

Early EFL Learners' Linguistic Identity Change*

Jin-sook Choi
(Yeungnam University)

Choi, Jin-Sook. (2013). Early EFL Learners' Linguistic Identity Change. *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal*, 21(3), 115-134. This study sets out to investigate how the primary school students' sense of linguistic identity has changed since the 2000 survey in which early English learning raised a suspicion of weakening it. As a measuring factor of linguistic identity, attitudes towards mother tongue (Korean) was used in this study. The quantitative questionnaire survey was carried out with 128 students who were learning English at primary schools (of the same age and same schools as done before). For supporting the results of the questionnaire survey, the qualitative focus group interview was conducted with 6 primary school students. As a result of the quantitative survey, the participants did not show changes in attitudes towards their mother tongue and own culture compared to the 2000 survey. Rather, the perception of their mother tongue as a linguistic identity had been strengthened in the survey. The qualitative survey also supported the above results confirming that the participants had a positive attitude towards Korean and Korean culture. Therefore, this study suggests that early English learning does not lead to softening the learners' strong perception of their language.

Key Words: Early English learning, linguistic identity change

I. Introduction

All the Korean primary school students in grade 3 have been learning English as a compulsory subject since March, 1997. However, "the policy that a foreign language should be compulsory at primary schools could be seen as one of the most powerful decisions in the history of Korean school education"(Choi, 2003, p. 116). It is due to the fact that the general purpose of the education in

* 본 논문은 영산대학교 교내연구비 지원으로 연구되었음.

primary schools had been aimed to acquire mother tongue skills, enabling the students to understand and use Korean language correctly in general life(KEDI, 1994). Nevertheless, the following Korean governments have shown more positive attitudes towards English learning at the primary school level. Especially, in 2008, the government announced a plan to drive immersion English classes in primary schools in order to overcome the previous weaknesses in English education and such a plan has recently been reported again(Yoon, 2013). This implies that the English education policy, especially in relation to early English learning, has been strengthened.

However, there has been a widely held suspicion that early English learning can affect the Korean children's sense of linguistic identity since English education has been introduced into primary schools. In fact, early English learning has had an impact on social changes over the last 12 years: the increase of the number of children learning English in English-speaking countries, the separation of families and the rise of parents' burden for English private college tuition fees in the Korean society(Korean Educational Statistics, 2010; Choi, 2004). Choi's 2000 survey results also brought a suspicion of a weakening sense of linguistic identity, showing that the participants preferred English to Korean and put more value in English rather than Korean. In addition, the results of the group interview in this research strengthened this suspicion that the participants' strong sense of linguistic identity has been softening due to the high exposure of English and Western culture. Furthermore, some studies(Baker, 1993; Caldas & Caron-Caldas, 1999; Cummins & Swain, 1986) show the result that early language learning can be extended to the anxiety that it affects the linguistic identity. In other words, the possible loss of linguistic identity can be considered as one of the possible consequences of early English learning.

Therefore, this study aims at identifying how our young students' sense of linguistic identity has changed over the last 12 years. For the purpose of the study, by comparing with the previous results of the 2000 survey for the students' attitudes towards Korean language and culture, their perception of linguistic identity was investigated through questionnaire surveys. In order to establish validity and reliability, the qualitative focus group interviews were also conducted in this study. Since there has been so little relevant research dealing with linguistic identity change, needless to say, the concrete information or

evidence from the survey could be a basis for further strategies interrelated with early English learners' linguistic identity in the area of sociolinguistics. This is the justification of this study.

II. Literature Review

1. Attitudes towards mother tongue as a measuring factor of linguistic identity

According to some studies (Fasold, 1984; Gardner, 1985), language and identity are closely related. Although there are many different arguments about the definition of 'linguistic identity', 'language' has been dealt as "an indexical expression that refers to a system of symbols and rules for their use that is shared by some unique group" (Choi, 2003, p.118). There are two features in dealing with the definition of 'linguistic identity' in sociolinguistics: subjective and objective features (Choi, 2004). In order to provide a more holistic definition of the concept of 'linguistic identity', it would be reasonable to combine both objective and subjective approaches (Edwards, 1985; Hoffmann, 1991). The subjective viewpoint refers to group members feeling that they are united or belonging to a particular group. The objective viewpoint means tangible features allowing a quick categorization. Therefore, the concept of 'linguistic identity' can be defined for this study "as a knowledge or self-awareness of oneself as belonging to Korea (subjective features), which can be characterized as having its own tangible marker such as the Korean language (objective features)" (Choi, 2003, p.6)

Then, the question emerges on how to identify whether linguistic identity is eroded or not. There would not seem to be a valid measurement for the change in linguistic identity because the basic concept of linguistic identity is derived from an internal psychological state. Nevertheless, if we believe that external behaviors and attitudes reflect cognitive processes on the basis of a mentalistic view (Fasold, 1984), we might be able to approach relevant measuring factors in a way that acknowledges language and identity correlations. In order to identify the loss of linguistic identity, this study adopts the approaches of studies relating identity and language. We can draw these approaches out of

sociolinguistic literature(e.g., Bourhis, 1997; Dorian, 1994; Edwards, 1985; Hoffmann, 1991; Sohrabi, 1997; Trudgill & Tzavaras, 1977; Winser, 1998), social psychological literature(e.g., Lambert, 1987; Giles & Johnson, 1987) and social educational literature(e.g., Caldas & Caron-Caldas, 1999; Choi, 2003). From these literatures, the factor applicable to the loss of linguistic identity can be emerged: attitudes towards mother tongue. This means simply that changes in attitudes towards their own language(mother tongue) can be the most obvious indicator of a change in linguistic identity and linguistic behaviors; if people are reluctant to attach a great importance to their own language or have low perception of their language, it is assumed that they are losing their linguistic identity.

2. Linguistic identity loss and maintenance

The cases of linguistic identity loss as a result of attitude changes towards mother tongue have been reported in various contexts. Especially, when the mother tongue is threatened, the attitude towards the mother tongue plays a crucial role in maintaining the perception of linguistic identity. For example, Trudgill and Tzavaras (1977) found that Arvanitika people's negative attitudes to mother tongue, Arvanitika, resulted in the decline of its usage and consequently perceptions of the importance of linguistic identity had been weakened. According to the research on language attitudes, their mother tongue had been declining dramatically in use, and simultaneously shifting to Greek, after Greek had appeared as a powerful language politically and socially. It was also revealed that the majority of sampled groups did not show interest in learning their language with low self-confidence in their language in terms of language usage, accordingly, their homogeneous Arvanitika culture had slowly been eroded. Trudgill and Tzavaras(1977) concluded that "weak perception of the usefulness of their language eventually led to the abandonment of their language and the loss of their long-held identity"(Choi, 2004, p.139). Similarly, Sohrabi(1997) conducted on immigrant contexts has confirmed that the social contexts in which group members acquire negative attitudes towards their mother tongue constitute the most important factor in predicting linguistic identity loss.

In contrast, there is evidence that in Quebec, Canada, positive attitudes, i.e.,

confidence in the French language, have contributed to the maintenance of linguistic identity. This evidence has been attracting the attention of many linguists. According to Bourhis(1997), French-Canadians constitute the majority group in Quebec(5 million), while English is the dominant language in North America. The speakers of English have taken higher socio-economic positions and thus a substantial number of French speakers have tried to learn English for their guaranteed future. However, the French speakers felt that the learning of English by increasing numbers of French-speaking Quebecois might bring a threat to the French culture and language. Perceiving that learning English is likely to be subtractive to their linguistic identity, they finally appealed to the Federal Parliament for French to also be learnt in schools. As a result, the government decided to also emphasize French and thus passed new legislation to make both English and French the official Canadian languages in order to motivate a desire to strengthen the French language.

Bourhis(1997) also reports that, as assimilation into English has accelerated and English-speaking Canadians have shown discrimination against French Canadians, much emphasis has been placed on teaching French in schools across Canada. The French-speaking Canadians' reaction may have been caused by an expression of strong resistance against English culture or jealousy of the superior status of English. Whatever the reason, as a result, it appears that French remains the useful and prestigious norm in Quebec, as French-speaking Canadians consider French as "a symbol of the unity, prestige and vitality of French culture in the world"(Bourhis, 1997, p. 313). Quebec's case indicates that a strong positive attitude towards one's culture and mother tongue may contribute to the retention of one's linguistic identity.

If we move to the case of the Catalan linguistic group, who established their own language clearly among other minority nations in Europe, we may understand the fact that the healthy linguistic identity is possible in the case where positive attitudes towards mother tongue exist. In fact, the case of Catalonia has been dealt as a special case by many sociolinguists because their language has survived, despite the political influence of Spain(Hoffmann, 1991). According to Hoffmann(1991), the survival of their language was affected by the Catalan people's attitudes: they have maintained a strong perception of their language and they always have made a special effort to use Catalan. For

example, in order to change their attitudes from negative to positive, "the language policy has become to emphasize the use of Catalan in administration and the media and gave institutional support with both linguistic and curriculum reform in education"(Choi, 2004, p.140). If we see the Catalanian case, it is now clear that attitudes towards Korean language would be one of the worthwhile measures to verify the weakened perception towards mother tongue, if any. This is the reason why the case of Catalonia is reviewed here.

If we see the current social phenomenon in the Korean society, a suspicion of linguistic identity seems to be strengthened. The increase of the number of Korean children learning English in English-speaking countries is the first sign of English education at primary schools. According to the Korean educational statistics(2010), since English learning has been introduced into primary schools in 1997, an average of 35.2(per 10,000)children from elementary school level left South Korea in 2008, nearly 59 times the number in 1997(0.7 children). The Ministry of Education and Science Technology announced the result of the research for private education in 2008, in which the total amount of private education was twenty trillion nine thousand billions won. The monthly private education tuition fees were 233,000 won per one student and the expense of English learning had already exceeded 17% of the average family budget, especially, after the immersion education as a result of strengthening English public education. In this mood, it revealed that English words were misused and frequently mixed with Korean(Bae & Kim, 2009). Excessive English use can also be seen straight away in many areas(e.g., advertising, TV programs, newspapers, magazines, commercials, shop sign boards, films, fashions, pop songs and even general conversations) in the Korean society. This high degree of exposure to English brings a suspicion that English may threaten Korean linguistic identity.

So far, attitudes towards the mother tongue in different situations have been discussed. What has been demonstrated throughout is that attitudes towards mother tongue play an important role in maintaining linguistic identity. Therefore, if we need to investigate the linguistic identity loss or maintenance, attitudes towards mother tongue can be used as its measuring factor.

3. Early language learning and linguistic identity

There has been a discussion that early language learning can affect the learners' attitudes toward mother tongue, linguistic identity (Caldas & Caron-Caldas, 1999; Choi, 2003; Cummins & Swain, 1986; Edwards, 1985; Kim, 2012; Lambert, 1987; Miller, 2000). First of all, it is worthwhile reviewing Choi (2003)'s research which investigated attitudes to Korean language among primary school students. According to her study, the Korean children preferred English to Korean and put more value on English rather than Korean. As a result, their attitudes towards Korean language brought a suspicion that their sense of linguistic identity had been weakening. Whether or not such favourable attitudes towards English and comparable negative attitudes towards Korean may lead to the softening of the participants' strong perception with their language was not clear in her study. However, according to Lambert's (1987) study, the children who had favourable attitudes to English and fluency in English showed a weak perception of their mother tongue. He viewed the children's weakened identity as a result of early English use. Cummins and Swain's (1986) study also suggests language learning is deeply related to the proficiency in the mother tongue and positive attitudes towards mother tongue, i.e., linguistic identity should be established prior to second (or foreign) language learning because of cognitive confusions between two languages. Here is another study showing that English learning at early age could contribute to the loss of linguistic identity. Caldas and Caron-Caldas's (1999) study provides reliable evidence that language learning at an early age is closely associated with linguistic identity. In their qualitative study conducted with three bilingual children, different languages and cultures motivated different linguistic identities: the boy who acquired English at primary schools identified himself with a 'American' and twin girls who learned French had feelings and thoughts of 'French'. According to this study, language environments were crucial to young children in forming their identity and sentiments. Miller's (2000) case study also confirms the link between early English use and identity formation. The participants who were hardly assimilated into the mainstream of English use and English culture maintained a strong sense of linguistic identity.

However, Kim's (2012) recent study indicates that early English learning may

be not related to the students' linguistic identity. She investigated the impact of early English learning on linguistic identity, comparing 50 schools where English education was carried out for year 1~2 with 50 schools where it was not done. As a result, while early English introduction had positive effects on the student's motivation for learning English, it did not show significant effects on linguistic identity among primary school students. If this study is taken as evidence on the relation between early English learning and linguistic identity, it would be meaningful to review Choi's(2011) study showing the decline of positive attitudes towards English among primary school students over the past 14 years. Their original favorable attitudes towards English formed in the first survey clearly declined in the second survey, which did not change in the third survey. This implies that their attitudes became neutral, and early English learning did not lead to fluency in English. Although there was anxiety that the original favourable attitudes towards English and comparable negative attitudes towards Korean may lead to the softening of the students' linguistic identity, the current neutral attitudes towards English seem difficult to expect significant effects of early English learning on linguistic identity. So now we are in a position to investigate how their linguistic identity has changed over the last 12 years through an empirical investigation.

III. Method

I. Participants

One hundred twenty-eight primary school students participated in the quantitative questionnaire survey(70 boys and 58 girls) and six students served as interviewees for the qualitative survey, a focus group interview(4 boys and 2 girls). The primary school students who participated in the survey were all in years 5-6 from the two schools in Seoul where the first questionnaire survey was conducted. And they should have been learning English in the schools since year 3 for the purpose of this study aiming at identifying if there has been any loss of linguistic identity. Interviewees who participated in the focus group interview were year 6 from the same class in the same school in Seoul(for a

comfortable interview, the familiarity with each other was considered) and they involved a different population to avoid answer repetition and to increase reliability. Since this study was to identify if there were any changes in the young students' linguistic identity, all the participants should be in the same age of the same schools as done in the 2000 survey for the validity of the study.

2. Questionnaire

The survey questionnaires used in the 2000 survey were distributed to the participants. The first survey questionnaire was designed as a result of a review of literature (Bourhis, 1997; Caldas & Caron-Caldas, 1999; Dorian, 1994; Edwards, 1985; Fasold, 1984; Giles and Johnson, 1987; Gardner, 1985; Hoffmann, 1991; Sohrabi, 1997; Trudgill & Tzavaras, 1977; Winser, 1998) and was conducted with 170 primary school students. For the reliability of the questionnaire, the initial and pilot survey were conducted with each a group of 30 students and their results were compared for examining the response consistency. In addition, revisions(e.g., the number of questions and answer scale considering the participants' age) and elimination of contents(e.g., different meaning, unanswerable questions and acquiescent answers) were followed from the results of the initial and pilot survey for establishing the validity. As a result, the questionnaire was produced as a way of eliciting the participants' views and perceptions concerning linguistic identity and answered on a five-point Likert-type. The questions are on the Table I

Table 1: Survey Questions

No.	Items
Q.1	How do you feel about the Korean language?
Q.2	How important is Korean language to you?
Q.3	How useful(valuable) is Korean language to you?
Q.4	How strongly do you perceive Korean language (Hangul) as a symbol of Korea?
Q.5	How strongly do you agree that the Korean people should speak Korean?
Q.6	How strongly do you agree that all Koreans use English instead of Korean?

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- Q.7 When using English, how strongly do you feel that you do not love Korea when they speak English?
- Q.8 When using English, how strongly do you feel that you are not Korean?
- Q.9 How proud of Korean cultural history and achievement are you?
- Q.10 How strongly do you feel that you are happy with their Koreanness?
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3. Focus group interview

The focus group interview was carried out with the questions relying on the above questionnaire but incorporating into an in-depth survey of the participants' linguistic identity. The reason why six members were chosen was because of the necessity of obtaining reliable data. Six people with one facilitator may assure a successful group interview(Choi, 2007) and may make it possible to gain insight from the participants and to support the quantitative result with the consistency for the reliability of the given issue(De Vaus, 1995). The researcher conducted the focus group interview in a classroom in a free atmosphere for about one hour and the record tape was used for the later analysis. Statistics were done with SPSS(version 16.0) computer program, and this survey was carried out in June, 2012.

IV. Results and discussion

1. The questionnaire survey

The results of the questionnaire eliciting participants' attitudes towards Korean language are given as follows:

Table 2: Mean Scores in the Questionnaire

	FK	PIK	PUK	PKS	NKK	UEK	FNL	FNK	PKC	HK
2000	4.00	4.05	4.10	3.89	3.52	3.35	2.72	2.34	4.12	3.75
2012	4.57	4.15	4.23	4.62	3.70	2.60	1.93	1.91	4.71	4.10

5 point scale; 5='extremely' and 1='not at all'

FK: Feeling about Korean Language
 PIK: Perceived importance of Korean
 PUK: Perceived usefulness of Korean
 PKS: Perception about the Korean language as a symbol of Korea
 NKK: Necessity of the Korean language for the Korean people
 UEK: Use of English in Korea instead of Korean
 FNL: Feeling that they do not love Korean when using English
 FNK: Feeling that they are not Korean when using English
 PKC: Pride in Korean culture and history
 HK: Happiness with their 'Koreanness'

First, overall results of the 2012 survey show strong perception of linguistic identity as almost all the items' scores are higher than the 2000's survey: In comparison with the 2000's survey results, the 2012's results directed more positive attitudes towards Korean and Korean culture. First of all, a better feeling about Korean was allocated to the current survey than the 2000's, but it demonstrated a very high difference in mean scores between the two surveys: the current survey showed a 0.57 higher mean score than 2000's. Furthermore, as for the results regarding the perceived importance of Korean(PIK), predictably, the participants also gave a little higher rank on the 2012 survey: the 2012 survey received just 0.10 more in the mean score than the 2000 survey, which shows almost the least difference between the two surveys. In regard to the perceived usefulness of the two surveys, there was not a big difference between the two means: 2000 survey was 4.10 and 2012 was 4.23.

More interestingly, the mean scores concerning the perception about the Korean language as a symbol of Korea(PKS) indicate that the participants did perceive Korean language to be much higher in the current survey compared to the 2000 survey, with a 4.62: 3.89 ratio for the current survey's as against the 2000's. This means that the participants may feel the Korean language as a symbol of Korea more strongly than before as the mean score has increased showing a big difference between the two surveys. Even though they have been exposed to English in their classes or private colleges, their perception has been strengthened towards their mother tongue, which is meaningful in this research.

Furthermore, NKK(Necessity of the Korean language for the Korean people) received a comparatively low agreement(M=3.52) in the 2000 survey, which was one of the interesting results because the majority of the participants expressed

the importance of Korean language and were proud of their culture. However, the 2012 survey's mean scores for necessity of the Korean language for Korean showed more interesting results: although the 2012 mean score(M=3.70) was a little higher than the 2000 survey(M=3.52), when compared with other items eliciting the participants' linguistic identity by attitudes towards Korean language(FK=4.57, PIK=4.15, PUK=4.23, PKS=4.62, PKC=4.71, HK=4.10), this item's mean score was much lower. This implies that the participants do not seem to insist strongly on Korean for their Korean identity. If this result is considered in the view of the perception towards the Korean language as a symbolic function, the communicative function of the Korean language is not strongly suggested among the participants. In other words, evidence that the communicative and symbolic function of the Korean language can be separated is also available, which may draw further discussions in further research.

The most noticeable results are regarding the use of English in Korea instead of Korean(UEK). In the 2000 survey, the participants agreed with the use of English in Korea with a mean score of 3.35. However, in the current survey, they showed much more negative attitudes toward the use of English instead of Korean in Korea with the mean score 2.60. In fact, this result is in conflict with the results of NKK(Necessity of the Korean language for the Korean people) because the participants did not insist strongly in using Korean. However, this low mean score(2.60) means they also do not insist strongly in using English, which implies they are in the middle of attitudes in using both English and the Korean language

With regard to FNL(feeling that they do not love Korean when using English) and FNK(feeling that they are not Korean when using English) which were designed to investigate the students' awareness of their linguistic identity when using English in language learning settings. If we see the above results, the participants did not agree strongly on the exclusive use of Korean(however, they also did not agree strongly the use of English in Korea), and through this factor we might expect that the participants do not feel awareness or have a lower anxiety in using English. As we expected, both questions occupied the middle range with a mean of 2.72 for FNL and 2.34 for FNK respectively in the 2000 survey. More surprisingly, the 2012 survey showed lower anxiety in using English with a mean of 1.93 for FNL and 1.91 for FNK than the 2000 survey.

These results imply that they were not much aware of linguistic identity loss when using English and English use did not really affect their perception of linguistic identity.

Lastly, as can be seen in Table 1, PKC(Pride in Korean culture and history) received the highest mean score(M=4.12) among all the items in the previous survey. In the current survey, it also ranked the highest(M=4.71) in the mean score of all the items. This implies that the pride in Korean culture and history has been strengthened with their happiness for their 'Koreanness' and they might feel the importance of their identity and thus put more value on their mother tongue. If the purpose of this study was to identify whether there has been a change in the attitudes towards the Korean language, now we clearly see that their perception of linguistic identity has been strengthened although the degree of exposure to English has been increased in English learning settings. It is because when the results of the two surveys were compared, most mean scores in the current survey showed higher scores than the 2000 survey.

2. The focus group interview

2.1. Attitudes towards English

The focus group interviews also included attitudes towards the Korean language, which were based on the questionnaire used for the quantitative survey. The interview began by asking about the interviewees' attitudes towards English(all the participants have been learning English since primary school year 3 and have been exposed to English after schools at least more than 2 hours at private colleges). As a result of the analysis, all the participants showed clearly positive attitudes toward learning English when the attitudes toward English (including interest in English and desire to learn English) were explored by the researcher.

"English skills are necessary when we get a job. If we speak English fluently at an interview, we'll have more opportunities to be successful and will be able to receive a good salary from the companies" (Interviewee A)

“I am really interested in foreign movies. If I speak English very well, I might be able to communicate with movie stars” (Interviewee B)

“If possible, I really want to be competent and fluent in English. I think, if someone speaks English very well, he/she looks very smart and intelligent” (Interviewee C)

“My mother pushed me to learn English because the high scores at English skills enable me to enter a good university.” (Interviewee D)

“If I acquire English skills, it will be easy for me to get a high score at the university entrance examination.” (Interviewee E)

These comments show an acknowledgment of the functional side of English and refer to actually using the language for communication. There were primary school students who were not aware of the advantage of using English in the business field, however their attitudes towards English might have been already socialized. These favorable attitudes toward English in the current interview is clearly related to their perception of the usefulness of English, which was the exact same response as the 2000 survey's. That is, in this comparison study, their attitudes toward English did not change.

2.2. Attitudes towards Korean

Then how about the attitudes toward the Korean language that are closely related to their linguistic identity. The attitudes toward the Korean language eliciting their sense of linguistic identity were evaluated by the questions and the results confirmed that they had a strong perception of the Korean language. For example, when the participants were asked about how strongly they feel the Korean language as a symbol of Korea, there was an obvious agreement with this question.

“Korean identity would be threatened by English if learning English creates a greater change in our attitudes in comparison with the past. But

I think my attitudes toward Korean have not changed in spite of the high exposure to English” (Interviewee B, who had lived in an English speaking country for 2 years)

“English use will not be able to change the homogeneous Korean culture and language as long as we have high confidence in our Korean identity, and such our attitudes would probably lessen some people’s serious concern about losing our Korean linguistic identity” (Interviewee D)

The majority of the participants expressed the feeling that they were very proud of the Korean language and thought strongly of the Korean language as a symbol of Korea. This result is also not much different compared with the previous survey.

2.3. The use of English in Korea instead of Korean

The next issue was the use of English in Korea instead of Korean. When the question was asked, their facial expressions were a little serious and reactions about the use of English showed clearly negative attitudes towards speaking English in a normal life and even in the school. And their disagreement with it seems to be based on their perception that they are not ready to speak English rather than they insist their language to maintain their linguistic identity. Their thoughtful comments were presented as the following.

“We want to use our own language. We don’t want to sacrifice ourselves for a foreign language that is merely one of the academic skills” (Interviewee F)

“English is only a tool to get a job and Korean is a symbol of Korea. We need to distinguish the two languages’ role in the Korean society. Schools would rather strengthen the programs for improving English skills of the students. At the same time, programs related to Korean history and Korean culture should also be strengthened” (Interviewee B)

In short, when their ‘real attitudes’ towards Korean language were revealed in accordance with the question, the range of their answers to the relevant

questions did not vary greatly. The noticeable thing was that they were only year 6 of primary school students, but their thoughts and comments were considerably more mature than the researcher had expected.

2.4. Anxiety about losing their linguistic identity

When the question about whether they feel anxiety about losing their linguistic identity when speaking English was given, their answers were that they hardly felt their linguistic identity was being lost because they did not use English very much and still felt uncomfortable with English.

One male student who spoke English fluently commented the following, which can be extended to an anxiety that language learning at an early age is associated with linguistic identity. However, as he grew older, he showed firm foundations of non-anxiety on speaking English.

“I started learning English early and my parents have forced me to speak English at home or in public or in any other private places. When I was very young, I thought I was not Korean when using English. But now I think the exposure to English through parental support was quite lucky for me as English is required in the current world. And I don't feel that I'm losing something important for me, like my linguistic identity, because speaking English is to provide opportunities to understand another culture. That is all I feel” (Interviewee A)

In an attempt to understand the possibility of linguistic identity loss, the question: "do you really think the use of English affects Korean linguistic identity?" was given to the participants. However, generally speaking, their attitudes reflected the firm willingness to remain Korean because they are Korean. For example, most participants denied that English use affected their linguistic identity because they did not use English very much as already mentioned above.

“I am not sure if we use English freely in a normal life. But now English use doesn't work as a affective factor to the loss of linguistic identity. I

don't use English at all except in the class" (Interviewee E)

In other words, they were not as fluent in English as to affect their linguistic identity. However, one of the participants accepted the idea that English use can affect the linguistic identity, as expressed as the following.

"To tell the truth, sometimes I feel like non-Korean, but like a foreigner when I use English. I am proud of myself and feel very competent among classroom mates, which makes me so happy. If I was reborn, I would prefer English-speaking countries because I might not need to learn English." (Interviewee C)

These comments left the possibility that the anxiety about losing linguistic identity can increase if they speak English fluently. However, they were not as fluent in English as to affect their linguistic identity. Summarizing the participants' profound comments on this issue, they hardly used English outside the classroom, even though the participants have been exposed to English in schools, private colleges and/or some places. Therefore, their perception of their linguistic identity could not be weakened, confirming that the strong perception of linguistic identity might be threatened only when English proficiency is high.

V. Conclusion

This study has focused on whether the primary school students' sense of linguistic identity has changed over the last 12 years. As a measuring factor of the loss, attitudes toward the Korean language was used in this study. The conclusion drawn from the quantitative survey is that the participants' sense of linguistic identity has been strengthened: the mean scores of all the items eliciting the perception of their language showed more higher scores than the 2000 survey. In contrast, their anxiety about linguistic identity loss when using English was weakened. Looking at the results of the qualitative survey (the focus group interview), the participants still had a favorable attitude towards English, but the most common idea expressed by the participants was that English was

a practical and useful language for their job and future. Furthermore, they had a strong perception of the Korean language as a symbol of Korea, high confidence in Korean identity and disagreement with using English instead of Korean. Since the participants hardly felt that their linguistic identity was being lost, it is difficult to say that early English learning did affect their perception of the Korean language, which supported the quantitative questionnaire survey. Therefore, this study carefully concludes that the primary school students' sense of linguistic identity has not changed compared to the 2000 survey, and the results suggest that rather, their linguistic identity has been strengthened over the last 12 years.

There might be a number of reasons why their perception of linguistic identity has been strengthened. It seems mainly due to the fact that they were grown learning that perceiving their own language as much as possible was important and linguistic identity can be threatened as a result of early English learning, so consequently they tried to keep their heritage and pride. In this view, early English learning awoke them from abandonment of Korean language. Another reason can be due to the recent 'Korea trend' which has been spreading to many overseas countries through Korean songs, movies, dramas and etc.,. Korea is a largely homogeneous and monolingual society. Therefore, early English learning might not significantly alter the Korean language affiliations that is so deeply rooted in such a large homogeneous society. Although the degree of English use increased in Korea as a result of English prestige, the loss of linguistic identity seems to be difficult. Therefore, it is suggested here to broaden the base of research in this area to include the relationship between the degree of English use and the perception of linguistic identity in the Korean situation in the next study.

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Jin-sook Choi
Department of Korea Business
Yongsan University
142 Bansong Beltway, Haeundae-gu
Busan 612-743, Korea
Phone: 051-540-7092
Cell phone: 018-230-8725
Email: jinachoi1@naver.com

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