

# Avoiding FOBs: An Account of a Journey

Mihyon Jeon

*University of Pennsylvania*

This paper is an ethnographic record of an on-going journey during which I have tried to understand the kinds of language ideologies that my students and I have constructed about the Korean language and culture. My students are mainly Korean-American university students who have never successfully achieved native fluency in their heritage language although several attended Korean Saturday schools as children. I am their Korean language teacher. A special word, “FOB” (Fresh Off the Boat), which I have discovered during this journey, proved crucial to my understanding of my students’ language ideology about the Korean language and culture. My language ideologies and those of my students appeared to be in conflict. My students were highly motivated to learn Korean, but they were opposed to Korean-English two-way immersion programs. I, however, strongly favored these programs. After a process of reflection, debate, journaling, and interviewing, I reached a new understanding reconciling the apparent ideological conflict that has separated me from my students. My findings suggest that attitudes toward the Korean language and culture are inextricably bound to their attitudes toward English proficiency and Korean immigrants.

## Prologue

### *Excerpt I*

326      Jeff:      Yeah that’s Dan, right? They say he’s a FOB. He’s called FOBby  
327                      it stands for Fresh Off the Boat.  
328      Mihyon: What is this?  
329      Jeff:      It’s like you just come from Korea.

What is a “FOB” (pronounced “fahb”)? This excerpt is from an interview (11/6/00) between Jeff<sup>1</sup>, one of my Korean-American students, and me, his Korean instructor. Jeff was talking about Dan, who is also one of my students. They are both college students and enrolled in my elementary Korean course. Dan immigrated to the

---

<sup>1</sup> All names in this paper have been changed to preserve confidentiality.

United States when he was six years old, while Jeff was born and raised here. According to Jeff, “FOB” stands for “Fresh Off the Boat” and is used for indicating newcomers to the United States who do not speak English well and stick to their own people. The term “FOB” turned out to have significant meanings – which are discussed later – in my efforts to understand the difference between my ideologies and those of my Korean-American students for learning the Korean language and culture.

This paper attempts to present my itinerary of an on-going journey for understanding this issue – the conflicting ideologies among me and my students about learning the Korean language and culture. The paper reports what I have heard, felt, and thought during my journey so far. The writing style that I chose to use is personal narrative. It is somewhat autoethnographical in that I insert myself into the text as both researcher and participant (see Ellis and Bochner (2000) for further discussion on autoethnography). The first point of my itinerary was when I felt that I shared my students’ attitudes toward the Korean language and culture as their heritage. The second point was when I was faced with a mismatch between what I expected my students’ response to be and what their actual response was to Korean-English two-way immersion programs. At this point, I discovered that my language ideology was different from that of my students. The third point was when I learned about the word “FOB” and its negative connotation during an interview with Jeff. At this point I was able to understand that the word “FOB” represented my students’ language ideology about the Korean language. The fourth point is now where I am trying to make sense of what has happened during my journey, while preparing for the next stop on my itinerary.

The organization of my paper is as follows. First, I give a narrative of a previous journey which tells about me and my background. My background clearly influenced my subsequent journey. Next I describe the beginning of my new journey with my students. Then, I conceptualize my journey in a theoretical framework, and show how my own ideology has been constructed by interactions between my own experiences and the literature. This part shows how I came to think that my assumptions and those of my students about learning the Korean language and culture are “language ideologies.” Fourthly, I present methods that I employed in order to get around during my journey. Fifthly, I report what I have heard, felt, and thought at each point of my itinerary so far, based on various sources of data and my analysis of the data. The data for this paper were drawn from various activities with my students, some of which were dictated by my teaching goals and others by my research. Finally, in an epilogue, I present what this journey means to me.

### A Previous Journey

I was born in Korea in 1971. With a BA in Elementary Education, I started

teaching in a public elementary school in Seoul in 1994. Beginning in my third year of teaching, in 1997, English education at the elementary level was mandated by the Korean Ministry of Education. In 1997, only the third graders learned English, and I was one of the elementary teachers who had to teach them. Up to 1997 English had been introduced in the first year of junior high school. The first time when I was exposed to English was also my first year of junior high school, when I was 12 years old. Because my own English education focused only on written English, I had not yet learned how to speak English before I had to teach English to my students. The elementary English curriculum was focused mostly on spoken English, my weakness. As a teacher, I wished I could speak English better. I thought that I needed to learn English more completely and I wished to know how to teach it better. This was the reason why I came to the United States.

With great expectations, which later turned out to be illusory – that I would be able to speak English fluently after a one-year stay in the United States – I arrived in Pennsylvania in the Fall of 1997. Once I got here, I felt ashamed of my low English proficiency. I also felt that my Korean proficiency was not useful for anything except for my own personal needs. Whenever I was listening to and speaking Korean, it made me so comfortable. In the meantime I had a few chances to meet some Korean-American students who were born in the United States, and whose parents had immigrated from Korea to the United States. Even though their parents spoke Korean, these students were not able to do so. Through meeting these Korean-American 2nd generation students, I began wondering about the value of the Korean language within Korean-American families. While I wished I could be able to speak English as fluently as they did, I could not help but think that these Korean-American students had missed a great chance to be bilingual in both Korean and English.

During these three years I received an MA in TESL at West Chester University and started my doctoral studies in Educational Linguistics at the University of Pennsylvania. Even after more than three years' studying and living in the United States, I have never felt that my English was good enough. I have never felt comfortable speaking English. My discomfort in speaking English has made me recognize clearly how much I feel comfortable speaking Korean, and how valuable it is to me, even though it does not seem to be valued in the American society.

### **Commencing a New Journey**

I started teaching Korean at the college level in the Fall 2000 without knowing that I would soon be doing research on the process. This teaching meant a lot to me because teaching the Korean language in a university in the United States was my first experience where learning Korean was valued at the American societal level. Soon my interactions with my college students led me to begin an investigation. During this study I had sixteen

Table I. Student Profiles

Name	Year	Age	Sex	Ethnicity	Immigration History	Attended Korean Saturday School	Favors Korean 2-way Immersion
Dan	Soph.	20	M	Korean-American	Immigrated age 6	No	No
Jeff	Fr.	19	M	Korean-American	2nd generation	Yes	No
Mike	Soph.	19	M	Korean-American	2nd generation	No	No
Lina	Fr.	19	F	Korean-American	2nd generation	Yes	Yes
Helen	Fr.	18	F	Korean-American	2nd generation	Yes	No
Alice	Fr.	18	F	Korean-American	2nd generation	No	No
Jane	Fr.	18	F	Korean-American	2nd generation	Yes	No
Kelly	Fr.	18	F	Korean-American	2nd generation	No	No
Jim	Soph.	20	M	Korean-American	2nd generation	No	No

Pill	Fr.	19	M	Korean-American	2nd generation	Yes	No
Sam	Soph.	19	M	Korean-American	2nd generation	Yes	No
Thomas	Fr.	19	M	European-American	Multi-generation	No	Yes
Ralph	Jr.	20	M	European-American	Multi-generation	No	Unknown
Harold	Grad.	50+	M	European-American	Multi-generation	No	Yes
Mali	Sr.	20s	M	Malaysian	Expatriate	No	Yes
Judy	Fr.	18	F	Korean & European American	2nd generation	No	No

All students had elementary proficiency in Korean.

students, eleven of whom were Korean-Americans, three who were European-Americans, one who was Malaysian, and one student whose mother was a first generation immigrant from Korea and whose father was a European-American. The table on the previous pages is a profile of the students, indicating each student's year in college, age, gender, ethnicity, immigration history, Korean proficiency, Korean Saturday school history, and each student's opinion on Korean-English two-way immersion programs.

Of the eleven Korean-American students, only Dan was born in Korea; the rest of the Korean-American students were born in the United States. They are mostly college freshmen and some are sophomores. They speak English fluently, but their Korean proficiency is low. With their strong desire for learning the Korean language and culture, they enrolled in my class. At the beginning of the semester, they showed their desire for learning the Korean language and culture in essays responding to why they wanted to do so. I was deeply moved by their essays which expressed both how much they have been frustrated by the fact they had not learned the language of their parents and of their heritage, and how much they wished to learn the Korean language and culture. As their Korean instructor, I also felt a strong responsibility for teaching them.

I believed that I understood my Korean-American students, in terms of what learning the Korean language and culture meant to them, until I was confronted with the fact that my students did not want to send their future children to Korean-English two-way immersion programs where both the Korean language and English language are used as the media of instruction. These programs aim to help both language majority students and language minority students develop balanced bilingual proficiency in Korean and English and cultural understanding through being enriched by each other. Two-way immersion programs are also referred to as two-way bilingual, bilingual immersion, dual language, or developmental bilingual programs (Christian 1994). The first two-way immersion program was implemented in 1963 at the Coral Way School in Dade County, Florida, in order to provide equitable educational opportunities for both native English-speaking majority students and native Spanish-speaking minority students (Pedraza-Bailey & Sullivan 1979). Recognized as an effective means of educating not only language minority students but also language majority students, two-way immersion programs have been receiving increased attention and funding in the United States since the early 1990s (Freeman 1998). According to the Directory of Two-Way Immersion Programs in the United States (<http://www/cal.org/twi/directory>), currently there exist 252 two-way immersion programs in 129 districts in 24 states in the United States. Although most of them are Spanish-English immersion programs (238 out of 252), there are four Korean-English immersion programs in California.

Learning about the existence of these four Korean-English two-way immersion programs was only my second experience of knowing that the

Korean language could be valued in public domains in the American society. I was very excited by the possibilities of these programs. I believed that they could be one of the best means of educating Korean-American children. However, my Korean-American students opposed the idea of sending their future children to these programs. Why did they not favor these programs? What kind of language ideology made my students reluctant to send their future children to these programs, even though they had a strong desire for learning the Korean language and culture? To understand our different and sometimes conflicting ideologies about learning the Korean language and culture was the goal for my journey.

### A Compass for the Journey (Literature Review)

The way in which I perceive my students' and my assumptions about learning the Korean language and culture has been shaped by the literature. First, I started off with the concept of frames as a way of understanding my assumptions and those of my students. According to Tannen, a "frame" refers to "an expectation about the world, based on prior experience, against which new experiences are measured and interpreted" (1979: 17). Frames are also referred to as "scripts" (Tannen 1979:15), "schemata" (Tannen 1979:15), and "assumptions." Fairclough refers to "common-sense assumptions" (1995:84) which, in my interpretation, are interchangeable with frames. He further emphasizes that common-sense assumptions become an ideology when they serve to sustain unequal power relations (Fairclough 1995:84).

The book, *Language Ideologies* (Schieffelin et al. 1998) helped me to perceive these frames as "language ideologies." Heath defines "language ideologies" as "self-evident ideas and objectives a group holds concerning roles of language in the social experiences of members as they contribute to the expression of the group" (1989:53). In my understanding, this definition of "language ideologies" shows that they represent the group members' social identities constructed in the process of their social experiences. Even though this definition does not explicitly recognize the power issue, a group may experience social relations of power regarding the group's language and culture. These experiences influence the group's social identities and their ideas about the roles of the language spoken by the group.

This concept provided me with the view that the frames my students and I have about learning the Korean language and culture are language ideologies. My students' reluctance to send their children to Korean-English two-way immersion programs is based upon their ideas about the roles of the Korean language, which were shaped through their experiences as members of this society. In my language ideology, the Korean language can be a resource not only for the Korean-American students but also for other students who have different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This orientation toward language as a resource is introduced by Ruiz (1984)

and elaborated by Hornberger (1991). In my belief, Korean-English two-way immersion programs are places where both Korean and English play roles as resources for their students.

Woolard's conceptualization of the term "language ideologies" is based on a concept of ideology as "ideas, discourse, or signifying practices in the service of struggle to acquire or maintain power" (1998:7). Woolard (1998) also introduces distortion, illusion, error, mystification, or rationalization as being central to the concept of ideology, a view which was originally posited by Marx and Engels. This concept of ideology as being distorted or mystified is constructed by the process of "naturalization" (Woolard 1998: 10). Woolard's concept follows Fairclough, who suggests that common-sense assumptions become naturalized and thus ideological when they are seen as *the* way instead of as being arbitrary (1995:91). This reminded me of my students' attitude toward English. Mike, one of my Korean-American students, said that "English is *the* language in this society and thus you should master it" (11/20/00). This means that Mike does not see English as arbitrary, but as the only language which he takes for granted as being used in this society. This naturalization of the English language is closely linked to the English-only discourse discussed in by Chick in this volume (2001). My Korean-American students' English-only discourse naturalizes the use of English in the American society and schools. Naturalization is one of several ideological strategies by which social relationships of power are established and sustained (Thompson 1990). In addition to naturalization, Thompson (1990) also suggests that stigmatization of discourse conventions of certain groups is also used as an ideological strategy for establishing and maintaining social relationships of power.

Even though these ideological strategies serve the functions of establishing and maintaining social relationships of power, language ideologies are not static. As Woolard argues, if ideologies compete in any society, some ideologies may continue to be held by people and some may be discarded in both societal and individual levels (1998:21). Chick (2001) suggests that each individual and each group has diverse and even contradictory social identities. These diversities and contradictions of social identities are also represented in my language ideologies and those of my students. Chick further asserts that "the subject has agency," citing Davies and Harré (1990:46) – "the individual emerges through the process of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed end product but as one who is constituted through various discursive practices in which they participate." This helps me perceive my Korean-American students as active subjects who have agency in shaping their language ideologies through the process of social interaction. My hope is that the differences between my students' language ideologies and mine might be lessened as we interact with each other and understand each other's points of view better.

### Transportation for the Journey (Methods)

How language and roles of language are perceived and understood is discovered through investigating language ideologies, which can be discovered in everyday language usage. According to Woolard (1998), language ideologies are discovered in linguistic practice: 1) in explicit verbal expression about language – metalinguistic discourse; and 2) in implicit language use such as linguistic signaling through “contextualization cues” in Gumperz’s (1982) terms. The major concern of this paper is to present competing and conflicting language ideologies about learning the Korean language and culture through analyzing both explicit metalinguistic discourses – what the participants say about learning Korean language and culture – and implicit language use regarding this issue.

In understanding my language ideology and those of my students by closely looking at our explicit and implicit language practices, my journey is based upon the ethnography of speaking proposed by Hymes. Hymes’ ethnography of speaking posits the importance of considering a community’s own theory of speech as part of any serious ethnography (Hymes 1974). A theory of speech that a speech community has seems to be represented by “norms of speech” and “norms of interpretation” (Hymes 1989). I am not interested in revealing the entire range of norms of speech and norms of interpretation that my students and I have. Rather I am interested in focusing on language ideologies which my students and I have, and which I consider as part of a community’s own theory of speech. In my journey, I recognize a speech community consisting of my students and me. This recognition of our speech community is based upon an assumption that there exist many layers of speech communities. The speech community that I recognize is rather small in its size and is embedded in other, broader speech communities.

My language ideologies and those of my students are revealed, in various speech events, such as interviews, tape-recorded conversations between some of my students and their parents, journal exchanges, and e-mail correspondences. My students and I exchanged a dialogue journal three times during the semester. First, I asked my students to write an essay about the reasons why they wanted to learn Korean. I gave their essays back to them with feedback and a few questions focusing on their ethnic identities and language use with their family members. In a second journal, the students answered these questions. In the third exchange, I asked them whether they would be interested in sending their children to Korean-English two-way bilingual schools. After I received mostly negative answers, I conducted interviews with all of my students. Each interview (11/3/00 - 11/8/00) was between thirty minutes to one hour. With Dan, Kelly, and Jeff I conducted second and third informal interviews.

On the twentieth of November, I invited my students to my apartment. After having dinner, we had a debate about the Korean-English two-way

bilingual programs for about an hour. After the debate, I sent an e-mail to my students, asking them to tell me what they remember about what they said in the debate and their thoughts about it. Seven students replied, including Jeff, Lina (the only Korean-American student who favored the two-way immersion programs), and Thomas (who is one of the European-American students). This dinner meeting with my students was the second time to get together outside of the classroom. The first time was at a Korean restaurant after the mid-term exam. I tape-recorded conversations at the restaurant and recorded field-notes after the conversations.

I asked some of my students to audio record their conversations with their families, and I provided them with an audio tape recorder and a tape. Dan, Kelly, and Helen tape-recorded conversations between them and their parents during the fall break (10/12/00-10/15/00). I transcribed these tapes before the interviews with the students in which we discussed my interpretation of the tapes. These tapes provided me with valuable information about how the language ideologies of my students' parents are expressed in their conversations with their children.

In addition to these tapes, I had a chance to talk to Jeff's parents in person. I was invited to Jeff's parents' home for Thanksgiving dinner (11/23/00-11/24/00). I talked to both of Jeff's parents about various topics, including their experiences raising Jeff as a Korean-American and their regrets and hopes regarding Jeff's Korean proficiency. I also shared my half-written paper with Jeff and my hopes regarding the acceptance of the Korean-English two-way immersion programs. After the conversation, I felt that I understood Jeff's position better and hoped that Jeff understood mine. In addition, my experiences as a teacher at a Korean Saturday school provided me with a better understanding about how my Korean-American students felt and what they experienced while they attended Korean Saturday schools long before they attended my class.

### What I Have Heard, Felt, and Thought

*First point on my itinerary: "I wanna talk to my parents in Korean. Korean is my heritage."*

Interested in knowing my students' motivations for and attitudes toward learning Korean, at the beginning of the semester I asked them to write an essay about why they were taking my course and why they wanted to learn Korean. Their essays told me both that they highly valued learning the Korean language and culture, and that they have suffered because of the fact that they looked Korean but couldn't speak the Korean language.

Kelly, who was born in the United States, said, "Because my ethnicity is Korean, I feel it is essential for me to learn Korean so I can speak it fluently one day and so I can maintain a better sense of communication with my family members." Mike, who was born here, said "A better understanding

in our relationship [between Mike and his parents] is the main impetus for my study of Korean.”

Communicating with families as one of the reasons for learning Korean was mentioned repeatedly in other students’ essays. All of the Korean-American students’ parents were born in Korea and immigrated to the United States at various stages in their lives, but not early enough for them to be able to acquire native English proficiency. On the other hand, their children, my Korean-American students, speak English fluently, but their Korean language fluency is not sufficient enough to communicate with their parents in Korean. The students know that their parents feel more comfortable talking Korean rather than English. In the same essay, Mike mentions, “...Still although they [Mike’s parents] have lived here for so long, because of their accents, they would rather have me or my brother speak to people for them in public, so I know that they always feel more comfortable communicating in Korean.” Knowing their parents’ feelings about using Korean and English, my Korean-American students want to learn Korean to communicate with their parents.

Alongside this desire for better communication with their parents, better understanding of their own heritage emerged as one of the reasons why the Korean-American students want to learn Korean. Mike stated:

*Excerpt II*

**...As I grow older, my own heritage has become increasingly more important to me.<sup>2</sup> Ironically, my study of Spanish has fueled my change in thinking and desire to learn the Korean culture and language. I loved studying Spanish in high school ... Yet as I became more involved in Spanish, I honestly felt a sense of guilt, as if I were forsaking the culture of my parents and in doing so, in a way forsaking them. I also realized that I want to be able to pass on to my kids some of the heritage and the language of my parents...**

Jeff also said that he believed that his parents wanted him to learn Korean so that he would not lose his Korean heritage. I deeply appreciated my students’ desire for learning the Korean language in order to communicate with their parents in their heritage language. I also felt that I shared a similar attitude towards the Korean language with my students.

While I was exchanging journals with my Korean-American students, I was also teaching at a Korean Saturday school. From my teaching experience in this Korean Saturday school, I realized that it was hard to motivate

---

<sup>2</sup> Words in bold in the excerpts highlight the parts that I refer to in the analysis.

the students there because they did not want to come. Their parents forced them to come to study. When I asked my Korean Saturday school students why they came to my class, many of them answered that their parents made them come. Some of the Korean-American students in my college class shared their experiences with me about attending Korean Saturday school when they were young. Tom, one of the Korean-American students said:

*Excerpt III*

**I was forced to go and had no desire to learn the language then.** I learned the characters and some basic grammar, but “Korean school” was a joke to me...We would fool around and would make fun of how poorly we read, which discouraged me from learning and shattered the small bit of confidence I had in my speaking and reading ability...**I think “Korean School” really had a negative effect on my learning the Korean language.**

Many other students said that they did not learn anything at Korean Saturday schools. I asked my Korean-American students why they thought they could not learn the Korean language Korean Saturday schools. They tended to attribute their inability of speaking Korean to their own faults or to their Korean Saturday school teachers’ ineffectiveness in teaching the Korean language. In his second essay, Jeff told me that he did not learn much in Korean Saturday school since he was often absent because of cello concerts and sports events. He blamed only himself for the fact that he could not learn the Korean language.

On the contrary, I had different views about their inability to speak Korean. All these facts – 1) the Korean-American students did not learn much at Korean Saturday schools; 2) they are trying to learn the Korean language now because they did not learn it before; and 3) my Korean Saturday school students are unmotivated – seem to originate from the macro-level social structure in which the Korean language and culture are positioned. Through growing up in a society where English is dominant and is considered the medium of social and economic success, the students built a certain attitude toward the Korean language and culture. This attitude made the students less motivated for learning the Korean language and culture even though they were given a chance. That Korean-American children attend Saturday Korean school only once a week might send them messages that the Korean language is less important than English

Moreover, when I asked my students why they thought they could not learn the Korean language from their parents, some of my students told me that their parents never spoke Korean to them even though they spoke

Korean to each other. This may be an extreme case of this influence of the macro-level social structure regarding the Korean language and culture. Mike said that he had never learned Korean from his parents because they were afraid that he would fall behind in school if he learned two languages at once. Of course, Mike's parents never sent him to any Korean Saturday school. In the case of Dan, who came to the United States at the age of six, he was not sent to Korean Saturday school even though his mother was a teacher at one. Ironically, the other students who were sent to Korean Saturday school did not really learn Korean, and they are taking my Korean class with others like Mike and Dan who have never been sent to a Korean Saturday school. Efforts made by Korean parents, hoping their children would learn Korean at Korean Saturday school were in vain, at least in the case of my Korean-American students.

Up until this point, even though my Korean-American students did not have the same perspective as mine in accounting for their low Korean proficiency, I believed that we shared a similar language ideology because of their strong desire for learning the Korean language. I felt that we were ideological allies.

*The Second point on my itinerary: "I do not want to send my kids to two-way immersion programs."*

I was not able to realize that there was a conflict between my language ideologies and those of my Korean-American students until I asked them whether they would be interested in sending their future children to Korean-English two-way immersion programs. At these programs, both Korean and English are used as the media of instruction for enriching Korean-American students and other students whose linguistic and cultural backgrounds are different from those of Korean-Americans. I was excited to know about the existence of these programs, and I believed that Korean-Americans like my students would benefit from these two-way programs. With the expectation that my Korean-American students would welcome these programs, I asked them to write a response to my question. In the question I provided basic information about the programs in terms of student populations and the use of both Korean and English as the media of instruction, and I asked them whether they would be interested in sending their future children to Korean-English two-way programs. Except for one student, Lina, all of my Korean-American students said that they would not send their future children to these programs. I was shocked by their answers, and I was puzzled by the mismatch between my students' strong desire for learning Korean and their reluctance to send their future children to the Korean-English two-way immersion programs.

Most of the students said that they opposed these programs because they believed that the programs would segregate Korean-American students and alienate them from mainstream American society. In the debate at my house, Dan said that if Korean-American students attended such

programs, they would associate with only Korean-Americans, segregating themselves from the rest of society. Secondly, my Korean-American students believed that these programs would prevent Korean-Americans from learning English fully. In his third journal, Mike said, "I don't know how justifiable this is, but my fear is that bilingual education will seriously hinder the English language and writing skills of its students." Thirdly, some students believed that two-way bilingual programs would harm the unity of the United States. For example, in his third journal, Pill said, "On the question of whether I would be interested in sending children to the Korean-English two-way programs I would be against such an idea...The reason I take such a strong position is for the reason of unity as a country, where if schools were allowed to choose the language they were to teach, what would stop the centralization of ethnicities across different regions of the country." The potentially harmful effects on the nation's unity, which my students believe about Korean-English two-way immersion programs, emerged in the debate.

When I was faced with my students' strong opposition to Korean-English two-way programs, the first thing that I did was to go back to their original reasons for why they wanted to learn the Korean language and looked closely at the language ideology expressed implicitly in their reasons. I wanted to make sense of the mismatch between my students' desire to learn the Korean language and their objections to Korean-English two-way programs. I tried to understand their opposition to Korean-English two-way immersion programs in terms of their language ideologies which I inferred from their expressed motivations for learning the Korean language.

As shown earlier, my students' desire is to learn the Korean language in order to communicate with their parents in Korean and in order to recover their Korean heritage. These reasons show that they have a certain language ideology about the Korean language and culture as something related to their parents, their families, and their own descendants. The Korean-American students identify the Korean language and culture as directly related to Korean person-hood. This language ideology suggests that my students do not expect that the Korean language and culture should be taught in school, because they feel that it does not fit into the mold of the American society. Therefore, it is their belief that the Korean language and culture belong only to Korean people, which includes my students and their families.

In contrast, my own language ideology about learning the Korean language and culture is different from those of my students. From my point of view, the Korean language and culture can be taught at school in such ways that Korean-American students and other students from different linguistic and culture backgrounds can benefit from being exposed to each other's languages and cultures. My course work as a graduate student studying bilingual education gave me a perspective which opened my eyes to the

fact that diverse languages and cultures can be seen as resources and rights, not problems. I gained this perspective from reading Ruiz (1984) and Hornberger (1991). In my students' language ideology, the Korean language and culture are seen to be hindrances for entering into American society. On the other hand, lack of Korean proficiency causes the students problems in communicating with their parents. They do not think that the Korean language and culture can enrich other people of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

*The Third point on my itinerary: "Two-way immersion programs are for FOB's, not for my future children"*

I did not realize that my understanding of my students' opposition to Korean-English two-way immersion programs was incomplete until I encountered the meanings of the word "FOB." The following excerpt describes the moment when I heard of the word "FOB" for the first time during an interview with Jeff. Just before line 326 in the excerpt, Jeff and I were talking about having Korean pride. I told Jeff that Dan is proud of being Korean.

Excerpt IV

- 318 Mihyon: Do you think if you learn more Korean and the Korean history,  
do you think you'll be  
319 more pride of being Korean?  
320 Jeff: I guess so.  
321 Mihyon: Do you know **영진** [Dan's Korean name]? He has a lot of  
Korean pride?  
322 Jeff: Yeah I can see that. The thing is when you look at him, when  
American people look at  
323 him they can tell he's Korean though. I don't know it just like  
hair, how he talks and all  
324 that and how he acts it's sort of like Korean.  
325 Mihyon: Oh what do you mean by that?  
326 Jeff: Yeah that's Dan, right? **They say he's a FOB.** He's called FOBby.  
It stands for Fresh off  
327 the boat.  
328 Mihyon: What is this?  
329 Jeff: **It's like you [yourself] just come from Korea?**  
330 Mihyon: But he's been here for a long time.  
331 Jeff: Yeah he's been here such a long time, but when people look at  
him.  
332 Mihyon: What are the characteristics?  
333 Jeff: Yeah it's characterized by hair, **머리** [hair style in Korean],  
you know all Korean people  
334 have long hair, I don't know, like an attitude.  
335 Mihyon: Attitude toward?  
336 Jeff: I don't know. I cannot describe. I guess when he talks. When  
you look at him when you  
337 hear him talk, you just know that he's different from us.  
338 Mihyon: Why?  
339 Jeff: I don't know it's sort of weird. Like me I don't hang around  
with him. When you just

- 340 look at him you just know that kid can be Korean.  
 341 Mihyon: I don't see any differences.  
 342 Jeff: But other people know. Other people in our Korean class,  
 they're like so scared when  
 343 first he came in.  
 344 Mihyon: Why?  
 345 Jeff: Because he seems like he looks Korean. And he talks pretty  
 well too.  
 346 Mihyon: What is the origin of this word?  
 347 Jeff: Fresh off the boat, Do you know  $\text{ㅃㅅ}$  [ship in Korean]?  
 348 Mihyon: Yeah, is this from boat people?  
 349 Jeff: No,  $\text{ㅃㅅ}$  that you have to use to across the sea to come here.  
 350 Mihyon: But you have to use plane.  
 351 Jeff: We use plane, it should be Fresh off the Plane, but we always  
 use FOB.  
 352 Mihyon: What kind of language is it?  
 353 Jeff: I think Asians just made it up. Like.  
 354 Mihyon: Is it a noun?  
 355 Jeff: It's a noun describing a type of person.  
 356 Mihyon: Oh I just learned this word today. He's been here more 10  
 years  
 357 Jeff: Yeah, he's been here that long too.  
 358 Mihyon: But he said, "I'm like acting like Korean and I'm proud of hav  
 ing Korean norms."  
 359 Jeff: That's really good though, but I don't know how he acts when  
 he's around other White  
 360 people though. For me to see him with other White people is  
 strange. He just hangs out  
 361 with only Korean people. I think that's something that people  
 wanna avoid.

During our conversation, I was not able to recognize that the word "FOB" has negative connotations. I was just overwhelmed by the new word and by the fact that some of my students felt that Dan was different from them. Later, through e-mail correspondences with my students, I realized the negative connotations of the word "FOB." Jeff said that FOBs always hang out with other FOBs, speaking only Korean to each other and acting like Koreans with Korean attitudes instead of acculturating into the American society (e-mail correspondence, 11/22/00). In his e-mail (11/27/00), Mike also said, "...in general this word has negative connotation... but I don't know where the negativity comes from."

After I learned the negative connotations of the word "FOB," I closely analyzed the original interview with Jeff. I noticed that Jeff was expressing implicitly the negative connotations of the word "FOB" in the interview with me. In line 326, Jeff said, "They say he's a FOB." Jeff was using the pronoun "they" instead of "we" or "I" even though Jeff himself considered Dan as a FOB. The use of the third person pronoun, as a contextualization cue, signals both that the word "FOB" has negative connotations and that Jeff wants to exclude himself from ones who use the word to label others. In line 329, by saying "It's like you just come from Korea," Jeff was emphasizing the fact that "FOB" refers to people just new to this country. By empha-

sizing the only one aspect of “FOB” – being new to this country – which does not directly imply any negative connotations, Jeff seemed to disguise the full meaning of the word “FOB.” He also included me, his teacher, in the category of FOB. This supports that Jeff was trying to make the negative connotations of the word “FOB” neutral. His use of the adverb “just” also signals that Jeff was trying to make the meaning of “FOB” less negative and less serious. Throughout the lines from 330 to 359, Jeff tried to say that the word “FOB” just refers to someone who is new to this country and who looks and acts Korean. Jeff did not imply directly any bad connotation out with only other Korean-Americans. This means that they do not want to be mistaken for FOB’s.

The word “FOB” provided me with a better understanding about what the Korean language means to my Korean-American students. The word “FOB” is invested with the Korean-American students’ language ideology about the symbolism of the Korean language and culture in the American society. My Korean-American students believe that if a Korean-American cannot speak English well and only speaks Korean, s/he is a FOB who will not be accepted by American society. This belief means that proficiency in Korean and not in English will stigmatize the speaker as an outsider who cannot be accepted by society and who also cannot achieve economic and social success. In this belief, even though the Korean language is their heritage, it is a thing that they should put aside until they can speak English fluently in order not to be FOB’s. In this belief, only after mastering English can one put an emphasis on the Korean language as one’s heritage. This explains what makes it possible for my Korean-American students to take my Korean class. Because they speak English fluently, they do not need to worry about becoming FOB’s. Once they have achieved English proficiency, they are in a position where they can appreciate the Korean language as their own heritage.

My understanding of the negative connotations of the word “FOB” enabled me to get a better insight about why most of my Korean-American students did not want to send their future children to Korean-English two-way immersion programs. In his e-mail, Jeff mentioned that many Korean-American students in the debate responded negatively to the Korean-English two-way programs because they believed that these programs would make Korean-American students become more “FOBby” (an adjective form of the noun “FOB”). To the Korean-American students, being a FOB is something they should avoid. They perceive that the Korean-American two-way programs are catering to FOB’s. How could they be interested in sending their future children to these programs where they believe their children would become FOB’s, which they themselves try to avoid? Dan says that he does not see any advantages of these programs except for those who have just immigrated to the United States (see excerpt VII). By saying that, he means that these programs are for FOB’s, not for his future children. In the debate at my house (11/20/00), the other Korean-American students

also agreed with Dan that these programs might be appropriate only for newcomers from Korea to the United States. This means that these programs are not for them or their children, but only for FOB's.

The word "FOB" is also associated with an orientation toward language as a problem because my Korean-American students consider FOB's Korean proficiency without English fluency a big problem. It makes them stick together and remain permanent outsiders from society. In addition, FOB's are perceived by my Korean-American students as usually being poor. In the debate, Jane said that new immigrants are generally poor. She also says that if new immigrants' children go to these Korean-English two-way immersion programs, the school cannot be good in terms of school facilities and quality of education because the parents will be poor and, thus, the schools will be too. The word "FOB" represents not only how the Korean-American students perceive language and roles of language but also how they perceive immigrants. As long as the Korean-American students associate the Korean-English two-way programs with FOB's, they will refuse to use these programs.

The negative connotation of Korean proficiency without speaking English fluently was shown in a conversation between Dan and his father. The following excerpt is from a conversation between Dan and his parents when Dan's parents gave him a ride back to school after the fall break on 10/15/00.

*Excerpt V*

- |    |      |   |
|----|------|---|
| 1  | Dan: | 근데 요새 난 발음도 인제 못하겠어 미국말만 했더니제. You know what I'm saying?  |
| 2  |      | <i>By the way, I cannot pronounce Korean because I speak only English.<sup>3</sup></i>          |
| 3  | Mom: | 응응.   |
| 4  |      | Yes, yes  |
| 5  | Dan: | 엄마 자꾸 R 발음이 나와. 나오기 싫은데   |
| 6  |      | <i>Mom, 'R'-sounds comes out, even though I don't want to say them. [when he speaks Korean]</i> |
| 7  | Dad: | 괜찮아. Don't worry about it.  |
| 8  |      | <i>It's okay.</i>   |
| 9  | Dan: | 왜요?   |
| 10 |      | <i>Why?</i>   |
| 11 | Dad: | 한국말을 잘 하면 영어발음이 나빠져. 너는 결국 여기서 살  |
| 12 |      | <i>If you speak Korean well, your English pronunciation will get bad. Because you'll</i>        |
| 13 |      | <i>eventually live here, it is English that you have to speak well. Do you know that?</i>       |
| 14 | Mom: | (laugh)   |
| 15 | Dan: | 네, 아버지. (using a loud and playful voice)  |
| 16 |      | <i>Yes, (honored) father.</i>   |

<sup>3</sup> Words in italics are my own translation from Korean to English.

This excerpt shows that Dan's father may be inhabiting the role of a wisdom-carrier or an advisor to his son, Dan. In lines 11 and 12, Dan's father says that Dan should be able to speak English well because he lives here and that Dan's ability to speak Korean will prevent him from speaking English fluently. This reveals Dan's father's language ideology about the Korean language as a barrier to living in this society. In fact, an interview with Dan (11/3/00) reveals that his father kept Dan away from other Korean kids and did not send him to a Korean Saturday school where Dan's mother was teaching. In the interview with Dan, he shows that he understood why his parents decided to keep him away from the Korean language and culture.

*Excerpt VI*

- 16 Dan: My parents didn't send me to Korean school, alright?  
 17 Mihyon: Was it available available?  
 18 Dan: It was available. **They didn't send me, they didn't send me because they wanted me to excel in English. They wanted me to adopt this country.** It kind of helped because I  
 19 don't have many Korean friends back at home town. Most  
 20 friends are white, but it helped  
 21 me adapt. Do you know what I'm saying? Because it's kind of  
 22 difficult to do, especially in  
 23 my neighborhood, we were like basically the only Asians.  
 23 Mihyon: Aha.  
 24 Dan: So it was very difficult for me to get accepted into the society. I was picked on a lot like  
 25 racist attacking stuff like that. So like it was difficult for me to  
 26 adapt. So my parents did  
 27 worry. I had very bad type of experience (...) because like  
 28 racism stuff like that (...)  
 29 because I wasn't accepted. **So my parents decided to put me they wanted me to adapt as quickly as possible. So they put me away from Korean and Korean culture (...)** The  
 30 **good thing is I adapted very well and was accepted because I did everything they did.**  
 31 The bad thing is you know my language like fell down and my  
 32 vocabulary fell down ah  
 33 that's it but the negative part about not sending me into  
 34 Korean, I developed a desire to  
 35 learn more. In high school I became very Korean proud.

This excerpt shows that Dan's parents believed that the best way to be accepted by society was to learn English as soon as possible. They also felt that the best way to learn English was by being separated from Korean culture and people. This language ideology of Dan's parents, shaped by the macro-social structure regarding the social position of the Korean language, represents a folk theory about bilingualism. Kenji Hakuta says that "...[according to the folk theory of bilingualism] in order to learn English

you need to let go of your native language...If you invest energy into developing your native language, then you will take away mental energy left over for learning the second language..." (Hakuta's commentary in a video (1989) titled "New Town High School"). This is consistent with Dan's father's saying that if Dan speaks Korean well, his English pronunciation would go bad. I believe that this folk theory of bilingualism, which Dan's parents have and which is also pointed out by Hakuta, is another name for the concept of "language ideology," because this folk theory presents people's ideas about language and roles of languages in society.

Dan's parents' language ideology is found in Dan's objection against the Korean-English two-way immersion programs. In his journal (10/30/00), Dan says:

*Excerpt VII*

"...I would not send my children to such schools. Not only is it isolating children from the society, it is also setting up more barriers in the already racial [racially] separated country. **I also do not see many benefits - except for those who just moved to the country** - for the children to be confused about learning a subject in two different languages."

Dan's parents' emphasis on being accepted by society is also expressed by Dan. This shows that Dan's parents' language ideology about the Korean language influences Dan's. Dan's parents are agents through which the influence of the macro-level social structure regarding the Korean language and culture is mediated to Dan. Dan believes that the Korean-American schools would prevent Korean-American students from being accepted by society. He also thinks that these programs would prevent students from learning English fully (11/20/00). He agrees with his parents that the Korean language is a barrier to achieving English proficiency and to being accepted by society.

*The Fourth point on my itinerary: "Moving beyond conflict "*

This section presents how what took place during my journey is interpreted in the wider social and policy contexts, focusing on the social relationship of power. My Korean-American students' language ideology represents the social relationship of power regarding the status of the Korean language and culture in the American society. The Korean-American students live in a society where their heritage language and culture are marginalized, and where the English language dominates the public discourse. Their view of the Korean language and culture directly reflects

how the Korean language and culture are treated in this society where English-only discourse is prevailing and the Korean language has low social and economic value. A Korean speaker without English proficiency is considered language-deficient. The Korean-American students stigmatize new immigrants or newcomers from Korea as FOBs in terms of their low proficiency in English and low familiarity with the American culture. My Korean-American students also naturalize the use of English. They believe that English is the language which serves to unify diverse people in the United States and, therefore, they privilege English over minority languages. My students' naturalization of the use of English and their stigmatization of Korean proficiency unaccompanied by English proficiency are two sides of the same coin. These two are different, but serve the same function in maintaining the established relationship of power regarding the social status of the Korean language and culture, ideological strategies that have been evident during my journey. I believe that my students' naturalization of the use of English and stigmatization of the Korean proficiency prevent them from accepting the idea of Korean-English two-way immersion programs. The Korean-English two-way programs represent a counter language ideology to that of my students. The existence of these programs challenges the language ideology rooted in monolingual and monocultural identity. The Korean-English two-way programs are advocating multicultural identities through providing their students with multicultural social and institutional contexts for constructing "multilingual identity" (Chick 2001).

The language ideology represented by the programs is new to most of my Korean-American students except for Lina. She is the only Korean-American student who has a positive attitude toward these programs, saying that bilingual schools are good for people. In her e-mail, Lina mentioned, "My friend went to a bi-lingual school and she is fluent in both French and English. Since she learned two languages from early on, she is fluent in both. I don't think going to a bi-lingual school was a handicap for her at all." Because of her friend's positive experience, Lina has a positive attitude toward the Korean-English two-way immersion programs. On the other hand, the rest of the Korean-American students are not familiar with bilingual education nor the Korean-English two-way immersion programs. The following is an excerpt from my first interview with Jeff.

*Excerpt VIII*

- |     |         |  |
|-----|---------|--|
| 159 | Jeff:   | I think bilingual school does have its advantages, I think it's gonna be hard for people to                  |
| 160 |         | accept it.   |
| 161 | Mihyon: | Because?   |
| 162 | Jeff:   | <b>Because it's too new. I can see it can be really helpful, but it's pretty radical. Radical,</b>           |
| 163 |         | I mean it's really different from everything else, too new, and it's like people cannot accept it very well. |



## Epilogue

This paper reports my journey toward a better understanding of the conflict between my Korean-American students' language ideologies and my own. So far throughout the four points on the itinerary of my journey, I have found meaningful accounts for this conflict. My Korean-American students value the Korean language and culture as their heritage and have a strong desire for learning them. And yet they show their stigmatization of Korean proficiency unaccompanied by English proficiency in a word "FOB." They also naturalize the use of English in public domains. Their stigmatization and naturalization reflect the social relationship of power regarding the status of the Korean language and culture in the society in which they live. Their stigmatization and naturalization prevent them from accepting the Korean-English two-way immersion programs.

The fact that my Korean-American students have a strong desire to learn the Korean language and culture, while they are reluctant to accept the Korean-English two-way immersion programs, reveals their agency in constructing and negotiating their language ideologies. This contradiction also shows that language ideologies are not fixed and static, allowing me to hope to lessen the distance between my students' language ideologies and mine.

Throughout my journey, I have tried to define my role in the interaction with my Korean-American students. I am not only the Korean-American students' instructor who teaches the Korean language; I also have a role as a minority language activist. I made use of activities such as journal exchanges and interviews to facilitate my students' thinking about their own language ideologies, and to help them to be exposed to alternative and counter language ideologies in favor of multilingualism. This does not mean that I try to impose my language ideologies on my students. I have been conscious that my position as a teacher might make my students disguise their thinking and tell me what I want to hear. After knowing that I am in favor of the Korean-English two-way immersion programs, most of the Korean-American students are, however, still not in agreement with me about the value of these programs. This indicates that the students have independent opinions, and they do not always answer according to what their teacher wants to hear. I try to acknowledge and accept my students' language ideologies and to understand how their language ideologies and mine have been constructed in the process of social interactions.

This journey has been a starting point for my better understanding of this issue. More research lies ahead of me. I believe that even the story that I have shared here so far can give helpful insights to other minority language learners and their instructors.

## References

- Christian, D. (1994). Two-way bilingual education: Students learning through two languages (Educational Practice Report 12). Washington, DC: National Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning
- Chick, K. (2001). Constructing a multicultural national identity: South African classrooms as site of struggle between competing discourse. *Working Papers in Educational Linguistics*, 17 (1 & 2), 27-46.
- Davies, B. and Harre, R. (1990). Positioning: The discursive production of selves. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior*, 20(1), 43-63.
- Ellis, C. and Bochner, A. P. (2000). Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity. In N. K. Denzain and Y. S. Lincoln. (Eds.). *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. (pp. 773-768). London: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Language and Power*. New York: Longman.
- Freeman, R. (1998). *Bilingual Education and Social Change*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters LTD.
- Gee, J. P. (1990). *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Heath, S. B. (1989). Language Ideology. In E. Barnouw, et. al (Ed.), *International Encyclopedia of Communications*, Vol 2, (pp. 393-395). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hornberger, N. (1991). Extending Enrichment Bilingual Education: Revisiting Typologies and Redirecting Policy. In O. Garcia (Ed.). *Bilingual Education* (pp. 215 - 234). Amsterdam/Philadelphia; John Benjamins Publishing Co.
- Hymes, D. (1974). *Foundations in Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Hymes, D. (1989). Models of the interaction of language and social life. In Gumperz, J and D. Hymes (Ed.), *Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication* (pp. 35-71). New York: Basil Blackwell.
- Pedraza-Bailey, S. and Sullivan, T. A. (1979). Bilingual education in the reception of political immigrants: The case of Cuban in Miami, Florida. In R. V. Padilla (Ed.). *Bilingual Education and Public Policy in the United States* (pp. 376-94). Eastern Michigan University: Bilingual Bicultural Education Programs.
- Ruiz, R. (1984). Orientations in Language Planning. *National Association for Bilingual Education Journal*, 8, 15- 34.
- Scheffelin, B. et al. (Eds.). (1998). *Language Ideologies*. New York:Oxford University Press.
- Tannen, D. (1979). What is in a frame? Surface evidence for underlying expectations. In R. Freedle (Ed.). *New Directions in Discourse Processing*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Thompson, J. B. (1990). *Ideology and Modern Culture: Critical Social Theory in an era of Mass Communication*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- University of California Extension (1989). New Town High School, Part 2. Center for Media and Independence Learning.
- Woolard, K. (1998). Introduction: Language Ideology as a Field of Inquiry. In B.Schieffelin et al (Ed.). *Language Ideologies* (pp. 3-50). New York: Oxford University Press.
- (1989) Video: New Town High School, Part 2. University of California Extension. Center for Media and Independence Learning.

*Mihyon Jeon is a doctoral student majoring in Educational Linguistics at the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania. Her research interest is language maintenance among immigrants through bilingual education.*