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The Role of Voluntary Factors in Heritage Language Development : How Speakers Can Develop the Heritage Language on Their Own.

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There are advantages to heritage language (HL) development⁽¹⁾. There is evidence that those who continue to develop their heritage language in addition to the language of the country experience slightly more school and occupational success than those who do not (RUMBAUT, 1995; KRASHEN, 1998a). In addition, heritage language development facilitates better communication with family members and with other members of the community (WONG-FILLMORE, 1991; CHO, CHO and TSE, 1997; CHO and KRASHEN, 1998), and may also be of economic value. Heritage language development may also help promote a healthy sense of multiculturalism, an acceptance of both the majority and heritage culture. But heritage languages are hard to maintain : language shift is powerful (VELTMAN, 1983; KRASHEN, 1996). In this study, we examine some of the factors that may play a role in heritage language development.

Predictors of Heritage Language Competence

We review here the results of previous research on HL competence. The first set of predictors can be roughly categorized as those that are related to comprehensible input in the HL :

(1) We thank Lucy Tse for her helpful comments on this paper.

1. Parental use of the HL. There is consistent evidence that parental use is a strong factor in HL development. In a multivariate study of 12-15 year old second generation HL speakers, PORTES and HAO (1998) reported greater HL competence when subjects belonged to a family in which both parents spoke the HL, and reported a strong relationship between HL development and parents' competence in the HL. Several descriptive studies have also produced evidence that this factor is very important. BAYLEY, SCHECTER and TORRES-ALAYA (1996) suggest that a "household ban" on English helped insure development of Spanish as an HL in one family. HINTON (1998), in an analysis of 250 "linguistic autobiographies" written by Asian-American university students, concluded that "... all those children who retained fluency or near-fluency in their native tongue come from homes where the heritage language was spoken as a matter of policy" (p. 15). Hinton also concludes, however, that parent use was necessary, but not sufficient; "many of the families ... did in fact choose to use the heritage language at home, and yet still found that their children were loosing fluency" (p. 15). KONDO (1998), in a study of HL competence in Japanese among second generation university students in Hawaii also concludes that parental input is an important factor, "but is not sufficient for the children's active use of Japanese" (p. 394).

2. Residence/proximity : Those living in close proximity to other speakers of the heritage language maintain it longer (DEMOS, 1988, PORTES and HAO, 1998). LI (1982) found this effect was especially strong after the first generation. HINTON (1998) also reported better HL development among students who grew up in ethnic enclaves, but also notes that the effect may not last : Once the speaker moves away from other HL speakers, HL competence may diminish.

3. Visits to the country of origin : DEMOS (1988) reported that frequency of visits to Greece was a significant and independent predictor of Greek HL competence, a factor found to be important in descriptive studies as well (BAYLEY et. al., 1996; KONDO, 1998, HINTON, 1998).

These trips provide comprehensible input, as well as the motivation to improve HL competence.

4. Length of residence : PORTES and HAO (1998) reported that those in the US longer had lower HL competence.

5. Reading : There is overwhelming evidence that reading, especially reading for pleasure, has a powerful effect on both first and second language acquisition (KRASHEN, 1993). KONDO (1998) notes that one of her subjects who was successful at maintaining the heritage language was an enthusiastic reader of comic books (Japanese manga), and KRASHEN (1996) reports anecdotal cases of two teenagers who improved their Chinese through pleasure reading.

6. Watching TV in the HL : HINTON (1998) notes that TV "sometimes helps in the maintenance or improvement of the home language" (p. 24). (Kondo's subjects (KONDO, 1998) watched Japanese TV but said that it did not help, because they relied on English subtitles.)

7. Practical needs : Some HL speakers are forced to utilize the HL more than others. A particularly interesting use is brokering, in which children act as translators for parents (TSE, 1995, 1996).

The next set of factors are primarily instructional, or school-related (which may or may not be comprehensible input) :

8. Attending heritage language classes : Univariate research is divided on this issue. TSE (1998a) reported that participation in heritage language programs has a positive impact on attitudes toward the heritage language, resulting in a more positive perception of the HL group (as well as better relationships with other groups), and higher self-evaluations. KATAOKA (1978), however, reported that for Japanese-Americans taking Japanese classes correlations between length of study and confidence in speaking Japanese were very low. Many of Hin-

ton's subjects (HINTON, 1998) found language schools ("Chinese school" or "Korean school") "boring or useless" (p. 23). Similar reactions were reported by subjects interviewed by GARRETON (1995) and KONDO (1998), and similar observations have been made by one teacher (LEMBERGER, 1997). The evidence thus ranges from positive to negative.

9. Bilingual education : This factor is distinguished from (8) above, in that it refers to early schooling in the heritage language, either in the home country before immigration (termed *de facto* bilingual education in KRASHEN, 1996) or in the country of current residence. Most of the latter programs have rapid second language acquisition as their goal, but their effect on the heritage language has been found to be very positive in the short term (WILLIG, 1985).

Other factors can be roughly classified as "affective" :

10. Attitudes of HL speaker : There is evidence that some HL speakers go through a stage of rejection or avoidance of the HL culture (TSE, 1998b), a "drive to assimilate" (HINTON, 1998) into the majority culture, which may be associated with low perceived entholinguistic vitality of the HL group (LANDRY and ALLARD, 1992). Those in the stage of "ethnic ambivalence/evasion" will not improve their HL competence, regardless of whether input in the HL is available or not (TSE, 1998b).

11. Reactions of other HL speakers : Some imperfect HL speakers report that their efforts to use the HL are met with correction and even ridicule by more competent HL speakers, a reaction that discourages the use of the HL (GUPTA and YEOK, 1995; KRASHEN, 1998b).

Other factors defy simple categorization :

12. Generation : LI (1982), using data from the 1970 census, reported that for Chinese-Americans, generation was the strongest predictor of

shift, with the most rapid loss of the heritage language occurring between the second and third generations. Similar results were reported by DEMOS (1988), for Greek-Americans. Both were multivariate studies.

13. Age : Older subjects appear to have higher competence in the HL, even when generation is controlled (LI, 1982). PORTES and HAO (1998) found similar results, despite the limited age range of their subjects (ages 12-17). Age was associated with HL competence in DEMOS (1988), but did not survive the multiple regression analysis : The effect of age disappeared when other factors, such as generation, visits to the country of origin, and residence were considered.

14. Socio-economic status : SES was a significant predictor in Li's univariate analysis (LI, 1992), with lower SES associated with more heritage language retention, but SES did not survive the multivariate analysis. It was not a significant predictor in Portes and Hao's multivariate analysis.

Factors 5 and 6 are the only ones of the set that appear to be under the voluntary control of most subjects. Assuming access to reading and TV, HL speakers can do these activities on their own. The focus of this study was to consider these two factors, while controlling for some of the strongest of the non-voluntary factors, parental input and visits to the country of origin.

Procedure and Results

Subjects for the study were 114 Korean Americans. Fifty-five subjects were born in the US and fifty-nine arrived in the US at an early age (mean = 2.02 years, sd = 2.42). "Generation" was thus controlled in this study. All except two were between ages 18 and 30. The mean length of residence in the US was 19.05 years (sd = 3.71). Ninety-

eight of the subjects were enrolled in Korean language courses, either at a private language or at a university. An additional 16 subjects were obtained through Korean language classes, church, or personal acquaintances of one of the authors (G.C.). Only those whose parents were both Korean were included in the analysis.

The 98 subjects enrolled in the Korean language classes filled out a questionnaire. Data was obtained from the 16 other subjects from in-depth interviews, using the questionnaire as a guide. Detailed notes were taken during the interviews and interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. In the following section, we present the questions asked and the raw data.

Korean language competence : All subjects were asked to rate their competence in Korean on a Likert-type scale from 1 to 5, where 1 = very poor, 2 = poor, 3 = average, 4 = good, 5 = very good. Responses 1 and 2 were categorized as "weak HL competence", 3 was categorized as "average" and 4 and 5 were categorized as "strong." Subjects rated themselves for speaking, listening, reading, writing and overall competence. We focus here on the results for overall competence. For overall competence, 69 respondents rated themselves as "weak" (60.5%), 28 as "average" (24.6%), and 17 as "strong" (14.9%). This appears to be typical of second generation speakers : PORTES and HAO (1998) reported that only 16% of their subjects felt they were "fluent" in their parents' language, and HINTON (1998) describes her subjects as "semispeakers" of their heritage languages.

Language Use : Subjects were asked to indicate how often they spoke Korean with different groups of people. The results, presented below, confirm that English is the overwhelming language of choice when communicating with friends and siblings, and many use English with their parents.

Table 1

| | Always English | Mostly English | Equal | Mostly Korean | Korean no resp. | |
|----------|-------------------|-------------------|-------|------------------|-----------------|----|
| parents | 22.8% | 18% | 31% | 20% | 19% | |
| siblings | 85% | 5% | 13% | 0 | 2% | 9% |
| friends | 81% | 7% | 23% | 1% | 1% | 1% |
| n = 114 | | | | | | |

Visit to Korea : Subjects were asked if they had ever visited Korea, and if so, how many times and how long they had stayed. We present below the responses for total length of stay for the 90 subjects who said they had been to Korea.

| | |
|---------------------|-----|
| less than one month | 17% |
| 1-6 months | 41% |
| 6 m to 1 year | 13% |
| 1-2 years | 12% |
| 3 years or more | 7% |

Reading in Korean : Subjects were asked how often they read books or other printed material in Korean. 73% of the sample said they never did, 17% indicated "sometimes", 11% "often" and only 2% "always." Clearly, reading in Korean was seldom done by this group.

Watching TV : Subjects were asked how often they watched Korean television. 42% never did, 23% did so "sometimes," 26% did so "often" and 14% did so "always." Thus, a considerable percentage of subjects watched at least some television in Korean. This was possible because the subjects all lived in Southern California, where Korean television is available.

HL Classes : Subjects were asked if they had ever attended Korean language classes or a heritage language weekend school, and if so, for how long. Fourteen subjects said they never had. Of the 100 who had, 29 had done so for less than one year, 37 for one to two years, 27 for three to five years, and seven for six years or more.

Parental Input : Subjects were often how often their parents spoke Korean with them. Sixty-eight percent said that their parents always

spoke Korean with them, 11% choose "mostly Korean," 24% said it was equally English and Korean, only 3% indicated "mostly English" and 7% choose "always English." Subjects were also asked what language they were most comfortable in : 90.4% choose English, a contrast with the language parents generally used with them.

Table 2 presents simple correlations between reported overall competence in Korean and the predictors we studied :

Table 2 : Predictors of overall competence in Korean : simple correlations

| | n | |
|--------------------------------------|-----|-------|
| parental use of Korean | 114 | .37 |
| visiting Korea (length of stay) | 113 | .32 |
| watching Korean TV | 105 | .50 |
| reading in Korean | 103 | .37 |
| attending HL class (number of years) | 112 | .22 |
| age | 114 | -.014 |
| length of residence | 114 | -.136 |

for $n = 100$, $r = .195$ is statistically significant (two tailed test, $p < .05$).

Table 3 presents the results of a multiple regression analysis in which all predictors were entered simultaneously. Only subjects with complete data were included.

Table 3 : Regression analysis; y = overall HL competence

| predictor | beta | t | p |
|------------------------|-------|-------|------|
| parental use of Korean | .37 | 4.02 | .00 |
| visiting Korea | .22 | 2.31 | .023 |
| watching Korean TV | .245 | 2.67 | .01 |
| reading in Korean | .22 | 2.49 | .014 |
| attending HL classes | .072 | .850 | .40 |
| age | -.103 | -.756 | .451 |
| length of residence | .162 | 1.06 | .293 |

$r^2 = .398$, $F = 8.789$, $p < .001$

Because length of residence and age were highly correlated ($r = .762$), an additional regression analysis was done without length of residence, yielding nearly identical results.

Table 4. Regression analysis, without length of residence; y = overall HL competence

| predictor | beta | t | p |
|------------------------|------|------|------|
| parental use of Korean | .329 | 3.95 | .00 |
| visiting Korea | .177 | 2.05 | .043 |
| watching Korean TV | .242 | 2.64 | .01 |
| reading in Korean | .207 | 2.38 | .019 |
| attending HL class | .089 | 1.07 | .287 |
| age | .011 | .134 | .894 |

$r^2 = .391$, $F = 10.06$, $p < .001$

As a reliability check, multiple regressions were also run using subjects' averaged scores for listening, reading, speaking and writing Korean. Results were very similar to those presented in tables 3 and 4.

Summary and Discussion

The use of standardized regression coefficients (beta) allows us to compare the impact of the different predictors.

Subjects' age was clearly not a predictor of heritage language competence. Apparently, within the 18 to 30 age group, this factor is not relevant. Studies that have found an effect for age dealt with a wider range or with a younger sample.

Length of residence was also not a significant predictor of heritage language competence, perhaps because all subjects were either born in the US or arrived at a young age, and all had considerable length of residence.

Duration of attending heritage language classes correlated weakly with heritage language competence, but did not survive the multiple regression analysis.

In agreement with DEMOS (1988), visits to the country of origin remained a significant predictor, and in agreement with all previous studies, parental input was a significant predictor, the strongest one of the set. These factors, however, may be beyond the subjects' voluntary control. The other significant predictors, reading and watching television in Korean are within subjects' control, and are significant predictors of heritage language proficiency even when parental input and trips to Korea are controlled.

These results give us some optimism: HL speakers can improve their knowledge of the HL on their own, even without contact with other speakers of the language. Of course it could be argued that correlations between reading or television viewing and HL competence exist because those with more HL competence will watch more TV and read more, not vice versa. But there is good reason to hypothesize that the relationship is at least bidirectional: Both reading and TV watching are comprehensible input, and there is enormous evidence that comprehensible input is the essential environmental factor in first and second language development (KRASHEN, 1985). In addition, there is a great deal of evidence supporting the "power of reading" (KRASHEN, 1993) and some evidence showing that television can be of value in language acquisition (BLOSSER, 1988). Finally, MCQUILLAN (1996, 1998) has shown that pleasure reading can have a clearly positive effect on heritage language development. According to our data, very few HL speakers take advantage of this source of input.

As noted above, our regression analysis showed no relationship between duration of time spent taking HL classes and HL competence. Previous research provides several possible explanations. TSE (1998a) concludes that HL classes are most effective when they are integrated as part of the school day, a conclusion consistent with reports from Hinton's subjects (HINTON, 1998), who complained that Saturday school classes prevented them from enjoying their weekend. Tse also notes that integrating the HL class into the school day sends the message that the class is sanctioned, and that the school recognizes the importance of HL development (TSE, 1998a, p. 68). Another obvious

factor is the nature of the instruction: Some classes are clearly more pleasurable and effective than others: Using light literature and free reading appears to be a particularly promising direction for HL education (MCQUILLAN, 1996, 1998)

Inspection of the r^2 in our multiple regression ($r^2 = .398$) suggests that while we have been able to account for some of the reasons HL's are retained, there is much left to be done. We did not carry out an analysis of residence and the presence of other HL speakers, and our analysis did not consider factors such as the attitude of the HL acquirer toward the HL culture or reactions of native speakers, early bilingual education, or the impact of brokering.

Also, our results derive entirely from self-report, either from responses to a questionnaire or a single interview. Our conclusions are thus subject to the limitations of this methodology. Nevertheless, it is interesting that our results are consistent with previous findings, including those utilizing different methodologies. Our results also suggest a path that heritage language speakers can follow that appears to be painless (and even pleasant; KRASHEN, 1994; TSE and MCQUILLAN, 1997) to improve their heritage language ability and reap the benefits of increased heritage language competence.

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