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The significance of bilingual education for language-minority children in the United States*

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Kim, Hye-Kyung. 2009. The significance of bilingual education for language-minority children in the United States. *Linguistic Research* 26(3), 181-197. Bilingual education proponents argue that language-minority children can learn English while maintaining their heritage languages and cultures. That is, they stress the parallel development of academic skills in the heritage language and proficiency in English as a second language. They emphasize that language diversity in the United States should be regarded as a rich resource instead of a lingering problem that needs to be eradicated. On the other hand, English-only advocates believe that a linguistically and culturally diverse country results in racial and ethnic conflicts and that an official language in the United States prevents such conflicts by unifying the country, thereby assisting immigrants. They claim that bilingual education works against the rise of English as a world language and encourages immigrants, both children and adults, to believe they can live in the United States without learning English. This paper examines controversies over bilingual education, including a brief history and background of bilingual education, and critically discusses why language-minority children should maintain their heritage language, focusing mainly on the advantages of heritage language development and the close interconnection of language, culture, and identity. **(Indiana University)**

Key Words Bilingual education, language-minority children, limited English proficient (LEP) students, identity

1. Introduction

As the twenty-first century moves toward a global and international community, proficiency in only one language is not adequate for economic, social, and educational success. Our interconnected global world requires the

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ability to speak more than one language to become a successful member of the community. In particular, language is central to the intellectual and emotional growth of children. In U.S. schools, in fact, language-minority students speak their heritage languages from all around the world.[1] Most of them may be bilingual in their first language and English. There are clear advantages to maintaining their bilingualism. Research shows that well-balanced bilingual students may perform better than monolingual students in thinking and in academic achievement (Collier & Thomas, 1999; Cummins, 2000b Hakuta, 1986; Krashen, 1996, 1999). They also can better communicate with family members and with other members of their home communities. Moreover, their heritage language development may help solve identity conflicts by promoting a healthy sense of multiculturalism.

Proponents of bilingual education argue that linguistic and cultural diversity are national strengths that should be nurtured, making the U.S. one of the most colorful language gardens (Baker & Prys Jones, 1998). They claim that bilingual education is the most effective way of teaching Limited English Proficient (LEP) students or English language learners (ELLs). They believe that language-minority children can learn English while maintaining their heritage languages and cultures. In other words, bilingual proponents stress the parallel development of academic skills in the heritage language and proficiency in English as a second language. They emphasize that language diversity in the United States should be regarded as a rich resource instead of a lingering problem that needs to be eradicated.

Despite known advantages of being bilingual, the effectiveness and necessity of bilingual education in the United States is under debate. If we look closely at restrictions on the use of languages other than English imposed through the history of the United States, the debate over bilingualism appears to reflect societal attitudes toward immigrants. The worst threat to bilingual education is the English-only movement, which endeavors to make English America's official language.

English-only advocates believe that a linguistically and culturally diverse country results in racial and ethnic conflicts and that an official language in the United States prevents such conflicts by unifying the country, thereby assisting

1) A heritage language is defined as "one [that is] not spoken by the dominant culture, but is spoken in the family or associated with the heritage culture" (Krashen, 1998, p. 3).

immigrants (Glenn, 1997; Porter, 1990; Russell & Baker, 1996). They claim that bilingual education works against the rise of English as a world language and encourages immigrants, both children and adults, to believe they can live in the United States without learning English. Many critics assert that bilingual education has resulted in students dropping out of school and that language-minority children can succeed academically without bilingual education.

This paper examines controversies over bilingual education including a brief history and background of bilingual education. Furthermore, the significance of the bilingualism issue to language education for language-minority students will be critically discussed, with a focus on the advantages of the heritage language development and the close interconnection of language, culture, and identity.

2. Brief history and background of bilingual education: What is bilingual education?

Bilingual education is generally defined as "education involving two languages as media of instruction" (Christian & Genesee, 2001, p. 1), but critics think that bilingual education includes "instruction in the native language most of the school day" (Porter, 1994; cited in Brisk, 2006, p. 31).

Since 1839, several laws regarding bilingual education have been passed. Around this time, Ohio first started bilingual education by teaching students both English and German. By the end of the nineteenth century, about a dozen other states taught bilingual education using English and several languages, such as French, Spanish, Norwegian, Czech, Italian, Polish and Cherokee. However, all bilingual education laws were abolished by the 1920's, as a result of anti-immigrant sentiments in the United States (http://sitemaker.umich.edu/370bilinged).

In the midst of the civil rights movement, Congress passed the Bilingual Education Act (i.e., Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act) in 1968 as a federal law which sought to make LEP children, especially Hispanic children, fluent in English. Under the Bilingual Education Act, school districts could receive federal funds without using languages other than English. In 1990 and 1992, the Native American Act was made to preserve indigenous languages in the United States. However, in 1998, California enacted an anti-bilingual

education law, Proposition 227. This law requires that all instruction in California schools be done in English only. Crawford (1999) sees Proposition 227 as a confusing proposal made to meet conflicting political and policy goals. In 2002, after the Bilingual Education Act was amended four times, the English Language Acquisition Act (i.e., Title III) was passed as a part of the No Child Left Behind Act. Title III effectively removes heritage language instruction for LEP students in favor of English-only instruction (http://sitemaker.umich.edu/370bilinged).[2)]

In the United States, English as a second language (ESL) courses are typically taught in a submersion program, an immersion program, and/or a bilingual program (Richard-Amato, 2003).[3)] In submersion programs, language-minority students are submerged in content classes, but the input is often incomprehensible to them and they are often treated as intellectually inferior students. Second language immersion programs are found in ESL, sheltered contents, and adjunct classes, but students' heritage languages and cultures vary depending on their home countries. In general, three basic types of bilingual education programs exist. In transitional programs, language-minority students learn most of the subject matter in their heritage languages until they are ready to be gradually transitioned to English-only classes. In maintenance programs, students learn part of the subject matter in their heritage languages in order to continue improving their skills while developing their academic proficiency in English. In enrichment programs, part of the subject matter is taught in the second language primarily for some future visit to another culture rather than immediate survival as a resident in a foreign country (Richard-Amato, 2003).

Bilingual programs can be characterized as either one-way or two-way. In one-way programs, language-minority students begin their education in the new culture by learning the core academic content in their heritage languages. Some one-way programs are maintenance programs in which students continue

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2) At present, thirty states have passed laws making English their official language: Alabama (1990), Alaska (1998), Arizona (2006), Arkansas (1987), California (1986), Florida (1988), Georgia (1986 & 1996), Hawaii (1978), Idaho (2007), Illinois (1969), Indiana (1984), Iowa (2002), Kansas (2007), Kentucky (1984), Louisiana (1811), Massachusetts (1975), Mississippi (1987), Missouri (1998), Montana (1995), Nebraska (1920), New Hampshire (1995), North Carolina (1987), North Dakota (1987), South Carolina (1987), South Dakota (1995), Tennessee (1984), Utah (2000), Virginia (1981&1996), and Wyoming (1996) (http://www.us-english.org/view/13).

3) Krashen (1994) provides a comparison of submersion and immersion programs. In submersion programs, children and native speakers of L2 are mixed, a majority language is taught, and children do not learn L1 language arts. In immersion programs, children are segregated from native speakers of L2, a minority language is taught, and children learn L1 language arts.

learning some parts of the content in their heritage languages. Most one-way bilingual programs in the United States today, however, are transitional programs. Once students have acquired a sufficient amount of the target language, the bilingual component of their schooling is dropped. Two-way bilingual programs are becoming popular in the United States. Goals of two-way bilingual programs include learning the mainstream subject matter and becoming proficient in both languages. Through two-way immersion bilingual programs, language-majority students can experience the same frustrations when they learn a new language as language-minority students do (Richard-Amato, 2003). Two-way bilingual immersions provide language-minority and language-majority students with equitable environments supportive of their linguistic, academic, and intellectual development (Senesac, 2002).

In this section I have briefly provided historical backgrounds and described a political dynamic to the issue of bilingual education. In addition, I have also introduced three basic types and characteristics of bilingual education programs in the United States. In what follows, current challenges to the defense of bilingual education will be discussed.

3. Debate over bilingual education: What does the research tell us?

Despite the extensive research on bilingual education programs, extreme disagreement still exists concerning the effectiveness of bilingual education. Bilingual-education proponents argue that cultural and language diversity are national strengths that should be nurtured(Baker & Prys Jouns, 1998). They claim that bilingual education is the most effective way of teaching LEP students or ELLs. They believe that language-minority children can learn English, while maintaining their heritage languages and cultures. In other words, they stress the parallel development of academic skills in the heritage language and learning English as a second language.

Collier and Thomas (1999) reported that two-way bilingual education was the optimal program for the long-term academic success of language-minority students. Thomas and Collier (1996) claim that in bilingual programs language-minority students tend to do best when they receive academic instruction in the first language for at least six years, while receiving progressively more of the same kind of instruction in the second language.

Furthermore, Collier and Thomas (1999) conclude that proficient bilingual students develop stronger cognitive abilities over monolingual students and that they generally outperform monolingual students on school tests.

Hakuta (1986) also clearly shows that those who continue developing their first languages have certain cognitive advantages over their English-only counterparts. Similarly, Cummins (2000b) points out that "bilingualism is associated with enhanced linguistic, cognitive, and academic development when both languages are encouraged to develop" (p. xi). Crawford (1992) also asserts that when their first language is cultivated alongside English, LEP students can normally develop their English fluency. He added that by entering the mainstream later, they can have improved chances of success and fluency in two languages.

Krashen (1996) argues that bilingual education is crucial to an immigrant child's language educational program, supporting both heritage language education and the gradual exit program. He points out that development of the heritage language helps students' academic success at school and that "children are exited into the mainstream gradually, subject by subject, as they are ready to understand the input," particularly in the gradual exit program (Krashen, 1998, p. 11). In support of Cummins's (1992) distinction between conversational and academic language proficiency, Krashen emphasizes that children do not need to exit the bilingual program but should continue first language development, and concludes that children need much less time to develop conversational proficiency (e.g., one to two years) in a second language than academic proficiency (e.g., five to seven years). In order to succeed in school, children need to improve academic English. Thus, Krashen claims that children's academic language ability such as literacy and background knowledge should be efficiently developed in their first languages. Krashen (1999) especially argues for the transfer of literacy from the first language to the second language, remarking that "well-designed bilingual programs produce better academic English ... because they supply subject matter knowledge in the students'primary language, which makes the English the students hear and read much more comprehensible" (p. 7).

On the other hand, English-only advocates claim that bilingual education works against the rise of English as a world language and encourages immigrants, both children and adults, to believe they can live in the United

States without learning English. Many critics assert that bilingual education has resulted in students dropping out of school as a result of the lack of opportunities to improve their English and that language-minority children can be academically successful without bilingual education.

Porter (1990) argues against bilingualism as a resource, mentioning that our pedagogical goal should be to make all students function successfully in the mainstream society. She mentions that if bilingual students are not given the indispensable tool of a high level of proficiency in English, they will lose the chance "to earn a living, to surmount class barriers, to become upwardly mobile, and to succeed at whatever they are determined to do" (p. 235). Glenn (1997) also claims that there is no evidence for long-term advantages or disadvantage to teaching LEP children in their first languages and that teaching students to read in English first, rather than in their first language, does not have negative effects. A journalist, Stewart (1998) especially argues against Krashen's claim that the best way to ensure immigrant children's literacy in English is to teach them in their first languages before they learn English. She strongly argues that there exist no scientifically robust studies that support Krashen's bilingual education philosophy.

Moreover, Russell and Baker (1996) assert that in ten studies comparing transitional bilingual education with Structured Immersion in reading performance, Structured Immersion was superior to bilingual education.[4] However, Krashen (1996) points out that immersion programs are really bilingual education programs because their goal is development of both languages. He also states that many individual studies that proclaim that bilingual education does not work and that children in bilingual programs do not learn English have serious limitations since they employ small sample sizes and are short-term rather than longitudinal. Krashen adds that they inadequately control variables such as social class and language differences, and ignore variations in design and program (Baker, 2006). With respect to many arguments against bilingual education, Krashen argues that opponents of bilingual education are totally ignorant of how bilingual education works and how second languages are acquired.

The English-only or Official-English movement argues that English is "the

4) Structured Immersion programs contain only language-minority children. In this program, the heritage language is not developed, but is replaced by English (Baker, 2006).

social glue that bonds diverse Americans and overcomes differences" (Baker, 2006, p. 394). Most Official-English supporters want to reform or abolish bilingual education. Proponents believe that a linguistically and culturally diverse country results in racial and ethnic conflicts and that an official language in the United States prevents such conflicts by unifying the country, thereby assisting immigrants.

However, González (2000) criticizes the English-only movement for promoting an already dominant and powerful language. TESOL (2006) also points out that the English-only movement misleads people with the mistaken arguments: (a) English-only will promote unity, empower immigrants, promote efficiency in government by conducting all official business in one language, and help protect the English language in the United States, and (b) bilingual education prevents immigrants from effectively learning English. TESOL claims that the reality of English-only will polarize rather than unify the country, and exclude rather than include immigrants, further marginalizing immigrant groups. TESOL emphasizes that language diversity in the United States should be regarded as a rich resource instead of a lingering problem that needs to be eradicated.

In short, a body of research supports the position that well designed bilingual education programs facilitate rather than retard children's English language development. In the following section, I will critically discuss the significance of the bilingualism issue to language education for language-minority students with a focus on the advantages of the heritage language development and the close interconnection of language, culture, and identity.

4. Language, culture, and identity: Why do language-minority children need to maintain their heritage language?

4.1 The advantages of heritage language development

We need to take into account Freeman's (2008) remark that "bilingual education is about much more than language" (p. 77). It is dangerous to claim that language-minority children need to be part of the mainstream society at the expense of their heritage languages and cultures.[5)]

5) U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences indicates that in 2006, about twenty

The maintenance of the heritage language is very important to ELLs with respect to language development, academic development, and cognitive development (Collier & Thomas, 1999; Hakuta, 1986; Thomas & Collier, 1996). Ovando (2003) also mentions that students who are given opportunities to grow in both their heritage language and English have the best chance at "full cognitive development" (p. 19). This reveals that when students are learning English without any attention to their heritage language, it is possible that they can regress on conceptual learning.

In monolingual programs, cognitive development is likely to be interrupted as a result of low self-esteem when students are not allowed to speak in their heritage languages at school. If that happens, language development and academic development can be negatively affected. Collier and Thomas (1999) emphasize the development of self-esteem and the importance of sociocultural and affective processes in bilingual education. According to Thomas and Collier (1996), when the two languages are given equal status, self-confidence is able to be created and has the ability to promote positive cross-cultural attitudes among all students, including language-majority students. It is well known that self-confidence, high motivation, and low anxiety as affective factors can affect the progress of language acquisition (Krashen, 1982). Hakuta (1986) also states, as mentioned before, that those who continue developing their heritage languages have cognitive advantages over those who only speak English.

Similarly, Tse (1998) points out that maintaining their heritage languages can allow language-minority children to benefit from closer contact with their own families, communities and countries. According to Tse (2001), good language programs should (a) "provide considerable exposure to the heritage language in oral and written forms," (b) "create comfortable and nonthreatening learning environments," (c) "expose students to the types of language and language situations students themselves consider useful and important," and (d) "accept nonstandard forms of the language and value the varieties students speak" (p. 63). Bosher's (1997) study also indicates that Hmong students who are academically successful can adapt to American culture by maintaining their heritage language, culture, and ethnic identity.

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percent of children at ages 5 – 17 spoke a language other than English at home, and five percent had difficulty speaking English (http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2008/section1/indicator07.asp #info).

4.2 Heritage language and identity

In bilingual education, students need to have the impression that their heritage languages are acceptable and important. If students are not allowed to speak in their heritage languages at school, they might think that their languages are not good enough to speak. That is, they can view their languages as incorrect, polluted, low, and inferior (Shohamy, 2006). Krashen (1998) points out that ridicule and correction of the heritage language used by more competent heritage language speakers result in heritage language loss. Cummins (2000a) also states that "in the vacuum created by the absence of any proactive validation of their linguistic talent and accomplishments, bilingual students' identities become infested with shame" (p. 13). In this regard, language-minority children should not be required to transform their sense of identity in order to assimilate to a new community.

Baker (2006) points out that schools tend to tolerate but not embrace linguistic and cultural diversity. Success in school often requires immigrant children to acquire the features of dominant culture, even though language-minority families already have their own valuable cultures (Delpit, 1988). Considering the claim that language is a symbol of our identity (Baker, 2006), heritage languages can play a crucial role in constructing immigrant children's identity in classrooms, and there is no doubt that those who develop their heritage language are more likely to hold a strong ethnic identity.[6)]

The following journal written by a 10th grade Dutch female student at the Vienna International School clearly shows a conflict of identity relating to her heritage language:

> What is my language identity? It's not Dutch, that's for sure. Dutch may be the language that my parents speak, but not what I am most comfortable in. I speak English far better than Dutch, hey I even speak French better than Dutch ... I don't know where I belong any more. I don't live in one culture, not in two but in a mixture of everything I have picked up in 11 years of international schooling. I don't have any one

6) I use 'identity' as a term which refers to "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (Norton, 2000, p. 5).

> country where I feel at home ... I enjoy traveling seeing the world and living among all the different countries. But sometimes it is frustrating, especially now. I am almost 16, I am starting to have friends for life and boyfriends, but I don't want to get too close, because I know that we will have to leave again sometime in the near future. (Carder, 2007, p. 102)

This excerpt shows well that through frequent travels around the world, she became fluent in several languages, but unfortunately lost her heritage language proficiency in the process. This student's identity is what Norton Peirce (1995) calls "a site of struggle" (p. 15). If she had been given heritage language instruction consistently at schools or at home, she might not have lost her home, her culture, and her ethnic Dutch identity.

This situation also occurs in the case of Korean children in the United States. As the demand for English teaching has grown around the world, elementary school children in South Korea have been expected to start learning English as a required subject in the third grade since 1996. As Lin (1999) sees English learning in Hong Kong as a key to success, the power of English as the best language for educational and socioeconomic advancement is growing in South Korea. Consequently, more and more Korean parents want to expose their children to formal English instruction even before the age of 10. As one way to provide formal English instruction, many Korean parents send their young children to English-speaking countries or some Korean families choose to come to the United States.

Upon arrival, many Korean families face the cultural tension that comes from immersion in English-only educational systems. As a result of the language shift that favors English over the language of the family, heritage languages are lost rapidly among immigrants. Park (2007) portrays Korean parents' 'English fever' in reference to their beliefs regarding their children's English acquisition in the United States. His study illustrates that unlike many Korean parents' beliefs, through their heritage language Korean children can better understand what they learn in and out of school and become more proficient in English. That is, he argues that heritage language maintenance is crucial in adjusting better to the new environment because the use of the heritage language helps Korean children linguistically, academically, and emotionally by letting them collaborate with each other in and outside the classroom.

Immigrants are well aware that English proficiency can be a key to being accepted in the mainstream of the United States. Accordingly, immigrant children favor English over their heritage language, which results in heritage language loss in immigrant families (Tse, 2001). You (2005) points out that many of these children later struggle with their ethnic identity and finally lose Korean speaking proficiency. In a similar vein, Tse (1998) asserts that heritage language development can play a crucial role in constructing students' ethnic identities. Tse (2001) also argues that the loss of heritage languages is the true language crisis because immigrant children lose opportunities to become bilingual and to have the important benefits of proficiency in two languages.

Some research, however, shows that Korean-American adults want their children to maintain their own languages and culture in order to develop positive ethnic identities as Korean-Americans (Kim, 1992). You (2005) also contends that language-minority children should preserve their heritage language to not only become fluent bilinguals, but also in order to promote their positive ethnic identities.[7] Similarly, Kim's (2006) research shows that a majority of Korean-American college students in American universities think that heritage language maintenance is crucial to ethnic and cultural identity. McCarthy, Romero, and Zepeda's (2006) study is also interesting in that it indicates that most Navajo youth view the heritage language as essential to their identities, and expect their parents to teach it to them so that it can be employed as a useful tool to learn English at school.

5. Implications for language teaching: What can language teachers do?

As Krashen (1996, 1999) argues, I believe that language-minority children should develop literacy in their heritage languages early to facilitate literacy development in English. I personally uphold gradual exit programs like the one proposed by Krashen in which LEP students first learn math in the heritage language, then move to a sheltered math class, and finally to a mainstream class. In this way, students learn academic English used in a math class as well as more math when they take the mainstream course. It is worthwhile to note

7) You (2005) points out that unlike other Asian community schools, many Korean community schools are run by Korean immigrant churches.

Krashen's (1996) claim that in bilingual programs subject matter should be taught in the first language without translation, and literacy in the first language should be developed so that it can transfer naturally to the second language. He adds that comprehensible input in English should be provided directly in ESL and sheltered subject matter classes.

As many bilingual educators mention, the rich diversity of heritage languages should be considered as a powerful linguistic and cultural resource that needs to be nurtured rather than a problem of academic achievement and cultural integration. Language-minority children need opportunities to think and learn in their heritage languages. Many language teachers agree that language teaching should start with respecting and understanding the heritage language students bring to school (Goodman, 2006). This attitude from teachers will help boost students' self esteem. In other words, teachers' attitudes towards the heritage language maintenance play a crucial role in effectively meeting the needs of ELLs. I believe that teachers who are open to other cultures, bilingualism or multilingualism, and research-based pedagogy are more likely to adapt their classrooms and curricula to incorporate the identities of the students in their classrooms. Furthermore, language-minority students whose identities, including heritage language, are embraced are more likely to experience academic and social success in the classroom. Language-majority students can also benefit from the exposure to new cultures, perspectives, and languages.

Hence, self-esteem should be a critical factor that must not be overlooked when we examine the effectiveness of bilingual programs (Richard-Amato, 2003). In fact, Richards and Hurley (1990) shows that successful bilingual education teachers frequently make use of their minority students' native language and culture to help them to participate more fully in the classroom. It is noteworthy that, as Luke and Freebody (2000) point out, "teaching and learning aren't just matters of skill acquisition or knowledge transmission" (p. 49). Language teachers need to view students' heritage languages as part of their identities as well as resources for learning. Moreover, teachers should understand that classrooms are complex social and cultural spaces in which student identities are constantly negotiated and shaped and that these identities are tied to language and language learning (Pennycook, 2000). With teachers' interest and enthusiasm, students can develop positive attitudes toward their heritage language because students' dynamic identities are influenced by various linguistic, social, cultural,

and educational factors. Teachers need to see knowledge of a language other than English as an asset for the individual, the community, and our society.

To this end, parents' active and voluntary involvement in the heritage language instruction should be encouraged to strengthen bonds between home and school, parents and educators, parents and children, and school and community. A good relationship between home and school is nurtured when families of language-minority students feel that they are a valued part of the learning process. Moreover, teachers and schools can learn and benefit from families of students. Parents can help their children maintain their heritage language by sending them to their community schools, and by encouraging them to read books, to write in their heritage language, and to watch the news and other TV programs in their own languages (Kim, 2006). In our discussion about bilingual education, we need to constantly seek parental, community, and national support for heritage language development.

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