

# The Introduction of English as a Second Official Language and Korean Linguistic Identity

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Choi, Jin-sook. 2004. **The Introduction of English as a Second Official Language and Korean Linguistic Identity.** *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal*, 12(3), 129-149. This study deals with the introduction of English as a second official language into South Korea and aims at identifying its effect on Korean linguistic identity and social phenomenon. Since English was introduced into Korean primary schools as a compulsory subject in 1997, the introduction of English as the second official language has been frequently becoming a public issue in South Korea. In attempting to identify why the introduction of English is a problem, this study examines the existing literature which is relevant to issues concerned: the relationship between language and identity is reviewed and then why Korean language is important to Korean people is explained. Furthermore, many cases where the incursion of new language into mother tongue environment happened are provided and the strong influence of English as a result of early English learning is discussed. This study concludes that the introduction of English as the second official language is undesirable, as it is evident in many studies that a more powerful language weakens a group's linguistic identity, brings serious social problems and, more importantly, restoring lost linguistic identity requires a huge amount of cost.

**Key Words:** introduction of English, Korean language, linguistic identify

## 1. Introduction

In Korea, English has neither been used in people's general communication or daily life, nor has it been used as a medium of instruction in normal schools until very recently when some private

schools and universities have begun to use English as a medium of instruction. However, for most of the last century, English has been a major foreign language (except during the Japanese occupation) and has been used in all kinds of school entrance examinations. Thus most Korean students have studied English to enter higher education or improve their employment prospects and thus secure their future. In other words, English has been associated with prestige among Korean students because of a belief that fluency in English can influence their future success and social class.

However, as the Korean government began to believe that it is essential to strengthen English language skills to cope with an enormous wave of globalization, it introduced a policy that Korean primary school children in grade 3 were to learn English as a compulsory subject from 1997. Especially after the economic crisis of late 1997, the Korean economy has become increasingly dependent on the U.S.A, and the global atmosphere has also enhanced the importance of English. Along with this mood, the introduction of English into Korean society as the second official language is frequently becoming a public issue. However, a growing fear about possible consequences of the introduction of English as a second official language has also been shown in the media and among scholars and people.

This study looks at the possible loss of Korean linguistic identity as a result of the introduction of English as a second official language. Many factors or issues in relation to the introduction of English are to be considered, however, this study deals with the effects of English on Korean linguistic identity from a sociolinguistic perspective, because it is the most urgent and important task. In order to provide a framework to understand why the introduction of English is undesirable, a theoretical approach to the connection of language and identity will be given and then the role of Korean language in Korean identity will be explained. This study will also provide case studies of countries where a more powerful language spreads over a mother tongue; how their mother tongue died; how their language survived and how they try to revive their language. A current social phenomenon as a result of the

introduction of English into Korean primary schools will also be reviewed in order to enable Korean people anticipate the social problems after the introduction of English as a second official language and perceive how English affects Korean.

## **2. Language and identity**

The introduction of English as a second official language can be extended logically or naturally to the anxiety that it can bring about the problem of reduced regard for the Korean native language and thus negative consequences for linguistic identity. In other words, the possible loss of linguistic identity is to be considered as one of the more costly possible consequences of the introduction of English. If many Korean people believe that the Korean native language is essential to the maintenance of Korean linguistic identity, the link between language and identity should be identified for the present study. The purpose here therefore is to review the relationship between language and group identity by drawing on broadly analyzed concepts from a number of sources. If the question of linguistic identity loss is a key result of introducing English, we need to look first at the details of how language is related to group identity.

An early study of the link between language and identity is found in Kedourie's precise and extensive study '*Nationalism*' (1961), which involves an approach to national categorization using language. He gave a positive view of the association of language with nation by stating "a nation is a group of people speaking the same language" (Kedourie, 1961, p.68). Many scholars have maintained a strong belief that language can be the characteristic which most clearly identifies a group. For example, Fishman (1994, p.87) suggests, "since language is the major symbol system of our species, it is only to be expected that any language will become symbolic of its users and of their culture". Giles et al. (1977, p.307) also propose that using the group's common language causes group feelings and solidarity to form. M. Kim (1998, p.65) tells of the non-existence of a nation and its spirit without a

language, and the work written by Edward (1985) implies that a language characterizes human beings and thus our group identity cannot be separated from a language.

In a general view, we might accept the proposal that a language is central to the categorization of a group because it is clear that an individual somehow belongs to a group and every group has its own language. However, if we wish to clarify the link between language and identity, we should be looking at the natural function of the mother tongue. Although a number of studies have dealt with this issue, the most comprehensive framework for this relationship is given by Fishman's (1972) *'Language and Nationalism'*. Fishman, who has extensively discussed linguistic identity issues in an analytical way and established a comprehensive theory about the relationship between language and group identity (see also his works published in 1994), suggests that the mother tongue has often connected with a nation in various ways: (a) as a symbol of the nation; (b) as a 'linker' with the nation's history and (c) as a 'presenter' of national sentiment (Fishman, 1972, pp. 44-45).

Fishman states that the mother tongue is often considered to be a national symbol, which "should be preserved, cultivated, protected, and advanced" (Fishman, 1972, p.47). As he wrote in another paper, "symbols 'stand for' or 'represent' objects and ideas", and the reason why "languages come to 'stand for' the communities of speakers" is that "a language is symbolic of its normally associated culture and of the members of that culture" (Fishman, 1994, p.87). That is, a language is dissolved in culture in various forms, e.g., "the laws of a culture, the folk tales, songs, riddles and rhymes, ironic phrases and puns, jokes... these and many more are all linguistic in nature" (Fishman, 1994, p.86), and this culture characterizes the flavor or nature of the nation (as a group) that those members are representative of. In this respect, the mother tongue as a symbol of nation's continuation might be considered as valuable as any heritage in the nation.

Another useful point that Fishman's work made is that a language can be associated with a nation as a 'carrier' of the nation's history. In

other words, a language often plays a role in connecting people with their nation's past and in linking the past with the present time. That language and history are closely related seems to be accepted in that the records of a nation's past and the substance of cultural history can, at least partly, be found through a language. That is, a mother tongue can be itself "the voice of years that are gone" (Macpherson 1760, cited in Fishman, 1972, p.45). Perhaps this notion is best explained by Edwards (1985) who saw a language as having a functional role in understanding the cultural history within the group of national members, stating that "this [the] ability to read between the lines, as it were, depends upon a cultural continuity in which a language is embedded, and which is not open to all. Only those who grow up within the community can, perhaps, participate fully in this expanded communicative interaction" (Edward, 1985, p. 17). Fishman followed from this concept to another treatment of mother tongue, i.e., mother tongue can also be a 'presenter' of a national sentiment. He explained that: "The essence of a nationality is its spirit, its individuality, its soul. This soul is not only reflected and protected by the mother tongue but, in a sense, the mother tongue is itself an aspect of the soul, a part of the soul, if not the soul made manifest" (Fishman, 1972, p. 54).

However, despite a language being a clear indicator of group identity, the idea that a language is inextricably linked to a group has long been attacked by Smith (1971). His common view is that group identity consists of a variety of factors, such as objective characteristics (e.g., language, age, sex, religion, geography, cultural tradition and race) and subjective features (e.g., the sense of solidarity or 'groupness'), of which language may play a minor part in representing a particular group. That is, there exist many factors that would relate to group identity. This argument develops the notion that directly linking language to a group's identity is an extreme view, because language is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for a nation where a variety of languages co-exist in one country (e.g., Switzerland with three languages, Papua New Guinea with 817 languages amongst 4.5 million people and India which cannot even pretend that there is one

language). However, Smith did not give much evidence pertaining to countries where there is one indigenous language and a high level of linguistic homogeneity throughout the country (e.g., Sweden-Swedish, France-French, Estonia-Estonian, Japan-Japanese, Finland-Finnish and Saudi Arabia-Arabic).

Smith's criticism is supported by Coupland and Jaworski's (1997) view. Even though "language is often perceived as a necessary condition for a nation to exist", they argue that "definitions of language can be very subjective" (Coupland and Jaworski, 1997, p.32). For example, some Welsh people who speak English do not perceive the Welsh language as a national language, but other Welsh people who are very concerned about the loss of Welsh identity strongly perceive the Welsh language as a national language integrated with Welsh identity. However, the scholars' view might be disputed in terms of its objectivity. That is, non-Welsh people may not care about how Welsh people perceive their language, but their language is still one of the tangible markers, which distinguish Welsh people in the eyes of outsiders.

Viewing the varying arguments about the relationship between language and identity, such analyses seem to conclude that emphases and views on this relationship are different depending on how it is examined in different contexts. Therefore, although we can accept the general assumption that a language can be seen as the most important feature of a group's identity, we must know that this assumption inevitably accompanies a negative view as well. However, the general point worth mentioning here is that "threatened cultures in particular have very definite views of the relationship between languages and cultures" (Fishman, 1994, p. 83). If "some cultural groups have consistently stressed their language as the principal carrier of their culture and relied on it as their main defence against assimilation" (Romaine, 1995, p. 304), the value of language is important. It is also a common view that in multilingual contexts where the linguistic diversity is extremely large (e.g., India, the USA or some European countries) there is less emphasis on the language-identity link than in monolingual or linguistically homogeneous countries (e.g., Korea or Japan). Korea is a

monolingual and homogeneous country. And Korea has always been in threatened cultures historically by powerful neighbours (China, Russia, Japan). If the Korean people who constitute an independent nation feel their linguistic identity to be threatened or at risk, they may take steps to stress their 'Koreanness' using the Korean language as their strongest tool. On the other hand, indeed, it may still be the commonly held view that in some cases a language can often act as a major factor in group identity, even if it does not apply in all situations.

### **3. Korean language as a facet of Korean identity**

Most nations have one or more official languages and in some cases language is one of the strongest symbols of national identity. In Korea's case, the quite homogeneous and distinctive Korean language along with the unique flavor of its culture, which is considered to define their national identity, is the Korean people's pride. This section provides information on the Korean language, which has been used for more than 4000 years. According to Sohn's (1994, p.1) Korean language study, Korean is spoken by nearly 70 million people: 42 millions in South Korea, 23 millions in North Korea and approximately 5 millions in 100 overseas countries. The Korean speakers outside Korea are mainly in China (approx.2.2 millions), the U.S.A. (approx.1.3 millions), Japan (approx. 0.7 millions) and the former U.S.S.R. (approx. 0.5 millions). The reason why the number of Korean speakers overseas has increased remarkably may be because of constantly increasing migration (Sohn, 1994, p.1). But internally, the rapid development of mass media and printed publications since the early 1960s have strengthened the vitality of the Korean language to the extent that "Korean is one of the most important languages in Asia", in fact, "in terms of number of speakers, international status and amount of material published in the language, Korean ranks only behind Chinese, Japanese, Hindi, and Russian in Asia" (Fouser, 1999, p. 153), and furthermore Korean ranks as one of the twenty most widely spoken languages in the world (Lee, 1970, p. 81).

An examination of the Korean writing system explains why Koreans take such a pride in their language. The Korean writing system, a native Korean script, known as Hangeul is "a masterpiece of linguistic engineering" (Fouser, 1999, p. 153). Hangeul (literally 'a national script') was invented in 1443 by Sejong (1418-1450), the fourth king of the Choson dynasty (1392-1910). This script (the 28 letters of the Korean alphabet, including the 4 letters that are in disuse) was officially promulgated in 1446 and was called Hunmin-Jeongum (an alphabetic system of writing phonetics to instruct the people). The purpose of Hangeul script was "to enable the Korean people to write their own language in their own way" (KOIS, 1988, p. 50). Prior to the creation of Hangeul, the Korean writing system relied on the Chinese characters (Hanja) for many centuries.

However, Hangeul was not accepted by the social elite who appreciated Chinese characters as a rich literary tradition. Thus Hangeul was neglected as being a system that had low prestige for a long period of time. Then the existence of Hangeul suddenly appeared as a central force in the unity of the Korean people when in the nineteenth century they faced a strong need for the maintenance of a national identity, as foreign countries exploited Korea. Korea has been an area of special interest to foreign countries throughout the ages and has been invaded by its dominant neighbors. However, Korea had a dangerous crisis in which it could have become subjugated to many foreign countries during 1880's.

That a crisis of national identity occurred with the annexation of Korea by Japan is a well known fact. Not only did Korean become almost a dead language officially, but also the identity of the Korean people was almost lost because of Japanese attempts to eliminate the Korean language and eventually Korean identity completely. Therefore, during the period of Japanese occupation, it would be fair to say that the Korean nation ceased to exist as an official country in global terms. Use of Korean was banned in public and the Korean people were forced to use Japanese and even adopt Japanese names. Under these circumstances, one of the best things nationalists and linguists could do



was to promote the Korean alphabet (Hangul) as a possible solution to overcome such crises. It is Korean people's belief that Hangul as a national language unified the Korean people by inspiring them with a sense of national identity and patriotism and prevented the total loss of cultural identity even under the Japanese colonial rule.

Korea has undergone great social changes that are a consequence of its modern economic development. The adoption of a Western culture was also an indispensable condition of survival in the global economy. Moreover, since 1945, the United States has emerged as a powerful influence on Korea. Therefore, the continuous incorporation of the English language into Korean was unavoidable, especially in the fields of politics and trade. In spite of such circumstances, the Korean people always remember that King Sejong's great Korean script is a facet of national identity, and they have never lost the perception of the importance of Hangul. To many Korean people, the creation of Hangul is their greatest historical achievement, and thus they celebrate Hangul Day (Oct. 9 every year) to commemorate King Sejong's greatness and to inspire patriotism and linguistic nationalism. The Korean currency bears King Sejong's features and the study of Hangul is highly regarded as the most important subject among Korean school students. There is no doubt that Hangul now plays an important role in maintaining national pride and the cultural sentiment of the Korean people and is a means of unifying all Koreans, no matter what language they speak and where they live (Lee, 1970). Indeed, in the Korean context, language is one of the strongest modern symbols of Korean identity as it has created the flavor of Korean culture.

#### **4. Case studies of linguistic identity loss**

Unfortunately, there is very little literature on the introduction of English that deals specifically with the Korean context in a sociolinguistic perspective. There might be a number of reasons why arguments about this topic need not be offered, but it seems mainly due to the fact that Korea is a largely homogeneous and monolingual

society and thus there is a strong perception that Korean identity is so deeply rooted that English use as an official language cannot significantly alter the language affiliations of such a large homogeneous community as Korea. However, more importantly, another reason that there has been so little relevant research is that there has been a tendency to ascribe less value to applied sciences such as sociolinguistics among Korean scholars. In reviewing the below cases, the researcher believes that although the following sociolinguistic studies involve different situational factors from the Korean context, many of the problems are still relevant since those studies have been concerned with the relationship between a new language and mother tongue. It is thus proposed here to broaden the base of research in this area to include the Korean situation.

#### **4.1. The case of Arvanitika**

Trudgill and Tzavaras (1977) report that more powerful language can result in the decline of mother tongue's usage and consequently can affect ethnic language life. They conducted research in Arvanitika-speaking villages where the majority of villagers are Albanian-Greeks who began to settle these areas in early 1200. Their language has been maintained for a long time as a part of culture as well as a symbol of the people; appropriated use of their home language provided a socially and psychologically stable situation and these language behaviors created their own culture. Naturally, the culture stored in the language enabled a strong Arvanitika identity which led to a view of themselves as Arvanitika. However, as Greek has recently taken political and social economic prestige status, the homogeneous Arvanitika culture has slowly been broken down. The research on language attitudes revealed that a majority of sampled groups had weak interest and low self-confidence in their native language in terms of language usage so that their own language, Arvanitika, has been declining dramatically in use, and simultaneously shifting to Greek. Trudgill and Tzavaras (1977) view this shift from Arvanitika as a consequence of Greek use: weak

perception of the usefulness of their home language eventually led to the abandonment of home language and the loss of their long-held identity. This language situation could be viewed as being quite different from the case in Korea where a politically independent government exists in a nation with language hegemony. However, it is necessary to point out that when a more powerful language such as Greek spreads over a previously established language, e.g., Arvanitika, mother tongue that comes to have a low status tends to be decreased by social forces.

#### **4.2. The case of Catalonia**

The maintenance of healthy identity is often seen in the case where positive attitudes towards mother tongue exist. The Catalan ethnolinguistic group established their own language clearly among other minority nations in Europe. In fact, the case of Catalonia has attracted many scholars' attention because their distinctive language has survived, despite difficult circumstances such as the political influence of Spain. According to scholars (e.g., Hoffmann, 1991; Woolard, 1991), Catalonia is located in the north east of the Iberian Peninsula as a part of Spain and has a politically independent government looking after six million nation people in the four areas of Barcelona, Tarragona, Lleida and Girona. During the last few centuries, Spain has oppressed Catalonia's politics and culture. For example, in 1716, Catalan self-government ceased to exist and thus the official status of the Catalan language was disused. This linguistic struggle continued over 200 years, as Castilian Spanish was used as the only official language. Until quite recently (1923-30), the Catalan language was targeted for extinction as it was prohibited in schools and in public administration under a stringent policy (for details of the history of Catalan, see Hoffmann, 1991, Chapter 13). Despite the political force wanting subordination to Castilian, the Catalan language has amazingly survived as a symbol of Catalan identity, as Catalonians have always insisted that Catalan should be used to maintain Catalan identity by

inspiring linguistic nationalism.

This symbolic function of the Catalan language was revealed by Hoffmann (1991) and Woolard (1991) to be affected by the Catalan people's attitudes: their perception of their language and a sentimental attachment to Catalan has always been strong and they always have made a special effort to use Catalan. For example, when they felt that the feeling of solidarity based on the mother tongue appeared to be beginning to weaken due to the lack of knowledge of Catalan as a result of "the Franco legacy and the influx of immigrants" (Hoffmann, 1991, p.275), the Catalonian government promulgated a language policy "to use Catalan more frequently and consistently, and to foster positive attitudes toward this language" (Hoffmann, 1991, p.277). That seemed to be a part of efforts to re-establish the weakened identity. Not surprisingly, in an attempt to motivate solid feelings towards their language, the first step was to focus on changing attitudes from negative to positive, and as a result the language policy has become to emphasize the use of Catalan in administration and the media and gave institutional support with both linguistic and curriculum reform in education.

These measures seem to work effectively. Woolard's (1991, p.80) study confirms that "Catalan may have higher value than ever". The Catalonian case is a valued source to be reviewed in the present study dealing with the Korean context, where linguistic identity has always been at risk due to foreign powers. Bearing the Catalonian case in mind, it is now clear that reinforcing the existing positive attitudes towards Korean language, altering the perception of English to be an official language and recovering the lost ground of the solidarity feelings or weakened perception towards mother tongue are the most urgent task. It is necessary to know why Catalonian people showed strong resistance for Castilian Spanish. This is the reason for the review here of the case of Catalonia.

#### **4.3. The case of Tom Valley**

Another case worth reviewing here is Winsor's (1999) extensive

study. This study illustrates how language in higher prestige contributes to the erosion of mother tongue and how the group members try to recover the lost linguistic identity. Her recent research is based on Tornedalen Finnish language speakers residing in the Torne Valley in the border between Swedish and Finland. Seemingly, for this geographical location, two languages, Swedish and Finnish must have co-existed this century in the Torne Valley. However, Tornedalen Finnish is the originally spoken language in the 'Torne Valley'. She takes a broad view of "a cultural definition of the spread of Tornedalen Finnish" (Winser, 1999, p. 19) as the oldest variety.

However, negative attitudes towards Tornedalen Finnish and Torne Valley's culture appeared among Tornedalens, which is shown from the evidence that many speakers of Tornedalen Finnish had a low opinion of the value of their language, while they believed that Swedish had a high prestige. The collective opinion of the parents and young Tornedalens was that "Finnish has only caused problems, in school, their careers and in society in general Finnish is an unnecessary language" (Winser, 1999, p.124). There no longer existed the perception among Tornedalens that Tornedalen Finnish should be used by Tornedalens as a facet of native Torne Valley linguistic identity.

The reason for these negative attitudes towards Tornedalen Finnish can partly be explained by the Swedish government's language policy that has aimed at encouraging the use of Swedish for a practical reason. However, when two languages are in contact, people generally move to the language acknowledged as having higher prestige. This is why language shift to Swedish occurred rapidly. These negative attitudes towards Tornedalen Finnish among Tornedalens significantly influenced a link between Torne Valley's identity and Tornedalen Finnish. Ultimately they made Tornedalen Finnish almost a dying language. Moreover, these attitudes seemed to be partly transmitted to the next generation, which might be due to the parents' demands that their children have competence in only Swedish, as it is evident that most young Tornedalens were not proud of their culture.

In the 1980s, Tornedalen Finnish, however, began to be perceived as

having a link with their language and identity, which was seen primarily as a result of reinforced cultural awareness. There has been a revival movement along with the establishment of the Swedish Tornedalians' Association and by using Tornedalen Finnish in various areas such as music, literature, and children's books and local radio. This visible language reinforcement prepared the ground to regain the lost portion of linguistic behaviors and original feelings and to increase awareness of cultural value and cultural identity. Now positive attitude change is altering the loosened connection to their native language and giving a hope that "Tornedalen Finnish will survive in the future" (Winser, 1999, p. 151).

However, it is doubtful whether Torne Valley's lost linguistic identity can be recovered because of a common view that if the sense of solidarity of a particular group started to be lost because of the lack of its use and a low self-regard, altering the resultant changes in the symbolic values of mother tongue may require great efforts by both the government and the group's people. In spite of such efforts, there may never be a 'perfect restoration'. Thus, worth mentioning here is that if English is introduced as the second official language into South Korea, Korean people would move to English in higher prestige and then lose a link with Korean language and Korean identity. However, Korean people would have a revival moment to regain weakened Korean language, which may require great efforts and a huge amount of cost.

#### **4.4. Some other countries**

As regards the relationship between English use and comparatively less perception of their native language, it may be useful to refer to the cases of some Asian countries (e.g., Philippines, Singapore or Hong Kong) where a colonial language is used as an official language. In the Philippines, "independence and nationhood were achieved without the support of a common language" (Edwards, 1985, p. 83). As a result, a lot of government effort is being made to encourage their ethnic languages, e.g., Tagalog. Nevertheless, the policy to associate Tagalog

with national language has not quite succeeded among the population because English as a colonial language has remained an extremely important language in the Philippines. M. Kim (1998, p. 56) cites the Philippines as an example of where national identity is being weakened because of the strong perception of English. He implies that a strong perception of English among population or English choice as an official language did not lead to a desirable or exemplary model situation at all. Thus he emphasizes that Korea should avoid the situation in which English assumes primary importance. Hong Kong has a similar language situation: English dominates in spite of there being several official languages. Singapore also shows a mass language shift to English as a consequence of their bilingual education policy (Pakir, 1994, p.370). However, those countries are no longer indigenous groups, but instead could be perceived as new forms of nations such as "neutral" or "supra-ethnic" (Edwards, 1985, p. 81).

Sociolinguists pay close attention to the development of English imperialism and show rejection of this 'growing hegemony of English'. For instance, Phillipson (2000) wrote that the influence of 'Americanization' often kills minority languages and local identities in European countries, and that in response to this, policies to promote the diversification of language are necessary such as the promotion of all other languages in the parts of Europe where linguistic imperialism is occurring due to the adoption of English. Linguistic imperialism is not a new phenomenon in many cases. However, Pakir (1994) warns that this linguistic imperialism takes away linguistic human rights, traditional values and unique aspects of culture and identities and that it is dangerous to shut out another linguistic world of human beings.

## **5. Current social phenomenon as a result of early English learning**

The South Korean government introduced a policy that in which all grade 3 students in primary schools were to learn English as a

compulsory subject from 1997. The policy could be one of the most powerful decisions in the history of Korean school education, because a foreign language at primary school level has not been compulsory since liberation. However, the promulgation of the policy raises a great many questions about social effects in the community and it has given rise to a widely held suspicion whether primary school students *should* learn English as a compulsory subject.

In fact, social impacts are taking place rapidly, which is evident from many signs: the rise of parents' burden for English private college tuition fees, a report that early English learning hampers the children's smooth and normal brain growth due to too much emphasis on English, the rise of variation in the knowledge of English between students as a result of less opportunity for the students in rural areas, the increase of illegal foreign teachers, tongue operations is popular among children for the better pronunciation of English, pregnant women's overseas travel to English-speaking countries for their delivery, and the separation of families as a result of the children learning English in English-speaking countries (Choi, 2003).

The impact of English on the modern Korean language is also becoming serious. It is not difficult to see the influence of English in Korea particularly in advertising, TV programs, newspapers, magazines, commercials, shop signboards, films, fashions, pop songs and even general conversations. Indeed numerous English items have been incorporated into Korean culture and are now used constantly in Korea. Further, the language shift to English from Korean is accelerating and is producing a new linguistic situation, which is enough for the Korean people to have a deep suspicion that English is taking up much influence in Korea. For instance, according to the Jeonbuk University research team who conducted a survey on language shift, an increasing number of shops (almost 70%) have signboards written in foreign languages, most of which are in English (Donga Ilbo, 1997a). There is also a report that among 774 Korean leading companies, only 3 companies opted for a company name written in 'pure' Korean, while the remainder used names written in English or another foreign



language or Roman characters or some combination of these with Korean (Donga Ilbo, 1997b). Further, supporting this point is the case cited by Y. Kim's (2000) report that visitors to Korea have often been shocked at the high degree of foreign language use and that 'anglicisms' apparently spread among the Korean people. More seriously, as Y. Kim (2000, p.101) notes, children are sometimes called English names such as 'Mary Kim' or 'Charlie Lee' instead of their own name in many private colleges and even in some public places.

Much of the evidence can be obtained from Choi's (2003) recent study that investigated Korean children's attitudes towards English and Korean. Three hundred and sixty one primary school students participated in this study. Data collection had been carried out quantitatively and qualitatively with questionnaires and interviews for 5 years. The results suggest that the Korean children have a favourable attitude towards English and are becoming increasingly involved in English. However, a suspicion of a weakening sense of linguistic identity had been raised, as the participants preferred English to Korean and put more value on English rather than Korean. And their perception of mother tongue was also not as strong as it was before. Thus Choi's (2003) study strengthens a suspicion that the Korean children's strong sense of linguistic identity has been softening for 5 years and leaves a doubt about whether they can maintain their previously established perception of the importance of the Korean language.

In fact, previously, it had been felt that unless it were proposed that English be used as the medium of instruction for other school subjects, language shift would be unlikely to occur, and the perception of the importance of the Korean language would not be eroded. Nevertheless, a number of schools (e.g., universities and private schools) are now opting for English as the medium of instruction. The government decided to use English as a medium of instruction in English classes as from March 2001 in primary and secondary schools. Whatever the medium of instruction, it is clear that there is no sign of withdrawing English from Korea.

Rather Korean society seems to accept the recent world phenomenon, e.g., "the growing linguistic hegemony of English" (Spolsky, 1998, p.76). For example, Netizen's Poll (Donga Ilbo, 2000) showed that 66.78% of people surveyed agreed with the introduction of English as the second official language, and also the policy formally permitting overseas study for primary and secondary school students was recently released. Seoul, the capital of South Korea, is currently pursuing English use movements, e.g., 'making English villages' and 'writing official documents in English'.

The researcher's view here being formulated throughout the studies is that group feelings of linguistic identity could be related to the group members' perception of whether their language is socially valued. The major concern in this study is that if social circumstances create the mood of 'English first', demanding the introduction of English as an official language, the Korean language would appear to have much less value than English. Then English use may influence the Korean people's perception of the Korean language. Chinese has also been recognized as a useful language and the people perceive that it will have a special prestige and practical value in the business fields. If the purpose of the introduction of English as the second official language is to survive in the global community, then should the government introduce Chinese as an official language when it becomes a single network and a tool for survival?

## **6. Conclusion**

This study aims at identifying how the introduction of English as a second official language will affect Korean linguistic identity by reviewing many studies and current social phenomenon. The conclusion drawn here is that Korean language is interrelated with Korean identity and Korean language can be a force in fostering Korean identity in Korean context. Looking at many cases, the natural function of the mother tongue was very important and maintaining and losing a mother tongue depended on group members' efforts and attitudes.

Furthermore, as can be seen the above, when Korean primary school children were investigated with learning English, it was found that their strong sense of linguistic identity was breaking down. Worth mentioning is that many languages are dying especially in where a more powerful language spread out, but restoring lost languages requires a lot of government effort. Furthermore, if English becomes an official language in Korea, social problems would appear to be more serious, as it is evident in current social phenomenon. Thus this study carefully concludes that the introduction of English as the second official language is undesirable in Korean society.

The social phenomenon revealed by the researcher's observation is much more serious than the literature review provided. New social ideology, emphasizing that English does not mean giving up a part of an individual's secure life, and that 'globalization' means the inclusion of their own language and their cultural flavor, should be given by the government. Furthermore, more thoughtful and detailed research about the introduction of English as the second official language is urgently required. Finally, if it is agreed that all Koreans do not need to use English, the precise strategy which leads English needers (especially the people involved in the areas where English is essential) themselves to a high level of proficiency in English without wastefulness must be thoroughly researched. This may reduce current social problems occurring by all the people's English learning.

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