mom and her culture . . . I am proud of my Korean heritage” (10). The other student expressed regret about her acquired level of proficiency in Korean, saying, “To be honest, it’s really frustrating to not be fluent/literate in Korean . . . Korean is

a part of my heritage, but I'm not able to fully live up to that. It's one of the biggest regrets of my life"(6).

Learning Korean in the home also proved typical for these two students (and most of the students surveyed). Both were tutored by their mothers at about the time they began kindergarten. One experience was negative, while the other was positive. One student, who grew up bilingual, said,

> My first encounter with reading and writing in Korean (that I can remember) was when I was very young, maybe six years old. In that time, my mother, realizing her mistake in letting our Korean skills slip away, tried to redeem her mistake by becoming a Korean teacher for me and my siblings. However . . . I resisted having to learn . . . The tutoring didn't last long, though I remember it well enough to know it was a very bad experience. (6)

The other student said,

> [My first encounter with Korean reading and writing] was positive initially—my mom taught me the Korean alphabet when I was in kindergarten and helped me with pronunciation about the same time I was becoming more proficient in reading English. So the basics became very much engrained. (10)

Both students indicated that at least one of their parents read to them when they were little, but more in English than in Korean.

Only one of these students was enrolled in weekend Korean language instruction in community schools as a child, and the experience was negative. This student wrote,

> I did NOT enjoy the many many years I spent struggling through Saturday classes . . . Some of the worst experiences come

> from getting frustrated in Korean school because they expected us to know so much more Korean than I knew and had ever been taught. (10)

While transitioning from younger students to adults, these two KHLLs expressed a sense of pride in becoming proficient in their heritage language while attending a university. One wrote, "The most memorable experiences are when I read something in Korean and understand it" (6). The other wrote,

> I would advise [someone from a similar family background with interest in learning Korean] to take formal classes from a school or university. [It is] crucial that you learn the fundamentals from teachers who are able to coach you in English and present the language in a kind of formulaic manner. (10)

These students describe significant trends related to motivation, family experiences, weekend school experiences, experiences as adults, and other trends that will be examined in more depth. As with the literature review, the six factors that have a large effect on heritage language learning will be addressed, with an emphasis on literacy (reading and writing): linguistic proficiency in reading, writing, listening, and speaking; motivation for learning; academic preparedness; cultural connectedness; emotional factors; and societal factors.

Linguistic Proficiency

Reading and writing. Surveys indicate, as predicted by the preliminary literary review, that KHLLs' experiences with reading and writing are far more limited than are their experiences with listening and speaking. Student responses illustrate this expectation. Students said the following of their Korean reading and writing experiences:

> I grew up illiterate in Korean . . . My first encounter with Korean reading/writing that I remember was at Christmas time. My mom would write our names on the Christmas presents in Korean so we would not know who the gift was supposed to go to . . . I did not know how to read or write until after high school. (2)

> My ability to read and write was nonexistent until this past fall semester. Growing up as a child I only knew how to speak and listen to my parents. (7)

> I can read and write, but there's no element of comprehension; it's literally just being able to spell and pronounce characters . . . My ability to read and write progressed steadily when I was younger and just starting to go through Korean school, however my ability to learn kind of plateau-ed and my skills haven't improved much until this class. (10)

Students indicated varying skill levels in Korean literacy. One student, who entered the heritage language classroom with more advanced literacy skills, said:

> My parents made it a rule to speak, read, and write Korean in our home . . . [They] made it a priority to have lots of storybooks so that we wouldn't run out of things to read in Korean . . . I thought it was so cool that I could read Korean comic books and Korean drama books. Knowing that I made the jump from children's storybooks to read teenage stuff made me more confident in my abilities. (14)

However, this student is one of the few exceptions. While the majority of the KHLLs we surveyed grew up speaking Korean to some degree

in the home and had varying levels of exposure to reading (or being read to from) Korean books as children, very few students had sustained exposure to writing, besides basic instruction in the alphabet and spelling. Therefore, students were generally less confident in writing and reading compared to listening and speaking.

Listening and speaking. Student survey responses illustrate trends introduced in the literary review, namely, that heritage students experienced high proficiency in listening and speaking when compared to their non-heritage classmates. Furthermore, these students were far more confident in the acceptability and appropriateness of their speaking and listening proficiency than they were of their reading and writing skills. Even so, actual skill level and confidence varied greatly among these HL students. One student indicated that this advantage stemmed from her parents making a rule to use only Korean in the home. She said,

> While living under my parents' roof, I think my abilities increased . . . I always came home where we always spoke Korean. (14)

Another student said,

> I am glad I can at least speak and understand a lot, although my reading and writing is not very advanced yet. (7)

A few students indicated having a clear lack of speaking and listening proficiency before entering the classroom. One student said:

> It makes me very aggravated to not understand Korean. I wish I knew what other people said around me, especially when my parents speak Korean. (9)

While students did not explicitly express frustration with adapting to the varying levels of formality or grammar, they sometimes expressed

frustration with their perceived limited vocabulary. While heritage students intuitively understand much of Korean grammar, university-level courses in Korean language can help them translate this understanding to grammar used in reading and writing. Only a few students indicated challenges of dialect legitimacy and proper use of formality in speaking. One said:

> I only took this class in order to correct my "saturi" country accent. Sometimes I do it and sometimes I do not, but I have learned from past experiences that it is not good to use it around people. (7)

This absence of concern regarding legitimacy or adapting to different formalities may be due to the authors' failure to probe into this aspect of language acquisition and proficiency.

Students also experienced a loss of listening and speaking ability when they entered school in the United States and proficiencies began transferring to English. One student said, "My first encounter with Korean was when I was little. It was actually my first language. But as I went to school, I only started speaking English and so . . . I began losing it. (3)

Of particular interest is how listening and speaking proficiency translated into literacy inside and outside of the classroom, and vice versa. One student said, "Understanding the grammar rules [of Korean] has made it so much easier to speak and understand" (5).

Another student with a self-assessed lower speaking and writing proficiency said,

> I don't remember ever struggling with English reading or writing. But Korean, it has been a long thorny road. I attribute that mostly to the fact that I was learning Korean reading and writing without any Korean language background. (2)

Although learning to improve literacy skills can be difficult and requires

practice and new knowledge for heritage learners, they seem to benefit from having any amount of oral and aural proficiency.

Motivation for Learning

As Lee and Kim (2008) found, motivation may be the most important factor in HL learning. Of the two types of motivation, integrational and instrumental, the KHLLs surveyed here experienced the former to a greater degree. Substantiating research presented in the literary review (Lee & Kim, 2008; J-S. Yang, 2003; H. Kim, 2002), almost every student surveyed expressed integrational motivation as the driving factor in their endeavors to improve Korean proficiency and literacy. While some students do wish to improve their Korean literacy for instrumental reasons (e.g., to obtain a better job, to earn more money, to complete graduation requirements), integrational factors were by far the greatest motivators. One student captured the feelings of many KHLLs' motivations when she wrote,

> Not being able to be completely proficient at [Korean] does not [a]ffect me in my daily affairs because I live in the [U]nited [S]tates. However, on an emotional level, it saddens me that I feel like I don't know my heritage completely or cannot express myself fully in my native tongue. Especially when it comes to communicating with family—be it immediate or extended. (11)

The three areas of integrational motivation that applied to KHLL experiences here were (1) understanding personal identity, (2) connecting with family, and (3) participating in the Korean community (Lee and Kim, 2008). Other factors, both instrumental and otherwise, also provided motivation for the KHLLs surveyed.

Understanding personal identity. The range of identification KHLLs

experience with their Korean heritage varies. Some feel that their Korean ethnicity and parentage largely contributes to their personal identity, and thus they feel a deep desire and responsibility to become literate in Korean. Other people of Korean descent lack that desire. One student's response highlighted this trend:

> My brothers also endured Korean school with me, and while they might have been able to read and write a little bit, now, I've no idea if they've retained any of it at all. I imagine that because they learned how to sound out characters when they were really little, they could probably pronounce some basic characters, but they haven't been exposed to very much Korean since quitting Korean school, and have essentially shunned the Korean half of their heritage.
>
> In my family, I've noticed that having a desire to embrace one's Korean heritage and culture and make it a part of one's identity is a big factor in determining the effort that goes into learning/maintaining Korean. Even after we all quit Korean school . . . I tried to take advantage of the opportunities for Korean exposure my life presented me with. Which explains why I'm taking Korean at BYU. My younger brothers on the other hand completely quit Korean when we were no longer forced to attend Korean school. They never speak it, they don't get excited by Korean food . . ., and perceive themselves as being Americans in the sense that they are "Caucasian" and not half Korean. And so they have no interest whatsoever in becoming more fluent in the language. (10)

Another student said, "It is very important in my culture that if you have Korean blood, you know not only how to speak the language but also know the traditions, customs, and history" (7).

The authors of this study recognize that students with little sense of Korean identity would likely not participate in language classes at the university—and consequently, few likely participated in this survey. But many students who were surveyed expressed the hope to "preserve a part of [their] heritage" by becoming more proficient and literate in Korean (5).

Connecting with family. One of the greatest satisfactions KHLLs experience as they learn Korean is an improved ability to communicate with their parents, grandparents, and extended family. Sometimes, too, KHLLs are motivated to study Korean on their own or at a university because their ability to communicate with extended family members is insufficient. One student wrote, "I feel like I should know more because it'd be a huge way to be closer to my mom and her culture" (10). Another student wrote, "I really enjoyed learning to write better in Korean because that meant I would write more meaningful letters to my family. Also, reading became more enjoyable when I realized that it was a way to know my culture in a deeper way" (11). Another student wrote, "I also like being able to talk to my mom and understand her better through her native language" (5).

Participating in the Korean community. KHLLs expressed embarrassment when their literacy proficiency did not meet the expectations their peers and community, and likewise expressed great satisfaction when they were proficient enough to participate in the Korean community. Students said,

> I love being able to read Korean. I used to attend a Korean branch [church congregation] when I lived in Sandy. I remember singing the hymns in Korean. That was one of my favorite things. (3)

> I didn't think much of [not being literate in Korean] because

> I was living in Utah and did not come into contact with Korean[s] very much. When I became more involved with Koreans more [*sic*], it was a little more frustrating not being able to read or write very well, or understand for that matter. (2)
>
> I used to get shy at the Korean branch when asked to read a scripture in front of the whole congregation, but I now feel comfortable doing that (12).

Other factors. Students also cited other factors that contribute to their motivation in learning Korean literacy, namely, the novelty of being able to write notes to siblings and friends and to read simple books, to obtain a better job (while taking advantage of bilingualism in youth), not to be looked down upon by other Koreans, to travel, simply to understand what Koreans around them are saying or to be the most proficient at Korean in certain situations, and/or to gloat over siblings. Responses such as "I enjoy . . . [being] able to read books that are in Korean that I couldn't before" suggest that a sheer sense accomplishment motivates students. While it falls into neither the integrational nor instrumental motivation category, the novelty of being literate and proficient in Korean is a significant motivating factor to which many students referred. Learning so as not to be looked down upon by other Koreans, or to prevent their parents from being looked down upon in the Korean community, was also significant, relates to the integrational motivation of participating in the Korean community, and is explored later in this report.

Academic Preparedness

The majority of KHLLs surveyed indicated that having childhood experiences with Korean language learning, either in a school or home setting, contributed to their language development in positive and/or negative ways. This language instruction included informal and formal

instruction inside the home as well as attendance at weekend Korean language schools in the community. Significantly, students indicated that some of their best memories and experiences with learning to read and write Korean occurred informally in the home under the supervision of their parents. Formal instruction in the home, usually under the direction of the KHLLs' mothers, was sometimes positive and sometimes negative, while formal instruction outside of the home was most often (but not always) a negative experience.

Informal instruction in the home. Student experiences with learning to read and write Korean centered on the home. Students' most positive experiences occurred in interactions with their parents where use of Korean was expected and/or taught. One student, who indicated bilingualism in all four language modes (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) wrote that she "owes" her language skills to her parents making "it a rule to speak, read, and write Korean in our home" (14). In some homes, Korean was the only language used, while in others, parents and children communicated with each other in a mix of Korean and English, each to varying degrees. The degree to which communication in Korean occurred often varied depending on the KHLL's age or their position in the family (first child versus later children). Children born earlier used Korean more frequently in the home than did their younger siblings, and became more proficient. One student wrote,

> I have two older sisters. Growing up, I don't know if it was because she spent the most time with my parents as the oldest child, but [my oldest sister] was the best at reading and writing more than me and my other sister. I think they pushed her to write a journal in Korean. I was the worst out of the three, and I believe it had to do with the fact that I am the youngest, but I am not able to articulate why that is. (11)

Furthermore, the extent of Korean communication sometimes decreased as the KHLL's dominant language transferred to English—a likely consequence of attending American schools. One student wrote:

> When I was really little, [my parents] read me Korean books. As they learned English and as I learned English, they started reading me English books. I loved when my parents read to me in both languages. (3)

Informal literacy instruction generally followed a pattern of parents reading to children and encouraging children to read on their own. While students experienced a mix of Korean and English books, most were read to primarily in English; only a minority of responses indicated that their parents continued to read to their children in Korean after their children started attending school and learning English. Most students, but not all, had positive experiences being read to (and reading) from storybooks with their parents, and indeed, this was likely their first experience with Korean literacy. About these experiences, students wrote:

> My parents were always reading to me before I went to sleep . . . [They] would usually speak English if we were reading a book and speak Korean if they were telling a story off their memory. So I liked both very much. (7)

> Both parents [read to me], and it was in English mostly, with some Korean. My mom usually sang to us in Korean, and we learned those songs. (9)

> When I was very young, my mom would read me children's books in Korean . . . [She] read to me both in English and Korean, though she read in English much more than in Korean. They were good experiences because I loved spending time

> with my parents when I was young. When my mom read in Korean, I never understood what she was saying. I just liked being with her. (12)
>
> [My parents] read to me in Korean. All I remember is that I wanted to learn how to read because I wanted to know what happened in the stories. My mom was a GREAT storyteller so I always loved it. My parents made it a priority to have lots of storybooks so that we wouldn't run out of things to read in Korean. (14)

Students seemed to express little preference regarding the language in which their parents read to them. Perhaps parents chose to read to their children primarily in English because they feared that focusing on Korean would hurt their children's academic performance in American schools. These responses beg the question (and further research): how do Korean story time and language proficiency relate? What are children's attitudes toward their heritage language when story time in the heritage language increases?

Formal instruction in the home. Of the 14 students surveyed, 7 described at least one experience where their Korean mother, determined to help her children become more literate in their heritage language, organized a language study program in the home. Sometimes this involved flash cards and spelling tests to learn vocabulary words, or workbooks and posters to learn how to say and write the Korean alphabet. One student (10) described an experience in the second grade when his mother entered him in a Korean spelling bee and supported his preparations by helping him to memorize the word bank. Another student's mother taught the student on the weekends how to count and write simple words (12). One student, who is quoted in the beginning this section (Results and Discussion), described the experience of formal tutoring in the home as

"a very bad experience" (6). While this student's experience was negative, others were positive or neutral. Most of these tutoring sessions appear to have ceased when the mother realized how difficult it would be for both she and her child—mentally and emotionally—to continue.

Formal instruction outside the home. Most formal instruction outside of the home occurred in Korean language schools conducted on weekends by community organizations, though a few students indicated experiences with reading and writing in other community organizations, such as churches. Six of the 14 students who completed the survey indicated having attended one of these schools at some point in their childhood (without being asked or prompted by the survey to do so). While some students indicated that these schools were very helpful, others viewed their attendance as negative, and gave reasons for their analysis.

One student wrote that the Korean language school (which she calls *hangul hakgyo*, lit: Korean script school) was helpful and demanding:

> When I was younger, there was actually a hangul hakyo that I went to. That helped my Korean a lot. It was pretty much like Korean 202 . . . the hangul hakgyos were amazing and I think that if I kept that up, my Korean reading and writing would be A LOT better. (3)

Another student indicated that weekend school was a positive experience until she discovered that students in the class were at different levels, and most were at a higher level than her:

> I went to Korean school with my siblings for several years when I was little, probably starting when I was six or seven. I started reading and writing then and it was a positive experience until we learned that the other kids in our class already were

fluent at Korean. (4)

Other students' experiences were not so positive. Many of their negative experiences centered on the unrealistic expectations placed on them at the Saturday schools. One said:

> When I was seven [my mother] sent us (my brother and me) to Korean school every Saturday night but I always fell asleep because I wasn't sure what was going on. We would always cry because we didn't want to go. (5)

While some students have positive experiences in Korean language schools, others become overwhelmed with the difficulty of the class and, in their frustration, quit. However, at least one student indicated regretting not working harder in Korean school growing up. A more thorough, methodical study of the effectiveness of weekend Korean language schools may be a useful tool in helping to improve KHLLs' experiences with learning Korean.

Cultural Connectedness

Students' experiences with cultural connectedness supports the aforementioned research ("HL maintenance is important in maintaining cultural and ethnic identity" and cultural connectedness affects motivation and linguistic proficiency). Cultural connectedness was evident in student responses in a variety of ways, including activities such as participating in Korean religious congregations where Korean literacy is expected and taught; working in Korea as English teachers or church representatives; meeting, writing to, or calling Korean relatives (parents, grandparents, cousins, and in-laws) and Korean friends; reading books (mostly children's story books, comic books, and teen fiction); and watching Korean cartoons

and dramas.

One student wrote that being connected to the Korean community inspired him to learn the language (2). Another student wrote that her self-assessed reading and writing skills were very basic, but she felt that her limited proficiency did not affect her daily affairs because she lives in the United States (11). The same student (11) wrote, "Reading became more enjoyable when I realized that it was a way to know my culture in a deeper way." Thus, KHLLs in Korean language classrooms connect with their culture in a variety of ways, and that connectedness inspires them to become more proficient in their heritage language.

Emotional Factors

Emotional experiences associated with a heritage language affect students' motivations. the heritage language teacher will benefit from understanding common KHLL emotional experiences as well as experiences less common to students but equally influential. Emotions common to the group of KHLLs in this survey include a desire and determination to connect with their heritage, a sense of regret for lost opportunities, frustration with the difficulty of the task, pride and satisfaction when they see improvement, and shame when they feel they are below a perceived standard of proficiency expected of people with Korean heritage.

As was outlined in a previous section ("Motivation for Learning"), students expressed a strong desire to connect with their heritage. Improving their proficiency in Korean was both a direct representation of this desire as well as a tool by which they could connect in other ways. Students sought to connect with their personal identity (both as children in a Korean family and as members of the Korean race); their parents, grandparents, and cousins; their culture (books, TV cartoons, and dramas, etc.); and their friends. Students wrote the following in their survey responses:

> In my family, I've noticed that having a desire to embrace one's

> Korean heritage and culture and make it a part of one's identity is a big factor in determining the effort that goes into learning/maintaining Korean. (10)

> Some of the most memorable [encounters with reading and writing in Korean were] the storybooks we had. I remember just reading the stories and feeling I was in a foreign land but it was something that was still close to me somehow. (11)

As has been mentioned, an opposing emotion—apathy—may apply in some cases to other students of Korean heritage who choose not to study the language in university settings.

Similar to student six in the introductory portion of the Results and Discussion section ("…it's really frustrating to not be fluent/literate in Korean . . . Korean is a part of my heritage, but I'm not able to fully live up to that. It's one of the biggest regrets of my life"), a few students expressed a sense of regret for not working harder as children to develop their language skills. In some cases, students felt their parents could have done better at teaching them the heritage language. Indeed, many students in heritage language classes learn from this regret, and took advantage of the opportunity to study their heritage language again.

Frustration was another emotion students expressed in their survey responses. A few students expressed frustration in not being completely fluent or literate in their heritage language—perhaps an unrealistically high expectation for a single class or series of classes. Frustration also resulted from the realization that becoming literate in Korean would be in some ways just as difficult and time-consuming for KHLLs as it is for non-native learners. Sometimes this frustration leads to a hiatus in literacy acquisition that lasts until KHLLs enroll in a university class or receive an opportunity to work in Korea. This frustration exists for KHLLs as well as their parents. For example, one student said, "My

mother tried to teach me to read Korean but it was very difficult so we stopped" (1). Other students wrote,

> [My first encounter with Korean] was difficult. I struggled a lot. And at a certain point I gave up until before I left on my [church assignment to Korea]. (13)

> It's frustrating to me that I'm not completely literate. It's hard for me to know how to spell sometimes, to tell where the spaces should go, or how the grammar should be. When I see return[ed] missionaries [church representatives who worked for two years in Korea] reading and writing at a whole different level, I really envy them and wish I could be better. (3)

As the last student expressed, these feelings of frustration may combine with a sense of envy regarding non-heritage students who have obtained higher levels of proficiency than the KHLL.

On the other hand, while some students expressed the difficulty of learning how to read and write in Korean as children, many also said they did not mind it because it was a chance for them to spend time with their parents. One student, when writing about growing up with a rule that only Korean be used in the home, said, "As a child, I absolutely hated it"; however, her encounter with tutoring from her mother "was positive because I was learning from someone whom I trusted and she taught me with lots of love and care" (14).

Likewise, almost every student expressed great satisfaction and pride when they saw real improvement in their language skills, especially as it pertained to their literacy skills, which they previously perceived to be lacking. The same student referenced above (1), who stopped learning to read as a child because it was difficult, wrote also of her experience learning to read in a university class. She said, "My first time reading . . . felt so good." Another student said, "I feel amazing. . . I feel

more in tune with myself and with [my] culture now that I am learning how to read and write" (8).

Finally, some students expressed a strong sense of shame or embarrassment associated with lack of proficiency in Korean for those of Korean heritage. As this emotion is strongly associated with societal factors, it will be considered in the next section.

Also of particular significance to research in this psychological aspect of heritage language acquisition is the effect of language modes on student motivation and desires to connect with their heritage. An example of this is given in the introduction of this paper. However, student responses to this survey yield no further contributions here. As with the emotions presented in this study, further research in psychological factors associated with heritage language learning may yield substantial insight for heritage language teachers.

Societal Factors

Student survey responses included a substantial number of comments that supported trends and gave insights into how societal factors affect literacy acquisition among KHLLs. The most significant of these factors is the negative perception that members of the Korean community have toward KHLLs who are not literate in Korean or proficient in speaking and listening. Student descriptions of informal home instruction also suggested that parents might perceive, to varying degrees, English as a "prestige language" with more significance to their children than Korean. Interestingly, these two factors produce conflicting goals.

Societal expectations are often high for KHLLs. A few student responses indicated their perception that members of the Korean community expect them to be proficient and literate in the Korean language; when they fail to adequately meet this expectation, students felt that they and their parents were being judged negatively by the community. For example,

one student wrote:

> [I]t is very important in my culture that if you have Korean blood you not only know how to speak the language but also know traditions, customs, and history . . . There are many Koreans I know who do not know how to speak, write, or read Korean and they are looked down upon among other Koreans and that is always a bad feeling. Your parents also look uneducated by not teaching you Korean. (7)

KHLLs are thus motivated to learn Korean in part by a sense of cultural duty (associated with their heritage identity) as well as from a sort of fear that if they do not learn they will be looked down upon by other Koreans. The same student expressed the latter—a fear of being judged and perceived "unworthy"—when he said,

> The one thing I have always hated growing up . . . is when I am in a group whether it's with people my age or my parents [*sic*] friends and I used to not be able to read or write. I could feel the people's eyes in the room staring at me. This was very annoying to me. I felt like I was not a worthy Korean. (7)

However, while some students associated embarrassment with not being more literate or proficient in Korean, a few students did not mention having those feelings. If this discrepancy is not merely a result of survey or failure to probe more deeply into this aspect of heritage language acquisition, it likely correlates with the degree to which students are "culturally connected" to the Korean community, as well as with the unique personality of each student.

The aforementioned fact that most informal literacy instruction in the home (reading children's books) occurred in English may be explained

at least in part by one heritage learner's (Giangreco, 2000, p. 61) claim that many first-generation immigrants perceive English as "the language of prestige, and thus success, integration, and assimilation." While it is uncertain exactly why in some homes parents stop providing formal and/or informal instruction to their children when one or more of the children enters public school, this idea of "language prestige" as perceived by the parents may be a contributing factor.

Student responses lacked any direct indication that other social factors—feeling isolated from their friends because of their heritage/race, for example—influenced their Korean literacy experiences. However, indirect evidence suggests that this trend exists, as one student described the his brothers having "shunned the Korean half of their heritage" and losing interest in all things Korean—along with their Korean literacy and language proficiency (10).

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

As mentioned earlier, this study is one of the first to address in a qualitative manner the experiences of KHLLs pertaining to literacy (reading and writing). It addresses Yokoyama's (2000) call for more "theoretical knowledge and research on heritage speaker pedagogy . . . in all languages taught at the college level" (p. 467). However, limitations to the present study certainly exist, and, more importantly, the results presented here suggest that more research in this area will continue to yield important insights for heritage language teachers and administrators.

One limitation concerns the question of whether a more methodical approach to administering the surveys would benefit the analysis. Surveys were administered to former and current students of one Korean language program. They were returned voluntarily and in a non-random manner. Statistical data (sex, age, number of classes taken, etc.) were, for the

most part, not collected. While a random, more statistically methodical survey may help decrease response bias, in this qualitative study, the authors hoped that students would respond more thoughtfully and thoroughly to an administrator whom they knew and with whom they felt comfortable sharing their personal experiences.

Fourteen students completed the surveys and submitted their answers to the authors of the study. It is certain that administering the survey to more students would yield a greater variety of results and experiences. Furthermore, because most survey participants were students with fairly similar backgrounds (i.e., age, religion) attending a university in the western United States, trends discussed in the results, while they may be applicable to the greater Korean community, must also contain some bias toward this particular group of KHLLs. Therefore, administering the survey to students from universities in various regions of the country and with different backgrounds will certainly improve the general applicability of the results.

As has been addressed previously, a study of heritage language learners is by definition limited to those students who are actively *learning* their heritage language. All students in this survey were university students. Listening to the experiences of KHLLs who are not actively learning the language, such as the Emily (Parker, 2000, pp. 55-59), referred to earlier in this paper, may be helpful to more thoroughly understand student motivations, emotional and psychological factors as they influence heritage language learning, and early childhood experiences with Korean literacy.

Other suggestions for further study have been presented in previous sections of the paper. These include a more thorough focus on the relationship between story time with parents and student literacy proficiencies and attitudes, language choice (heritage or non-heritage), and language proficiency; a methodical study of the effectiveness and challenges of KHLL education at weekend schools; and an in-depth study of the many psychological (emotional) and social factors that influence

attitudes and proficiencies.

Conclusion and Implications

This study seeks to answer questions about KHLL college students regarding their perceptions and attitudes toward heritage language literacy, how attitudes were shaped by early experiences with language learning, and how literacy acquisition and retention occurred as these students became adults. Conclusions were made about each of these questions where survey responses indicated general trends, but individual responses varied.

This study revealed general trends in student attitudes and perceptions toward heritage literacy. KHLLs entered the heritage language classroom with high levels of integrational motivation, and they experienced great satisfaction when they noticed progress, especially in literacy. They also enjoyed observing an increase in cultural connectedness when their language proficiency increases. Many, however, felt regret for having "missed an opportunity" to be more proficient in the language by taking advantage of language learning opportunities when they were younger. Some were afraid that members of the Korean community judged them negatively for their limited proficiency. Students were generally more confident in speaking and listening than they were in literacy.

Childhood experiences seem to have played an important role in shaping KHLL student attitudes. The students surveyed indicated that they spoke Korean as children, at least to some degree, in the home. In many cases literacy was taught, but to a lesser degree than speaking. Literacy instruction existed in the form of parents reading children's books, mothers teaching the alphabet and other literacy skills to children, and children attending weekend language schools. Of these three types of instruction, students have the best memories of informal instruction with their parents, both in the way of communicating in the home and in reading Korean books

together when they were younger. However, many students indicated that language instruction decreased as they entered elementary school. As a result, KHLLs experienced or observed shame and embarrassment when their heritage linguistic and literacy proficiency did not meet the family or community expectations. Surprisingly, even informal home instruction became more and more English-based as students got older.

This study also revealed how these KHLLs practiced literacy acquisition and retention as adults. As adults, the KHLLs were motivated integrationally, largely by a desire to understand their personal identity as Korean Americans, to connect with their Korean family, and to participate in the Korean community (including preparing to work in Korea). They were also motivated by perceived progress in the language, such as when they were able to read books that before had been beyond their capabilities. These motivations led students to study on their own and in university-level classrooms.

This research is useful in a variety of ways. Heritage language instructors are more effective when they understand their students' motivations and attitudes toward learning their heritage language, as well as the experiences that shaped those attitudes. This knowledge will help instructors personalize lessons and instruction aligned with student needs and motivations. It will help curriculum designers create new strategies for teaching heritage languages learners based on theory. Student self-awareness of their motivations and experiences with their heritage language will also likely support learning. Furthermore, if the goal is to increase community and at-home language instruction, this study raises a number of questions and concerns that, if addressed, will decrease negative childhood language experiences in heritage language learning, increase proficiency, and improve student attitudes.

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Appendix A: Ten-question survey

Could you tell me about your overall experience with reading and writing in Korean? Please feel free to write as much as you want for questions that are meaningful for you (use the back side of the page).*

1. How does it feel for you to be literate or not literate in Korean (able to read and write)?
2. What was your first encounter with Korean reading and writing? Was it positive or negative?
3. How has your ability to read and write Korean changed over time, if it has changed?
4. Did your parents read to you when you were little? If so, in what language(s)? What do you remember about that experience?
5. Can you tell me about your family members and their literacy experience? What stands out about their uses of reading and writing, if anything?
6. What are some of your most memorable encounters with reading and writing in Korean?
7. What are some of your worst experiences with Korean literacy?
8. How do your Korean reading and writing experiences compare to your experiences with reading and writing in English?
9. If someone from a similar family background asked you for your advice about learning to read and write Korean, what would you say?
10. Do you have anything else you want to share about your experiences with Korean literacy?

* Demographic information (age, sex, year in school, number of Korean courses taken at a college or university, heritage background, and immigration age [if applicable]) was collected for some, but not all, of the participants.