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# Language as Function or Fashion? Multilingual Identity Formation Through Korean Language Learning

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## Abstract

This research examines identity in relation to the Korean language learning experiences of non-Korean and ethnic Korean learners. Based on participant observation and interviews done in Toronto and an international online survey, I use a language-ideological perspective to look at why and how people choose to learn (or not learn) a particular language. Specifically, I analyze how nationalist, functionalist and cosmopolitan language ideologies position learners in various ways and in turn, affect their sense of ethnic, cultural and other forms of identity. I show how these ideologies are interrelated and have different effects on how the identities of non-Koreans and ethnic Koreans are constructed based on their respective statuses as outgroup and ingroup members learning Korean. This research provides a better understanding of the motivations behind heritage and minority language learning, and suggests a less homogeneous conceptualization of heritage language learners.

## Keywords

language ideology, Korean language, heritage language learning, minority language learning, identity

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## Chapter One: Introduction

On the first day of my fieldwork in Toronto, I arrived at a Korean language class held by the Korean Education Centre in Canada (KEC). Leading up to that day, I had framed my research questions around the experiences of heritage language learners, hoping to better understand how language learning affects their conception of identity. In the “About Us” section on the KEC website, the director indicated that the KEC was “an organization dedicated to educating Korean-Canadians about the Korean language and culture to maintain and increase their pride in their Korean heritage.” Seeing the obvious connections with my research objectives, I contacted the Korean language teacher in advance to obtain permission to recruit participants and signed up for an intermediate class as a student. On the first day, I did not expect to walk into a classroom of fifteen non-Korean students. Besides the Korean language teacher, I was the only ethnic Korean person.

For the second class the following week, we had a substitute teacher, Mrs. Lee. Mrs. Lee gave a very friendly impression to students and created a lively and engaging learning environment. She was not aware of my position as a researcher. As she was passing out grammar worksheets to each student one by one, she eventually came to me and paused. She looked at me quizzically and asked, “Are you Korean?” “Yes,” I responded. She followed immediately with “why are you here?” This question confused me. *Why can't I be here?* I thought. *What's wrong with a Korean person learning Korean?*

After the class, I spoke with Mrs. Lee to explain my study on heritage language learning. She informed me that she teaches Korean in other locations around Toronto and that the classes are always full of non-Korean learners. Mrs. Lee also told me that adult heritage language learners would be difficult to find in Toronto because very few Koreans maintain their heritage language and take classes if they are more comfortable with English. “Look at you. You only speak English too,” Mrs. Lee said. I was told that I would find ethnic Koreans in classes specifically designed for heritage language learners. However, in Toronto these classes are considerably rarer than those that cater to the instructional needs of non-Korean learners.

To accommodate for non-Korean learners who appear to represent the vast majority of Korean language learners, I adjusted my topic to Korean language learning, allowing for the inclusion of both non-Koreans and ethnic Koreans. My research initially sought to explore the experiences of heritage language learners in relation to identity. However, I could not ignore the large population of non-Korean learners and their invested interest in what is essentially a minority language compared to ethnic Koreans who appeared to be less concerned about maintaining the Korean language. In his interview, James, a non-Korean participant, recognized this discrepancy within his beginner class and said:

Everybody else wants to learn Korean. And then Koreans won't know Korean. Can you imagine that? I'll teach you Korean! It's like we're swapping. Take mine and I'll learn yours. It's a crazy experience when you meet somebody who speaks your language better than you do. I don't even care anymore though. I don't need Italian anymore. I'll take Korean.

Rather than concentrating on how learners “acquire” certain aspects of the language or what factors contribute to successful learning, I focus more on the social and ideological aspects of language learning motivations and experiences. The ways in which learners ascribe particular values to the language is important for understanding why people choose to learn (or not learn) Korean. My revised research topic looks at how certain ideologies of language affect identity construction differently among the two groups of learners.

Throughout much of the research process, I referred to my group of ethnic Korean participants as “heritage language learners.” I began this project with the intent of it being a heritage language learning study so despite the topic change, the terminology stuck with me for a long time. However, to be a “heritage language learner” brings with it ideas about motivation that link language to ethnic and/or cultural identity. The term “heritage language learner” and the ideological implications inherent in its use do not properly frame the experiences of ethnic Korean participants in this study. As we will see in later chapters, ethnic Koreans express a variety of motivations that are not always related to a desire to connect with their heritage. I chose to refer to this group as “ethnic Koreans” in order to parallel my use of the term “non-Koreans,” to include the experiences of those

who do not wish to learn Korean and to describe them in a way that is less ideologically motivated.

### Linguistic context of Korean language learning

The growing interest in heritage language education and minority language learning is attributed to factors like increased immigration, the recognition of linguistic rights and the trend towards valuing bi/multilingualism (Leeman 2015:101). As Montrul states, “there is a growing sense that minority languages are worth preserving and maintaining rather than suppressing or ignoring” (Montrul 2010:3). Since the Cold War era, the “less commonly taught languages” such as Arabic, Chinese, Tagalog, Japanese and Korean have shown significant growth in enrolment, particularly at institutions of higher education (Byon 2008; Leeman 2015:101; Van-Deusen Scholl 2013:211). At York University in Toronto, this appears to be true in the case of Korean with a growing number of students every year. Professor Kim, a Korean language professor at York University informed me that in 2010, the school had around 110 students enrolled in Korean classes. This number grew rapidly to 430 students six years later in 2016. Professor Kim also mentioned that her department plans to offer two more beginner sections for an additional 60 students in the upcoming fall semester to accommodate for the expected influx of interested students.

The growing numbers of minority language class offerings in some languages appear to be evidence of an increased interest in heritage language learning. However, for Korean classes, the students enrolling in these courses are predominantly non-Korean. Depending on where the class is offered, ethnic Koreans, regardless of their language proficiency, are not permitted to enroll. For example, at the University of Toronto, students who wish to enroll in Korean language classes are not accepted to any course if they have some prior linguistic or cultural background (Korean language program policy, para. 2). This policy is meant to bar fluent speakers from taking these courses but it also excludes ethnic Koreans with low proficiency levels who seek to improve their language skills. Although Korean language classes are becoming more numerous and readily accessible across Toronto, a rise in Korean class offerings does not necessarily equate to



a growing interest in heritage language learning mainly because it is non-Korean learners who take these classes.

Comparisons between heritage language learners and second/foreign language learners often focus on correlations between motivations and language skills as well as the specific learner variables that contribute to successful learning (Kondo-Brown 2005; Mori and Calder 2015; O'Rourke and Zhou 2016). For example, foreign language learners are generally more motivated and perform better on reading and writing-based tasks while heritage language learners are less motivated but excel in activities related to listening and speaking. Despite the abundance of learning resources available to heritage language learners who may not speak the language well, they represent a small number of learners in language classes in comparison to foreign language learners. The lack of motivation that appears to be characteristic of other ethnic groups in addition to Korean is often problematized:

Heritage speakers' loss of their heritage language skill is a loss not only to the individual in terms of cultural heritage, professional opportunities, and the cognitive aspects of bilingualism but also to the country as a whole in terms of global economic competitiveness (O'Rourke and Zhou 2016:1).

Specifically regarding the use of Korean among Korean-Americans, Byon (2008:252) argues: "there must be efforts to raise Korean-American students' and their parents' awareness regarding the importance of acquiring bi-cultural and bilingual competences." He also asserts that learning Korean will help dissolve any identity conflicts and crises. However, the view that language is an essential part of identity and a skill that Koreans "must" have fails to consider ethnic Koreans' experiences and the possible reasons why there are low enrolment numbers and a lack of motivation to learn. While the literature is moving away from the assumption that individuals with greater heritage language proficiency have a stronger sense of ethnic identity, this idea still remains strong among students and teachers (Leeman 2015:114).

In contrast to arguments about heritage language education, foreign or minority language learning is not considered a pressing "problem." Instead of making assertions that dictate how learners should identify, the literature on minority language learning tends to focus on research that has direct pedagogical implications. For example, some researchers suggest effective learning and teaching strategies in minority language

education (Ruan et al. 2015; Ritzau 2015) and others categorize various forms of motivations among learners (Flynn and Harris 2016). Meanwhile, students' initial interests in learning a particular minority language and their language learning goals are not often explored.

O'Rourke and DePalma (2016) suggest that minority language learning is a form of educational tourism or "edutourism" where learners seek authentic cultural experiences that include the "consumption" of the language as a commodity. Duff (2015:74) notes also that language education can be a form of travel for learners who pursue a deeper engagement with understanding oneself as a global, multilingual individual. In light of my research, these ideas are helpful when looking at the motivations of non-Korean learners. As we will see in later chapters, non-Korean participants pursue Korean language learning as a form of self-enrichment and education about other cultures, allowing them to proudly claim a multilingual identity. However, the reasons why they pursue this must be further questioned in relation to language ideologies.

The decision to initially learn a language and the motivations for continuing are dependent on a variety of factors that include, but are not limited only to, access to education, learner variables and the availability of speech communities. Correlational models for understanding language learning ignore the motivating forces that are usually linked to social evaluations of the language (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994:70). The influence of language ideologies on questions about identity and learners' goals can provide a better understanding of the experiences of people who use language as a way to perform and negotiate certain identities.

## Theoretical Framework

A language-ideological perspective is important to understanding the complexity of social relations in regards to language. It also helps to explain how speakers use and think about language to create and negotiate their sociocultural worlds. Language ideologies are defined as "sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use" (Silverstein 1979:193). Irvine (1989:255) also describes language ideology as "the cultural system of

ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests.” Both definitions focus on speakers’ ideas about language and how they relate to their social lives. Language users’ ideologies bridge their social experiences with language, enabling them to create ties between their linguistic resources and features of their sociocultural experience (Kroskrity 2004:507). This perspective examines specifically what people think, or take for granted, about language (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994:56).

There are three important features of a language ideology. The first feature is the belief itself. An example of a belief could be the assertion that “you should learn Korean.” The second feature of a language ideology is the central notion of rationalization. Speakers rationalize the legitimacy and truthfulness of the belief. This involves ideas about what is “true” (e.g. you will become a better Korean by learning Korean), “morally good” (e.g. you shouldn’t learn a language just for economic reasons), or “aesthetically pleasing” (e.g. learning Korean is cool). Although these notions are presented as universally true, they are rooted in and reflective of the interests of a specific social or cultural group (Kroskrity 2004:501; Woolard 1992:237). It is important to note that while certain ideologies are dominant and shape general understandings of language use, there can be divergent perspectives. Since language ideologies are grounded in social experience they are, by nature, multiple.

The third feature of a language ideology is the notion of power. Learners can use language as a tool for self-empowerment, enabling them to enhance themselves in a way and feel more accomplished. However, language can also create a sense of disempowerment among speakers if they do not “fit” the legitimized ideology. For example, Jaffe’s (1993) study on Corscian language learners demonstrates that students can be reluctant to use the language out of fear of making errors in a language that they are already supposed to know. The students’ presence in a Corscian class and the struggles they experience while learning are reminders that they do not meet cultural and linguistic expectations. There is a subordination of those who do not command “proper” knowledge of the language (Kroskrity 2004:509).

Since language ideologies link language to sociocultural experience, they can create ties between language and identity. Through Korean language learning,

participants hope to enhance themselves to become a particular kind of person. The reasoning behind their goals for learning are inextricably linked to language ideologies. In this research I identify three main language ideologies: a nationalist language ideology links language to a particular ethnic group, a functionalist language ideology focuses on the practical uses of a language, and a cosmopolitan language ideology asserts that it is “cool” to learn a minority language. These ideologies are interrelated and work together to influence learners’ sense of identity differently depending on whether they are non-Korean or ethnic Korean.

### Notes on terminology

Some of the terms I will use have meanings that are interpreted differently among researchers and participants themselves. Words like “heritage,” “heritage language,” “Korean,” and “identity” are broad terms that I hope to make clearer here.

In this research, “heritage” encompasses two different definitions. One understanding of heritage involves the notion of descent, which includes racial features and physical characteristics. Heritage can also be current cultural knowledge and practices. Participants and I use “heritage” to refer to both understandings of the term. The distinction between the two uses will be made clear based on references to either racial features or cultural knowledge.

“Heritage language learner” is a term “constructed largely by researchers, educators, and administrators and assigned to a group of students, rather than by heritage language learners themselves” (Leeman 2015:104). However, many researchers have questioned the terms “heritage language” and “heritage language learner” largely because they often go undefined and are sensitive to a variety of interpretations and meanings (Van Deusen-Scholl 2003:212). For example, the word “heritage” can carry connotations of the past and can affect the perceived status of the language. Some define “heritage language” in terms of ancestral ties or incomplete acquisition of a native language (Wharry 1993:122; Montrul 2010:11). This definition, however, does not consider learners who were not exposed to the language growing up. A heritage language is not necessarily a “native” or “first” language that was never acquired because some learners may not have learned the language at home from an early age.

The definition that is most applicable to this study is by Van Deusen-Scholl (2003:221), who characterizes heritage language learners as “a heterogeneous group ranging from fluent native speakers to non-speakers who may be generations removed, but who may feel culturally connected to a language.” This definition takes into account the diversity of learner experiences and also counters inaccurate assumptions that all heritage language learners are already “partially bilingual.” Despite this, I avoid the use of the term “heritage language learner” because of the implications that ethnic Koreans are motivated to become “more” Korean and more connected to their heritage through language learning. Instead of using “heritage language learners,” referring to them as “ethnic Koreans” is a more suitable term that is less ideologically motivated and also includes those who intentionally choose not to learn Korean. I use the terms “heritage language” and “heritage language learning” when referring to the literature and to ideologies that make assertions about how people should think about language in relation to their heritage.

Korean participants in this research are specifically second- and third-generation Korean-Canadians. Although they are not Korean nationals from Korea, I use the term “Korean” or “ethnic Korean” to refer to them. This is because of their own assertion that their Korean ancestry and physical appearance are enough to consider themselves Korean. Being of Korean descent is considered the most important part of claiming a Korean identity. According to my participants, the term “Korean” can include those who do not know the language as well as those who do not have any knowledge about the culture as long as they are of Korean descent.

The claiming and construction of identities are related to assumed similarities or differences within and between groups: “the perception of shared identity often requires as its foil a sense of alterity, of an Other who can be positioned against those socially constituted as the same” (Bucholtz & Hall 2004:371). Although the notion of a shared or group identity is more relevant to ethnic Korean learners, participants also constructed highly personal identities unrelated to nation, ethnicity and culture. In an effort to become a particular kind of person, individuals can assert their own understandings of their identity. However, as Leeman (2015:108) notes: “although speaker agency plays a key role in the construction and performance of identity, identity claims and performances are

also constrained by the identities ascribed by others.” The unchangeable, ascribed aspects of identity like ethnicity, for example, greatly influence the kinds of identities learners can claim. Identities are not “fixed” within an individual but instead are both shaped and constrained by ideologies and power relations (Leeman 2015:102).

Like language learning, identity work is a process; there is no defined end-state. Maintaining an awareness of the fluid and changing nature of the multiplicity of identities enables us to better understand non-Korean and ethnic Korean learners who negotiate various identities during the language learning process.

## Methodology

During the summer and fall of 2016, I collected data from three sources: online surveys, interviews and participant observation. In total, I received 92 survey responses from non-Korean learners and interviewed 8 ethnic Koreans (including two people who deliberately choose not to learn Korean), 15 non-Korean learners and one Korean language professor. The names of participants in this research are all pseudonyms.

I conducted participant observation in the summer of 2016 during the classes and Korean cultural events offered by the KEC. At these classes and events, I was usually the only Korean person present. Based on the types of activities such as making *kimbap* (seaweed rice roll) and trying on a *hanbok* (Korean traditional clothing), these events were clearly intended for non-Koreans unfamiliar with Korea. I also attended K-pop related events like concerts and conventions to better understand how the language is used (or not used) in settings where the use of Korean would be appropriate.

Since this study seeks to understand why participants learn Korean and what they hope to achieve with it, semi-structured interviews were used to allow participants to speak openly about their experiences. I recruited interview participants from an intermediate summer class offered by the KEC as well as from beginner, intermediate and advanced level classes at York University in Toronto. Among interview participants, most were undergraduate students in their late teens and early twenties. They majored in linguistics, music, East Asian studies, computer programming, sociology, psychology, English literature, health sciences and other fields. The two older interview participants in their forties and fifties worked in health care and education. Similar to the survey

respondents, interview participants were also majority female: 20 out of 24 interview participants were female. This uneven representation is reflective of the gender distribution observed within the classes offered by both the KEC and York University.

I built close relationships with the students from the summer class who freely shared their thoughts and stories related to Korea and Korean language learning in informal conversations outside of the interview. I did not have the opportunity to build a rapport with students recruited from the York classes; however, all of them spoke comfortably without reservations during their interviews, which was their first time meeting with me. Korean language learning in general appeared to be a topic that participants felt open and passionate about and many of them continued to speak excitedly about Korea-related things even after their interview ended. Despite this level of comfort during the interviews, I recognize that because I did not become close with them personally, I was unable to obtain responses from them regarding follow-up questions that emerged months later during the writing process.

Survey respondents completed an anonymous online survey made with Google Forms. I chose two K-pop websites in particular because the content of these sites were relatively community-generated, making it easier to request the survey be posted in “free for all” posts that were unrelated to K-pop. The survey was open for one week or until I stopped receiving responses due to it being overshadowed by newer content on the sites. It consisted of closed-ended questions for demographic information and open-ended questions asking for their opinions and experiences with Korean language learning.

The majority of my study population ranged from the ages 18 to 25. Almost all survey respondents fell within this age range. This is likely because I recruited them from online K-pop communities, which are usually of interest to younger people. Despite being similar in age, survey respondents came from various ethnic backgrounds in twenty different countries. They were overwhelmingly female, representing more than ninety percent of respondents. These demographics correspond with the census results of one of the K-pop communities from which survey respondents were recruited (Omona census survey results 2016).

All participants (survey and interview) were asked questions like: What motivates you to learn Korean? What do you think Korean is important or valuable for? How do

people around you encourage or discourage you from learning? How does learning or using the language affect the way you see yourself? Non-Koreans and ethnic Koreans were also asked to speak about how Korean language learning was or was not related to their ethnic and cultural identity.

After transcribing all of the interviews and collecting the survey responses, I used the qualitative data analysis software NVivo for coding. Since my research focuses on identity formation, one of the main codes used was “identity,” which included Korean identity, Canadian identity, dual identity, and individual identity. The first three were more relevant to ethnic Korean learners (chapter two) while the assertion of individual identity appeared to be a common theme among non-Korean learners (chapter three and four). Participants’ self-reported motivations were coded under “reasons for learning” and further divided into nine categories: accomplishment, career opportunities, cool, communicating with family, connecting with others, open-mindedness, pop-culture/entertainment, travel, and worldliness. In the early stages of analysis, grouping motivations in this way enabled me to see the differences and similarities between non-Korean and ethnic Korean learners’ reasons for learning.

Comments made about people (specifically, other language learners, native Koreans and people with no interest in learning languages), as well as about other languages (English, French, Chinese, Japanese, and other languages) were coded as sub-categories within “beliefs about people” and “beliefs about language.” The way in which participants perceive difference also emerged as a useful theme. Feelings of either familiarity (coded as close, familiar) or distance (coded as different, foreign) were expressed when speaking about encountering or attempting to understand something foreign to them. The perception of difference was also coded alongside what they believed was easy/difficult and positive/negative. For example, most non-Koreans spoke about how the Korean alphabet was similar to English in some ways, making their learning experience both fun and easy. In contrast, ethnic Korean learners emphasized the difficulties in learning that were linked to negative experiences with native Koreans. See Appendix B for the full list of coded themes.

The main language ideologies that emerged from participants’ narratives were the three that I chose to concentrate on for this project. A nationalist language ideology was



most apparent in ethnic Korean participants' reactions to the general Korean understanding of nation, ethnicity and language. The responses that focused on career opportunities, communicating with family, connecting with people, and travel aligned with a functionalist language ideology that highlights the practical functions of language learning and use. Participants who strive to be open-minded, "cool," accomplished and worldly are associated with what I chose to name a cosmopolitan language ideology; a language ideology that draws attention to the "coolness" of multilingualism and its desired international traits.

Throughout the writing process, there were certain statements that were more memorable than others either because they suited my predictions for this research or because they completely overturned them. In order to make full use of the data collected, I re-read all interview transcripts and survey responses numerous times to include relevant thoughts and comments in the appropriate chapters. I made sure to re-read the transcripts and responses even during the final stages of writing with the intention that this work will represent the experiences of all participants, whether or not they were memorable to me in the early stages of research.

Despite attempting to portray participants' thoughts accurately and as true to their own experiences as possible, I am aware of the limitations of this research. The statements said in interviews may not align with what participants actually think or do. My position as an ethnic Korean may have also had an influence on what interview participants in particular were willing to share. As a third-generation Korean, I am most similar to the ethnic Koreans in this study who are also second- and third-generation Koreans. They may have been more open to share certain anecdotes with me under the presumption that we are like-minded and have faced similar experiences. Non-Koreans probably would not feel as willing to speak about difficult or negative learning experiences with an ethnic Korean person for fear of criticism. I am also aware that there are experiences not represented in this research. For example, among the classes I recruited from, there was an absence of ethnically mixed Korean learners, whose experiences may be very different from those expressed here. Thus, I do not intend to generalize these findings to all Korean language learners.

In addition, there were also limitations to using a survey as a research tool. While respondents gave frank and direct answers to my questions, they were also brief and often left without an explanation. I asked them to spell out their ideas to the best of their ability but not all participants followed these directions. Also since it was an anonymous survey, I did not have the opportunity to ask them to elaborate on particular answers nor was it possible to question them further with follow-up questions. The tone of survey responses was much more casual, and this also meant that some respondents completed the survey half-heartedly, resulting in answers that could not be coded. For example, responses with consistent one-word answers like “lol” and “idk” were unusable in this research. Despite these limitations, the survey proved to be a useful tool that reached out to many young people from various countries and helped to situate my Toronto study within a broader context.

What began as a heritage language learning study rife with the very assumptions discussed in this paper has evolved into a personal learning experience for me as I come to better understand others’ motivations behind Korean language learning, as well as what a hyphenated identity means to me. As a third-generation Korean-Canadian with little knowledge of Korean, I began to think about questions of language and identity during my first stay in Korea three years ago in 2014. Prior to this visit, I had always considered myself Korean growing up despite being unfamiliar with the language and culture. During my one-year experience in Korea, my sense of Korean identity was both reinforced and challenged in ways that usually involved language. Through this study, I have come to better understand why I felt a conflicted sense of “Koreanness” even after returning to Canada and why I held contradictory opinions towards learning the language.

### Summary of chapters

The goal of this research is to examine the ways in which language ideologies affect the construction of identity among non-Korean and ethnic Korean language learners. Three main language ideologies emerged as most salient in the experiences of my participants: a nationalist language ideology, a functionalist language ideology and a cosmopolitan language ideology. These ideologies overlap and work together to influence identity formation differently among learners depending on whether they are

non-Korean or ethnic Korean. I argue that a cosmopolitan language ideology allows non-Koreans to construct a “cool” multilingual identity that is linked to valued qualities like worldliness and uniqueness. In contrast, functionalist and cosmopolitan language ideologies reinforce a nationalist ideology among ethnic Koreans, pressuring them to construct an expected Korean identity.

In chapter two, *“Language is Identity”* I examine the role of language in claiming an ethnic and cultural identity. This chapter looks at the responses to a nationalist language ideology, which is a dominant discourse behind the assumptions that language is equated with ethnic identity. Those who learn a language unrelated to their heritage as well as those who have low competence in their heritage language challenge the idea of “one language, one people.” Non-Korean learners deny claiming a Korean identity through language learning because they recognize their status as a visible outgroup member and do not wish to wrongfully claim an identity that is not accessible to them. Ethnic Koreans negotiate nationalist demands for cultural and linguistic homogeneity with a Canadian identity. Some willingly embrace these demands and hope to become closer to their heritage through language learning while others reject a nationalist language ideology and refuse to claim the Korean language and/or culture as part of their identity.

Chapter three, *Korean as a Practical Resource*, examines the functional uses of Korean among learners. A functionalist language ideology links a language to practical purposes that can include economic, social, cognitive and expressive goals. Among participants (non-Korean and ethnic Korean learners), there were two related uses of Korean. The language can function as a tool for social and material gain and can also be used to build deeper relationships with Korean-speaking people. A functionalist language ideology influences identity similarly among non-Koreans and ethnic Koreans because both groups view Korean as a resource that can help them achieve a particular goal. Between the two groups, there are minor differences. For non-Koreans, having Korean as a practical resource makes them into a more skillful person with a wider worldview of other cultures. A genuine interest in the Korean culture was required to be a “successful” language learner because of negative views that do not value purely economic motivations. Ethnic Koreans can more easily strive for material goals because of

nationalist assumptions that heritage language learning is a form of self-exploration and a way to become closer to one's heritage culture.

In chapter four, *Coolness and Cosmopolitanism*, I examine the non-material or symbolic value of Korean language learning. Non-Koreans who embrace cosmopolitanism and desire unique individual qualities construct a multilingual identity that is grounded in what they believe is "cool." Instead of economic gains, they acquire symbolic, worldly features that are highly valued among those who internalize a positive discourse about multiculturalism and diversity. I also consider how the pursuit of cosmopolitan qualities is linked to race, class and privilege. For ethnic Korean learners, cosmopolitanism can reinforce the demands of a nationalist language ideology because it highlights the important linguistic and cultural resources that minorities are expected to have. Instead of building symbolic capital, ethnic Korean learners risk symbolic capital when speaking poorly and regain it by learning a language they are assumed to already know.

In my final chapter, I summarize the main points and briefly comment on non-Korean and ethnic Korean learners' views of each other during the language learning process. I also discuss considerations for future related studies as well as the pedagogical implications of this research.

## Chapter Two: “Language is identity”

### Nationalist language ideology

“Not knowing your language is like a wall that blocks you from exploring a side of yourself that you should already have,” explained Sophia, a second-generation Korean re-learning Korean as an adult. For her, learning Korean is part of an effort to reclaim a Korean identity that she denied as a child. This is an example one of the most widespread and commonly held language ideologies: the notion that there is a fundamental link between a particular language and a people (Echeverria 2003; Woolard and Schieffelin 1994). A nationalist language ideology allows an ethnic Korean person to ground their claim of a Korean identity in their use of the Korean language. In addition, since language is supposed to be a clear marker of national or ethnic identity, it is also expected that ethnic Koreans are highly proficient in the language. However, the enforcement of the view that language and ethnic identity are bound together complicates the experiences of those who are of Korean descent but do not speak the language well. The expectation of fluency for ethnic Koreans and the belief that non-Korean learners claim a Korean identity through language learning are both assumptions rooted in a nationalist language ideology. Exported globally through European colonialism, a nationalist language ideology serves as a dominant model that shapes how people view themselves and others based on language and group identity (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998; Woolard and Schieffelin 1994:60).

Conforming to a nationalist language ideology, certain groups are assumed and expected to be highly competent in particular languages. For example, ethnic Korean participants in my research reported that people often assume they can speak Korean because of their Korean ethnicity. Many ethnic Koreans living in Toronto are in fact competent speakers of Korean reinforcing assumptions about an individual’s linguistic repertoire. However, in any ethnic group, intra-group variation in terms of ideologies can lead to diverse practices and experiences, so there are members who have maintained the language and others who have not. A nationalist ideology of language ignores linguistic and other differences that exist within the group (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998:199). The underlying assumption of homogeneity within the group erases intra-group differences and naturalizes the link between language and group identity. Thus an ethnic

Korean who has little or no knowledge of Korean challenges the ideas that a language and a people are inextricably tied together.

Nonetheless, a nationalist language ideology still persists as a dominant framework for categorizing people based on “clear” identity markers. For example, the belief that there is a natural relationship between ethnic/national identity and language can be reflected in an individual’s decisions to learn (or not learn) a language, based on how they choose to identify. For example, Sophia initially distanced herself from her own ethnic identity by choosing not to learn the Korean language:

When I was growing up, being Asian wasn’t something to be proud of. People would make fun of your eyes or say ching chong. They said a lot of mean things and that really got to me as a kid. That was a big part of my life when I didn’t want to learn Korean. I told myself that I don’t need to learn this language and it wasn’t something that I was proud of. I felt ashamed.

It is the belief that language and ethnicity are naturally tied together that influenced Sophia’s decision to reject the Korean language when she was younger. The intentional absence of Korean from her linguistic repertoire caused her to feel a sense of distance from her ethnicity. In a later effort to embrace her Korean identity as an adult, she surrounded herself with other Korean people and made a conscious effort to re-learn the Korean language.

Similarly, competence in a particular language can influence an individual’s conception of identity. Echeverria’s (2003:360) study on Basque language and identity revealed that adolescents who claimed a Basque identity partly grounded this claim in their use of the Basque language. Although a nationalist ideology of language ignores the social dynamics of language, it is one of the most prevalent language ideologies that frame current understandings about group identity and language itself among my participants.

## Non-Koreans

### “I know I’m not Korean”

Following the reasoning of a nationalist language ideology, one would assume that non-Korean learners of Korean disregard their own heritage and attempt to construct new “hybridized” cultural identities by learning the language (Kim 2016). However, this

is not the case among my participants. Many of them described themselves as people who are genuinely interested in Korean language and culture and are very aware that they are not Korean. For example, Helen explained: “I wouldn’t say that I’m Korean because I’m not. But I feel more cultured and closer to them.” In her interview, Kate answered similarly:

My friends say that [learning Korean] is so weird. They think that I just want to be Korean. “Why are you trying to be Korean?” It’s not like that but that’s how they view me. It’s a nice language and it would be nice to know it. I like the culture and I’m interested in the music so why not? I know that I can’t ever be Korean!

The learners themselves do not reinforce a nationalist ideology of language. However, the people around them who do hold this ideology make assumptions that learners are “trying to be Korean.” Like Kate’s friends, Alice’s parents tease her for her extensive interest in the language and culture: “I’m so into the music, and the shows and the culture that my parents will sometimes say, ‘You’re turning into a Korean. You’re so Korean.’”

Despite this, non-Korean learners of Korean clearly recognize their position as someone from outside of the ethnic group. Learning the language does not allow them to claim a Korean identity because of beliefs about race. Many non-Koreans grounded their denial of a Korean identity in their acknowledgement of the physical differences between Koreans and themselves: “I always feel like a white person when I’m learning Korean. Some people who are Asian, but not Korean, could maybe pass if they speak it. But I’m always going to be white,” said Anna. For Anna, it would be more plausible and acceptable for an Asian person, who is more similar to Koreans in terms of physical appearance, to claim a Korean identity if they desired, while it would not be possible for herself.

For most, learning the language highlights and makes visible their “outsider” status as a non-Korean. Pronunciation and grammar errors during the language learning process, especially when speaking, serve as a constant reminder that they are different from fluent Koreans. Grace, who self-identifies as white, reflects on how her fluency in Japanese (her second language), rather than English, often impedes on her efforts to speak Korean well:

I'm so used to speaking in Japanese that when Korean comes out, it has a Japanese accent. I can't kick the Japanese accent. It makes me feel a little further away because I can't get the natural sound to my speech. Because of that, it makes me feel out of place completely. But it doesn't discourage me from learning at all, it kind of encourages me because I'd like to become better.

During the interviews, I asked all of my participants about their ethnic identity. Looking back, I noticed that these questions often disrupted the flow of the interview. Participants never talked about their own ethnicity unless prompted and when they did, it was usually in a straightforward way that was unrelated to their efforts to learn Korean. "Just Canadian," replied Christine. Questions about how they identify themselves in terms of ethnicity were not seen as relevant to their experiences with learning Korean. Those who claimed a hyphenated identity (for example, Grenadian-Canadian or Filipino-Canadian) instead elaborated on which one of the two they identify with more and how they negotiate this hyphenated identity in different situations. So learning the Korean language does not change how non-Korean learners view themselves in terms of ethnic identity.

Contrary to a nationalist language ideology, non-Koreans view the Korean language and their own ethnic identity as separate and unaffected by each other. Thus the Korean language is not a sufficient marker of group identity for non-Korean learners and knowing only the language without other ancestral connections is not enough to claim an ethnic identity. Pina-Cabral's concept of "ontological weight" describes that some factors count more in establishing the "realness" of an entity: "ontological weight is a process by means of which some aspects of personhood are less easily silenced than others; they are made to be more certain" (2010:307). To non-Korean learners, the most "real" Korean is from Korea, looks Korean, speaks the language and knows the culture. If one or more of these factors are lacking, they are "less" Korean. In this case, physical characteristics and ancestry constitute more ontological weight than language ability and cultural knowledge in claiming an ethnic identity. Even though many of the non-Korean participants are moderately proficient in the language, they attribute greater importance to racial features over other factors like language, making it impossible and undesirable to claim a Korean identity.



## Ethnic Koreans

### Shared cultural heritage and ethnicity

The notion that a certain identity is embodied in language is an assumption that oversimplifies the relation between language and identity. It views language as an objectively bounded entity that is linked directly to a national or ethnic identity (Leeman 2015:108). It is an assumption that influences how a learner asserts their identity as well as their motivations to learn a particular language. Natalia explained to me that even as a second-generation Korean, it is crucial to know your language, your “mother tongue.” Within the notion of the mother tongue is the idea that people are “culturally predisposed” to know their heritage language (Jaffe 1993:104). A nationalist language ideology conflates ethnicity with language and encourages assumptions that people with high proficiency in their heritage language have a stronger claim to their ethnic identity. When asked what constitutes a strong sense of Korean identity, Rose answered:

You have a strong Korean identity if you are proud of your Korean heritage, if you value what you were brought up with and just uphold your ancestral beliefs and values. Language is huge. I think the better you get at the language, the stronger the connection you have to your heritage.

When speaking about heritage language loss, Professor Kim claimed that it was a problematic trend because most people no longer seem to identify with their ethnic roots: “Everyone speaks English now and they’re all from everywhere else. Your root is somewhere else but you are Canadian, you are American, you are not German or Irish or Korean or Japanese.” This correlational view of language and ethnic identity does not represent the experiences of all ethnic Koreans, however, it greatly influences how people perceive non-fluent members of a minority group.

High proficiency in a heritage language does not necessarily lead to the formation of a homogeneous ethnic identity (Brown 2009; Jo 2001; Kang 2013). In contrast to much of the literature on heritage language and identity, I also argue that the absence of the Korean language among Koreans does not suggest a weak sense of ethnic identity. I interviewed Jeremy, a third-generation Korean one month before he began a beginner Korean class. At the time of the interview, his knowledge of the language did not go beyond food names, kinship terms and words commonly found in popular music. He was

fully aware that he was not a competent speaker but still asserted a strong sense of ethnic identity:

I'm not learning it to be more Korean. I am Korean. I don't care if someone can speak it better than I can, I identify as Korean. It may make other people think I'm trying to be more Korean but I feel like I am already very Korean.

For Jeremy, there is greater certainty and “more existence” to his Korean descent and racial features over other factors like language and cultural knowledge. By doing this, he does not dissociate language from ethnic identity. Instead, he “attributes greater importance to some aspects over others in personal constitution and, in this way, establishes an order of ontological precedence” (Pina-Cabral 2010:307). His heritage carries the greatest ontological weight in claiming an ethnic identity, allowing him to assert a strong Korean identity regardless of his language competence and cultural knowledge. Similar to Jeremy, Elizabeth also maintained a strong Korean identity despite admitting to having subpar language skills. She spoke of language influencing cultural knowledge, revealing a view that unifies language and culture, rather than language and ethnic identity:

I was born in Korea, I am one hundred percent Korean. I really should be able to speak the language properly because you don't really understand the culture unless you speak the language. I think you can be Korean because of your heritage but if you don't speak the language, you just don't understand the culture. That doesn't mean you're not Korean.

Ethnic Korean participants consider themselves Korean regardless of their language ability. Their lack of competency in Korean does not necessarily mean that they have a weak sense of ethnic identity. Instead, a shared Korean identity is acknowledged and embraced primarily because of heritage.

A nationalist language ideology that overlooks the lived experiences of actual speakers and learners is comparable to what Hill (2002) refers to as “expert rhetoric” in literature on endangered Indigenous languages. While expert rhetoric is aimed to gather financial and public support, it does not consider what government-constructed discourses mean for the communities that are themselves a diverse group. For example, Meek's (2010) research on Kaska language revitalization in the Yukon points to a disjuncture between the identities people enact locally and those imposed by the government:

“The Yukon government’s slogan ‘We Are Our Language,’ while intended to communicate solidarity through the identification of a language and culture with a people, ideologically marked heritage speakers (elders) as core members of ‘We’ and erased those large numbers of First Nations who do not speak an aboriginal language” (2010:158).

Local ideologies of language use as well as non-competent speakers themselves are ignored in a nationalist discourse. Despite this, the absence of a heritage language does not diminish a sense of ethnic identity among ethnic Koreans. The actual linguistic diversity that exists in most, if not all, communities demonstrates the oversimplification of the relationship between language and identity in a nationalist language ideology. While the experiences and struggles of Koreans and Indigenous peoples differ greatly, there are notable similarities in the ways they are regarded by others who subscribe to a nationalist language ideology.

### Expectations for a homogeneous Korean identity

Participants were not uniform in their views on what constitutes a Korean identity. Their alignment to or resistance of a nationalist language ideology revealed two distinct stances. Those who conformed to a nationalist language ideology asserted the importance of language to ethnic identity while those who challenged a nationalist language ideology claimed that knowing Korean was not a necessity. For the latter group, proficiency in Korean does not guarantee a stronger sense of ethnic identity since becoming “more” Korean than they already are is not possible (Brown 2009; Kang 2013). However, their low language proficiency demonstrates to others who do hold a nationalist ideology that they fall below expectations of a “real” Korean person. Ethnic Koreans with low language competence can face rejection and criticism from other members of the Korean community who look down upon their poor language skills (Cho 2000).

The strict hierarchical social structure of Korea brings many expectations for how people of Korean descent should behave. It is required to show respect towards those who are older or of higher status. During my stay in Korea, I worked as an English teacher in a small elementary school in Gongju. The teacher who was to act as my translator once said to me, “The principal is king.” Those who are older/higher status hold power and absolute authority by virtue of their age and/or status. It is compulsory

that one must comply with their requests and should not question or confront them about their decisions. Being respectful to someone older or of higher status also includes actions like doing *insa* (saying a formal hello or goodbye while bowing). Other small actions are considered signs of respect or disrespect. For example, it is rude to cross your legs or to lean into the back of a chair. Also, during mealtime, younger people should not start eating until the older person has taken their first bite. Besides the social rules that dictate proper behaviour, respect is also shown through the use of *jondaemal*, or formal language.

The expectation that ethnic Koreans should speak Korean well aligns with other expectations for how Koreans should behave. Those who do not meet the expectations of fluency are viewed negatively for failing to uphold Korean cultural values and disregarding what is believed to be central to their identity. Elizabeth uses Korean only with her parents and equated her proficiency level to that of a nine-year-old child, the age at which she immigrated to Canada. She described to me a time when a Korean person asked her about her age and she responded incorrectly:

When you have strangers tell you that you don't even know how to count properly, you feel pretty bad. "How do you not even know how to say your age?" She went on about how I said it all wrong and that's not how you say it. She put me down and I was embarrassed. So I feel like I can't say anything now because what if I'm wrong? I'll never say my age in Korean ever again. Even now, if somebody asks how old I am in Korean I say it in English because I know I'll say it wrong. I always say it in English. When I was in Waterloo over the weekend, I went to a Korean restaurant and the lady there asked me, "how old are you?" in Korean. But I wasn't going to say it in Korean because I still remember that.

When making mistakes with the language, ethnic Koreans become targets of criticism, especially by other Koreans. In a classroom setting, their low proficiency is viewed as being dishonest and an attempt to receive a high grade in a subject that they already know well. Jane fervently described her experience of the first day of intermediate Korean class at university where the teacher tried to convince the ethnic Korean students that the course would be too easy for them:

In Korean, she was saying, "If you feel that you cannot be a good student, show up to class, do the work, I'm telling you now, don't come to this class." On the first day! Who are you to know what my motivation is? I don't get fifty-fives and feel happy about that. I'm not that kind of person. Who are you to tell me that just because I'm Korean, I'm not going to show up? After that first class, I really

contemplated on whether or not to stay. But I just stayed. She really wanted me to leave but I'm not leaving. I felt bad for that one guy who left, I really do, but I'm not going to leave just because someone told me to. I should stay because I know that my Korean isn't good.

Elizabeth and Jane acknowledge that they fall below the expectations of a "real" Korean person because of their low language skills. However, they do not equate their lack of proficiency in Korean to a lack of Koreanness, thus opposing a nationalist language ideology that a language and an ethnic group are inseparably bound. In contrast, other ethnic Koreans spoke about their experiences and motivations in ways that were greatly influenced by a nationalist ideology of language. These participants viewed learning Korean as a responsibility rather than an asset. Dan admitted that he was struggling terribly in his intermediate Korean class but he continues with it because learning the language is a cultural and linguistic liability:

When I was growing up, I wasn't into the Korean culture at all. I was super whitewashed. My mom kept telling me to learn and I felt like I was being a total second gen, not speaking Korean and not doing anything with Korean. But now I feel like it's my responsibility to be able to communicate in Korean and to be able to teach it to my kids.

Although many ethnic Koreans attribute the responsibility to themselves, some assigned the blame of low Korean proficiency to parents. When the participants blamed parents for low language proficiency, it was only when speaking about others. Those who responded in ways that were consistent with a nationalist language ideology viewed the Korean language as an inherited skill. However, there was an explicit contradiction in this belief of an inherited language. While the participants viewed Korean language transmission as natural, they also described it as a skill that had to be taught. It is the responsibility of the parents to pass on to their children a language that is related to the "essence" of Korean cultural heritage. Lee's (2013) study demonstrates the pivotal role of the family in the maintenance of heritage languages because the parents' language attitudes are often mirrored in their children's beliefs. The literature on parents' attitudes towards language maintenance reveal that Korean parents generally hold positive attitudes towards maintaining the Korean language for their children because they believe it is beneficial for ethnic identity formation, family cohesiveness and future career opportunities (Jeon 2010; Kang 2015; Park and Sarkar 2007). However, their positive

attitudes do not necessarily lead to effective educational practices and language use within the home. In contrast, Song's (2010:27) study on Korean mothers and their educational practices found that some mothers prioritized English and refrained from teaching Korean to their children. The mothers in this study still ascribed a Korean identity to their children. These contrasting perspectives on Korean language maintenance demonstrate the linguistic dilemmas Koreans (both second-generation and their parents) face when confronted by different meanings of being Korean.

All participants reported that they use both languages and sometimes a mixture of Korean and English with their parents, depending on the context and what needs to be communicated. However, the participants who subscribed to a nationalist language ideology emphasized the importance of only Korean in the home. Natalia explained: "For Korean people especially, it's looked down upon if your parents don't teach you the language well enough that you're fluent. If you're not able to speak just at a basic level, it looks bad on your parents as well." When describing two students who appeared to have no knowledge of Korean, Professor Kim made this remark: "I was very surprised. Don't you speak to your parents?" According to Professor Kim, not only should Korean be used at home, it is normal and expected to do so. While ethnic Koreans themselves receive criticism for not being competent in Korean, part of the blame is placed on their parents for not teaching the language.

Despite asserting a strong ethnic identity regardless of language ability, the learners who do not align with a nationalist language ideology still expressed a sense of regret for not being fluent. In her forties, Rose is relearning Korean in order to communicate better with her parents. She explained:

I feel guilty that I don't speak well but my parents got used to it. I forgot a lot of Korean and it got to the point where they didn't expect me to speak formally to them. Sometimes I would speak to them like friends (informally) and I felt kind of bad about that. I remember as a kid I would read articles and books. My mom has this book and she always said, "I wish you could read it."

Another language ideology that is relevant to the experiences of ethnic Koreans is the notion of language competence as duty. Unlike the ethnic Korean learners in this research, Korean nationals who have grown up in Korea do not have to make a conscious effort to learn the language to achieve fluency. Adult native speakers born and raised in

Korea are certainly competent enough in the language that they do not view Korean language learning as a duty that they must consistently work towards. This ideology that it is a duty or responsibility to learn Korean is more applicable to children of Korean immigrants who often use English as their preferred language. Viewing heritage language competence as a duty upholds a nationalist language ideology for ethnic Koreans outside of Korea and reinforces the notion that it is their responsibility to fulfill language expectations. For those who conform to the ideology that language is bounded to ethnic identity, low Korean language proficiency evokes feelings of guilt, shame and embarrassment (Jeon 2010:51). This is in direct opposition to a cosmopolitan language ideology that embraces choice and challenges the orthodoxy of language loyalty.

Not all ethnic Koreans expressed guilt, however, none of them were proud of their low Korean proficiency because they were aware of the expectations others had of them as ethnic Koreans. They overwhelmingly agreed that their current level of proficiency is inadequate and expressed the desire to improve their language skills. In a classroom setting, Jane described the pressure of having to meet higher expectations than her non-Korean peers:

For the first couple of quizzes, I got a few things wrong and I could tell on [the professor's] face that she was very surprised. She thought I was faking it to be in the course. After that, I guess her guard is a little let down. But she probably thought it was embarrassing that I didn't do well.

By performing poorly, Jane demonstrated that she was at an appropriate level for the class. However, she also exposed herself as a non-competent speaker, making obvious that she falls below expectations of an ethnic Korean person. Her errors revealed her knowledge of informal and colloquial Korean that were not suitable in a classroom environment that focused heavily on proper spelling and grammar.

While Jane expressed her dislike of having to fulfill higher expectations than her non-Korean classmates, she still studied diligently to improve her Korean language proficiency. Other participants reacted differently to these expectations. For example, instead of improving her language skills, Elizabeth avoids interaction with Korean-speaking people:

When I went to my aerobics class, I happened to be wearing my taekwondo jacket. It's written in Korean and I didn't realize I had that jacket on. I was doing my exercise and out of the corner of my eye I see this Asian woman staring at me

through the whole class. So we finished and I went to get my bag ready and she ran to me and she goes (in Korean), “Are you Korean?” I said no and I walked away. As I was walking away, I realized on the back of my jacket it says taekwondo in Korean. [Laughs.] I thought, oh my God, I just lied to this lady. But I don’t want to hang out with Korean-speaking people because to me, they’re different. If she’s Korean-speaking, she’s like a foreigner. I don’t really want to connect with her. Maybe that’s why my Korean is getting worse because I’m running away from Koreans.

Cho (2000) describes low heritage language proficiency as a disadvantage in social interactions. However, for Elizabeth, what is more relevant are the anticipated cultural differences between her and the Korean woman as well as the language expectations, which are seen in how the woman approached her using Korean. In contrast, Sophia embraced and internalized these expectations, willingly accepting the assumptions of a nationalist language ideology. While her reasons for learning reflect an ideology that links language and identity, she also positions herself differently from “real” Korean people in terms of culture:

At first, I learned it because I wanted to be more Korean. I wanted to be able to hang out with actual Korean people without it being obvious that I’m different. But then after going to Korea, I realized that it’s not possible for me. I can’t be like them. I think through this class, I just want to be able to speak the language that I inherited from my parents and continue that. When I pass on the knowledge to my children, it won’t be what my parents gave to me. It’ll be more the Korean-Canadian mindset, culture and language. My experience.

Some Koreans chose to act in accordance with the expectations of fluency, thus fulfilling a responsibility as an ethnic Korean, while others decided to stay away from situations that require the use of Korean, for fear of negative evaluation and judgment from others. Like Sophia, those who subscribed to a nationalist language ideology often spoke passionately about their language learning goals since the language was an inseparable piece of being Korean. On the other hand, the participants who chose not to learn or were learning for reasons unrelated to their ethnic identity (for example, “it might be useful for something later”), were less enthusiastic about the “necessity” of being fluent in Korean. “It’s not really something I need. I don’t want to say that it’s not important... but it’s not important,” said Jeremy with a laugh. Much of the literature on heritage languages among minority groups equates low language competence to a weak sense of ethnic identity (Brown 2009; Cho 2000; Lee 2012). However, this does not



appear to be true among my Korean participants because all of them, regardless of their language ability, claimed a strong Korean identity despite expectations to be “more” Korean through language.

### Contested meanings of Korean, Canadian and dual identity

Ethnic Koreans responded differently to expectations rooted in a nationalist language ideology and also spoke about their experiences differently. However, all of them claimed a Korean-Canadian identity. Before looking at how ethnic Koreans conceptualize a Korean-Canadian identity, it is important to first understand what meanings they associate with being Korean and being Canadian.

As mentioned previously, all participants asserted that they were Korean primarily because of the fact that they are of Korean descent. Their heritage alone was enough to claim a strong Korean identity and was seen as something that is simply passed on from generation to generation. There is an “ahistorical, reducible essence of ‘Koreanness’” that is transmitted through generations (Jo 2001:90). By virtue of their roots, all ethnic Koreans agreed that a Korean identity was an undeniable part of how they viewed themselves. “My parents didn’t want me to forget that I was Korean growing up. They would say, ‘you’ll learn English at school but remember that you’re Korean.’ And I think that had a lot to do with me thinking that I’m Korean and Canadian,” replied Claire when I asked her how she identified herself. Elizabeth also recognized the deep importance of heritage for a Korean identity:

Even when they were occupied by the Japanese, Koreans stayed Korean. You can’t be half-Japanese, you have to be Korean. This one hundred percent Korean blood is important in Korean culture and that’s what we all pass on to our kids. I guess we do it without knowing. We have this Korean pride that we pass on and pass on without even knowing what it is. So I could never see a non-Korean as Korean but someone who has never stepped foot in Korea, who doesn’t know the language but has Korean heritage is still Korean. That must be ingrained into our brains.

Much of the literature on nationalism in Korea ties this strong sense of ethnic nationalism to historical relations with Japan. Nationalist discourses that viewed nation, ethnicity and culture as a collectivity emerged in response to Japan’s annexation of Korea (Campbell 2015; Kang 2016). During the occupation that began in 1905 and after Japanese rule that ended in 1945, Koreans framed their national identity on the basis of

ethnic and cultural homogeneity (Campbell 2015:483). The assumed and desired ethnic, cultural and linguistic homogeneity of Koreans continues to be a dominant discourse today and shapes current understandings of who can claim a Korean identity. However, this is complicated by the present realities of a diverse Korean diaspora and a growing multicultural population within Korea (Lee 2009; Watson 2012).

Rembold and Carrier (2011) argue that notions of national identities still persist in a time when transnationalism and globalization seem to undermine national ideologies. In alignment with this, all participants, regardless of birthplace, feel a sense of unity with other Koreans over their shared heritage and hope to instill in later generations a sense of “Korean pride” and loyalty. Within this idea that all Koreans have a shared ethnic identity is the implicit assumption that all members should have the same goals and motivations. Kang’s (2004) study on Korean-American camp counselors demonstrated how this underlying assumption could lead to dilemmas where members of the same ethnic group prioritize different goals. Some camp counselors argued that the primary objective of the camp should be the “transmission” of Korean language, arts and etiquette to young Korean-American campers while those who were in favour of mentorship were more interested in sharing social experiences as Korean-Americans growing up in America (Kang 2004:229)

Although all participants in this research acknowledged and accepted a shared ethnic identity, those who did not speak Korean well challenged the notion of shared goals. For others, being Korean encompassed more than just descent and physical features. In accordance with a nationalist language ideology, proficiency in the language and knowledge of the culture was required and expected of ethnic Koreans. Throughout her interview, Sophia described the Korean language as something all Koreans should already know, viewing language, culture and ethnicity as linked and essential to her ethnic identity. Others like Elizabeth and Jeremy did not claim to feel any “less” Korean because of their low proficiency, separating language from ethnicity and asserting a Korean identity without knowledge of the language and culture. The different conceptions of what it means to be Korean were reflected in their attitudes and motivations towards learning Korean.

An important distinction ethnic Koreans made was between an ascribed identity and an experienced identity. They used the words “being” and “feeling” Korean to differentiate between the two. “Being” Korean was unquestionable and unanimously accepted as a core part of their identity. It was an ascribed identity based on physical characteristics that was nonnegotiable and unchangeable. However, participants reported that they could “feel” Korean in varying degrees depending on their interest and participation in Korean cultural practices. An experienced identity was more fluid and changing, allowing them to feel both a heightened and lessened sense of Koreanness based on their experiences and interactions with others. For example, Dan explained to me that it was impossible for him to be “more” Korean but described some instances that highlighted his Koreanness: “On New Year’s when you do *sebae* (deep formal bow) and eat *ddukgook* (rice cake soup), that day when we play *yutnori* (traditional board game) with our grandparents. The traditional stuff makes me feel so Korean for that short period of time.” All except one expressed that their love of Korean food was something that made them feel very Korean. In contrast to this, Rose feels “less” Korean when non-Koreans display their knowledge about current Korean pop culture, something she knows little about. The use of the language was also relevant to feeling less or more Korean.

Jane: I feel more Korean when I speak Korean. I feel more foreign in a way. But if I were to speak to a really fluent Korean speaker who’s been there for longer than I have, of course, they’d look at me like I’m funny. “You’re not that Korean, you’re Canadian.” So in a way, it also makes me feel less Korean. It depends on how people view me. But me speaking it reminds me that I’m Korean. You were born there, don’t forget that.

While Jane asserted her Korean identity based on her physical characteristics, she refused to accept the Korean culture and language as part of her identity. Her negative experiences with the Korean community as a self-identified second-generation Korean led her to choose “the Canadian mindset” over Korean culture. She characterized the two mindsets as a dichotomy, arguing that they are too different to be blended together. The literature on heritage language and ethnicity tends to conflate a strong ethnic identity with a positive one (Brown 2009; Cho 2000; Lee 2012). For example, Brown (2009:11) states: “If ethnic minority students are more appreciative of their culture, they are more likely to cultivate a strong ethnic identity, as opposed to those who merely maintained the heritage language without an appreciation of the heritage culture.” Some of my participants

challenge the notion that a strong ethnic identity is undoubtedly positive and is linked to a deep appreciation of the culture. In her interview, Jane spoke extensively about the aspects of Korean culture that she did not like, while at the same time, expressing annoyance towards her non-Korean peers for their ignorance of these deep-seated cultural issues:

Korea is not as pretty or perfect as it presents itself. That's what is kind of frustrating about these [language] classes, to be honest. I can't really relate to anyone there because no one hates on it, no one questions it and no one wants to get to the bottom of why Korean behaviours are a certain way. They don't see it that deep. It's just, "oh, he's famous, he's good-looking. I want to understand everything he's doing. I want to talk like him and dance like her. You respect elders? That's cute." No, I hate that. They like the theory but they don't know what it's like in real life.

Language competence and identity are not "static entities" that are related in correlational ways (Kang 2013:251). Ethnic Korean learners are constantly negotiating meanings of Koreanness in different situations. The nature of change in language learning and use can also influence their conception of a Korean identity. For example, Sophia described to me that she is making a conscious effort to change her speech patterns in order to fulfill what is expected of a Korean person:

When talking to my mom, I use *banmal* (informal language) instead of *jondaemal* (formal language) so that's something that I'm working on right now. I'm starting to understand the Korean mentality and culture better so I understand the respect that you're supposed to have for your parents. I kind of wish my [younger] sisters had that respect for me as well. You know how there's *unni* (older sister) and stuff? I wish they would call me something like that but they don't. They're always like, "yo." I'm starting to see how rude they are now. [Laughs.]

Ethnic Korean learners have diverse understandings of what it means to have a Korean identity and they (re-)position themselves in relation to Korean culture based on their interests and language learning goals. Learners' understandings of Canadianness were also related to understandings of Koreanness. In contrast to a Korean identity that was understood primarily in terms of physical characteristics and sometimes in terms of language and culture, a Canadian identity always required fluency in English and the acceptance of a "North American way of being."

Elizabeth: I don't see myself as an immigrant. I'm Canadian. That's how I see myself and that's how my coworkers see me too. It's because of language, because I speak fluent English. And of course, I carry myself differently. I don't

dress like the Korean-Koreans. Even their movements are different. They walk differently, they stand differently, their gestures are different, everything is different. I was raised here so everything about me is Canadian.

Canadianness was better suited as the primary identity label for most. Even Natalia, whose interview responses consistently conformed to a nationalist language ideology answered in this way: “I’m technically Canadian but my parents are Korean.” Additionally, certain aspects of Korean culture made more visible the centrality of Canadianness to participants’ preferred identity. Claire was more aware of her Canadian identity when she saw contrasts between Canadian and Korean culture:

There are times when... someone will say something in Korean and I’ll feel, “Oh, I’m really Canadian.” Not because I can’t understand but because I would never say something like that. There are different social customs where they’ll talk about weight or how pretty you are or whatever. We don’t do that in Canada. We don’t say, “Wow, you have really bad acne,” but it’s so common for them. So when I hear things like that, I feel that I’m very Canadian.

Regarding pseudonyms, the ethnic Korean participants who chose their pseudonyms all selected English names rather than Korean names. All ethnic Koreans with English names usually have given Korean names, even if it is not part of their full legal name. Those in the advanced class were required to use their Korean names with Professor Kim but when speaking with me, they referred to themselves using their English names. All other Korean participants used their English names with me as well. No one opted for a Korean name when given the option of choosing their own pseudonym after the interview. Participants may have chosen an English name over a Korean name out of convenience but it can also reveal their preference for Canadianness over Koreanness. Although it is a pseudonym, they were aware that the chosen name would represent their experiences in this research. If the interview prompted them to focus only on their Korean identity and was conducted in Korean, it is possible that they would choose differently. After speaking in-depth about how they negotiate a Korean and Canadian identity and with some even positioning themselves closer to a Canadian identity, it is unsurprising that they chose an English pseudonym. Their preference of a certain name over another can be seen as an intentional act to use the name as a reflection of their selfhood in a particular setting.

While identifying as culturally Canadian was considered the norm, claiming only a Canadian identity was not looked upon favourably. At the very least, it is required to accept an public identity based on clear physical features that mark them as a visible minority (Choi 2015:249-250). Natalia explained: “I wouldn’t like it if my kids or my family members denied being Korean because if you look at yourself, you’re clearly not white or whatever you think a Canadian person is.” In addition to Natalia, other participants like Sophia, Rose, and Dan embraced the language and culture as part of their ethnic identity, while others claimed a Korean identity only in terms of physical appearance. As Brown (2009:12) states: “Some heritage language speakers accept only the physical aspect of their public identity and reject the cultural aspect. A sharp discrepancy then forms between the way they feel about who they are and the way society identifies them.”

With cultural and language expectations on both sides, some work to maintain both, some reject certain aspects of one side and others are not sure. Claire described: “I feel like we have... not an identity crisis but what are we supposed to be? And I also wonder, do other second gens of other cultures feel this way too?” In a blog post published by the *Belonging, Identity, Language, Diversity Research Group* (BILD), Eun-Ji Kim (born in Korea and raised in Winnipeg) expressed similar feelings of confusion with her own identity when she moved to Ottawa and later to Montreal. She self-identified more with Canadian culture but comments made by others that highlighted her otherness forced her to construct her identity as primarily Korean. In another *BILD* post, Sumanthra Govender (Indian descent but born and raised in Canada) spoke about how her answer to the question, “Where are you from?” would not satisfy some people who wanted to hear an answer that was “visually understandable.” Similarly, ethnic Koreans “wear their ethnicity,” requiring them to accept an identity based on physical characteristics despite identifying more closely with Canadian culture.

For ethnic Koreans then, the hyphenated identity, “Korean-Canadian,” is a viable and fluid label that not only encompasses different meanings of Koreanness but also enables them to identify culturally with Canada, the country in which they were raised. Choi (2015:254) refers to this dual or hyphenated identity as a “conforming remedy” between a non-negotiable identity and their own asserted identity. As Eun-Ji Amy Kim

states in a blog post for the Belonging, Identity, Language, Diversity Research Group, “In that hyphenated identity, I was both othered and included” (Kim 2015). Like any identity label, however, the dual identity “Korean-Canadian” is not a fixed category that is understood similarly by all participants. For Natalia, claiming a hyphenated identity means that she is wholly Korean and wholly Canadian: “I think my identity is pretty solid. I see [Korean and Canadian] as different and I don’t try to mix them up because I don’t think that makes a lot of sense. There is no Korean-Canadian culture.” Natalia is proficient in both Korean and English and frequently visits Korea to maintain a cultural connection to her parents’ homeland. She views her identity as unchanging as long as she stays in tune culturally and linguistically, with both Korea and Canada. Elizabeth initially described herself as wholly Korean and wholly Canadian as well but reversed her statement when she considered her insufficient knowledge of the language and culture:

I belong in Canada. I came from Korea but I don’t belong there anymore. This is who I am now but Korea is still a part of me. At first, I thought I was two wholes but my Korean whole cannot go to Korea and live there. I wouldn’t fit there. I’m Canadian with a Korean background.

A dual identity implies the combination of a Korean and Canadian identity but those who claim this identity conceptualize it in various ways. For example, in Kang’s (2004) study, self-categorized Korean-Americans aligned themselves primarily with their Americanness, in direct opposition to Koreanness. For many, a hyphenated identity is a balance that allows them to “adjust to the American ways without turning their backs completely on their ethnic background” (Lee 2012:128). Among my participants, some claimed that they were both Korean and Canadian and resolved what they viewed as conflicts between these identities by viewing them separately.

Others asserted that their dual identity was different from both a Korean and Canadian identity, claiming that it was not a combination of the two but a third, “hybrid” categorization where learners “position themselves on the boundary between the two worlds of American-ness and Korean-ness, depending on the situations they are in, and they conceive a hybrid, third space for themselves, where they have taken on aspects from both worlds” (Kang 2013:259). Tetreault refers to this as “transculturality,” or the way in which children of immigrants can express migration and diaspora in ways that relate to the first-generation experience but are also innovative (2015:4). Transcultural

processes involve “the simultaneous positioning *between* social categories and semiotic referents” (Tetreault 2015:16). While some participants view Korean and Canadian identities as mutually exclusive, others construct and express their identity as simultaneously Korean and Canadian. For example, Sophia likens her Korean-Canadian identity to her advanced Korean language class that incorporates both Korean and Canadian elements but is different from other classes in both Korea and Canada:

I feel more welcomed. Everyone in the class knows the Canadian mentality so it’s a lot easier for me to feel comfortable compared to when I took classes in Korea. We’re not just talking about Korea and how they think. We think the Canadian way and the Korean way. So it’s kind of perfect for me. I’m more Korean-Canadian than Canadian or Korean, so a kind of third, different identity. That class is kind of like the perfect space for me.

In contrast to this, Jane described that the Korean language class was enforcing a fully Korean environment into one that should be Canadian. She took issue with certain cultural customs that were expected of her, for example, the common rule for those of lower status to say a polite hello while bowing when greeting their superiors:

When the professors look at you, they don’t say hi to you first. They never say hi to you first. One time I walked into class and she looked at me and I looked at her and she kept looking at me. Am I supposed to say hi now? Do I bow? Are we in Korea? Obviously I know how to treat an elder but we’re in a Canadian class. Then again, clearly not.

The varying views and opinions participants bring to the classroom are evidence of their diverse experiences with the language and the culture. Jo’s (2001 and 2002) studies demonstrate how language classes for Korean-Americans actually complicate their previous experiences with the language. Instead of leading to homogeneous ethnic identity formation, students negotiate and transform their sense of ethnic identity. The diversity of experiences evident in the language class enables them to compare their own experiences with others and “think about their closeness to, or distance from, ‘Koreanness’” (Jo 2002:111).

In an informal conversation, Amber described to me a time when she was in Korea, speaking with schoolteachers about food, and used the word *dakkuang* to refer to pickled radish. *Dakkuang* is the Koreanised version of the Japanese word *takuan*. Amber learned this word from her grandparents who grew up during the Japanese occupation of Korea and emigrated before the intensification of nationalist campaigns that tried to erase



Japanese vocabulary in everyday speech. To Amber and her grandparents, *dakkuang* is the correct Korean word to use when referring to pickled radish. However, the Korean teachers immediately chastised her for her use of *dakkuang*, calling it a Japanese word and told her to use the Korean word *danmuji* instead. What she believed was a correct Korean word was deemed inappropriate to use in certain contexts, thus reconstructing her knowledge of the Korean language and what is acceptable for use outside of informal family situations. This example demonstrates that ethnic Koreans' experiences with Korean are not only transformed within the classroom context but can also occur in any interaction when a fluent Korean speaker asserts their standard and legitimate knowledge of Korean.

While language is often assumed to be a clear identity marker, it erases the heterogeneity of experiences that is so prevalent among the children of immigrants. As Jo states: "when the language is located in actual use, it elicits different and often conflicting senses of the experiences of being Korean" (2002:112). For second- and third-generation Koreans, the language learning process is intended to lead to homogeneous identity formation but instead makes visible their contested meanings and experiences of Koreanness. Some learners accept and embrace the nationalist language ideology implicit in Korean language education while others continue to negotiate the conflicts between how others see them and how they choose to identify.

## Conclusion

A nationalist language ideology does not allow non-Korean learners to assert a Korean identity due to beliefs about race and the more "weighted" factors in claiming an identity. This ideology impacts ethnic Koreans more so than their non-Korean peers because of assumptions and expectations that they should already have a high proficiency in Korean. The nationalist demands for cultural and linguistic homogeneity require ethnic Koreans to negotiate Korean, Canadian and Korean-Canadian identities. Due to their diverse experiences with the language and culture, ethnic Koreans respond differently to the expectations of a nationalist language ideology. Some accept the language as a core part of their identity, some reject either the language or culture while still asserting a Korean identity and others express confusion over what they are "supposed" to be. While

a nationalist language ideology is useful for better understanding the experiences of ethnic Koreans learning Korean, it does not consider motivations that go beyond “becoming” more Korean. The following chapter on a functionalist language ideology addresses the practical uses of Korean for both non-Korean and ethnic Korean learners.

## Chapter Three: Korean as a Practical Resource

### Functionalist language ideology

When defining language, it is common to refer to the functions of language. For example, Kramersch (1998:3) states that language expresses, embodies and symbolizes cultural reality. Language is a system of signs that allows speakers to communicate about experiences and events, and to express ideas and attitudes. There is a clear communicative function of language that enables individuals to conduct their social lives.

A functionalist language ideology centres on the idea that language serves practical purposes, helping users achieve economic, social, cognitive, and expressive goals, among others. If a single language is sufficient, then learning another language is unwarranted, from a functionalist perspective. Practical motivations for learning an additional language include the expectation of economic resources and social benefits. A learner motivated by a functionalist language ideology may be seeking a job that requires knowledge of a particular language or may wish to communicate with people who speak that language. While a nationalist language ideology connects language to ethnic identity, a functionalist language ideology emphasizes the practicality and usefulness of a particular language.

Beyond the individual-level, languages also have important society-level functions. The operation of a nation state usually requires the appointment of official languages for use in government and education. States necessarily privilege one language or a small number of languages since they function in and through language (Brubaker 2015:22). In Canada, the special status of English and French is supported by functionalist arguments that prioritize efficient and effective communication.

Following a functionalist ideology, languages that are seen as practical and useful are considered more valuable than other languages with reduced or less obvious functionality. In Canada, no one questions one's motivations for learning English or French because there are obvious material and social benefits to knowing either language. Particularly for immigrants in Canada, knowledge of the English language is closely linked to economic opportunities and social mobility. In fact, there is an expectation that all residents of Canada should be able to communicate in at least one of the official languages in order to be contributing members of society. For this reason, the

government provides resources to teach English and French to newcomers and children in schools. Following the reasoning that English and French are necessary for communication and success in Canada, learning an additional language beyond what is required would be considered unnecessary. Learning foreign and minority languages require explicit justification because the practical purpose of these languages is in doubt.

While people do not question the value of learning languages that can provide material gains, it is normal for adherents to a functionalist ideology to question spending time and money learning a language with no clear practical benefit. I asked all participants whether or not the people around them supported their desire to learn Korean. The majority of participants received conflicting messages. While learning other languages is seen as a good thing, it is perceived as “weird” to study a language that is not very practical. Linda, a non-Korean survey respondent from Bogota, Colombia replied:

[My parents] encourage me by saying that learning another language is important, but on the other hand, they discourage me by saying Korean is not very useful, that I should choose another language.

Similarly, Anna (non-Korean) reported that her parents continuously question her reasons for wanting to learn Korean: “They’re always like, ‘Why are you learning Korean? Out of everything, why?’” By saying this, Anna’s parents imply that there are “better” and more valuable languages to learn aside from Korean. Learners are sometimes viewed as deviant for investing in a language that has comparatively few speakers and is seen to provide less material benefits than other languages like English or French.

Participants described two main reasons for learning Korean. The first was to achieve economic and material gain in Korea, where there is a clear use for the language. Flynn and Harris (2016) call these “instrumental motivations.” They are motivated by the need to use Korean in Korea as well as potential career achievements. The other group had “integrative motivations” and sought deeper connections with Korean-speaking people and used the Korean language as a tool to feel closer with a particular person or group. Participants also assigned moral values to different motivations. Instrumental motivations that looked only towards potential economic benefit were less morally valued than integrative motivations that were seen to encompass a genuine interest in the

Korean culture. While for some participants the two types of motivations were related and not mutually exclusive, the value judgments placed on certain reasons for language learning demonstrate an ideology that looks beyond language as a tool solely for superficial or material benefit.

## Non-Koreans

### The pursuit of economic and material gain

Although Korean has little use in Canada, some participants had the goal of living and working in Korea, where having Korean language skills would certainly serve a functional purpose. Sara explained that she had an “indescribable attachment” to Korean history and culture and plans to live there after graduating: “I always wanted to be fluent in Korean. My goal is to eventually end up there. I plan to live there for as long as I can.” Through any means, Sara hopes to live in Korea for an extended amount of time. Teaching English is the most popular job option for non-Koreans in Korea and usually requires a Bachelor’s degree. Sara explained that she decided to return to school and complete her degree in order to be eligible to teach there and fulfill her dream of living in Korea. After her interview, she informed me that she was heading to the International Affairs office to inquire about an exchange to Korea. For Sara, learning Korean, completing her degree and teaching English in Korea are not goals in themselves but required steps to being able to live in Korea.

Like Sara, Anna also had an instrumental use for Korean but it was different from just living in Korea. Anna expressed a strong desire to teach and was pulled towards Korea for its extremely high demand for English teachers. Compared to the job market for teachers in Canada, she felt that teaching in Korea would be better suited to her interests.

Anna: I want to learn Korean because I want to teach there. Thinking about money, it will be a great job. But also, I have an interest in the culture, so it’s like an all in one thing. I feel like this is the perfect job for my kind of personality and what I like. I have an interest in other cultures too but because I don’t feel like I will ever really need those languages, I guess I haven’t pursued it the way I have with Korean.

Anna's reason for learning Korean is for the practical purpose of communicating with Korean people in Korea. She is currently learning in order to prepare for living and working overseas. She justifies her focus on studying Korean rather than other languages she is interested in because she does not expect to "ever really need those languages." Marie, another participant, also intends to use her Korean language skills in Korea. However, instead of living or working there, her motivation to learn Korean was mainly for travel purposes. Marie reported that she experienced many linguistic and cultural barriers during her first stay in Korea and felt regret for being unable to communicate well. Although she recounted only positive experiences as a foreigner in Korea, she wanted to learn the language well enough in order to return for another visit.

Marie: I want to be able to travel by myself without any problems or feel like there's a language barrier. It would be really great to do things on my own like order food or ask for directions. That would be big progress from where I was a few years ago when I couldn't even read *hangul*. If you know many languages, you can travel without feeling like you don't know what's happening. You can feel a bit more comfortable with whatever you do.

For Marie, learning Korean has an instrumental purpose of facilitating travel experiences within Korea. Knowing Korean while travelling will help her feel more at ease and will also allow her to communicate successfully with others who do not speak English. For the participants who are primarily concerned with overseas employment and travel, knowing Korean has an obvious function. Their goals for the future involve them being in Korea, where there is a clear use for the Korean language.

### Seeking cultural understanding and connections with others

The non-Korean participants who planned to go to Korea and use the language made a clear distinction between themselves and other foreigners who do not aim to learn anything beyond survival phrases. They believe it is "wrong" to expect everyone in Korea to speak English and to seclude oneself from the Korean people while living there.

Kevin: I would like to know how to communicate in that country rather than just go and be an aloof foreigner. If I'm going to go there, I want to experience the country and not just hide in a foreign district.

For non-Korean participants, there are two functions of Korean language learning. One function of learning is for economic gain and the other function is for education about different cultures. Although participants sought material gain from learning

Korean, they also emphasized that they were different from “tourists standing on the outside” and other foreigners who have no interest in the language and culture. Unlike “aloof foreigners,” their objectives for language learning also included building an understanding of and appreciation for Korean culture. The moral hierarchy of motivations was evident in Sara’s responses when speaking about people who learn a language solely for material reasons.

Sara: It’s really just for myself. Obviously the money is a bonus and it helps especially if you want to live or work there but it kind of sounds superficial. If you’re only doing it for the money or for the title, ok? If that’s your only reason, to say that you can speak it, it’s kind of showing off as well.

Although Sara is learning Korean in order to live in Korea, and thus seeking to achieve a material goal through language learning, she expressed a negative opinion about people who want to learn the language only for that reason. She states that her primary reason for learning is not “superficial” and instead asserts that it is a personal aspiration that looks beyond material gain. Although participants made explicit moral judgments on which type of motivation is “better,” their goals for learning frequently involved both instrumental and integrative motivations since they are not mutually exclusive categories (Flynn and Harris 2016:380). Since having a purely material aim in language learning is viewed as a morally weak form of motivation, participants tended to make additional comments on their personal interest in and appreciation of the culture.

Among all of my participants, only Emily, a non-Korean survey respondent from San Diego, admitted that she had a purely instrumental reason for learning and that it was to make her feel more empowered and accomplished:

Honestly, just the fact that I can add another language to the “languages I can speak” list makes me feel good. I feel this way because people are impressed by the number of languages one can speak and also because it can't hurt to put it on your resume.

In addition to Korean, Emily also has Spanish and Arabic on her list of languages. It is possible that survey respondents might have been more willing to admit to instrumental motivations because of the nature of anonymous data collection. Acknowledging their own motivations that did not go beyond material gain would not result in any negative judgments. However, interview participants, who spoke about their motivations with me in a one-on-one setting, might have been more reluctant to focus

primarily on the possible economic benefits of learning Korean for fear of creating a negative impression.

For participants who looked beyond economic gains, languages were said to “open doors” and have an intrinsic value beyond their use as a tool for communication. In O’Rourke and DePalma’s (2016) study on non-Galician students learning Galician (a minority language spoken in north-west Spain), they describe language learning as a form of “edutourism” where learners seek “authentic” cultural experiences alongside language learning. In their study, none of the participants reported purely instrumental goals. Their interest in learning the language was always rooted in their appreciation of the culture (O’Rourke and DePalma 2016:6). Similarly, my participants spoke about how language learning broadens their worldview as they continuously learn more about the culture.

James: A lot of people don’t know how helpful [learning a language] can be until they start doing it. That’s one thing I think we don’t do a lot. We don’t say, “learn a second language, you can find more joy in life,” it’s more like, “learn a second language, it’s helpful for your career.” It’s oriented towards being useful while we took away a lot of the enjoyment of the language. People just assume that French is going to be the same as English without thinking about how it could change their way of thinking. They see it as a medium but they don’t see it as something that could open their world a little bit.

All interview participants looked down on career-oriented language learners because those who are not concerned with the cultural environment will not make the necessary connections with native speakers to maintain the language. Communicative approaches to language learning are seen as more important and necessary (Ritzau 2015). Kathleen, a non-Korean survey participant from Toronto, noted from experience that the lack of interest in the culture will eventually lead to the inability to learn the language further:

I realized that to fully be immersed in a language one pursues it helps to be equally immersed in the culture. I learned French up until my freshman year of university but lost the motivation to continue because outside of the language on its own I had no interest French culture, making it hard to fully apply my ability to speak French.

While some non-Korean participants had aspirations that involved going to Korea, other participants did not cite travel, work or international experiences as their main motivation for language learning. Instead of pursuing economic gain or a life in Korea, some participants have integrative motivations and learn the language as an



attempt to become closer to a particular person or group of people. For example, Lisa does not have any aspirations to travel or work abroad. However, she dedicates her time to learn Korean in order to feel closer with her older sister who reportedly has a great interest in the Korean culture and currently lives in Korea as an English teacher. Lisa's main motivation for learning was to have something in common with her sister:

My sister is six years older than me. When we were younger, she got into Japanese culture like anime and stuff and even took Japanese classes. I followed after her and did the same to get closer to her as a sibling. After that, she realized that Japanese was way too difficult so she gave up on it and switched to Korean because it was a lot easier. She switched over and got into K-pop and dramas. She immersed herself in that and I was curious what she was doing. She showed me and then I got into it myself. I guess it was to get closer to my sister because of our age difference.

Although Korean is not practical in the sense that it allows her to communicate with the majority population or gain any material benefit, it serves a purpose of bringing Lisa closer to people with whom she wishes to connect. For Lisa, there is a personal rather than material value in learning Korean. So she consciously uses the Korean language as a means to bridge the gap between herself and her sister. Lisa was aware that learning languages served a functional purpose for her as she reflected on her motivation behind learning French:

My cousin only spoke French when we were younger and I wanted to be able to talk to her. I guess the reason why I learn languages is for other people so that I can communicate with them.

Similarly, Megan learns Korean in order to feel more accepted by her Korean boyfriend's parents. She explained that her interest in K-pop and dramas was not enough of a motivating factor to take language classes but now that she is in a serious relationship with her boyfriend, she has a "real life" reason to learn and use Korean.

Megan: My boyfriend and I are living together now and we're thinking seriously about staying together. If I picture myself to be part of his family later on, it would be really nice if I could communicate with the rest of his family. They can't just call me a bitch and I wouldn't know. He told me that Koreans aren't very fond of mixing. He's the first-born son of the first-born son of the first-born son. His family kind of has an issue with me because I'd be tainting the line. I thought maybe if I know Korean and put in a lot of effort learning, they would be more accepting.

Through interactions with her boyfriend's family, her outsider status was highlighted and she reported feeling a "divide" because of the cultural barriers and their feelings of resentment toward her. So Megan, like all other non-Korean participants denied constructing a Korean identity through language learning. As we saw in chapter two, a language with no relation to heritage is not supposed to change one's notion of identity. Instead of "changing," participants learning the language spoke instead of "adding" new aspects to their sense of self: "I'm attaching a new part of me to myself. It's not warping who I am, it's just bringing in something new," said Megan. This conception of identity is further explored in chapter four on a cosmopolitan language ideology.

Like Megan, James was also motivated by the desire to feel included and connected with Korean-speaking people. He explained that his primary motivation to learn the language was to better understand his friends who are mostly ethnic Koreans and non-Korean learners of Korean:

A lot of my friends are Korean. The ones who aren't Korean know Korean so they end up speaking Korean all of the time. You want to be able to do stuff with your friends and not feel lost. I'm the only one who knows Italian. I have another language already but I wanted to have a little more fun because I want to know what's going on. With a lot of friends who are Korean, I feel like I know them a little better now because I'm learning the language. And vice versa because one of my Korean friends is learning Italian and it worked the same way.

For these participants, the objective is not to gain economic or material benefit but to have the skills required to connect with a certain person or group of people. Through language learning, they are trying to acquire skills that make them feel more accepted by the person or group with which they wish to connect. Their goal to feel included and to learn more about the Korean culture is a function for learning that is highly morally valued. These participants spoke proudly about having a "real" integrative purpose for learning Korean.

Among my survey respondents, the majority stated that their primary motivation to learn was to understand the pop culture that they consume on a daily basis. Their purpose in learning was to better make sense of what their favourite celebrities say without having to rely on subtitles. When asked what motivates her to learn Korean, Charlotte, a non-Korean survey respondent from Toronto wrote:

To be able to be fluent enough to read Tweets by my fave idols and actually understand all the slang! Also to be able to read or watch anything in Korean without a struggle to understand the meaning or why something is funny.

Survey participants reported that they do not use the language because they do not have many opportunities to speak with native Koreans. It appears that their notion of “using” a language involves only speaking, but does not include listening and written comprehension. While they do not believe that that they are using the language, they are actively using their comprehension skills to achieve their objective of understanding what is said in television shows and dramas. Their knowledge of Korean serves the function of better understanding the celebrities or as one respondent wrote, “to fangirl more efficiently.” They do not invest in Korean to improve their career opportunities nor to become a unique individual but learn for the purpose of understanding the language used by Korean entertainers.

In contrast to participants who learn Korean to better understand Korean celebrities, Jamie, a non-Korean survey participant from Singapore, translates a long-running Korean comedy show on her blog and cited that her main motivation was to “bridge the gap” between Korean celebrities and English-speaking fans. The language is not used to bring her closer to Korean-speaking people but to facilitate and encourage other non-Koreans wanting to better understand a particular TV show. She does not receive any economic gain but learning the language still serves a functional purpose of connecting an English-speaking audience with her favourite show.

Learning Korean to understand forms of entertainment is associated with wanting to better understand the culture and to feel a sense of connection to Korean-speaking celebrities. Based on the moral hierarchy of functions and what is considered a “good” reason to learn, these motivations centred on pop-culture should be morally valued. However, those who learn only for K-pop were criticized as much as those who learn for solely economic reasons.

Anna: Wanting to know what their bias (K-pop fan terminology for ‘favourite member of a group’) is saying, I feel like that wouldn’t be enough motivation to learn a whole language. That’s fleeting. That’s a phase. Biases change real quick. [Laughs.] I like K-pop and I really enjoy knowing what they’re saying. That’s a plus but that shouldn’t be your only goal.

This judgment towards K-pop fans is perhaps due to the recognition that pop-culture and the images that celebrities show on-screen are not always representative of the lived experiences of regular people. K-pop is not always seen as “authentic” Korean culture. Marketed cultural products like music can become a commodified form of authenticity that has little connection to the language and culture (Heller 2003:474). Although K-pop learners try to understand what they see and hear in various forms of entertainment, other participants criticize them for looking only at Korea’s “mask” and the “fake” aspects of the culture.

Despite these criticisms, many non-Koreans are learning Korean partly because of their interest in K-pop. Following this, one would assume that learners use their language skills in K-pop events, especially if they have an opportunity to communicate with their favourite groups. However, my observations of K-pop crowds showed that this was not necessarily true. The vast majority of people who attend K-pop related events do not use or demonstrate that they understand Korean. During the talk segment of a concert for a boy group that came to Toronto in April 2016, a non-Korean fan shouted from the audience to the member who was speaking, “*jal senggyeosseoyo!*” meaning, ‘you’re handsome!’ The comedic timing of her loud statement should have prompted laughter from the audience but very few people laughed, demonstrating that the others who remained silent did not understand what was said. In addition, the talk segments of this concert were done primarily in Korean, as none of the boy group members could speak English well enough to convey their feelings of gratitude to the audience. People cheered only after hearing the interpreter on stage translate what the performers said. Those who consume K-pop without an interest in the language are not criticized nearly as much as those who actually learn Korean because indulging in pop-culture is not seen to require any goals or motivations. Since language learning requires a “strong” motivation, non-Koreans who learn just for K-pop are judged for having shallow reasons.

In general, when participants use the Korean language as a means to achieve a particular goal, they are faced with conflicting ideologies. The first is the societal message that learning multiple languages is important. This message about the significance of different languages is rooted in a multiculturalist discourse that my young participants have grown up to learn and accept as the norm. They do not doubt that all

languages are important because they have normalized positive discourses about multiculturalism both as residents of a diverse city and as students in a diverse school environment.

The second ideology that participants consider is the notion that a language must be useful. This ideology is reflected in comments said to them by others who question why they would want to invest time and money on a language that is not considered useful. Cathy also mentioned that since the practical use of Korean in Canada is not very high, she would be indifferent to losing her knowledge of the language:

I wouldn't go as deep and say that [Korean] is important... When I think about it right now, if I were to never learn Korean again, I wouldn't feel like it would be a big loss. It would be a shame but I don't feel too much about not being able to learn it later on.

This ideology conflicts with the idea that all languages are important because it ascribes more value to certain languages that potentially have more “use” like French, for Canadians.

The last ideology is an ideology that participants themselves assert in response to assumptions that language learning should be primarily based on economic benefit. They claim that successful language learning is not only about material gains but also involves a sincere interest in the culture embedded within the language. So while many interview and survey participants have a functional purpose for Korean language learning (e.g. to live/work in Korea, to understand TV shows, or to connect with Korean-speaking people), they combat negative assumptions about learning for superficial and selfish reasons by displaying their genuine interest in the Korean culture.

## Ethnic Koreans

### Economic gain and career opportunities

Among ethnic Korean learners, only Jane had career aspirations that required a high level of proficiency in Korean. She is currently employed at a bank and hopes to have more opportunities with more languages attached to her resume:

One of the reasons why they took me on the job was because I can speak several languages. Obviously the Korean immigrants coming in are a huge consumer base. If you can speak Chinese or Korean, it's a plus. Based on how I can speak already, they hired me. If you want to move up in the company and you have to

meet customers and speak at a higher level, not being able to do that limits you. I know that firsthand because my dad does business with Korean people as well. Because of that, it kind of pressured me to learn more because I don't want my Korean level to limit what I can do.

Jane's comments focus on the Korean language in a purely instrumental sense since she hopes to use it as a resource that benefits her professionally. Unlike non-Korean participants who have negative opinions of those who look only at the economic gains of learning languages, Jane instead expressed her reluctance to embrace aspects of the Korean culture. Due to negative experiences of being required to meet what she considers are unreasonable expectations based on nationalist assumptions as well as her preference for Canadian culture, she is not concerned with immersing herself in the culture of her heritage as she learns the language:

I would base it on my career and business, not because I only want to cater to Korean people but because it could open up more opportunities. Realistically, that's more of why I'm learning Korean, not so much because of culture or heritage or because I want to go back. I already know the culture. I know how Korean people are and I don't want to be part of that. I feel really bad saying it but I wouldn't really care to pass on most parts of the culture and heritage.

In contrast with her non-Korean peers, Jane rejects the Korean culture and has a purely instrumental outlook on Korean language learning despite commonly held views that learning a language solely for economic gain are morally suspect. Jane's instrumental motivations contrast with those of other ethnic Korean learners who follow a nationalist language ideology and want to develop a deeper connection with their Koreanness. At the time of our interview, both Sophia and Natalia were enrolled in an advanced level Korean course for business. This course included projects like debates, news reports, learning how to sell products and preparing for job interviews in Korean. While the course is tailored to provide students with the necessary business skills in Korean, neither participant made any reference to how these skills could help them in the future. Sophia briefly mentioned possible career benefits but her primary motivation was to feel culturally closer to her ethnic roots:

I feel more proud of myself that I was somehow able to maintain my cultural heritage and at the same time, adapt to the language and culture here. I made myself better by having this passion about my heritage.

A functionalist language ideology does not necessarily conflict with a nationalist language ideology. The priorities and goals of the learner appear to be most relevant to which of the two ideologies have a greater influence on learners' identities. Some ethnic Koreans learn the language to fulfill the assumed cultural and linguistic duties of an ethnic Korean person. Others reject the culture and learn the language for purely material reasons. Although participants like Jane seek only the economic gains of Korean, her reason for learning is not seen to be less morally valuable by others. Due to nationalist assumptions, heritage language learning is assumed to be a form of self-exploration. When I asked ethnic Korean learners whether the people around them were supportive of their goals to learn, they all answered yes. Family and friends never discouraged them from learning Korean. So unlike non-Koreans, ethnic Koreans' motivations for learning the language are never questioned or criticized, even when they are learning for a purely functional reason.

### Improving communication with family

Similar to non-Koreans who learn the language to establish and maintain connections with Korean-speaking people, ethnic Koreans are also motivated by their relationships with others. For ethnic Koreans with low language proficiency and Korean-speaking parents, improving communication with their family members was usually their primary reason for studying Korean. Dan explained that his goal to improve his Korean skills is a promise to his mother in order to strengthen their communication with each other. After realizing the implications of a language barrier within his own family, Dan aims to use the language comfortably after years of pushing away his heritage culture.

Dan: My parents and I are able to communicate but at times we aren't able to at all. Every time my mom and I get into a little argument and we're trying to prove our point, since my mom can't understand when I speak English, she'll be like, "Oh my gosh, how are we going to communicate when you get older? You'll be like thirty-five and you can't speak to me because I don't understand English. You better learn Korean so that we can still communicate." That's my main motivation right now. If my parents didn't push Korean on me, I would totally forget about it. I was pushing away Korean culture but when my mom said that, that really struck me.

Dan deliberately avoided the Korean language and culture as a child but as he grew older, he began to feel that learning the language was not only essential to communicating with his family but also a responsibility and duty. His decision to learn

Korean to better communicate with his parents and grandparents paved the way for him to embrace a nationalist language ideology. Unlike Jane, Dan does not only see the instrumental uses of Korean. He feels that having a deeper connection with his Korean-speaking family members also enables him to have a deeper connection with his heritage. Thus, Dan's integrative motivations combine both a functionalist and nationalist language ideology. He views the Korean language as a tool with the purpose of bringing him closer with his family but also as an inherent feature of his identity as an ethnic Korean.

In a radio story on first language attrition (Kim 2012), Korean-American James Kim illustrates the difficulties he had when communicating with his parents. As a second-generation Korean speaker with low competence in Korean, he expressed feelings of guilt for being unable to speak with and understand his parents. He initially believed that increasing his proficiency in the language would solve his communication issues but later emphasized the importance of changing his attitude towards the Korean culture:

My lack of Korean language wasn't the problem; it was my attitude towards Korean culture. This whole time I thought the solution was as simple as taking some courses at a Korean language school. Instead, I learned that my whole demeanor towards my native culture needs a revision.

Here, James Kim links language and culture instead of language and identity. Having a more positive attitude towards his heritage culture and thus a "stronger" motivation to learn will allow him to learn the language more effectively than if his goals were simply "to communicate" with his parents. He seeks deeper cultural understanding with his parents that go beyond asking them questions like, "what's for dinner?" Instead of seeking to (re)claim a Korean identity, Kim prioritizes cultural understanding through a shared language. Kim's radio piece added a new perspective that was not represented in the experiences of my participants. He did not stress the necessity of becoming "more" Korean and embracing a Korean identity but emphasized bridging the cultural and linguistic gap with his parents.

Rose also reported that her initial motivation to learn Korean was for her parents because she had lost most of her language skills after emigrating to Canada. However, she also stated that her parents "got used to it" and have adjusted to her low competency in Korean. Like Dan, Rose views the Korean language as a tool with the purpose of



improving communication with her family and as an inseparable part of her identity. However, it appears that she ascribes more value to family communication over connecting with her heritage. For example, she explained that her efforts to learn Korean should be reciprocated with her parents learning English in order to better understand each other:

My dad will speak a bit of English here and there but my mom pretty much speaks in Korean unless I don't understand. Then she'll say it in English. I respond with both. I wish my parents would learn more English. My mom can get by because she used to run a store and she could interact with the customers. So she had to know some English. But sometimes she'll start talking to my brother-in-law (who is of German descent) in Korean. And I'll say, "Mom, you know he doesn't understand anything you're saying." I think she needs to make more of an effort for my brother-in-law who is not Korean.

Rose views Korean and English primarily as tools for communication and both languages can be used to establish deeper connections not only with her immediate family but also with extended non-Korean family members. While her heritage is also important to her, Rose prioritizes improving communication within her family, regardless of which languages are used.

Unlike both Rose and Dan who are motivated to learn Korean based on the feeling that they cannot communicate well enough with their parents, Elizabeth's reluctance to learn the language appears to stem from her belief that there are no language barriers with her family. Elizabeth was one of two participants who studied Korean in the past but has never sought to learn it afterwards despite her low proficiency in the language. I interviewed her to better understand the perspective of ethnic Koreans who deliberately choose not to learn Korean.

Elizabeth: If I were to say 'chair' in English, [my mother] knows that. She knows I will say some words in English. Maybe that's why I forget Korean words because I never have to say them. In my mind, I'm speaking all in Korean but I probably said seventy percent in Korean and thirty percent in English. Part of it is I don't remember it in Korean and part of it is I know my mother understands some English words. So I can mix it up and it's ok. Maybe she doesn't understand the English word but she understands enough because the rest is in Korean. She never says anything to me so I just speak to her that way. But if I have to talk to someone who doesn't understand any English, I get stuck.

Elizabeth admits that her language skills are poor but does not feel the need to learn partly because she can communicate well enough with her parents. She only uses

Korean with her parents so she feels that she has no reason to learn Korean. Her mother accommodates to her proficiency level and overlooks the mixing and errors she makes with the language. Due to negative experiences that resulted in her avoidance of other ethnic Koreans, learning the language to communicate with Korean-speaking people is not a priority. Elizabeth chooses not to learn the language because she refuses to immerse herself within the Korean culture and also feels that her current level of Korean is sufficient for her to function well enough.

Having a practical reason for learning the language (getting a certain job or improving communication with family) makes it easier for ethnic Koreans to readily embrace the assumptions of a nationalist language ideology. Through language learning, they are more exposed to Korean cultural environments and the expectations that Korean-speaking people have of them. Learners who intentionally reject their heritage culture adopt a functionalist language ideology that involves only the instrumental uses of Korean and can readily do so without criticism. They can pursue purely economic gains without facing judgment by others because of nationalist assumptions that they are trying to make deeper connections with their heritage.

Despite this, the literature on heritage language learning faults the “language-as-resource” discourse for the same reasons that non-Koreans criticize instrumental motivations of learning. The pursuit of social and material goods through language learning is seen as trivializing the importance of minority languages. For example, Ricento (2005:357-358) is highly critical of the instrumental uses of language and appears to align more with a nationalist language ideology:

The employment of [language-as-resource] discourses tends to perpetuate a view of language as instrument (as opposed to language as identity marker), and, by doing so, seeks to garner support for the teaching and learning of heritage languages by de-linking language from ethnicity or race. In other words, the view promoted is of language as commodity, displaced from its historical situatedness, a tool to be developed for particular national interests.

However, the use of language as a resource goes beyond economics and can promote of the intrinsic value of languages (Ruiz 2009:164). Non-Korean and ethnic Korean learners in this research indicate that the practical functions of Korean can involve having deeper connections with a particular group or person. They still use

language as tool for a specific goal but it does not only include the pursuit of material and economic gains.

With regard to a functionalist language ideology, non-Korean and Korean participants seem to view and use the Korean language similarly. Participants in both groups have both instrumental and integrative motivations for learning the language. While ethnic Koreans are less criticized for asserting instrumental functions, all adherents to a functionalist language ideology view language as a tool that can help them achieve an economic or social goal. By accumulating economic gains or feeling closer with a particular person or group through language, participants also view and utilize Korean as a tool for self-empowerment. In this chapter, the distinction between the two groups (non-Korean and ethnic Korean learners) is less salient because both groups recognize and work towards similar practical goals.

## Conclusion

A functionalist language ideology influences identity similarly among non-Korean and ethnic Korean learners although there are minor differences. Ethnic Korean learners can more easily adhere to a functionalist language ideology without criticism because of nationalist assumptions that they are learning to become closer with their heritage. A functionalist language ideology can overlap with a nationalist language ideology to reinforce the demands of Korean language proficiency among ethnic Koreans.

For non-Koreans, having a functional purpose for learning allows them to achieve goals that include material gain and deeper personal connections with others. Learning Korean makes them into a more skilled person with valuable resources and networks. Seeking only economic profit is sometimes criticized because language is seen not only as a tool but also as a “door” into a different culture. A functionalist language ideology, however, does not explain non-Koreans’ initial interest in Korea nor does it make sense of the experiences of other participants who do not have a practical reason to learn Korean. The following chapter on a cosmopolitan language ideology better addresses these questions.

## Chapter Four: Coolness and Cosmopolitanism

### Cosmopolitan language ideology

There is something appealing about foreign languages and the worldliness one hopes to achieve by learning them. Duff (2015:75) describes language education as a form of “imagined transnationalism” where learners can “move” or “travel” to explore authentic cultural experiences. Participants’ eagerness to travel abroad, their determination to learn a minority language and their consumption of foreign pop culture demonstrate this desire for cosmopolitanism or a unique and worldly perspective. Young adults in particular, value these cosmopolitan traits highly. It is considered advantageous to have interests, hobbies and career aspirations that can take them outside of national borders. International travel and foreign language learning are two of many ways they can acquire characteristics of cosmopolitanism. These decisions and goals are not constrained within the boundaries of nations nor are they particularly relevant to arguments about practicality and economic benefit. Thus, the desire for cosmopolitanism presents new opportunities for the transformation of the relationship between language and identity.

All participants spoke about language learning in a positive way and the value of international interests and experiences was never questioned or doubted. Participants described the intrinsic value of cosmopolitanism in a straightforward manner that assumed the universality of these beliefs. They ascribed a high moral value to qualities of cosmopolitanism. For example, “it’s good to go to different places,” “it’s good to be more open-minded,” and “it’s good to know different perspectives.” Similar variations of these phrases appeared in all interviews. In addition to language learning being an inherently good thing, commonly listed benefits included the ease of international travel and competitiveness in the job market. Aside from the obvious material gains, the question to be answered is this: why is cosmopolitanism such a desirable quality and why do participants view it as “inherently” good?

A common answer was the value in connecting with people who are different. Most participants have internalized dominant messages about multiculturalism that have defined Canada as a diverse and accepting nation. Canada’s multicultural policy introduced in the 1970s and later the Multiculturalism Act in 1988 adopted the notion of

diversity as the basis of a Canadian identity (Mann 2012). The literature on multiculturalism in Canada tends to be critical about the disjuncture between broad ideological discourses about Canada's cultural identity and the reality of "monoculturalism" that reinforce the marginalization of minorities (Elderling 1996; Karim 1993; Winter 2007). However, all participants expressed feelings of pride and gratitude for living in a city in which the philosophy of multiculturalism is deeply rooted. Reports and studies on Canadian values consistently demonstrate that Canadians like to think of themselves as welcoming to diversity. Younger people in particular are more likely to give answers that support diversity and are very comfortable with people from different ethnic backgrounds (Parkin and Mendelsohn 2003).

Despite the critiques of the multicultural model, participants in this research appear to embrace popular discourses about multiculturalism and view it as a positive idea that contributes to the betterment of themselves and society as a whole. Most participants, who are young students in their late teens and early twenties, are fully immersed in a multicultural school and work environment. They are typical Canadian youth who have likely internalized these multiculturalist discourses to the extent that being open-minded about different languages and cultures is an obvious and natural idea. In our interview, Marie spoke about languages and cultures in a way that showed her interest in and acceptance of difference:

Whatever language you learn, it's a way to get closer to the culture itself and the people that are from that culture. You get to learn more about what's around them and how their life is compared to yours. You can see a difference between where they're from and where you're from.

Cosmopolitanism is a worldly perspective that leads to novel experiences and broader social connections. By taking an interest in different languages and cultures, participants can attribute to themselves the desirable quality of cosmopolitanism and display a sense of uniqueness. Participants' goals for language learning are not motivated only by economic benefit. Underlying their interest in the Korean language and culture is a desire for progress and movement, rather than conformity and stagnation. To someone with no interest in other languages or cultures, Kate had this to say:

What are you doing with your life? There's so much more to life than just staying in one spot. By not doing that, you have this one perspective to life while there is

so much more than just the western perspective. You know the term YOLO, you only live once? You might as well do as much as you can and learn as much as you can.

Kate criticizes those who do not branch out and attempt to learn things beyond what is familiar. Stemming from Canadian multiculturalist discourses, the belief that “different is good” is a naturalized and unquestioned notion that appears to influence participants’ decisions to learn a language. As residents of a diverse city where acceptance of minorities is encouraged, their transnational interests and experiences are often regarded highly. This internalization and acceptance of positive multiculturalist ideals is the basis of a cosmopolitan language ideology.

A cosmopolitan language ideology refers to the notion that there is coolness in knowing a minority language. As Woolard and Frekko state, cosmopolitanism is “an everyday solution among ‘rank and file’ young people... often fitting uncomfortably with the familiar nationalist political rhetoric” (2013:133). Maher’s principle of Cool interprets this as an aesthetically motivated perspective that minimizes the naturalistic connection between ethnicity and language: “Cool is the unexplained force that adopts cultural heterogeneity by coopting difference as design and fashion” (2005:90). More specifically, it is an attitude that uses ethnic language as an accessory for aesthetic effect. Maher continues:

Ethnic minorities have or at least symbolize something the mainstream wants. What is it? Multiculturalism, heroism, and, unlike import foreigners, they can tell us about it in our shared language. From within a circumscribed habitus within “our” mainstream body they have an outer body, a transnational worldliness that we admire (99).

Coolness is relevant to both minorities and the mainstream because it allows both groups to engage with what they believe is different. In our interview, James spoke about the features of rarity and foreignness as important to the perceived appeal of a particular language:

It’s the exotic aspect of it. This is a special language. Therefore, you are now special for knowing it. My Korean friends think Spanish is amazing. Spanish, Italian and French to them is so beautiful and cultured.

While non-Koreans appear to look beyond European languages for something different, those European languages can signify the same traits of coolness and worldliness for people already part of a minority. The value of a “cool” language is not

invariable and is highly dependent on how learners, as well as others, position themselves in relation to the language and culture.

An example of how language can index coolness can be seen in the use of foreign languages in advertising. Piller (2003:175) describes how English has become a symbol of modernity, globalization and progress in non-English-speaking countries. Thus English use in advertising has little to do with non-English speakers' comprehension and instead works to associate a product with a status of modernity and cosmopolitanism. My participants, who are all native English speakers, recognize this global symbolic value of English. For example, Anna spoke about her knowledge of English as a "privilege" and "luxury," acknowledging the status of English and the advantage she possesses over English language learners. However, at the same time, English fluency was also normalized and it appears that now, other languages index those same features of cosmopolitanism:

Christine: We've all grown up with English. If your family doesn't speak another language, all you have is English, like my family. We only speak English. Being that one person in your household or your friend group who can speak these other languages that not a lot of other people speak is a cool thing. I have this thing that nobody else does. It makes you feel special.

Within a multicultural city like Toronto, abundant access to various languages changes the perceived norm of language as a marker of ethnicity. Pujolar and Gonzales (2013) report that the use of the Catalan language in Catalonia is increasingly "de-ethnicized" as language choice in everyday informal communication proves to be more pertinent than a nationalist language ideology. A cosmopolitan language ideology attempts to reject the politicization of language and recognizes that language choice and use are highly personal. It acknowledges the diversity of experiences and motivations of language learners. As Woolard states: "individuals who share background, social location, and many life experiences can nonetheless live in different sociolinguistic worlds, experiencing linguistic tensions and possibilities differently" (2013:211). The differences in how people ascribe particular meanings to a language are also related to their stance toward the relationship between language and identity.

When language is no longer seen as a marker of ethnic identity, it becomes linked to coolness, worldliness and a broadened perspective. Its detachment from group identity

leads many authors to label this phenomenon a “commodification” of language and culture (O’Rourke and DePalma 2016; Heller 2003). In the case of minority language learners, an economic motivation is absent and instead, the language is “sold to and consumed by learners of these languages” (O’Rourke and DePalma 2016:2). While language is no longer linked to ethnic identity it is still linked to cultural knowledge and experience. Thus learners seek “authentic” cultural experiences by learning the language. A primary example of Korea’s globally exported culture can be seen in Korean pop music or K-pop. An overwhelming majority of non-Korean participants cited K-pop as the factor that sparked their interest in Korean culture and later attracted them to learn the language. When asked what motivated her to learn the language, Julia, a non-Korean survey respondent from Makati, Philippines answered very frankly: “To understand SHINee (K-pop boy band) with all my capacity.” In this case, language is consumed alongside pop culture in a way that does not call attention to the crossing of ethnolinguistic boundaries.

An important notion that is closely linked to “coolness” is Bourdieu’s symbolic capital. Bourdieu refers to symbolic capital as “the acquisition of a reputation for competence and an image of respectability and honourability” (1984:291). From a cosmopolitan perspective, cultural difference and internationalism are valued, allowing Korean language learners to benefit from their linguistic knowledge in ways that portray themselves as worldly and open-minded. Language is seen as a skill or resource that can help them expand their social networks or become more competitive for job opportunities. Their competitiveness in the job market is not because their competence in Korean is required but because of the valued qualities of cosmopolitanism and open-mindedness associated with learning a minority language like Korean.

While some consider the pursuit of minority languages an effort to destabilize the dominance of English (Kim 2016), I contend that the symbolic capital accumulated through learning Korean is only possible because of the economic capital participants already have as native English speakers. Although many participants viewed English as “boring” or “uncool,” the dominance of English is reinforced instead of challenged through Korean language learning. Many non-Koreans and ethnic Koreans adhere to a cosmopolitan language ideology and participate in the accumulation of symbolic capital,



however, the effects on identity formation vary. The differences in expectations and evaluation of language competency are based on their social identities as Koreans and non-Koreans learning the language.

Although a cosmopolitan language ideology emphasizes choice and language use outside of traditional ethnolinguistic boundaries, those whose motivations adhered to a nationalist language ideology were believed to have a more “valid” motivation for learning Korean. In other words, ethnic Korean learners, by virtue of being ethnically Korean, were considered to have a “better” reason for learning the language than non-Koreans.

Grace (non-Korean): There’s a girl in our class who’s Korean but she doesn’t know Korean because she’s second- or third-generation. The teacher asked her, “why are you here?” and she said, “I would like to learn the language of my heritage and so that I can teach it to my little brother.” She has a motivation that’s more than what most people can say, compared to the white kids.

On the other hand, ethnic Koreans often spoke negatively about their non-Korean peers for having a seemingly superficial interest in Korea. For participants, a superficial interest involved the infatuation with Korean pop music without a concern with other aspects of the culture. The interest in K-pop among non-Korean learners gives the impression that they are only learning because of their investment with Korean pop culture. “I want to know what my *oppa* is saying!” said Jeremy mockingly about the many non-Koreans, assuming that their motivation for learning only involves understanding what their favourite celebrity has to say. Jeremy was learning Korean in order to watch Korean videos without subtitles and also “to just know another language.” His answers reveal the relative importance of a functionalist and cosmopolitan language ideology rather than a nationalist language ideology. While his reasons for learning are not very different from his non-Korean peers, a non-Korean would probably not ridicule him in a similar way for the reason that he is ethnically Korean. This is likely because he is seemingly fulfilling the expectations of a nationalist language ideology as an ethnic Korean learner.

Non-Koreans who emphasized a cosmopolitan language ideology made comments about each other as well. Those who were uninterested in K-pop informed me that some of their classmates, who were avid K-pop fans, judged them for taking the

language class. “You don’t like K-pop, you don’t watch dramas. So what are you doing here?” In contrast, the participants who claimed to like learning different languages or did not list K-pop as their primary motivation also spoke negatively about their “K-pop obsessed” peers. Sara explained, “All of these people who are learning Korean because they like K-pop, they’re the ones who are going to have the biggest culture shock if they go [to Korea]. They have no awareness of everything else.” Interestingly, in almost every interview with a non-Korean participant, I was warned about their “extreme” K-pop classmates who may have also agreed to be interviewed for this study. While many of them admitted that that K-pop was what initially piqued their interest in learning Korean, no one proudly listed K-pop as their sole motivating factor. So it is possible that the “hard-core” K-pop classmates never participated in this study. However, if they did participate, it is also likely that they chose to focus on different reasons in their interview, knowing that learning a language only because of pop culture is not looked upon favourably, especially as an adult. Although interviews were done in an informal and casual manner, participants may have believed that it was not appropriate to speak excitedly about pop culture for a research project about language learning and identity. Also, my position as a researcher and an ethnic Korean may have also contributed to their decision to refrain from emphasizing their interest in Korean pop culture. Non-Korean participants would briefly mention K-pop but would not elaborate until I encouraged them to speak more about their favourite groups. Knowing that I did not judge them for their hobbies, some participants continued to speak about K-pop even after the completion of the interview.

A cosmopolitan language ideology on its own does not appear to be as dominant or “valid” as a nationalist or functionalist language ideology. However, learners who have cosmopolitan desires interact with both nationalist and functionalist language ideologies in various ways depending on their individual goals. Ultimately for participants, learning Korean was a conscious and deliberate effort to construct a particular identity. While knowledge about language use is often tacit, participants in this research demonstrate how their decision to learn a language was an intentional choice related to their identity.

## Non-Koreans

### Different is cool

Among non-Korean learners, challenging nationalist language ideologies creates a sense of pride and achievement. They are seen as cool or unique for their unexpected linguistic knowledge. Cathy, who is currently learning Spanish and Tamil in addition to Korean, expressed: “I think it’s really cool if you’re not a person from that country but you’re able to speak that language.” Learning a language that has no relation to one’s national or ethnic background is considered good and admirable, thus contrasting with nationalist assumptions about language and identity. While non-Korean learners construct a cosmopolitan identity against a nationalist language ideology, they do not wish to weaken or undermine the entrenched nationalist assumptions to which most people subscribe. This is because coolness only arises from doing something unexpected and different. A nationalist language ideology and the language expectations that it perpetuates must exist among the majority for non-Korean learners of Korean to be considered cool, different and unique. So by adhering to a cosmopolitan language ideology, they are in a sense playing with a nationalist language ideology. While cosmopolitanism appears to be incompatible with nationalist assumptions for valuing difference and uniqueness, it simultaneously reinforces and upholds the standard of a nationalist language ideology.

For non-Koreans, there is an appeal in the distinctly “foreign” aspects of East Asian languages and cultures. “I’ve never been to Asia so it would be a culture shock but I want that. I’m kind of used to this now. I just want to see how other people live,” explained Anna. Through learning Korean and becoming a “language tourist” (O’Rourke and DePalma 2016), Non-Koreans strive to learn about and experience something new. Helen explained to me that a language like French that uses the familiar Roman alphabet is insufficient and not quite as adventurous: “[French] is not as distant, it’s closer to home. We live in Canada and it’s the second official language. It feels like you’re just staying here.” Their ability to use a foreign language is considered more interesting than a familiar European language. Christine explained, “I like the idea of having the ability to speak a language that doesn’t even use the Roman alphabet. It’s a completely different

alphabet and completely different sentence structure. It's cool and I just like the idea of that. [Laughs.]”

Although the foreignness of Korean language and culture is appealing to non-Koreans, many of them also drew attention to the ways that the language and culture are familiar and accessible. Regarding the Korean writing system, all participants noted that learning how to read and write was fairly easy. Most of them learned how to read and write on their own, outside the classroom and without any formal instructional aids. The perception that Korean is easy is likely because the phonetic structure of the Korean alphabet is somewhat comparable to how words are formed in English. While the English alphabet is generally phonetic, the spelling of some English words like laugh, quay, colonel and choir give little indication of correct pronunciation. Like English, *hangul*, the Korean alphabet, consists of consonants and vowels where each symbol corresponds to a particular sound. However, the pronunciation of the letters is generally more consistent, making it simpler for beginners to begin reading despite not understanding the meaning of the words. 나무 ('tree') consists of the letters ㄴ [n], ㅏ [a], ㅁ [m], and ㅓ [u] and is pronounced as *na-mu*. Each cluster of letters forms one syllable, meaning that the Korean word for 'tree' consists of two syllables *na* and *mu*. All non-Korean participants spoke about how quickly and easily they learned to read and write in Korean. Easiness was always linked to enjoyment and they often explained with great enthusiasm how fun it was to learn:

Jessica: At first I wasn't really interested in learning. We had a long bus ride so [my friend] just decided to teach me the Korean alphabet. Once she taught me, I just couldn't stop. I was learning more and more. It's so easy and I was so amazed. We got off the bus, we went to the mall and we were learning in the food court. We went to her house and we were learning more. It was so fun.

When participants say that Korean is easy, they focus on the simplicity of *hangul* and the lack of certain linguistic features present in other languages that are known to be notoriously difficult. For example, there are no tones in Korean, which makes it seem easy compared to languages like Mandarin. Although homophones exist (ㅂㅍ) *bae* means 'stomach,' 'boat,' and 'pear'), Korean relies on context cues rather than tones to distinguish between them. In addition, the Korean language lacks person, gender and number inflections on verbs that many French language learners find difficult. The

conjugation of the verb ‘to eat’ (먹다) in the present tense will always be 먹어요, regardless of ‘I eat,’ ‘she eats,’ or ‘they eat.’ When comparing to other European languages in particular, Korean appears simpler. Christine described the easiness of Korean by contrasting it with the perceived difficulty of Italian: “My friend was telling me about her Italian class and how there are a lot of complex things. Whenever she would mention something I would say, ‘that’s not a thing in Korean. That just doesn’t exist.’”

The linguistic features of Korean that are normally difficult for English speakers were largely overlooked. While participants say that the sound correspondence of the letters is easy to learn, the syllable construction of *hangul* is not as straightforward. Many Korean language learners struggle with *batchim*, or syllable-final consonants. For example, the consonant ㄹ in the words 얼음 (‘ice’) and 여름 (‘summer’) are placed within different syllables when written. However, the second syllable of both words is pronounced identically (*eo-reum* and *yeo-reum*). Beginners hearing both words for the first time will not intuitively know where ㄹ should be placed in the word. Some words on their own like 종류 (pronounced as *jong-nyu* not *jong-lyu*) and 관리인 (*gwal-li-in* not *gwan-li-in*) are examples of *batchim* pronunciation that do not follow the script. Double consonants (ㄲ, ㅃ, ㅆ, ㅈ, ㅊ) also prove to be tricky for English speakers. The consonant ㅃ represents a fortis consonant [pʰ], contrasting with the unaspirated ㅂ [b] and aspirated ㅍ [pʰ] consonants at the same place of articulation. English only has a voiced and voiceless distinction between /b/ and /p/, making it difficult for learners to distinguish between 불 (‘fire’), 뿔 (‘horn’), and 풀 (‘grass’).

With the complexity of syllable-final consonants as well as consonants that begin a syllable, Korean pronunciation can be quite difficult. The consonant clusters that can appear between syllables and the vowels that bring them together can form sounds that are unlike what most are accustomed to in English. James was the only non-Korean participant who recognized the difficulty of Korean pronunciation, explaining that some elements are extremely foreign and nothing like the familiar Latin languages.

Another overlooked feature of the language that adds to the difficulties of learning Korean is the complex honorifics system. In Korean, the various levels of formality

depend on the age and status of the person being addressed. The strict hierarchical social structure of Korea requires the use of appropriate words and verb endings. For example, the informal ‘happy birthday’ (생일 축하해 *saeng-il chuk-ha-hae*) is acceptable for use towards someone of equal or lower age/status but is inappropriate in contexts where a sense of respect must be shown. A higher level of formality usually includes the addition of 요(*yo*) at the end of an informal phrase (생일 축하해요 *saeng-il chuk-ha-hae-yo*). However, when addressing a much older person, like a grandparent, a different word for ‘birthday’ is required as well as a more formal verb ending (생신 축하드립니다 *saeng-shin chuk-ha-deu-rim-ni-da*). In addition to age and status, kinship terms and job titles are other labels that often determine the level of formality used.

Korean language education tends to focus on formal language and grammar. Knowing when and how to use the different levels of formality appropriately in different social situations can prove to be difficult for learners who study only formal language within a classroom context. Andrea described that she found out through her Korean friends that it is not customary to use only formal language:

I have some Korean friends that would teach me as well and help me out. When they’re helping me with homework they say things in a different way. They say, “What is that? That’s a weird sentence.” We’re only learning honorifics but I guess sometimes people don’t use it.

Brown (2013:5) asserts that the “marginalization of non-honorific language” is perhaps done out of fear of misuse but it also ignores the important uses and cultural meanings of informal language. Most Korean pop culture fans easily pick up informal phrases from shows and music but are unaware that these phrases are suitable only in specific situations with certain kinds of people. To complicate the learning experience further, ethnic Koreans do not tend to correct non-Koreans when using the wrong verb endings nor do they enforce the use of appropriate words. The fact that a *waegookin* (‘foreigner’) is speaking their language is usually admirable enough to overlook their errors with formal and informal language. For example, Jessica spoke about her experience in Korea and her confusion with the social rules behind the different levels of formality:

I felt that a lot of things were brushed off because I’m a foreigner so it was unclear what kind of behaviour is actually necessary. Everyone allows me to

speak *banmal* (informal language) but I don't know if it's rude in some situations. When I was there, I got confused with what I knew was necessary and what I was told I could be excused from. Since I was a foreigner, I could just speak casually but then I wonder, should I have said something formally to that person if I was a real Korean person? I don't know. As a foreigner, they're always forgiving but I want to know the real stuff. I don't want to be excused because then I don't really know.

Generally, using only *banmal* (informal language) regardless of who one addresses is unacceptable in Korean society. Not only does formal language communicate respect to someone older or of higher status, it also conveys a sense of professionalism, distance and politeness to someone of similar or lower age/status. In situations where formal language is commonly used (e.g. in the workplace or when meeting another adult for the first time), the use of informal language can be interpreted as being arrogant or overly casual. Although Jessica only uses *banmal*, her unexpected use of Korean as a foreigner in Korea likely overshadowed her errors with formality. Jessica's outsider status as a foreigner lessens the inappropriateness of saying the wrong words but also makes it difficult for her to learn the complex social rules of the honorifics system.

Learning Korean as an English speaker is further complicated by grammar rules. Korean has a subject-object-verb order (e.g. I water drink) that differs from English's subject-verb-object sentence structure (e.g. I drink water). In addition, Korean also has a large number of suffixes. During our interview, Professor Kim pulled from her shelf a thick book on Korean suffixes to show me how complex the grammar can be:

Look, we have a whole book on suffixes and this doesn't even include everything either. There are so many different types of sentence endings. This isn't even everything. Here are connectives and also particles like subject markers, object markers, time markers, location markers, goal markers, irregulars. Again, this isn't everything. This is only a subset of what we teach in college, it's not everything. I think Japanese might be around the same. Grammar wise, Korean is so hard. Pronunciation wise, it's a little harder than Japanese. In that regard, Chinese would be the way to go. [Laughs.]

The appearance of the Korean writing system is sufficiently different from English but the phonetic structure is considered similar enough to make learning the language easy and fun. While many difficult aspects of the Korean language like syllable construction, pronunciation, formality, and grammar are ignored, the phonetic

constituents of written Korean create an appeal that makes learning the language appear achievable for native English speakers. In addition, its non-Roman script makes it seem exotic and different enough to be cool.

When speaking about how easy it was to learn Korean as a beginner, non-Koreans consistently compared Korean with the other East Asian languages, specifically, Chinese and Japanese. Unlike the Korean and English alphabet that consists of symbols that represent sounds, written Chinese uses logographic script, where a written character represents a specific word or concept. Japanese also uses Chinese characters but pairs them with syllabaries, symbols that represent syllables instead of individual phonemes. For example, さ [sa], す [su], and そ [so], compared to Korean 사 [sa], 수 [su], and 소 [so]. Written Japanese consists of two syllabaries, *hiragana* and *katakana*, in addition to logographic *kanji*. It is common for written Japanese sentences to combine all three. For example, the simple phrase コーヒーが好きです ('I like coffee'), mixes all three writing systems. In general, *katakana* is commonly used for loan words such as 'coffee' (コーヒー *kōhī*), *kanji* represents the verb 'like' (好) and *hiragana* is used for grammatical functions (が, き, です) and words that do not exist as *kanji*. The complexity of written Japanese can discourage potential learners right from the beginning, especially when compared to the seemingly straightforward system of *hangul*. There was a notable commonality among many non-Koreans who stated that they tried Japanese first but later gave up and chose Korean when faced with the daunting task of memorizing all three writing systems. Non-Koreans who attempted to learn Japanese attributed their lack of success in learning to the perceived difficulty of the language.

Megan: I tried Japanese and I failed. I outright failed because of the three writing systems. I memorized one and thought, ok I got this. Then they gave me another one and I was like... ok, ok I can do this. And now here's another one! Oh my God! At least Korean is really easy to read. I taught myself how to read it.

Megan's feelings of exasperation with the difficulty of Japanese in the excerpt above were echoed in all other participants' re-tellings of their experiences. Regarding Chinese, most participants did not even wish to learn the language because of its perceived difference and difficulties in relation to English. Kate, who is of Chinese and Vietnamese descent, grew up learning spoken Cantonese but refuses to learn Vietnamese for similar reasons: "I'm not learning Vietnamese because I've heard that it's hard. There



are different accents and words where you have to use the top of your mouth and the back of your throat. That's too much work.”

While non-Korean learners find the foreignness of Korean appealing, other languages like Chinese and Japanese that are “equally” foreign to native English speakers were considered too different and thus difficult to learn, based solely on their writing systems. Even for someone like Grace who is fluent in Japanese and is learning Chinese and German concurrently with Korean, there were still languages that she believed to be so different to the extent that any level of competence would be unachievable. During our interview, she said, while motioning toward Arabic writing on the chalkboard, “If you look at that right over there, I feel like I'd never be able to understand that. Even if I tried to learn, I don't think I'll be able to get it.” For non-Korean participants then, difference and foreignness alone are not sufficient to be cool. There must be some elements in the language that are familiar and accessible to native English speakers for them to view their learning experience as both fun and cool.

In addition to the Korean language itself, Korean pop music also blends together foreign and familiar elements in a manner that is appealing to non-Korean participants. The *hallyu* phenomenon, or “the Korean Wave,” boasts hybridity and celebrates transnationalism in both the production and consumption of Korean pop culture. K-pop and K-dramas were consistently mentioned in interviews as a motivating factor for language learning. Korea's largest entertainment company, SM Entertainment, houses some of the most popular acts in the industry like Dong Bang Shin Ki, Girls' Generation, SHINee, EXO and Red Velvet. SM Entertainment is known to buy the rights of music from American and European composers to arrange the songs as a K-pop release. For example, SM Entertainment purchased the rights to the song “Deal With It” by Corbin Bleu for SHINee to later release as “Juliette.” Many other SM songs like Dong Bang Shin Ki's “MIROTIC,” Girls' Generation's “You Think” and “Run Devil Run,” as well as EXO's “Monster” and “Call Me Baby” also have original English versions that were either released by another artist in the West or remained as demo songs. For the popular dances that accompany the songs, SM Entertainment often employs American or Japanese dancers to choreograph the dance routines. In addition to the English words and phrases that are sprinkled throughout the lyrics of most songs, the final product sold as K-

pop is not as “authentically” Korean as some fans may believe due to its increasingly transnational and hybrid aspects (Jung 2009).

Hybridization is not necessarily a culturally faceless entity but instead occurs as agents “interact and negotiate with global forms, using them as resources through which local peoples construct their own cultural spaces” (Ryoo 2009:144). K-pop represents a creative form of hybridization that sustains a seemingly Korean identity within a global context. Kate attributed her interest in Korea to her desire to better understand K-pop and explained its hybrid appeal:

Entertainment is kind of the hook that brings people in. It’s the most captivating aspect. Korean music, although it’s music, is visually appealing. Everyone is beautiful. Their music is very closely connected to Western music so that kind of helps. It looks very different but has a kind of familiar sound and I think that’s what draws people in. It’s not completely foreign.

The familiar aspects of foreign music allow non-Koreans to easily consume Korean pop culture and this interest in K-pop often becomes the “gateway” into learning more about Korea. Coolness is not equated only with foreignness and difference, but also seems to require the accessibility and familiar elements of a language and culture. While something that is perceived as too different is unapproachable, the mix of foreign and familiar elements of Korea’s pop culture and written language appears to attract non-Korean fans, allowing them to attribute coolness and features of cosmopolitanism to themselves.

### An individual and unique identity

A cosmopolitan language ideology values hybridity, difference and choice. Those who adhere to this ideology consider it cool for non-Koreans to learn Korean and other minority languages. Language learners always viewed their knowledge of different languages positively. When asked about any disadvantages to learning Korean, all participants denied any possible disadvantages and instead drew attention back to the benefits of learning. Multilingualism was always a source of pride. For example, I asked Kate if she considered herself multilingual after being informed that she spoke two additional languages besides English and Korean. She replied, yes, while proudly flipping her hair.

Sobanski (2016:167) notes that multilingual individuals change their “very way of being in the world” through learning different languages. While all participants stressed the importance of learning about different cultures and recognizing the importance of different viewpoints, the effects on their identity were not viewed as being profound. Many participants explained to me that learning Korean does not necessarily change who they are but instead enhances or adds on a new aspect of themselves:

Grace: It doesn't change my identity, it enhances who I originally am. It gives me another attribute as a person. I'm unique because I can speak Japanese, Korean and other languages. So instead of building another me, there are just more branches coming out of me.

A cosmopolitan language ideology gives learners the opportunity to use language learning as an avenue for self-improvement. By learning Korean, they are considered unique in a positive way that can also lead to later benefits. While some participants acknowledged that they recognized the advantages of learning Korean, most asserted that their identity remained unchanged. Lauren, a non-Korean survey respondent from Toronto wrote:

It doesn't affect how I see myself. Some might automatically think that I'm a koreaboo or some “*oppa* lover” but that's not the case.... I'm spending my own time and my own effort to invest in a new skill by learning a new language and the culture behind the country of the language! Koreaboos and “*oppa* lovers” (the crazy delusional ones) are a totally different category from someone genuinely interested in the culture and language. I'm still the same old me.

The participants who denied any change to their identity contrasted their “same old selves” to “koreaboos” and “*oppa* lovers,” or non-Korean K-pop fans who are only invested in pop culture and wrongfully claim a Korean identity. For participants, the concept of “identity” seems to encompass only national, ethnic and cultural identities, which gives a reason for their denial of identity construction through learning Korean. Whenever I mentioned the word “identity,” all participants were quick to refuse that Korean had any effect on how they saw themselves. Melissa, a non-Korean survey respondent from Santiago, Chile replied simply, “Learning Korean is just a hobby that I really enjoy... It isn't that deep.” Andrea, who self-identified as Grenadian-Canadian, said:

No, it doesn't really change anything. If I was learning something like Patois or something, it might change how I feel because over there, they can tell I have a Canadian accent. If I was speaking in a different language like Korean I feel like it wouldn't change anything. It's just me learning a different language.

For Andrea, learning and using Patois could have a potential effect on her identity as someone with Grenadian heritage. This reflects a nationalist ideology that conceives of identity as “embodied in language” (Leeman 2015:100). Korean, a language with which she has no connection, is not seen to have an influence on her conception of identity. Since the current discourse on identity as well as the common understanding of the term focuses on national, ethnic and cultural identities, neither of these categories is relevant to the experiences of non-Koreans learning Korean. Due to beliefs about race, learning Korean cannot and should not have an effect on their national, ethnic or cultural identities.

Instead of looking at the concept of identity within the boundaries of nations and ethnicities, it is more useful to consider how non-Koreans construct a unique individual identity. Their personal decisions to learn Korean lead to a highly individualistic sense of self, unrelated to national or ethnic ties. So rather than talking about identity, which was believed to be associated only with nation and ethnicity, non-Korean participants spoke instead about the value of learning new skills and feeling a sense of self-accomplishment. For example, Kevin spoke about the personal value and benefits of Korean during the learning process:

I definitely gained some confidence. I used to be incredibly reserved and shy and I just kept to myself but now I'm a lot more outgoing and I'll talk to people. With learning a language, I'm forced to talk to people and communicate with people, even if it's just through messaging. I think it's helped a lot to get me out of my shell. I'm a little bit more knowledgeable too, I suppose. It's hard to put words to it. Before, I was a terrible student who never did any homework. But now, I actually study and I found something I genuinely want to learn about.

While participants did not explicitly or consciously link Korean language learning to their understanding of the word “identity,” they consistently drew attention to the ways in which language learning made themselves into a skilled, interesting and better person. Thus the notion of a personal and individual identity, rather than national or ethnic identity, is more relevant to the experiences of non-Korean learners. Some parts of their identity, like ethnicity, are ascribed and unchangeable while other parts can be achieved.

This linguistic expression of an individual identity, particularly among young people, highlights selfhood as a process as well as the fluidity of identity.

Youth identity is another model of identity that relates to the experiences of non-Korean learners because it emphasizes the “here-and-now” of young people’s experiences (Bucholtz 2002:532). While youth identity focuses on the experiences and perspectives of young people, their identities and practices do not always concentrate on the trajectory towards adulthood. For example, Bailey describes that Dominican-American youth construct their identity in terms of language (Spanish) to counter assumptions that they are African-American (2001:191). Although they are black, they assert that they are Spanish in order to resist the cultural and linguistic assumptions of non-white identities. Youth is often perceived as a “liminal position” between childhood and adulthood but it is important to consider young people’s distinctive identities and practices within their own social worlds. In this research, however, there is a clear desire for “growth” and “becoming” among participants that appears to be connected with adulthood. Participants emphasize and work towards cosmopolitanism and also acknowledge the value of cosmopolitan qualities for future endeavours like expanding social networks and seeking employment.

While learning and knowing Korean helps learners feel a sense of accomplishment and self-improvement, many of them described that they rarely use the language with Korean-speaking people outside of the classroom. Andrea, who was in the intermediate class said, “I feel intimidated because I don’t want to butcher someone’s language. I would rather not speak it. I feel like I still have a lot more to learn.” They often use Korean with other non-Korean learners but there were reservations about using it with fluent Korean speakers outside of a classroom environment. Usually, interactions with Korean speakers were reported to be in English instead of Korean. Alice described English as a “bridge” that “opens more doors to other cultures and languages.” Having English as the common language allowed her to “connect” with Korean people and speak about her language learning rather than actually use Korean:

Language connects you to people. My co-worker is Korean and they were shocked because I left my textbook on my table. They’ll start talking and that kind of connects us like, “Oh, you’re learning Korean? What do you know? Can you read this? What kind of K-pop bands do you like?” I’ve met a lot of friends

that I connected with through Korean culture. I think I was buying my textbook at the bookstore and the cashier was Korean so she was like, “Oh you’re learning Korean?” I was like, “yeah” and she said, “you should go to Korea.” And we had a whole conversation.

The word “language” in Alice’s first sentence can refer to both Korean and English because the connections she made with her co-worker and the bookstore cashier were formed through English interactions about Korean. So non-Korean learners’ sense of uniqueness and an individual identity does not necessarily arise from Korean language use in interactions. By virtue of their status as an outsider learning a minority language, they feel special enough to be proud of their unique interests and hobbies. Many survey respondents reported that they have never interacted with a Korean person before. Outside of trying to understand what is said in online mediums, many do not use Korean at all. Based on their responses, survey respondents understood the phrase “using a language” as speaking the language so they might not have considered their production of written Korean. However, like the interview participants, the survey respondents who did interact with others using either spoken or written Korean did so with other non-Korean learners more commonly than with native Korean speakers. Despite this, they still proudly asserted a positive unique and individual identity for undertaking the challenge of learning Korean.

While many participants were hesitant to use the language with Korean speakers, others were more willing to apply their knowledge in interactions with Koreans. For example, Grace was one of the few participants who used her Korean skills outside of the classroom:

I feel really good about myself if I can properly speak to someone. If I go to a store for example and it’s run by a Korean person, I would try to speak to them, even if it’s a simple *gamsahamnida* (‘thank you’) or *annyeonghaseyo* (‘hello’). To watch someone whose native tongue is the language I’m trying to speak, brighten up when I say something, it makes me happy. I went to a sushi restaurant and I asked a really simple question in Korean and she was like, “Wow, how did you learn Korean?” She looked so happy and it’s really funny to see that kind of reaction.

The encouragement and support given by Korean speakers reinforces non-Korean learners’ positive attitudes towards learning Korean and also strengthens their identity as a cosmopolitan and unique individual.

## Race, class and privilege

While all non-Korean participants expressed their desire for cosmopolitanism, their underlying reasons for choosing a language like Korean appeared to differ. One group of people did not experience much diversity during their upbringing and are now working towards constructing cosmopolitan qualities while the other group viewed their interest in Korea as a natural consequence of their exposure to diversity at a young age. The participants who did not have many experiences with multiculturalism or diversity growing up tended to come from small towns outside of the big cities. At the time of our interview, Kevin had a Korean girlfriend and enthusiastically told me that his life goal was to “travel to different countries and eat.” This contrasted greatly with his “monocultural” childhood far outside of a metropolitan city:

I spent a few years growing up out in the countryside where there are just white people. Everyone is so racist! Like holy crap! It’s terrible. That, I hate. I would rather be somewhere multicultural where there’s no reason to judge someone for their colour or language or anything like that. We’re all people anyway.

Similarly, Grace described the area in which she grew up a “hick town” where it was “just a bunch of white people who don’t really know much.” Attending university in a large diverse city opened her eyes to the opportunities for learning about and meeting different people. Throughout our interview, she was deeply immersed in her strong desire to travel, saying regretfully that she had never left Canada.

Grace: Maybe it’s the fact that I’m stuck in Canada and I’m so bored of being here that I’m interested in everything that’s not this. Canada makes you have that wanderlust feeling because there are those towns like Koreatown and Chinatown where you can get that little taste of what it’s like to be in that environment. It’s like going to Costco and eating all of the samples. You get that little taste but what does the rest of the world look like?

Kevin and Grace are searching for diversity in order to assimilate with the “norm” of cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism in Toronto. They also desire to be more knowledgeable, skilled and open-minded than their old “hick town” neighbours who are seen to represent the very opposite of cosmopolitanism. Breaking away from monolingualism, stagnation, and conformity, they desire worldliness and new experiences that take them away from what is familiar. The experiences of both Kevin and Grace who did not have many experiences with diversity growing up differ greatly from those who grew up with multicultural experiences. I asked Sara, a beginner student,

to elaborate on her plans to live in Korea “for as long as she can” without having travelled there before. She replied that her experiences living in England, France, New Zealand and Zimbabwe will help her adapt to living in Korea as she was already accustomed to travelling and adjusting to different places. Another participant, Alice, identifies as Indian and has lived in India and the Czech Republic before coming to Canada. She was the only non-Korean participant who considered the thought of claiming a Korean cultural identity for a brief moment because she conceptualized her identity as a mix of cultures that have helped shape who she is today.

Alice: I’m still Indian and I lived in Czech Republic so all of those things become a part of me. It’s like a mix. My family and I, we’ve always been diverse. We’ve been moving a lot and we know a lot about different cultures and we know there’s still a lot more to learn. Because you’re so exposed to different languages and cultures, you’re more open.

Both Sara and Alice do not actively search for diversity and cosmopolitanism because they have always been surrounded by difference. Their interest in Korea was not seen as particularly special because it was a normal outcome of their experience with diversity. The cosmopolitan features that they already possess appeared to have cultivated their interest in a new culture and language, thus reinforcing their cosmopolitan qualities.

Race was the primary difference between the two groups described. Kevin and Grace self-identified as white and Sara and Alice were both visible minorities. While other participants who were members of visible minority groups did not have an extensive travel history, it is possible that they may have constructed cosmopolitan qualities from a young age based partly on their experience as an “other.” Since they are a part of the multiculturalism that cosmopolitanism celebrates, international experiences and foreign language learning may not be necessarily required for visible minorities to feel surrounded by diversity. By racializing non-Korean participants as white and non-white, I do not mean to create a fundamental division between their experiences. Among my participants, there were also white participants who grew up with multiculturalism as a normal and natural part of living in Toronto. While race may not be the most significant factor in understanding non-Korean learners’ pursuit of Korean, it is worth considering in conjunction with class.



As Bourdieu first described, class status is maintained by displaying appropriate taste, manners and culture (Bourdieu 1984). People can gain access to particular social networks through the consumption of valued cultural goods. In this research, minority language learning represents a form of capital that attributes the desired quality of cosmopolitanism to the learner. The Korean language is a form of cultural capital (knowledge, skills) that can later be converted into economic capital (money) and/or social capital (connections, networks). Symbolic capital refers to resources that lead to an image of respect and prestige (Bourdieu 1984:291). Language learning and international travel experiences do not represent a tangible form of capital but are considered prestigious and a marker of status. Forms of symbolic capital are often derived from economic capital, meaning that the possession of economic resources often precedes the pursuit of symbolic profit. In my research, cosmopolitanism and minority language learning represent symbolic profit because they do not provide direct material benefits but require time and economic capital for activities like language classes and travel. The profit of learning a language like Korean differs from that of a majority language like English because English has obvious practical uses and economic benefits in Canada. Interests are not always economic so the benefits and capital gained in learning a minority language in Canada are less clear than those gained in learning a majority language. A cosmopolitan outlook and the pursuit of symbolic capital can also lead to more social capital, as learners increasingly associate with like-minded worldly travellers.

While cosmopolitanism is usually celebrated for its encouragement of diversity and worldliness, it has also been criticized as an elite phenomenon (Friedman 2003). Friedman argues that cosmopolitanism is very much a politicized position related to class, one that pits itself against “backward-looking” nationalists. He argues: “the elite seeks to furnish its localized life spaces with the accumulated paraphernalia of a world of differences” (2003:750). When speaking about the younger generation and their cosmopolitan desires, Professor Kim attributed their interests to their residence in a metropolitan city:

If you go up to northern Ontario, do you think being multilingual is a great thing? People probably don't care. It's only in the big cities. Toronto is very international, multicultural and one of the most diverse cities in the world. It's a

very city-centric idea because the urban areas are generally more liberal. The people who live in those areas are more open to learn other languages and will think that it's kind of cool.

As residents of Canada's largest metropolitan city and surrounded by diversity, participants can symbolically distance themselves from the poorer rural populations (that tend to be dominantly white) by accumulating their repertoire of international languages and experiences. Even though economic gain is not inherently obtainable through learning Korean, cosmopolitanism is an alternate avenue for upward social mobility while for those who have grown up with diversity, it is a way for them to maintain their "elite" status as a worldly individual and reinforce their cosmopolitan qualities. Displaying their taste and interest in activities valued by the elite grants them access to social networks and also enables them to build an image of prestige and respectability. Along with the normalization of a positive multiculturalist discourse, multilingualism has come to be associated with the desired qualities of worldliness and uniqueness among the elite.

While participants did not respond to later follow-up questions inquiring about their socioeconomic status, I presume that at least some of them come from middle-class families because economic gain did not appear to be a concern in any of their self-reported interests, priorities and goals. For example, James recounted his experience growing up in an affluent area and hearing encouragements from his family to study subjects that lead towards a "real" job like a lawyer or doctor. He instead majored in East Asian studies. For his immigrant parents and grandparents, subjects that presumably lead to economic gain always took priority over learning a language, which was considered to be secondary and less important. The economic capital that James already possesses allows him to explore alternate interests that can lead to the accumulation of symbolic profit, rather than only economic profit.

Among many participants in this research, there was a perceptible underlying desire for social empowerment and privilege ("[Knowing Korean] is a good conversation starter," and "It looks impressive on your resume"). While a cosmopolitan language ideology serves as an alternate route for people who view nationalist demands for the unity of language and ethnic identity as a dead end, it can also highlight and enhance existing power structures between the global and local/minorities. Some participants

explicitly stated in their interviews that speaking English comes with a sense of privilege. Jessica was also aware that her foreigner status, particularly as a white person in Korea, gave her many advantages and privileges that were comparable to celebrity treatment:

Everyone looks at you and stares at you. I like the attention and the spotlight but always? No. But you do have an advantage in a sense. You speak one word of Korean and they're impressed. You can have it easy because Korea is such a small country and they feel touched if an outsider takes an interest in them. But many people take advantage of that. They like being treated like a celebrity. Everything they do is impressive. Koreans have a flawed way of idolizing European people and a lot of people take advantage of that too. A lot of white models go there because she can't be famous in her own country but she can be hella famous in Korea.

The hierarchical relations between English-speaking westerners and Koreans are reinforced in interactions. Non-Koreans are continuously praised for their use of Korean in interactions with native Korean speakers. The positive reinforcement that they receive through interactions with Koreans enables them to profit from these interactions in the form of symbolic capital. Not only are they praised but they also come away feeling more unique, worldly, open-minded and culturally aware.

At a large event hosted by the Korean Education Centre in Canada (KEC), Korean language students were encouraged to participate in a speech contest. Students were free to choose their topic as long as they spoke in Korean and provided English translations in their PowerPoint presentations. Many spoke about how they became interested in Korea or what they wanted to do if they had a chance to go to Korea but one girl chose to speak about the difficulties learning the difference between *jondaemal* (formal speech) and *banmal* (informal speech). She shared her mistake saying *arasseo* (informal 'I understand') instead of *arasseoyo* (formal 'I understand') to her Korean teacher who later informed her about the different level of formality between the two statements. During other speeches and this one in particular, I glanced around at other people to see their reactions. I noticed the director of the KEC watching and listening with a large grin on his face. Although the student talked about the difficulties of learning and openly shared her mistake that is considered inappropriate to make, he looked so proud and happy. Another boy who participated in the speech contest could not even read what he supposedly wrote and asked someone else to read the Korean while he read the English translation. The director beamed throughout his presentation as well and even presented

him with an award for his speech. Their status as non-Korean English speakers allows them to make errors with the language but still feel proud and encouraged.

The superiority of the English speaker (and more so for the white English speaker) is reinforced when they attempt to close the social distance between themselves and Koreans. Bourdieu refers to this as a “strategy of condescension.” (Bourdieu 1991:68). He states:

Such a strategy is possible whenever the objective disparity between the persons present is sufficiently known and recognized by everyone so that the symbolic negation of the hierarchy enables the speaker to combine the profits linked to the undiminished hierarchy with those derived from the distinctly symbolic negation of the hierarchy (Bourdieu 1991:68).

English speakers’ use of Korean symbolically denies the social distance between themselves and native Korean speakers but the power relations between them do not cease to exist. By attempting to negate the power relations between English and Korean, this actually strengthens the hierarchy of languages and enables English speakers to gain symbolic profit (i.e. cosmopolitan features of uniqueness and worldliness) from the interactions, even if their displayed level of competence is low. This differs from the negative experiences of ethnic Koreans who are instead criticized for their errors with the language. Although the ethnic Koreans in this research are also native English speakers and align themselves more closely to Canadian values, their ascribed identity as an ethnic Korean does not allow them to gain symbolic capital from the use of Korean like their non-Korean peers.

In a blog post on *Babbel Magazine*, a website that contains language-related blog posts and language learning courses, Michael Youlden, a language and travel enthusiast from England, explained why he chooses to learn minority languages over “super languages” like Chinese or Arabic:

Taking the effort to learn a minority language is an acknowledgement of the value of a subordinated culture, and an implicit display of respect... Therefore, if you want to get your views across, or bring your ideas and opinions to the table, the safest way of earning someone’s trust and attention is through their language. The death of a minority language is a loss for everyone. If you want to draw the world’s attention to a culture and ensure its preservation, the best way is by learning its language (Youlden 2017).

Youlden appears to be aware of his position within the hierarchy of languages and is confident that he can negate the recognized disparity between those in power and a “subordinated” culture. The non-Korean participants in this research did not seem to be as aware of these power relations but instead emphasized how happy they felt about “connecting with others.” Since they are always praised for learning Korean, this enables them to unknowingly benefit from the unequal power relations between English and Korean. By speaking Korean or demonstrating that they are learning it, non-Korean participants ultimately derive profit from Korean language learning in the form of symbolic capital.

## Ethnic Koreans

### Cosmopolitanism and heritage

While a cosmopolitan language ideology serves as a way to challenge nationalist demands of language loyalty and can also strengthen positions of power among non-Korean learners, for ethnic Koreans, it instead draws attention back to a nationalist language ideology. The multiculturalist discourse of preserving heritage and promoting difference highlights their status as a minority along with the linguistic and cultural knowledge they are assumed to have. Learning a heritage language is encouraged and promoted within a multiculturalist discourse, making it easier for ethnic Koreans to fulfill their “duty” of learning Korean. Sophia recounted experiences of bullying in her childhood and contrasted this with those of her younger cousin who is proud of being Korean and knowing the language. The difference in their attitudes towards the language was largely dependent on the views of the people around them and their level of acceptance:

I have many younger cousins who came here to study English and I noticed that they're maintaining their Korean culture and heritage because they know how important it is and they're very proud of it. I can tell that she's not ashamed to be Korean. She's only six but when she goes to school, she says that's she's Korean, she'll talk about her culture and she's fine, no one makes fun of her. I feel like things have changed. For me, I got bullied for being Asian. I just wish I was able to maintain the language when I was younger because now I'm old and it's hard.

For current ethnic Korean learners, it is not looked down upon for knowing Korean and asserting a Korean identity. Instead, cosmopolitanism encourages heritage

language learning. However, in response to the ideas promoted by a cosmopolitan language ideology, some participants felt a sense of guilt and shame. While non-Koreans are crossing ethnolinguistic boundaries to learn Korean and other minority languages, ethnic Koreans feel inadequate for not having already fulfilled expectations. Non-Korean learners can accumulate symbolic capital but for ethnic Koreans, studying Korean is a way for them to regain the symbolic capital they are assumed to have. Claire expressed that her Korean language skills are poor but she likes to think of herself as bilingual. It “feels bad” to be unable to speak her parents’ language, especially knowing that so many people now are becoming increasingly proficient in other languages unrelated to their heritage. Feelings of guilt and jealousy were also expressed when faced with a non-Korean who is highly skilled in Korean. “I was watching foreigners on TV speaking Korean and I was so jealous! They know it better than me! How could that be? That’s not right,” said Rose.

In this way, cosmopolitanism appears to highlight and reinforce nationalist demands among ethnic Korean participants. In his interview, Jeremy denied that his learning was related to ideas about language loyalty and was instead motivated by what he believes is cool. However, both a nationalist and cosmopolitan language ideology appear to be relevant to his reasons for learning:

It’s just cool to speak a different language. You can speak English and be bilingual. I think that’s cool. With Korean being my background, I would rather learn Korean than learn French, just because it’s my background.

Although cosmopolitanism is meant to challenge the assumptions of a nationalist language ideology, it ultimately pressures ethnic Koreans to conform to nationalist expectations. For ethnic Koreans, nationalist and cosmopolitan language ideologies do not conflict with each other and instead overlap to reinforce the linguistic assumptions others have of minority groups.

## Conclusion

A cosmopolitan language ideology influences the construction of identity among Korean language learners differently, depending on whether they are non-Korean or ethnic Korean. For non-Koreans, adhering to a cosmopolitan language ideology allows

them to build symbolic capital and construct a “cool” multilingual identity. For ethnic Koreans, a cosmopolitan language ideology can reinforce the demands of a nationalist language ideology because it draws attention to the valuable knowledge and skills minorities are assumed to have. When they do not possess adequate language skills, they risk symbolic capital when speaking poorly because a high level of Korean proficiency is expected. So ethnic Korean learners construct an expected bi/multilingual identity by regaining symbolic capital.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

When learning Korean, non-Koreans and ethnic Koreans differ in their construction of identity. Based on how others view and interact with them, this generally results in positive learning experiences for non-Korean learners, who are never expected to know or use the Korean language. Non-Koreans construct cool multilingual identities by appearing to challenge the assumptions of both a nationalist and functionalist language ideology. By doing this, they also build symbolic capital and valued features of cosmopolitanism. In contrast, ethnic Koreans who fail to meet the expectations of a homogeneous Korean identity shaped by nationalist assumptions face criticism for not having already learned the language. For ethnic Koreans, functionalist and cosmopolitan language ideologies tend to reinforce the demands of a nationalist language ideology, pressuring them to construct an expected multilingual identity and regaining the symbolic capital they are expected to have.

Nationalist, functionalist and cosmopolitan language ideologies overlap and are intertwined in various ways. Although a cosmopolitan language ideology ostensibly challenges the other two ideologies, cosmopolitanism essentially relies on the existence of nationalist and functionalist assumptions to create an oppositional “coolness.” The ideologies do not necessarily conflict with one another. Instead, these ideologies are interrelated and work together to position non-Koreans and ethnic Koreans differently. For example, Judy, a non-Korean survey respondent from Cedarburg, Wisconsin wrote a short response that exhibits the ideas of all three language ideologies explored in this study:

Korean is important for Koreans and people of Korean descent [nationalist]. It's also important if one is living in Korea [functionalist]. Since none of those are applicable to me, I think it's just important to learn languages and about other cultures to have a wider worldview [cosmopolitan].

The examination of these ideologies provides a clearer understanding of what motivates people to learn (or not learn) Korean and how these motivations influence their construction of identity. Exploring this highlights the role of language in performing cultural, ethnic and other kinds of identity.



## Implications of Korean language learning for non-Koreans and ethnic Koreans

James: I think learning any language feels like you have options, even if that doesn't even make sense in the world. You feel like you have the key to a lot of doors. It really does. If you chose to, you can access a whole other culture, a whole other group of people and who knows what you'll find there?

Participants consistently spoke of language learning as a way of “opening doors” and broadening cultural perspectives. They strongly believe that through learning Korean, they gain valuable cultural knowledge that widens their worldview. However, what constitutes having a “wider worldview” varied among non-Koreans and ethnic Koreans. Regarding aspects that helped to broaden their perspective, non-Koreans often mentioned their knowledge of K-pop, Korean history and the honorifics system.

Megan: The formal and informal language helps you understand that you have to respect certain people. We don't have that in English. You can distance yourself from people through language. I didn't know that. I just knew informal language that I picked up from dramas. After learning properly, I started to understand that distance and how you can position yourself with a different person through language.

For non-Korean participants, broadening their worldview meant learning aspects about the Korean culture that differed from their own. However, for others, knowing about K-pop or the difference between formal and informal language is not enough for someone to claim that they know about the Korean culture. It was often ethnic Koreans who voiced these critiques and dismissed non-Korean learners' interests as shallow and superficial. For ethnic Koreans, a real understanding of the culture comes from the lived experience of being ethnic Korean. Elizabeth, in her fifties, looks down on young non-Korean learners who appear to be interested in Korea only because of Korean pop-culture:

They must be learning just because of entertainment, for superficial reasons. I don't think there's anything fantastic about the language or culture that people want to learn about other than Korean music and dramas and movies. My son started getting interested in the language because of Korean music. But he's Korean so he can go deeper. For other people, it must be very superficial.

The nationalist demands that complicate ethnic Koreans' experiences also serve as a “deeper” and more valuable reason to learn the language. Even if non-Koreans display a genuine interest in learning about the language and culture, some ethnic

Koreans hold very negative opinions about them and their seemingly shallow motivations. Non-Koreans had little to say about ethnic Korean learners other than short comments about how ethnic Koreans have a more “valid” reason to learn and use the language.

Although ethnic Koreans in my study tend to hold negative opinions of non-Korean learners, it was the non-Korean participants who spoke the most positively about their language learning experience while ethnic Koreans recounted more difficulties. Different attitudes towards the culture may have an impact on this as well. Since non-Koreans usually have more positive experiences with the culture, they are more willing to learn the language. In contrast, some ethnic Koreans are less willing to embrace the cultural aspects of their heritage and are thus uninterested in learning or studying as diligently as their non-Korean peers. For example, the differences in attitudes can be seen in Anna and Jane, who are both enrolled in the same intermediate class but spoke very differently about their experiences. Anna, a non-Korean spoke about how fun and engaging the classes are while Jane, an ethnic Korean, felt out of place:

Anna (non-Korean): When I see my other friends in the class struggling, there’s a feeling of “we’re doing it together.” My friend and I always talk together in class and study together so it’s fun. I really like our teacher too. She’s hilarious. She always talks about Infinite (K-pop boy group) and I really like Infinite too. [Laughs.] A lot of people in the class also have the same interests as me so it’s nice to finally be around other people who have the same goal too. It’s fun to be with people who are after what you want too.

Jane (ethnic Korean): If you ever see me sitting in this class, I just look so lost. I’m one of the only Koreans in the class with that other guy. I think he and I are the most lost people in the class because we don’t understand what they’re so happy about. They get super energetic off of each other’s comments [about K-pop and Korean culture] but we don’t get that. This department lives off of it. Look at how many people are signing up.

There is an imagined sense of power and superiority expressed by ethnic Koreans when speaking about non-Koreans. I also observed this during one of the K-pop concerts I attended. When the concert ended, fans began to surround the performer’s exit of the venue to see them off. When the boys finally emerged from the building and climbed into their van, one of the girls in crowd shouted loudly, “*saranghaeyo* Daehyun!” (‘I love you Daehyun’). It is common and normal for fans to express their enthusiasm and love for

their artists in this way. Beside me, my friend, who is also Korean-Canadian, said very audibly, “*changpihae*” (‘how embarrassing’). Her insult toward the girl went unnoticed by others even though the people around us were all within close proximity. Her spiteful remark was masked by her use of Korean and she did this knowing that others would not understand. While ethnic Korean participants felt a sense of superiority over non-Koreans, the reality of the power relations between the two groups appears to be the opposite. Especially when interacting with native Korean speakers, non-Koreans can feel enriched and accomplished, while ethnic Koreans are often disempowered by their lack of Korean language skills.

The positive encouragement towards non-Koreans appears to contribute to rising numbers of non-Korean learners while the rejection of nationalist demands asserted by some ethnic Koreans may be related to the smaller numbers of ethnic Korean learners. The contrasting trends cannot be examined without looking at the beliefs, attitudes and values of learners as well as those around them. Ethnic Koreans presumably have the most use for Korean but non-Korean learners appear to be more eager to learn the language. The way in which learners construct their identity based on language ideologies can provide a better understanding of learner motivations that go beyond obvious utilitarian reasons.

Although language is often seen as a marker of identity, this study has demonstrated how people can re-conceptualize the assumed relationship between identity and language in various ways that both reflect and oppose ideologies of language. People’s diverse linguistic and cultural experiences do not always fit within the fixed assumptions and categories we project onto them. Amelia Tseng, a sociolinguist, talked about the changing relations between language and identity on an NPR One podcast:

As a society, we haven’t quite caught up with the new diversities that we have. We may just not have a framework to process it. Maybe we don’t have the language... It’s also important to celebrate the new practices. We can get so fixated on “are you a real such and such?” We should be recognizing that when people go to a new environment, they’re going to be different. They’re going to change and adapt and come up with new hybrid process that conserve connections with the home culture and language but also blend them in new combinations and come up with new ways of being. That’s something that is quite wonderful and creative and should be celebrated and acknowledged as opposed to being constantly put down as “not enough” (Tseng 2017).

Both non-Koreans and ethnic Koreans in this research explore the ways in which language can be used or (not used) to perform different cultural, ethnic and other forms of identity. Learner motivations do not always conform to societal expectations of who should be learning a particular language.

### Reflecting on my own identity as a Korean-Canadian

Through this study, I have learned how I conceptualize my own identity as a Korean-Canadian with little knowledge of the language. Growing up, I always knew that I was Korean but I never really understood what it meant. I spoke English at home and lived apart from the Korean community in Toronto. Later in high school, I felt that I needed to learn more about my heritage in order to learn more about myself. I read up on Korean history and culture, I began to learn the language and also took an interest in the pop culture. After graduating from university, I thought living and working in Korea would be a good opportunity to further explore the culture that I felt connected to.

Nothing made me feel more Canadian than going to Korea. Making errors with a new language is something all learners go through. However, when interacting with strangers like cashiers, I received scornful looks when making a mistake or when I could not understand what they were saying. They looked at me like I was stupid and were often unwilling to help me further or explain what they meant. Since I was clearly “not enough” to be Korean, I considered myself more of a *waegookin*, or ‘foreigner’, in part because there were many other aspects beyond just the language that were unfamiliar to me. However, some of my Korean colleagues would ascribe a Korean identity to me when I demonstrated my knowledge of Korean food names or certain kinship terms. “You know that? You’re really Korean,” they would tell me. I felt that I was constantly pushed and pulled between two categories, neither of which I really fit into. When riding the subway or when walking in a busy crowd, I could only think of myself as an imposter among them. I looked like them on the outside but inside, I was very different. Meanwhile, I connected more with my *waegookin* friends, who looked different from me.

I always assumed that improving my Korean language skills would bring me closer to the culture and that it was something I should do. However after being in Korea, I no longer wanted that connection because I knew that learning the language would

bring more unwarranted criticisms directed towards me and also to my parents for not being fluent Korean speakers. Learning the language was not worth the effort of trying to become someone I was not and would never be accepted for.

Returning to Canada, I felt that this was my home and where I belonged. However, when meeting new people, they would sometimes ask, “Are you Korean?” I had no choice but to say yes even though I do not speak the language and I distanced myself from the culture. By doing this research, I can better understand the confusion I felt with my identity in relation to the language. Now that I have a clearer sense of the ideologies that influenced my thinking in the past, I can make more definite assertions about my own identity.

Like the ethnic Korean participants who reject a nationalist language ideology, I also believe that the demands for linguistic and cultural homogeneity among Koreans are unreasonable and impossible to achieve, especially for those who reside outside of Korea. I also have no practical use for the language because issues with communication are not a problem in my family. All of my family members speak English, including my extended family and grandparents. The pressures and expectations to know Korean because of an increased interest in cosmopolitanism no longer affect me because I have already decided against learning the language. This, however, does not mean that I completely shut out the Korean language and culture. In my leisure time, I learn new words and phrases from watching Korean movies or TV shows but I do not wish to seriously study the language in a language class.

Although I consider myself primarily Canadian, I still embrace a Korean identity based on my heritage as a person of Korean descent. I accept only the physical aspect of a Korean identity and identify more with a Canadian cultural identity. Although I can now communicate in Korean to a certain degree, I still consider myself monolingual. Deliberately not learning the language allows me to distance myself from a culture that I do not identify with, despite others’ assumptions that both the language and culture are core components of my identity. I have learned that conceptualizations of language and identity are not only based on individual assertions but are also influenced by broader, unquestioned discourses that encourage the learning of certain languages among certain people.

### Limitations, pedagogical implications and future considerations

The main limitation of this study was the inability to ask follow-up questions. Although I reached out to non-Korean participants to inquire further about questions about socio-economic class in chapter four, they did not respond. This is likely because I did not maintain a relationship with the York University students and the class issues became evident in my research months after they completed their interviews. The analysis regarding class issues and cosmopolitanism could have been more thorough with more information collected from participants. There was also a lack of follow-up with survey participants due to the nature of anonymous data collection.

Another possible limitation to this study is the division of participants as non-Koreans and ethnic Koreans. Since the main topic of this research is Korean language learning, I grouped participants in this way, expecting their language learning motivations and experiences to be different. Their experiences with learning Korean and the effects on their identity certainly differed based on their social identities. However, I realize that my participants, regardless of being non-Korean or ethnic Korean, think about language similarly and adhere to language ideologies in ways that do not differ greatly. The ethnic distinction between the two groups may not have been helpful. A different categorization of participants based on motivations or another aspect of their background may have been more useful.

In regard to the pedagogical implications of this research, I suggest that the instructional needs of non-Korean and ethnic Koreans be addressed in different types of classes. Based on what non-Korean participants have told me about Professor Kim, she keeps the class excited and engaged with Korean cultural references. Instead of focusing only on improving spelling and grammar, she applies the language to real life, in ways that are meaningful to her young students.

Professor Kim also informed me that other universities have a separate “heritage track” while York University does not. Some ethnic Koreans in her classes do not feel that the classes meet their needs. They do not understand the pop culture references and these classes do not give them the opportunity to express and negotiate their different meanings of Koreanness. The advanced class for business is the only Korean language class at York University designed specifically for ethnic Koreans, and some participants

in this class have spoken about how it represented the perfect “hybrid” space for them. For example, Sophia expressed how comfortable she felt in this class despite it being very difficult. For her and her Korean-Canadian classmates, the class is like being in Canada and Korea simultaneously where they think “the Canadian way and the Korean way.” Professor Kim mentioned that the students in the business class enjoy talking about Korean news in comparison to Canadian news and politics. They also discuss the different standards in the process of getting a job in Korea versus in Canada. The class environment encourages students to bring forward their different meanings of Koreanness and Canadianness instead of prioritizing the “transmission” of a shared and homogeneous Korean identity. However, this class remains inaccessible to those with lower proficiencies.

Further research on language and identity should be done with other East Asian languages, particularly Chinese and Japanese to explore the experiences of Chinese-Canadians and Japanese-Canadians who may also be affected by similar ideals of linguistic and cultural homogeneity. In addition, there should be an investigation of non-Chinese and non-Japanese learners’ motivations and how they may be different from those of non-Korean learners of Korean. Mrs. Lee (the substitute teacher from the KEC classes), whose husband is Polish, also informed me about the closely-knit relationship between the Polish-Canadian community and their own heritage. The experiences of other Canadians and how they view the language of their heritage are important issues relevant to the research on language, identity and language pedagogy.

It is vital for researchers to focus on the experiences and perspectives of the learners instead of imposing moral valuations of what kinds of languages are good or bad for particular people. By accepting the diversity of experiences Canadians have, we can come to a better understanding of why people assert particular identities that are reflective of or in opposition to dominant ideologies of language. Rather than focusing on what languages people should or should not learn, the scholarly discussion on heritage language learning would be far more productive by highlighting the ideologies evident in individual experiences and assertions about language and identity. The category of the “heritage language learner” in studies on language and identity should also be challenged because not all learners are motivated by heritage reasons.

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## Appendix A: Survey/Interview Questions

### Background Questionnaire

- What is your age?
- What is your gender?
- What is your ethnic background?
- Where are you currently living? (for survey respondents only)
- Please list the languages you can communicate in fluently.
- Please list the languages you have learned/are learning.
- What is your Korean proficiency level?
- How long have you been learning Korean?
- In what capacity have you learned Korean?

### Questions for both non-Koreans and ethnic Koreans

- Have you taken Korean classes before? If so, where/what kind of class?
- What started your interest in Korean language or culture?
- Would you like to go to Korea? What would you like to do there?
- What other opportunities to learn Korean have you had?
- What motivates you to learn Korean?
- How does learning Korean affect the way you see yourself?
- What do you think is a legitimate reason for learning Korean? What is not?
- What do you like learning about Korean?
- What do you like about Korean culture?
- Does learning Korean help you to identify with Korea culturally?
- How does your family encourage/discourage you from learning/using Korean?
- When do you use Korean? With whom?
- What do you think Korean is important/valuable for?
- What do you think English is important/valuable for?
- As a Korean language learner, how do you see yourself in relation to fluent Korean speakers?
- How do you see yourself in relation to friends who do not speak Korean?
- Why Korean? Why not another language?
- How do you measure your own progress or success in learning Korean?
- What do you wish to achieve by learning Korean? How does learning Korean benefit you?
- How would you identify in terms of ethnicity/culture? Is language part of that identity? Why do you identify with that ethnicity/culture?
- What are some advantages of knowing many languages?
- What are some disadvantages of knowing many languages?

### Questions for ethnic Koreans

- What makes you feel Korean? Tell me about a particular episode that made you think about being Korean.
- What makes you feel Canadian?
- Do you think of yourself as having a dual or mixed identity?

- What does it mean to be Korean, to have a strong Korean identity? Would you describe yourself in these terms?
- Growing up, were there any expectations from your parents to learn or use Korean?
- Does anyone in your family speak Korean at home? Describe who, situations.
- Why do you think that you are not “completely fluent” in the language?

## Appendix B: Coded Themes

Node Name	Number of Interview Participants (Total: 24)	Number of Occurrences (per interview)	Total Occurrences (all surveys)
<b>Beliefs about languages</b>			
Chinese	10	13	17
English	19	45	56
French	11	23	4
Japanese	11	23	10
Korean	22	61	94
Other languages	4	9	21
<b>Beliefs about people</b>			
“Heritage” learners	10	22	0
Native Koreans	9	24	12
Non-Korean learners	14	44	24
People with no interest in languages	11	21	31
<b>Difference</b>			
Close, familiar	16	39	23
Different, foreign	23	75	72
<b>Identity</b>			
Canadian identity	11	49	0
Dual or mixed identity	7	18	0
Individual identity	18	76	63
Korean identity	15	89	76
<b>Level of difficulty</b>			
Difficult	19	52	15
Easy	19	47	64
<b>Perception of Korea(n)</b>			
Negative	8	45	0
Positive	21	72	85
<b>Reasons for learning</b>			
Accomplishment	16	25	62
Career opportunities	18	41	37
Communicate with family	9	16	6
Connect with people	19	58	43
Cool	16	52	30
Open-mindedness	19	58	45
Pop culture	14	36	80
Travel	17	32	30
Worldliness	12	23	51

Due to the way NVivo imported the survey data, I am unable to show the number of survey participants per node. The total number of node occurrences among survey respondents is shown here.



# Ethics Approval



## Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board NMREB Delegated Initial Approval Notice

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Karen Pennesi  
**Department & Institution:** Social Science\Anthropology, Western University

**NMREB File Number:** 107800  
**Study Title:** Heritage language learning and identity among Korean language learners in Toronto

**NMREB Initial Approval Date:** May 02, 2016  
**NMREB Expiry Date:** May 02, 2017

### Documents Approved and/or Received for Information:

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Letter of Information & Consent	Instructors	2016/05/02
Letter of Information & Consent	Students	2016/05/02
Instruments	Instructor Interview Questions	2016/02/16
Instruments	Background Questionnaire	2016/02/16
Instruments	Interview Questions - Students	2016/04/12
Western University Protocol	Received April 26, 2016	
Recruitment Items	Permission to Recruit Email	2016/04/22
Recruitment Items	In-Class Verbal Recruitment script	2016/04/22

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the above named study, as of the NMREB Initial Approval Date noted above.

NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the NMREB Expiry Date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario.

Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB

[Redacted]  
Ethics Officer, on behalf of Dr. Riley Hinson, NMREB Chair or delegated board member

Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information: [Redacted]

# Curriculum Vitae

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## EDUCATION

Master of Arts (in progress), Anthropology 2015 – present  
The University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario

Bachelor of Arts (Distinction), Anthropology 2010 – 2014  
McGill University, Montreal, Quebec

## EMPLOYMENT

Teaching Assistant, The University of Western Ontario 2015 – 2016  
- LING 1027B, Introduction to Linguistics  
- ANTHRO 1020E, Many Ways of Being Human

## AWARDS

SSHRC Canada Graduate Scholarship – Master's 2015  
Western Graduate Research Scholarship 2015