

The Perceptions of Korean Immigrant Parents Regarding their Children Learning Korean as a Heritage Language*

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Yim, Yoon-kyung & Lee, Romee. (2012). The perceptions of Korean immigrant parents regarding their children learning Korean as a heritage language. *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal*, 20(4), 109-129. This study explores Korean immigrant parents' perceptions of their children learning the Korean language and the Korean learning environment in Vancouver, Canada. The research focuses on (1) immigrant parents' attitudes toward their children learning Korean, its relationship with the parents' backgrounds, and the reasons they value their children's Korean language learning and (2) parents' efforts to provide their children with Korean learning opportunities and the obstacles to this effort. Study participants included 173 volunteers who completed a survey and three parents who participated in an additional interview. The findings show that almost all of the parents perceived that their children's Korean language learning was highly important. The results also indicated that the reasons parents valued their children learning Korean can be classified broadly into practical and ideological. The study results also suggest the influence of the Korean wave on forming a positive identity among a youth group of Korean heritage.

Key Words: Korean as a heritage language, identity, immigrant parents, Korean wave

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1. Introduction

Approximately 7.2 million Koreans now live overseas. Regardless of whether they are temporary residents or naturalized citizens of the host countries, they have made great efforts to integrate into the countries in which they live, and many have tried to preserve their heritage language and culture. The number of Korean immigrants in Canada has now reached up to 0.23 million (Korea Statistics Service, 2011), and many settle in large cities such as Toronto, Vancouver, or Montreal. In the Metro Toronto area, 89 Saturday or Sunday schools teach the Korean language, and 19 are operating in the Greater Vancouver area. These schools have played a pivotal role in teaching children Korean, which is often called a *heritage language* (Kim, 2007). With lack of funding and low enrollment of local students, however, a program in Vancouver that teaches Korean as a second language (a Saturday program) has been on the verge of closing down (Pyo, 2006).

Parents are key decision-makers regarding their children's education, especially when the children are still young. It is important, therefore, to explore what Korean parents in Canada think of Korean language learning for their children and to understand their perceptions of the environment in their communities related to learning Korean. Therefore, the main purposes of the present study are as follows: What are the perceptions of the Korean immigrant parents in the Greater Vancouver area regarding the role of Korean as a heritage language? How are these perceptions sustained in this specific context of immigrants' lives? Moreover, this paper poses two sub-questions:

1. Do Canadian immigrant parents' attitudes toward their children's Korean learning differ based on their backgrounds (i.e., gender, age, length of residence, plan for residence, and confidence level)? What are the major reasons parents value their children learning the Korean language, if they do?
2. What kinds of efforts do parents make to provide their children with opportunities to learn the Korean language? In this process, what are the major challenges parents face?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Heritage Languages and Heritage Language Learners

Among many other scholars, Cummins (2005) suggested a succinct definition of heritage language (HL) and heritage language learners (HLLs). He defined HL as “...languages of immigrant, refugee, and indigenous groups” (p. 586) and HLLs as “...students who have either learned the language as their home language (L1) or who have some form of family or ‘heritage’ connection to the language (e.g., second and third generation immigrants)” (p. 586). Interpreting this in the U.S. and Canadian context, HL refers to a “non-English language” (Valdes, 2001) spoken in the two countries, and HLLs are the learners who are related to the families and ancestors who speak a language other than English (Hornberger & Wang, 2009). Accordingly, Korean is a HL in North America, and the HLLs of Koreans include the children of Korean immigrants who are monolingual English speakers due to their historical and personal connection to Korea.¹⁾

Many studies on HL reported benefits of immigrant children maintaining their HL. Some of the benefits included an increase in intergenerational communication within the families (He & Xiao, 2008); cognitive development (Hakuta & Diaz, 1985) resulting in higher academic achievement; growing positive attitudes toward their HLs and their culture (Comanaru & Noels, 2009); and developing a strong sense of identity with one’s ethnic group (Feuerverger, 1991). Researchers of Korean HLLs also argued in favor of HL learning because they recognize its positive effects, including forming a strong Korean identity (An, 2008) and promoting social interaction and relationships (Cho, 2000).

Issues of HL and HLLs, however, often accompany various complexities, including concerns regarding the loss of HLs by being overpowered by a dominant language (Wong Fillmore, 1991). Furthermore, in the U.S., the so-called “English-only language policy” has negatively affected HL maintenance (Attinasi, 1999). In Canada, however, linguistic diversity is regarded as an

1) According to Canadian Languages Association (2009), heritage languages refer to “languages other than English or French that are taught by non-profit schools/programs outside of the provincial curriculum” (p. 2) and can also be referred to as second languages.

important part of the country's multiculturalism. Often, this is only seen as a mere gesture and, in fact, very limited resources are often allocated to heritage language education (Cardinal, 2005; Cummins, 2005).

2.2. Parental Perceptions of Children's Learning Korean as Heritage Language

Studies of first language (L1) loss or maintenance have strongly argued for the role of parents in helping their children maintain their L1 (Lao, 2004; Guardado, 2002). Researchers seem to agree on the crucial role parents play as they are often actively involved in the process of their children's HL learning or maintenance as decision makers, motivators, or even as instructors (Park & Sarkar, 2007; Yan, 2003). Lao (2004), for example, pointed out that language use at home among parents and children is the most crucial factor in determining whether the HL will be maintained or lost over generations. Li (1999) also supported this idea using a case study of an immigrant mother and her daughter in the U.S. context, which argued that immigrant children's heritage language skills and identity formation are greatly influenced by parents' positive attitudes toward the HL at home. Guardado's (2002) study on the loss and maintenance of Spanish among Hispanic children in Vancouver, Canada showed the critical role of parents in helping their children maintain their L1. He added that the types of encouragement (i.e., authoritarian versus positive or entertaining discourse) could either facilitate or demotivate their children maintaining their L1.

While many studies have dealt with first-generation immigrants' language socialization, most of them focus on the difficulties of learning the new language or being alienated from the dominant culture (Duff 2007; Leki, 2001; Morita, 2000, 2004). The challenges of first-generation immigrants' language learning are often intertwined with their aspirations for social integration. In many studies on Korean immigrants in North America, this tendency emerges as parents emphasize learning English over maintaining Korean for their children (Park, 1989). However, recent studies have highlighted more positive perceptions of learning HL by parents of immigrant families. Yan (2003), for example, examined the views of parents with Arabic, Chinese, Hebrew, and Spanish

backgrounds that chose to send their children to heritage language schools in the U.S. The results showed that parents held positive attitudes toward HL, and HL was used at home in most cases. In the case of Korean immigrant parents in Canada, positive attitudes were also observed toward their children's HL learning or maintenance. In Park and Sarkar's study (2007), for example, Korean parents believe that their children's high level of Korean language proficiency would help them retain their cultural identity as Koreans, ensure better future economic opportunities, and give them more chances to communicate efficiently with their grandparents. For these reasons, it is worthwhile to explore parents' perceptions as important resources for discussing Korean HL education. Indeed, parents are actively involved in the decision-making processes of whether and how to teach HL to their children.

3. Methods

3.1 Research Participants and Procedures

The present study consists of two parts: a questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews. Survey participants were 173 volunteers who were recruited in different parts of the Greater Vancouver area. Parents of a child or children of any school age were the target group for the present study. Participants were recruited from several Korean churches as well as acquaintances of volunteers. Collecting the survey data was followed by in-depth interviews with three parents (one of the parents in each family) who had completed the survey and agreed to participate in the interview. The survey questions were adopted from Yan (2003) and consisted broadly of (1) demographic profile of participating parents including age, length of residence in Canada, occupation, education, their plan to stay in Canada, and their English confidence level; (2) parents' attitudes toward their children's Korean learning; (3) parents' effort to help their children learn Korean and perceived difficulties.

Interview questions were similar to the questions asked in the questionnaire, but the researcher asked for greater depth and solicited more extensive answers. For example, in the interview, the parents had an opportunity to share their

stories related to immigration, their observations of their children's language use, and their perceptions and efforts of their children's language learning in greater detail. Interviews were conducted individually in Korean, and the entirety of each conversation was tape-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

The questionnaire data were entered into SPSS and processed for statistical analysis. To examine the relationship between parents' backgrounds and their attitudes toward their children's Korean learning, Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated. In analyzing the data obtained from the questionnaire items that allowed the participants to select more than one response, the multiple response analysis was run. Such questions included selecting the reasons parents valued their children learning the Korean language, the channels of teaching the Korean language to their children, and parents' perceptions of the Korean language programs, focusing, in particular, on the obstacles of providing children with opportunities to learn Korean. These three questions had a list of possible answers from which the participants could choose.

With the interview data, all of the transcribed interview scripts were reviewed several times to check the consistency with the survey responses. The quantified results from the survey data were compared with the parents' accounts from the interviews. The informants' accounts were coded and categorized into several themes according to the research questions. In this process, the informants' unique responses that were considered particularly insightful were also noted. Although the number of informants interviewed was small, the data contributed to clarifying and deepening understanding regarding the issues related to Korean HL learning for immigrant families. Recurring themes were generated and salient issues were noted for further discussion.

Regarding the gender ratio of the survey respondents, twice as many mothers participated compared to fathers. The parents' ages varied, but more than half of them were in their 40s. The majority of the parents had one or two children, and the average age of their children was 14 years old. Only 5.9% of the respondents had a high school diploma or less, whereas the remainder of the participants had a college degree or higher. With regard to length of residence in Canada, 30.6% of the participants had lived in Canada for less than five years, 28.2% for 5 to 10 years, and 41.2% for more than 10 years. When asked about their plan for further residence in Canada, about half of the

participants responded that they planned to live in Canada permanently, and 30.4% responded that they were not sure about how long they would live in Canada. In terms of English confidence level, the parents were asked to self-assess their language ability on a scale of one (very low) to five (very high) among five skill categories: overall, listening, speaking, reading, and writing ability. As is summarized in Table 1, more than half of the parents responded that their overall English ability was fair. This response was consistent in all other skill areas as well.

Table 1. Summary of Parents' Background Information

Variable	Category	Percentage (Frequency)
Gender	Mother	65.9% (112)
	Father	31.8% (54)
	Other	2.4% (4)
Age	30–40 yr. old	23.1% (39)
	41–50 yrs. old	56.2% (94)
	Older than 50	20.8% (36)
Education level	High school or less	5.8% (10)
	Bachelor's degree	65.9% (112)
	Master's degree or higher	28.2% (48)
Length of residence	Less than 5 years	30.6% (52)
	5 - 10 years	28.2% (48)
	More than 10 years	41.2% (70)
Plan for further residence	Permanently	49.7% (85)
	5 - 10 years	4.7% (8)
	3 - 5 years	2.3% (4)
	1 - 3 years	12.9% (22)
Confidence level of overall English ability	Not sure yet	30.4% (52)
	Very low-Low	30.8% (35)
	Fair	56.8% (96)
	High-Very high	22.5% (38)

The three participants who agreed to participate in the interview were mothers of two children. They are Yu-nah, Sin-bi, and Ji-in, and their background information is summarized in Table 2.²⁾ When Yu-nah immigrated to Canada, her two children were in the third grade (elementary school) and in the kindergarten. Both of Shin-bi's children were born in Korea, and she moved

2) Pseudonyms are used for all participants in this study.

to America when her first child was in kindergarten and the second child was two years old. Ji-in's first child was one year old when she moved to Canada, and her second child was born in Canada.

Table 2. Background Information of the Interview Participants

	Yu-nah	Shin-bi	Ji-in
Age	49	44	39
Length of residence	13 yrs.	8 yrs.	10.5 yrs.
Education level	PhD	PhD	BA
Children's age	Child 1: 22	Child 1: 15 (grade 10, secondary school)	Child 1: 11 (grade 6, elementary school)
	Child 2: 18	Child 2: 12 (grade 6, elementary school) ³⁾	Child 2: 8 (grade 2, elementary school)

4. Findings

4.1. Quantitative Results

4.1.1. Immigrant parents' attitudes toward their children learning Korean

First, when asked whether the parents perceived their children's learning or maintaining their Korean language proficiency was important, everyone with one exception responded positively. In addition, when asked about the level of Korean language proficiency the parents aspired their children to achieve on a scale of five (i.e., no skills necessary = 0; a little = 1; moderate = 2; high = 3; very high = 4; and native-like = 5), about 60% of participants answered either "very high" or "native-like" proficiency. The mean of the desired level of language proficiency was 3.83, and about 90% of the parents chose the high level or above. Participants were also asked to rank the importance of their children's Korean

3) In Vancouver, elementary school is typically from kindergarten to 7th grade (K-7), and secondary school is from 8th to 12th grade. The 10th grade is equivalent to the first year of high school, and the 6th grade in elementary school is equivalent to the 1st year of middle school in Korea.

learning for academic and career success, respectively, on a scale of four from 1 (not important at all) to 4 (very important). The average score was 3.14 for academic performance and 3.31 for career success (see Table 3).

Table 3. The Mean Score of Parents' Rating on the Korean Learning and the Effect on Children's Academic and Career Success

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Academic performance	3.14	.76
Career success	3.31	.65

The relationship between parents' backgrounds and their beliefs about the importance of their children's Korean learning for career as well as academic success was also examined. Several variables of the parents' backgrounds were entered to be correlated with parents' attitudes; that is, the participants' gender, age, educational level, length of residence, their plan to stay in Canada, and their English confidence level. Parents' attitudes toward Korean language learning captured the parents' ranking of the importance of their children learning Korean for academic performance and career success. The quantitative results from those two questions were correlated with their background variables. The variables that showed a significant relationship with the parents' attitudes toward their children's Korean learning were the parents' English ability and their length of residence in Canada (see Table 4). The parents' English confidence level was negatively correlated with the parents' belief about the positive effect of learning the Korean language on their children's success in school. In other words, the higher the parents ranked in their own English ability, the lower importance they placed on their children learning Korean and its relationship to success in academic performance in regular Canadian schools. In addition, as the length of residence in Canada increased, the parents' beliefs dropped regarding the importance of their children learning Korean for career success. The correlation coefficients for these variables, however, indicate weak relationships between the variables. The other variables, such as the parents' age, educational level, or their plan to stay in Canada, did not significantly contribute to their attitudes toward their children's Korean learning. This can be explained by the fact that most parents believed that their children's learning or maintaining Korean was important for academic and career success.

To answer the question of why parents value their children learning the Korean language, the participants were asked to select all responses that applied among five options and write other specific reasons if they were not listed in the questionnaire. As summarized in Table 5, the results of multiple response analysis reveal that most parents (90.9%) agreed that learning the language was a way to maintain Korean identity and to connect with the parents and ancestors' culture. Two other important reasons were "to communicate with family, relatives, and friends" (76.4%) and "to succeed in job markets" (71.5%). In addition, "to visit Korea" (26.7%) was also selected as a reason parents valued their children's learning Korean.

Table 4. Correlations between Parents' Backgrounds and their Attitudes toward their Children's Korean Learning

Variables	Description	Years	Language ability	School success	Career success
Years	Length of residence	--			
Language ability	Confidence level of overall language ability	.158*	--		
School success	Learning Korean and school	-.150	-.176*	--	
Career success	Learning Korean and career	-.175*	-.120	.483**	--

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

Table 5. Parents' Reasons of Valuing their Children's Learning the Korean Language

	Categories	Responses
		Percent of Cases (N =165, 8 missing cases)
Q15	To maintain Korean identity and to connect with parents/ancestors' culture	90.9% (150)
	To communicate with family, relatives, and friends	76.4% (126)
	To succeed in job markets	71.5% (118)
	To visit Korea	26.7% (44)
	To fulfill a foreign language requirement at school	9.1% (15)
	Other	5.5% (9)
Total		280% (462)

4.1.2. Parents' efforts and challenges in helping their children learn the Korean language

The average score of children's overall Korean language ability as rated by their parents was 3.78 along a 5-point scale. Sixty-two percent of the parents rated their children's Korean language ability as either high or very high. The parents were asked how much they use Korean when communicating with their children. Sixty percent answered always (95 – 100% of use), 26% of parents most of the time (70 – 90%), 6.9% about half the time (40 – 50%), and 2.3% rarely (less than 20%). See Table 6.

Table 6. Parents' Amount of Korean Use with Their Children at Home
(*N* = 165)

Amount of Korean use	Percentage (Cases)
Rarely (less than 20%)	2.3 % (4)
Half the time (40 ~ 50%)	6.9% (12)
Most of the time (70 ~ 90%)	26% (45)
Always (95 ~ 100%)	60.1% (104)

When asked whether the parents had ever provided their children with opportunities to learn or maintain Korean previously, 85.5% (142 participants) responded positively. In addition, when parents were asked whether they currently provide their children with opportunities to learn or maintain Korean, 76.8% (126) answered yes. Among those who responded negatively to this question, 42% (16) explained they were recent immigrants and their children had already acquired fluency of native speakers of Korean. Only a few of the parents (4 cases) stated that it was because their children did not want to learn Korean.

Most parents who were offering their children the opportunity to learn Korean responded that it was usually through conversations with the parents or grandparents at home, as is summarized in Table 7. The second-most answer the parents selected as a channel of teaching Korean was by participating in local community activities such as churches or friends. In addition, 30% of parents chose Saturday or Sunday school in the Korean language. Among the parents who selected "other" (25 cases), 68% stated that they have their children read Korean books or complete home-study materials at home. In addition, some

parents (7 cases) also have their children maintain Korean language by allowing them to use the Internet or watch Korean television programs.

Table 7. The Channels of Teaching Children Korean Language

Channels	Percentage (Cases)
After school classes	6.5 % (8)
Saturday or Sunday school	30.1 % (37)
At home (with parents or grandparents)	78.9 % (97)
Community (friends, church, etc.)	43.9 % (54)
Others	20.3 % (25)

To the question whether parents thought there were enough resources or programs that their children could access to learn Korean in Vancouver, 21% of the parents answered yes, 42% no, and 37% responded not sure. Parents who responded as “no” were asked to choose what they thought the biggest obstacle for them in helping their children learn Korean. As summarized in Table 8, the majority of the parents (82.4%) selected “a lack of Korean programs at the community level” as the biggest obstacle. In addition, 45.6% selected “insufficient time to teach Korean” as another great problem. Many of the parents were sending their children to a variety of after-school activities; as a result, they seemed to sacrifice time to teach Korean.

Table 8. Parents' Perception of Korean Programs ($N = 68$)

Perceptions	Percentage (Cases)
No community support	82.4 (56)
Insufficient time to teach Korean	45.6 (31)
Lack of language use situations	25.0 (17)
Lack of needs of teaching Korean	7.4 (5)
Other	8.8 (6)

4.2. Qualitative Results

4.2.1. Immigrant parents' attitudes toward their children learning Korean

All the parents interviewed were making efforts to support their children in maintaining or learning Korean in various ways. Yu-nah and Shin-bi in particular seemed quite enthusiastic about supporting their children in learning

Korean. It seemed natural for them to demand their children learn Korean as part of maintaining the Korean culture, because they are Korean descendants. In the interview, Yu-nah used the term *identity* to refer to this:

The reason that I sent my children to the Korean Saturday school even though they didn't want to was not because of patriotism or anything. I had a kind of obligation. I felt a kind of responsibility. I thought Koreans shouldn't lose Korean language. I think it was the issue of identity. How could a Korean lose Korean language? I didn't want my children to become strange. So I forced them to go to the Korean Saturday school.

She added more to her comment on identity as follows: "Identity... It includes everything. It is about culture, culture in the family, our life style. Language comes along with it. It [language] comes in a package." Ji-in expressed her desire of her children to maintain Korean on a more practical level when she said:

Because..., I had not realized until my children grew up and reached puberty that I would like them to talk to me when they have problems at school or plan the future. They may seek advice from counselors, but I wish they would share them with me. I wish I had a good command of English so that I could talk to my children comfortably on various topics, but it's not the case. Therefore, it would be much easier if my children maintain and develop their Korean more so that we could fully communicate with each other.

Another interesting theme that emerged during the interviews was the impact of the Korean wave (*Hallyu in Korean*) on Korean youths' attitude toward Korean language. The Korean wave is defined as "a surge in the international visibility of Korean culture, beginning in East Asia in the 1990s and continuing more recently in the United States, Latin America, the Middle East, and parts of Europe" (Ravina, 2009, p. 3). For example, Shin-bi observed her daughter as follows:

For the last two to three years, my first child has reached puberty and started to hang out with her friends more often. She didn't have many Korean friends, but

then her Chinese friends became influenced by the Korean wave and are listening to Korean pop music and watching Korean dramas. Some of them take Korean classes or have Korean language tutors. Since her friends appreciate Korean culture, she has recently shown more interest in learning Korean language, asking me a lot of questions about Korean vocabulary and watching Korean dramas. She also listens to recent Korean pop music very much.

Because many of her children's Asian friends showed an infatuation with Korean pop stars and music, this must have boosted her pride, which led to increased interest in her own culture.

4.2.2. Parents' efforts and challenges in helping their children learn the Korean language

For all three families, maintaining and learning the Korean language was much easier and more successful with their first child. Because the parents were the only or major source of providing Korean input at home, the second child, who did not receive formal education in Korean, seemed to have lost his or her opportunity to develop Korean. As was revealed in the survey results, the parents pointed out a lack of time as the major obstacle in teaching their children Korean. Some parents wrote in the questionnaire that their children were too busy to follow a regular curriculum at school. The children had to invest a great deal of time in adjusting to the new school life in Canada, and as a result they could not find time to learn Korean. All of the parents interviewed were sending their children to other foreign language programs such as French or Chinese. Shin-bi, for example, commented on the difficulty she had supporting her children in learning Korean:

My children have too much to do other than learning Korean. They have their life here. They have to study at school, learn French, etc. Therefore, they have invested less to learn Korean so far.

In addition, the Saturday school teaching Korean language was located in a city that was quite distant from where they lived. Their children were engaged

in other extra-curricular activities on weekends as well. Furthermore, parents also pointed out the quality of the Korean program as Kim said:

I understand we have to pay some for the Korean program. The school [Korean school] is too far, and I heard that the program does not meet the parents' expectation for the time and money they invest.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study explored immigrant parents' perceptions of their children's learning Korean in Vancouver, Canada. Regardless of the parents' gender, age, educational level, or their plan to stay in Canada, immigrant parents perceived that their children's learning Korean was important. As the length of residence in Canada increased, the parents seemed to think that their children's need to learn the Korean language might not contribute to finding a job or success in the job market. It is not surprising that children of those who have lived in Canada for long are likely to settle down in North America, where learning Korean might not be a critical requisite to succeed in the job market. The correlation is not, however, strong enough to argue for this relationship considering that most parents highly regarded the importance of their children learning the Korean language whatsoever. Notable is that although not all Korean immigrant parents thought that their children's Korean learning would likely contribute much to their success at school and work, most of them wanted their children to be able to speak Korean with very high proficiency.

The Korean immigrant parents' desire for their children to learn Korean can be explained through two main attributes: one is ideological, and the other is practical. On one level, most parents agreed that Korean language learning is important for maintaining Korean identity and connecting with parents or ancestors' culture. As was revealed in the interviews, Korean parents seem to have strong ethnic identity and maintaining or learning the Korean language is a way to hold on to that identity. On another level, a great number of participants agreed that they wanted their children to learn the Korean language as a way to succeed in job markets in the future. This result can be interpreted

in three ways. First, the parents might hope that their children could have more options when they grow up by working in either Korea or Canada. Second, if their children return to Korea after finishing their schooling, their children will have better job opportunities by being bilingual. Third, even when their children would get a job in Canada or the States, being able to speak Korean might serve as an advantage in case they do business with Korea. This aspect is consistent with the findings of Guardado (2002) as he discussed the case of Spanish language maintenance to extend the opportunity to work with Latin America.

Not only at the ideological level but also at the practical level, Korean immigrant parents hoped that they would continue to build up intergenerational ties among family members communicating with their children in their mother tongue. What should be highlighted is the ideological aspect of heritage language learning, which is even stronger than the practical reasons. Although their children might not need Korean language proficiency for their academic or career success because they might settle down in Canada, maintaining a sense of ethnic identity is seen to be very important to Korean parents. It was clear from the interview data that parents believed that language is something to be learned or maintained as part of the culture among Koreans.

Another interesting finding regarding Korean language learning that emerged during the interview was related to the Korean wave phenomenon. According to the parents, their children's attitude toward Korean changed due to the influence of the Korean wave as they started to show more interest in learning Korean and appreciate Korean pop culture. This is in line with the phenomenon observed in other parts of the globe, where the increased popularity of Korean pop stars and Korean dramas has increased Korean tourism, caused a boom in the Korean markets, and has also impacted Korean language learning (Lee, 2005). This finding indicates that speaking Korean in Canada increasingly has a positive influence on helping children form their Korean heritage identity.

More than a half of the parents responded that they always use Korean when communicating with their children. This can be explained in part by the fact that most parents are the first generation of immigration or recent immigrants, and their children might have been exposed to the Korean language learning environment before they immigrated. Furthermore, most parents

seemed to make efforts to support their children in learning Korean through various methods such as home teaching, having them socialize at church or in activities with friends, or sending them to Korean classes. The immigrant families, however, had a somewhat ambivalent attitude toward formal or informal education of Korean language. They were supporting their children to excel academically at school in Canada so that their children could live in Canada as competent citizens. At the same time, they also wished their children to maintain their Korean language and ethnic identity.

The most noticeable aspect among the channels of Korean education was the parents' involvement as the major source of heritage language learning, which has been asserted in other research as well (Guardado, 2002; Maloof, Rubin & Miller, 2006; Noro, 2009; Yan, 2003). Notably, parents do not seem to resort as much to institutional support for their children's heritage language learning for various reasons. First, the immigrant parents perceived that their children had little time to learn Korean because they had to adjust to new school life in Canada. Besides, even if they had wanted to learn Korean, the Saturday school of Korean language was not located in a city to which they could easily commute. Furthermore, the parents even commented that the quality of the Korean language program did not meet the parents' expectations and perceived that commuting long distance to the weekend school of Korean language was not worth the time and money to invest. With a lack of suitable programs that would meet their needs, it appeared that parents placed most of the responsibility for Korean language education on themselves through home schooling.

To resolve some of the identified problems, training professional Korean teachers and programs that suit the various levels and needs of the parents should be in place. The growing popularity of Korean culture and language learning overseas may be a signal of opening a new era that more Korean programs can be offered in various places. At the same time, developing teaching materials to suit learners of different backgrounds seems to be an urgent project. Big questions still remain: who is responsible for Korean language education, and can organizations or companies in Korea take part in providing Korean language programs in partnership with school districts in Canada?

This study examined the role of Korean as a heritage language from the perspectives of Korean immigrant parents living in Canada. It needs to reflect the voices of other stakeholders such as the personnel in the heritage language programs or those indirectly or directly involved in funding the Korean language programs. The study was limited by sharing the views collected from only three parents even though their accounts were insightful. It will be also worthwhile to collect the children's perceptions of Korean language learning and to compare those with a higher number of parents. These are topics for the future research.

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