

## **Ethnic Identity of Students with Mixed Heritage in Defining Korean as a Heritage Language**

PARK, Kwang Jong  
University of New Mexico

**Abstract:** Language acquisition is often understood as a biological inheritance, interpreted as a natural process (Fishman, 1988). People often think the mathematical formula which biological heritage equals the heritage language acquisition. This definition may apply to a traditional monolingual context of one language in one culture, where people do not encounter linguistic or cultural boundaries. However, most people encounter multiple linguistic and cultural contacts with others and it has been difficult to apply the equation of language and biological inheritance in such contexts. As Lynch (2003) and Wiley (2001) discuss, the profile of heritage language learners has become complicated and diverse. We can no longer define a shared ancestral heritage as the sole characteristic of heritage language learners. Contemporary researchers emphasize the importance of subjective group membership and the degree of affinity between one's own identity and the ancestral language for defining heritage language learners (Carreira, 2004; Kondo-Brown, 2003; Wiley, 2001). For this reason, this study examines the sense of Korean ethnic identity of students with mixed heritage, as their ethnic identity as Korean is often challenged due to limited linguistic and cultural knowledge and even appearance. The study of students with mixed heritage helps illuminate sociocultural factors that discourage the potential for multiethnic identities, multilingual and multicultural competence of our students.

**Keywords:** identity, ethnic identity, heritage language, mixed heritage, multiculturalism

### **Introduction**

As Wiley (2001) discusses, although definitions and labels are key to constructing learner profiles to meet students' needs, defining heritage language learners is difficult because of the complexity and idiosyncrasy of heritage language learners themselves. According to Cho, Shin and Krashen (2004), "heritage languages are spoken by the children of immigrants or by those who immigrated to a country when they are young" (p. 23). This definition excludes students who were adopted when they were young as well as students with mixed heritage whose first language is English. Drawing upon the definition of "heritage" suggests the intergenerational transmission of language. Language acquisition is often taken as a biological inheritance, interpreted as a natural process "acquired with the mother's milk" (Fishman, 1988, p. 84). This understanding emphasizes the equation of language and biological inheritance. It might apply to the traditional context of one language in one culture, where people do not encounter linguistic or cultural boundaries. However, in most contexts people encounter multiple linguistic and cultural contacts with others, and in such settings it has been difficult to apply such an equation of language and biological inheritance.

We can no longer define a shared ancestral heritage as the sole characteristic of heritage language learners. In my own Korean language classroom, the diversity of my students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds mirrors the complexity of defining what heritage language is and who heritage language learners are. Their motivation and attitudes toward learning Korean, their levels of proficiency, and their personal experiences with the Korean community are as diverse as their ages. One common thread is that every student is associated with the Korean community in some way: a student who was adopted by American parents, four students who have a Korean parent, two students who have a Korean

spouse, and students who are otherwise socially, personally, and religiously affiliated with the Korean community. Except for two Anglo American students who have a Korean spouse and two other students who want to learn Korean for their personal reasons, most students have a Korean ethnic background. However, can I refer to all students with a Korean ethnic background as heritage language learners? As my student who is a Korean adoptee said, “I am supposedly a Korean.” Is Korean “supposedly” a heritage language for my students because of their genetic inheritance?

When people do not have a sense of identity with their genetic ethnic origins, can we still refer to them as heritage language learners? Ancestral heritage is one of several characteristics defining heritage language learners. However, a sense of ethnic identity should be considered in defining heritage language learners. During the last six years of my teaching career in a Korean language school, I was surprised by my students’ sense of ethnic identity and their attitudes toward and perceptions about learning Korean. Most students identify themselves as American rather than Korean, regardless of whether one or both of their parents are Korean immigrants. One of my students even identified himself as a “Twinkie” indicating that everything about him is white except his skin color. Why does this student think that his skin color does not match his affinity or cultural identity?

For this reason, I chose to examine how my students identify themselves and what factors influence their self-identification. This study particularly examines the sense of ethnic identity of students with mixed heritage since their ethnic identity as Korean is often challenged by themselves and others due to, in part, limited linguistic and cultural knowledge and even appearance. The purpose of this study is to construct a better understanding of my students with mixed heritage and to be better able to help them construct a positive self-identification. Throughout my paper, I elucidate my students’ experiences as persons with mixed heritage. In an attempt to understand the experiences of students with mixed heritage in the interrelationship between language and identity, this study addresses the following questions: (1) what does it mean to be of mixed heritage? (2) why do students with mixed heritage identify themselves as they do?

## **Literature Review**

### *Identity*

Stephen (1991) defines identity as “a meaning a self acquires when ‘situated’-that is, cast in the shape of a social object by the acknowledgement of his participation or membership in social relations” (p. 261). However, this definition is not sufficient to explain idiosyncratic and personal elements in identity formation. People do not make meaning about themselves just by acquiring a meaning assigned to them. As Fishman (1988) emphasizes, ethnicity is recognized by both self-identification and acknowledgment in the eyes of others. Identity is shaped through the processes of self-awareness and self-reflection, especially when one is situated as “other” in interactions with people, place, and position. People perceive, reflect upon, and reconstruct their identities when they encounter borders situated by those with whom we interact, where we are, and our positionality in relation to other people. Erikson (1980) views identity as self-representation across various contexts, emphasizing the fluid and ongoing process of identity formation. In sum, “self” plays a crucial role in constructing identities in conjunction with social interaction with others. Mead (1964), on the other hand, defines “self” as the passive product of social processes, taking attitudes of others to complete one’s self identity. Ironically, though, Mead’s definition of “self” supports the active role of “self” by recognizing the reflexivity, multiplicity and flexibility of self in relation to other people and organizations. Moreover, when it comes to “affinity, loyalty and

feeling attached to membership” (Hall & Turner, 2001) and defining who are “the others”, individuals’ idiosyncratic perspectives in identity formation cannot be ignored.

In summation, identity can be defined as a situated, reciprocal, and negotiated process of self representation in relation to people, place, and position. Also, identity is not formed by simply acquiring others’ identities and/or definitions of ourselves but by reconstructing our own identities through our relationships with people, place, and position. These aforementioned perspectives share an understanding of the elements influencing identity formation: self, society and social actors (others). So far, I have discussed the definition of identity and elements influencing identity formation. However, it is also necessary to examine how people develop their multiple identities as well as their core identity to understand the complexity and idiosyncrasy of identity.

### *Identity Development*

According to Gee (2001), all people have multiple identities connected to performance and participation in society, but we have a “core identity” that holds more uniformly, for ourselves and others, across contexts” (p. 99). Gee also presents four ways to view identity: nature identity, institution identity, discourse identity, and affinity identity. Each of these four perspectives interrelates with the others. Whereas nature identity is identity aligned with our biological nature such as people may adopt a particular ethnic identity because their parents are members of the ethnic group, institution identity is formed by position assigned with power, responsibility and authority. Discourse identity is constructed by recognition through “dialogue of the other people” (Gee, 2001, p. 103). Gee (1996) describes identity formation through discourse as follows:

A discourse is a socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and ‘artifacts’ of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or ‘social network’, or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful ‘role’ (p. 131)

As Gee discusses above, discourse plays a great role in building affinity nature because it is accomplished through participation with groups sharing values, beliefs, attitudes and social practices. Gee’s four ways to view identity cannot be separated from each other because they reinforce one another in building affiliation and belonging to a certain group. People make meaning of themselves and try to find the appropriate way to represent themselves depending on place, people and position. Wallace (1997) defines identities as “the result of the meanings people ascribe to themselves and to others based on their membership in social groups” (p. 31). Encountering borders built by place, people, and one’s positionality often prompts us to think about who we are, which in turn allows us distance from the familiarity and solidarity of our own group and leads us to reflect upon, negotiate and reconstruct our identities. In other words, we are situated to think about our own knowledge, values and beliefs when we encounter borders built by others (self is situated as “other” to the group as well).

### *The role of language in identity development*

As McCarty and Romero refer to language as “social-cultural glue” (p. 16), the maintenance of heritage language is vital in connecting where we come from, who we are and who we become. Language is like a fertile soil helping a tree have strong roots to grow and be part of the life cycle; we become enriched and nourished by knowledge, beliefs and wisdom that we receive, negotiate, and construct through communication. In other words, language plays a crucial role transmitting the knowledge, values, and beliefs to help children

become members of their community through social interaction between grandparents, parents and children. Therefore, language is not only a tool to transmit knowledge but also to provide a strong base to understand and construct who we are. According to Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba (1991), language is a “unique symbolic system for the transmission of knowledge from generation to generation” (p. 25). They also state that language is a system serving to help us “define, interpret, classify, store, [and] communicate mental messages” (p. 25). However, this symbolic system is not internalized as a passive product. It requires social interactions which allow people to build their affiliation with the group by sharing values, beliefs, attitudes and social practices to participate in the group as a member.

Overall, identity is shaped through interaction with people, place and contexts. People perceive, negotiate and reconstruct their identity through meanings that others assign to them and meanings they construct from their own experiences (Wallace, 1997). Therefore, as Norton (1997) states, communication is imperative because it is a means to be “engaged in identity construction and negotiation” (p. 410). In summation, language is a means to receive, share, negotiate, and reconstruct knowledge, beliefs, and values which help to form membership and build affiliation with the ethnic group. If this is so, what is the relationship between ethnic identity and language when students with mixed heritage speak only the majority language, English? When they do not have a means to communicate with Korean speakers, how does this language barrier influence their affiliation with that ethnic group?

### **Methodology**

New Mexico is known as a multicultural state and is often regarded as a “majority minority” state. De Vargas (2003) even describes New Mexico as a “tricultural state” where “the Hispanic and Native American cultures have managed to coexist for generations and complement the dominant Anglo culture” (p.2). However, New Mexico has more than just three cultures. Asian cultures are also present in New Mexico. According to the 2000 U.S. census, Asians represent 1.1% (19,255) of the total population of New Mexico (1,819,046); and among Asians, Koreans represent 9.3% (1,791) of the Asian population. As Giles and Johnson (1987) discuss, the Korean ethnic group in New Mexico does not have high ethnolinguistic vitality as determined by three factors: “(1) status factor (such as economic, political, linguistic prestige), (2) demographic factors (such as absolute numbers, birthrate, geographical concentration), and (3) institutional support (such as recognition of the group and its language in the media, education, government)” (p.71). Due in part to the small size of the community, the Korean language does not have economic, political, and linguistic prestige; therefore, neither the Korean language nor the Korean ethnic group is recognized in the media, education and government. Students of Korean ethnic background do not have much exposure to Korean language and culture. Moreover, students with mixed heritage who speak English as their household language have even more limited exposure to the Korean language and culture.

Korean language schools known as “Saturday schools” are autonomously established and run by Korean residents in foreign countries on weekends for the purpose of instructing children in Korean language, history, and culture. They are not part of the public school system. Most are non-profit organizations formed in order to teach Korean to the Korean community and broader local community. Korean parents or parents who adopt Korean children frequently try to send their children to the heritage language school so that they develop an understanding of the culture and language of their roots. The report “Education in Korea: 2003-2004” by the Korean Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2003) includes Korean heritage language schools (otherwise known as

Saturday Schools) as overseas educational institutions, defining the purpose as “raising the national consciousness as Koreans of Korean residents to help them become proud Koreans” (p.144).

To examine experiences of students with mixed heritage in relation to language and identity, I used a qualitative practitioner research design. Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (1994) define practitioner research as “research done by practitioners using their own site (classroom, institution, school district, community) as the focus of their study” (p.2). My teaching experience in a Korean language school has raised many questions regarding students’ identity and attitudes about the Korean culture and language, particularly because most students identify themselves as American rather than affiliating with their Korean background. Sparked by my teaching experience and interest, I started collecting data on students’ and parents’ attitudes and perceptions on languages.

The study includes interviews and teacher field notes about students’ comments during class or in the Korean language school. However, in this paper, I will mainly focus on interview data. Based on in-depth interviews, I present a detailed, in-depth account of students’ experiences as persons with mixed heritage and how these experiences shape the way in which they come to define and situate themselves within white mainstream society.

### **Findings and Discussion**

This study’s findings indicate that even though students label themselves as American, they have difficulty negotiating the duality and complexity of their identity as students with mixed heritage for the following reasons: (1) appearance, (2) lack of exposure to the Korean language and culture, (3) awareness of stratification and status differential in cultures and languages, and (4) parents’ influence. Findings suggest that limited cultural and linguistic knowledge about an ethnic group often leads children to struggle in negotiating their multiethnic identities because their own perception and others’ ideas on the authenticity of being a member of the group is heavily interrelated with language as well as other factors such as appearance and cultural knowledge. Since the dominant society promotes the culture and language of white middle class as official, legitimate, and valued, minority parents are often portrayed as “apprentices” while white American parents are often represented as the “masters” of the linguistic, social and cultural knowledge. This representation often creates an ambiguity between the hegemony of parental authority and the ascribed “apprentice” status because Korean parents’ cultural and linguistic knowledge cannot be appreciated in mainstream society given the stratification and status differential of their language and culture.

### **Being “mixed”**

Most of my students feel positive about being of mixed heritage. Allen said, “I can be somewhat exposed to both cultures. Feel more comfortable in two different places.” He also emphasized, “Even though you [others] don’t think that I am better. I’ve got a little more than them. Not whole a lot, [but] more than mom.” In terms of cultural and linguistic knowledge, they compare themselves favorably to their American parents. Kathryn stated, “I know basic meanings what she [my mom] said. Whereas my dad doesn’t...really understand what my mom means when I do.” Kathryn also articulates her ability,

You will know more about different heritage because I mean two or more heritages so you will know more about them and you will also well you will get deeper view of the world the kind of like you can see things little clear. Different way you could understand more stuff.

However, Kathryn's positive view was also contradicted by her lack of linguistic and cultural knowledge about her Korean heritage. This contradiction causes many of my students to feel alienated, distanced, and even scared to be in a situation with which they are not familiar and knowledgeable. Kathryn said,

It is confusing thing. Cause in different families going to have to behave differently because they come from different cultures stuffs. And it is sometimes just a little scary because on my Korean side sometimes I don't understand what's going on or what my relatives' sayings are so I am going to have to ask my mom. What are they saying, what's going on. But on my American side my family I understand things a little further but I am still kind of uncomfortable because I am different

Kathryn's confusion is reiterated in Camellia and Misoon's narrations. As Camellia noted, Like at the same time it would be nice to identify with one and not have to straddle the line and not have to worry about titles or designations and just know exactly what you are and not have to struggle with the title

On the other hand, Misoon who seems to be caught between three cultures, the mainstream culture, Hispanic culture and Korean culture stated,

It is kind [of] like it is cool and it is hard. Cause like when I am in Dad's house I do like certain things like I eat different foods like I act differently like around his family stuff like that. And then with my mom, like when she is with her friends stuff like that, I am more polite and more like yeah I am not as hyper and happy...I guess Korean culture is more like restrict you to do something in polite way because others might say something 'You are not polite enough something like that'.... With my mom, you know you have to act with certain way toward people because you don't want to offend them because you used to like how things are in Korea. Like being treated in a special way so I just I am more polite like do what my mom tells me to do

As mentioned, students struggle with their otherness in different sociocultural contexts. In the next section, findings indicate how students situate, negotiate, and identify themselves when they encounter linguistic and cultural borders.

### **Factors influencing identity construction**

*Appearance: "What are you?"*

Rodriguez (2003) mentioned that the Census Bureau's decision to allow Americans to check more than one box in the "race" section of the 2000 Census was an important step toward greater identity freedom; he thinks that it means endowing racial issues with the complexity and nuance that people with mixed heritage deserve. Nonetheless, the complexity of status and identity for people with mixed heritage cannot be solved by checking more than one box for their racial identification. In America, the status of people with mixed heritage has been decided and/or ignored depending on dominant political and economic interests (Williams-Leon & Nakashima, 2001). On the other hand, since "mixing" with other races in Korea is viewed as damaging national pride in ethnic purity, children with mixed heritage have traditionally been stigmatized and ignored by society. The concept of Korean as monoethnic often contributes to the perception of children with mixed heritage as non-Korean (Murphy-Shigematsu, 2001). Therefore, children with mixed heritage are often

excluded from both societies and regarded as “foreign” or designated as “other” within Korean culture.

A common mainstream platitude is that being American is acquired simply “by birth and by citizenship,” (Du Bois, 1996) not by race, language or ethnicity. If this is so, shouldn’t all Americans have equal authority, privilege, and power? My participant who is a Korean parent said “they [my children] are really I call it the United States of American person”. Why, then, are my students asked by others “what are you?” or even questioned or challenged about their right to identify as American.

As McIntosh (1988) elaborates, white privilege, which is not recognized as privilege by whites, including not being asked or challenged by others about “what they are” is a privilege that my students with mixed heritage cannot have because of “who they are”. Takaki (1993) states that the narrow concept of defining American as whites and the image of nonwhites as foreigners and outsiders are reinforced by a Eurocentric curriculum. Due to this reason, even though the “Asianness” in my students’ physical features is minimal, it is enough to bring their “Americanness” into question because of the notion of American as whites.

My students often encounter others’ curiosity. Kathryn stated the following: “Americans do look at me differently but it is not a big deal because [there are] lots of people with mixed heritage in America. They usually asked me ‘what are you?’”. Another participant responded to her difference in the Korean community. “[Korean people] judge you. [they said] you just don’t look Korean”. Angela is frustrated that everybody compared her looks with her sister’s who looks more Korean than herself based on others’ comments. Her frustration and resentment appear as a reason to distance herself from the Korean community as follows. “I don’t like to go to (Korean) church just, because I am not Korean, well I am, but I don’t look it” (Angela, 13). The frustration was echoed by Camelia recalling her adolescence in New Mexico,

Well, like in New Mexico. It is always very apparent to me that I was different. So like when I was younger, I hated that... I remember back one time... one guy was talking to me and he was saying this weird thing so then, he asked me a question so then I was taking a moment to think about it. And he is looking and said ‘you don’t understand a word I am saying, do you? You don’t speak English’ and so that was like ‘how could he say such a thing, I am an American (Camellia, 19)

Camellia’s resistant feeling changed into motivation to know about her Korean side as she grew up and accepted her difference:

Then, as I got older, like ok I am different, So I need to reconcile, I need to understand. Like physically, like of course I look a little bit different than other people I am growing up with so I need to understand culture behind it so that I can explain it. So that is my main motivation. Like to reconcile like especially in New Mexico more how you look, you have to have something to back it up. (Camellia, 19)

*Lack of exposure to the Korean language and culture: “I just call myself American.”*

Vermeulen (2000) states, certain ways of ethnic minorities are often regarded as illogical, exotic, and incomprehensible because outsiders to that ethnic group do not understand how and why they respond to the situation as they do. Since many of my students do not have sufficient knowledge about Korean culture, they often feel that their Korean parent’s

behavior is incomprehensible and illogical. After my explanation of Korean collectivism versus American individualism during the interview, Angela interpreted the collectivistic aspect of Korean culture as illogical and undesirable, saying, “Who raises people that way?” She further imposed her values on my explanation as follows, “when it is time for them [children] to leave, they [children] won’t be very independent.” Whereas Angela talks about cultural difference as illogical and undesirable, Emily talks about her identification with America in relation to her knowledge about Korea. “I cannot speak Korean, I have never lived in Korea. I just call myself as American”. Insufficient knowledge of the ethnic group causes Emily to identify herself as American.

Through language, children learn values, culture and beliefs and share the depth of their understanding by interacting with elders (Benjamin *et al.*, 1996). Therefore, my students who learn and practice the values, beliefs and culture of the mainstream feel unfamiliar with Korean culture. They may even feel inferior to American culture. As Angela responded,

South Korea is poor. We are big country and it is not like one main place. But since South Korea is very small, you can see poverty a lot ...Most Korean people are very gossip. They cannot close their mouths... That’s not culture. That’s poorness. Not to be able to have a toilet... My grandparents’ house. They really live in a nice condominium. Swimming pool, everything. But the door is sliding door. It is like a closet...They don’t have big TV... It is not like here. It makes me headache. (Angela, 13)

Angela’s distance from Korean culture is perpetuated by limited exposure to Korea through the media. Aboud and Doyle (1993) argue the impact of media conveying differential group status and reinforcing the stereotypes of minority groups. Considering images of Koreans and Korea through the media, the limited and biased information given is more than enough to plant inferiority and shame about their ethnic background, which in turn leads mixed heritage students to distance themselves from their ethnic minority background. This excerpt illustrates that process.

Angela explained, “That crazy man [Jeong-Il Kim] who is bald who don’t give food to people (who is that?) the news. Yes, they always mention that we have to.” Because of the lack of information about Korea through the limited access of media, she doesn’t distinguish North Korea from South Korea.

*Awareness of stratification in cultures and languages: “That’s not culture. That’s poorness.”*

Angela’s other comments also explain how the invisibility in schooling, media, and society of the minority language and culture was interpreted as illegitimate and inferior. Angela told me that she wants to learn English and French for the following reasons (note: she refers to American English as “American,” and British English as “English”).

I am not going to make career of Korea. But like France and England, you could have designers. And you have to speak their language. Now England, they speak American but like they have different words for like toilet is *loo* and pants are *trousers*. They are different. France is number one cloth place. And so you have to speak French.

The following excerpt also explains how invisibility impact student’s perception of language status. “In high school, you have to learn different languages. But there is no Korean in high school curriculum because it is so difficult. They use symbols. You are not allowed to. You just don’t want to learn symbols.” As a result of legitimatizing white middle-

class history, culture and values as official knowledge through a Eurocentric curriculum (Apple, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Lesko, 2001), students often interpret the invisibility of people of color in curriculum as illegitimacy and inferiority of cultures and languages of minorities. Eurocentric curriculum also promotes the image of people of color as “outsiders to civilization, as violators of an alleged social contract who must be dragged out into the light of white rationality” (Allen, 2004). In sum, limited exposure to Korean culture and language and awareness of stratification in cultures and language in society discourage students from affiliating and identifying with their own Korean heritage.

### *Parents' influence*

Whereas four of my participants identified themselves as American for the aforementioned reasons, some students identified themselves as Korean American and Korean and one of the participants indicates her fluidity of identities depending on place, people and positionality in diverse contexts. As Allen states,

I like to identify myself as Korean American.... [In] my school, the only Asian kids are my brother and I. It is just. I guess. You can be different in a way... Make sure that people don't get the wrong impression that I'm just like Korean or American. More to just be known both sides.

Misoon, who is told by others that she doesn't look Hispanic and regarded as Korean because of her Korean name, identified herself as Korean. She responded,

Yeah, they ask what ethnic area whatever, 'oh I am Korean' I hardly I don't really say I am Hispanic that often. I just say that I am a Korean. No [there is not a reason that I don't say that I am Hispanic]. I just say 'Korean' I just like it.... I am Korean and there is the other part I should

Misoon seemed to feel that she ignored part of her heritage but still showed her preference identifying as Korean. The racial hierarchy that Misoon's mother thinks about Hispanics seem to influence this. Misoon's mom responded,

As I lived with my ex-husband, I didn't like the way they [Mexicans] live. I like Korean way better. I told my children about it. I asked them not to even think of dating Hispanic. I kind brainwashed them. Living in America, I have seen that Hispanics work hard but some Hispanics are lazy. And they do not have strong capability. They are poor. A few people are rich. They usually do unimportant jobs.”

Parents' influence on children's identity shows in Camellia's following excerpt as well. Camellia noted,

It [Korean American] does make perfect sense because like because you are American but at the same time, you are not ...I said something to my dad. Like...'[am I] Korean American?' 'No, you are not Korean American. You are American' so I mean then I got impression like “oh you are not supposed to take your Korean side but you are supposed to be proud that you are like Korean “and” American?” “I thought that made sense because I am like half Korean half American, but they shot that down saying no that's not what you are so, I get the impression that I'm not supposed to side with Korean because there is always that part of me that's not like you said pure Korean, so I guess I could never be Korean but like at the same time you're American but with a different heritage.

Whereas other participants talk about choosing one identity over the other, Camellia discussed the duality and fluidity of her identities based on place, people and her positionality in the context. This excerpt describes it well. “I think it is relative to where you are geographically like um in America especially in smaller cities you’re seen as much more ethnic verses when I’m in Korea, I am obviously an American. [In] urban America oh I could be a Korean.” As Kim (2003) discusses in his study, a trip to Korea often triggers individuals’ identity as Korean American, particularly in the Korean context where their relatives and other native Koreans look at them as not being Korean enough and being too American. Whereas visits to the country of origin is encouraged for promoting positive identity and heritage language development (Cho & Krashen, 2000), students may realize their otherness from that ethnic group and confirm their unique and dual identity (Kim, 2003; Tse, 1998). Camelia, who was visiting Korea while I interviewed her, responded, “yeah, I think at first when I got here I didn’t think it would be that big of a deal because in America I am used to being more ethnic but being here I am seeing a difference and obviously I dress American and so I guess I look pretty American here.” Camellia still mentioned the difficulty of being in two worlds,

um, it’s difficult I guess, how to identify yourself because being half you are one and the other and everything, but you’re not really both, but you’re not really one or the other um I guess I don’t really know....even if you wanted to be one or the other you always are both.

Students identify themselves in relation to appearance, knowledge and status of language and culture but parents’ influence cannot be disregarded in this identity formation.

### **Conclusion**

According to Phinney & Roteram-Borus (1987), ethnic identity takes into account “the personal ownership of ethnic group membership and its correlated knowledge, understanding, values, behaviors, and the feelings that the direct implication of that ownership has” (p.33). Therefore, even though students with mixed heritage have “desirability of affiliation” and identification with groups (Zack, 1996), they can not claim membership because they do not think they have sufficient knowledge, understanding, values and behaviors about the ethnic group.

As the findings suggest, my students with mixed heritage discussed their duality of identity; at the same time, children still hesitate to identify themselves as a member of the ethnic group. Since language is a means to receive, negotiate, and construct knowledge, values, and beliefs, students who do not have a means to interact with the ethnic group have greater difficulty affiliating with the group. As Meyer (2005) discusses, promoting speedy transition from heritage language to English in the United States often demands the sacrifice of community identities, values, beliefs, and wisdom grounded in their heritage language and cultural practices embedded within it. Moreover, under white mainstream society, which legitimatizes white middle class history, culture and values as official knowledge (Apple, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Lesko, 2001), minority parents often lose opportunities to transmit their values, beliefs, and wisdom to their children (Wong Fillmore, 1991). As Kohn, Slomczynski and Schoenbach (1986) discuss, “people’s own experiences become more and more important for their values, with their own sociostructural positions and attendant experience eventually overshadowing the influences of their parental families” (p. 99). As children grow up, they surpass parents’ level of fluency in the majority language and become more familiar with values of the mainstream. Due to this, children who were not used to questioning their minority parents’ status as a master of knowledge, begin to challenge

parental values that minority parents want to transmit to their children. Students often express their frustration because of their different linguistic and cultural membership. Reverse roles in a master-apprentice relationship between a minority parent and children who have already mastered the discourse of power and prestige can create ambiguity between the hegemony of parental authority and the stratification of language and culture.

The promotion of certain regimes of linguistic and cultural knowledge at the expense of others not only sacrifices national resources (Brecht & Ingold, 1998) but also disconnects familial and communal bonds bridging our past, present and future. Therefore, as Apple (2004) suggests, educators need to build a sense of community grounded in an ethic of caring and connectedness, not creating a hierarchy over one another. The points in favor of this position include choices of “the maintenance of minority languages and culture, improvement in school retention and academic success among minority children, inclusion of parents and the minority community in the educational process, and the need for multiculturalism” (Wright et al., 1992). When school becomes a place to value equally and sanction the diversity of culture, it will be a foundation for the successful integration of America. For successful integration in school, students’ diverse cultures should be reflected in the curriculum, and minority communities should be actively involved and viewed as educational resources. When schools provide a safe, open, truthful, and sensitive environment to talk about conflict, stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination, we can say “this is America for all.”

Ethnic identity is an often unstable and ongoing process “in the course of a lifetime or in different situations” (Stephen & Stephen, 1989). Therefore, what I learned through this research cannot be the end but the beginning of my research. As my students allow me to open a door to see their world, I will continue to be a border-crosser between my world and my students’ world.

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