Involuntary language loss among immigrants: Asian-American linguistic autobiographies

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Despite the fact that some 97% of the American population knows English "very well" or "well," according to the 1990 census, there is a constant fear expressed by various public figures that the English language is somehow endangered in the United States, and the only way for English to maintain its status is for other languages to disappear. Despite decades of research findings to the contrary, a large portion of the American public, the educational system, and the government believe that bilingualism is both bad for children and unpatriotic, and that the only way to be a true American is to leave behind any other language and allegiance that might be in your background.

As we will see in this paper, children also buy into this belief system—both long-term Americans and immigrant children. Yet at the same time, there is a strong feeling among immigrant families that it is important to maintain ties with the old country and to maintain the heritage language. Among the children of immigrant parents, this conflict between assimilation and heritage maintenance is played out in various ways at different stages of life. I look at the ages between birth and college—only the beginning of life, but the most important time in terms of language development. This paper is based on a set of about 250 "linguistic autobiographies" of Asian-American college students, done over the last several years in a class at the University of California at Berkeley. Quotes from the autobiographies themselves make up the heart of this paper. In this self-reporting mode, we see the human, rather than the political, side of language shift.[1]

It is usually the goal of the parents for their children to be bilingual: to learn English fluently but not forget their heritage language. To the parents' disappointment (and ultimately to the regret of the child, as we shall see) this goal is only rarely fully achieved. We will see that it is commonplace that fluency in the first language declines as English improves, so that by the end of the high school years, the child is a semi-speaker of his heritage language at best. I will examine the pattern of language shift that takes place in the young first- or second-generation student, and why this shift takes place. I look at the kinds of efforts made by families to keep the heritage language strong, and why they are usually doomed to failure. I also examine those relatively rare people who have succeeded in becoming bilingual, and what happened to make it work for them. Finally, I discuss policy implications.

Parental goals. Immigrant parents have relatives, friends, a lifetime of associations and customs in their home country, and perhaps generations of family history there. They may even intend to return someday. Often, the families see their arrival in the United States not as an abandonment of their old country but rather as a process of making a bridge between the two countries. The language of their country may be the language the family has spoken since time immemorial. Typically, the parents want their children to adapt to the United States, but at the same time retain the knowledge and values of the old country as well.

> Our family was the first one [among our kin] to leave the mainland of South Korea. The day we left for United States, everybody was pretty emotional at the airport, but I remember one single thing my aunt shouted down the airport corridor (in Korean), “Don’t forget Korean!” (K-9)

Learning English. The most frequent experience of the students has been that they knew little or no English when they started school in the United States.

> At the age of ten, my family on my mother’s side immigrated to America and this is when I learned my second language. Going to school made me feel deaf, mute, and blind. I could understand nothing that was going on around me. (C-6)
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> Although I did know some useful phrases, such as, “Could you prease point to the bathroom?” and “Sorry, I don’t speake any Engrish,” besides those handy phrases, I survived the first few months by utilizing the art of hand gestures and various body language. (K-9)
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> I was not able to communicate well at first. Smiling was the best language for me to show other Americans. Whenever I didn’t understand, I smiled. I felt stupid, but I didn’t look bad. (K-18)
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> I came to the United States when I was just ready to begin preschool and the only language I spoke was Hindi. My first exposure to American-English was with another young Indian girl. She spoke only in English and I only in Hindi, but amazingly enough the language barrier was unable to prevent us from some-

> how communicating and playing games. However, when I went home, I remember feeling bad for the girl because I thought she had a language deficiency and could not speak. I thought Hindi was the universal medium of communication and the concept of speaking a different language was unfathomable. (I-5)

Language shock. The students entering school without knowing English often undergo shock and depression.

> I started as an eighth grader in a junior high school and soon my burning desire and hope of a brilliant novel life [in America] began to fade away. I faced an unexpected obstacle of miscommunication between my fellow students and teachers. Back in Korea, I and my friends thought that after living in the U.S. for only [a few] months, you would be perfectly fluent in English. . . . But soon I found out that several years of studying English is needed to speak it fluently. Unprepared to meet the dilemma, I was quite depressed and in a condition of despair for the beginning year. . . . I used to be very active and popular in my school in Korea and here I was nothing. (K-6).
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> I got my very first impression of the American culture and language at third grade. I went to an elementary school where there were virtually no Asians and predominately whites. At first, I was excited to see kids with blond hair and pale colored skin like those people in the movies. However, my excitement didn't last long as I began to realize that there was no way I could communicate with them because I spoke no English at all. I began to dread going to school the few months in America. I was so miserable because all the kids looked at me as if I was a monkey in the zoo. I didn't have any friends at all because nobody spoke Chinese. How I longed to go back to Taiwan and to see familiar faces and to hear my native language being spoken. I never expected so much difficulties in assimilating into a brand new culture with a brand new language. (C-64)

ESL. Virtually no one who wrote these autobiographies had ever been in a bilingual education program, showing that despite all the controversy about bilingual education, true bilingual education programs are a rare breed, at least for Asian Americans. For some children, however, ESL (English as a Second Language) classes were available in school.

> Thirteen years ago, my family and I escaped from communist Vietnam and arrived at Michigan, USA. At that moment, we found ourselves lost in a new environment where no one spoke Chinese, the only language that we knew. It was a tremendously hard task to communicate with anyone. Fortunately, our church sponsor felt it necessary for my sister, brother, and I to be enrolled in school to learn English, the impossible foreign language then. The administrators gave me a program, English As A Second Language, to aid me in learning English. I was gradually acquainted with this peculiar language, and within one year, my attendance at school allowed me to communicate in English a little. (C-8)

The general impression one gets from the autobiographies is that there is a hodge-podge of approaches to teaching English. Many schools are inadequately prepared for the students who needed to learn English, and some bizarre solutions were offered at times:

> When I started kindergarten, I did not know how to speak the English language. I didn't even know my own name in English. (Pretty sad, huh?) . . . The only [classes] offered to non-English speakers were ESL for Spanish speakers and Sign Language for the deaf. Since I couldn't be put in the ESL classes, I was taught sign language. That was the only way I knew how to communicate with all the white people who talked so differently than myself. Gradually I began to learn English from my classmates. (K-39)

Television. There are several other sources from which children learn English as well. Chief among these are television and friends. On television:

> Until the age of abut four, I spoke entirely in Korean with my parents. Shortly thereafter, I rapidly began to learn English. Television shows, like *Sesame Street* and *Mister Roger's Neighborhood* greatly contributed to my learning process. The English sounds that had once been so foreign before soon became my own. (K-16)
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> For a couple of months [as a newcomer to the U.S. who spoke no English] I continued my cartoon ritual. Cartoons served as my foothold into English, and I understood more and more as the weeks passed. For a brief, interesting while my vo-

> cabulary consisted of words and phrases like "x-ray vision," "transformation," and "radio controlled drones." American television helped me learn English, but more importantly it eased the shock of transition as I struggled to bring American culture into harmony with my Chinese identity. (C-15)
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> In our household we use Mandarin mainly, but we watch Taiwanese-speaking or English-speaking programs as well. Ninety-five percent of the programs are with Chinese subtitles, and I personally think that's a great way to learn a language. We use the subtitle machine which is for deaf people to know what's going on on the television, to improve our English listening ability when we just arrive this country, and this helps us understanding videos and shows much better. (C-65)

Friends. Friends may play the biggest role of all in helping children learn English.

> One day I found my first true friend in the states. His name was Jason and he was Hispanic. He liked me for who I was, not where I came from. He was not only my best friend but also my teacher. He always invited me to his house and taught me English. I guess if it wasn't for him, I would have really had a hard time adapting to the new language. (K-2)
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> When I was in junior high in the United States [having arrived at age 14], I hardly had any Korean friends. I had a couple of American friends who I played with all the time. One of them was a deaf person. I learned some of the basic words in sign language, but most of the time I wrote him notes to communicate. Not having Korean friends helped me a lot to learn English fast. I was out of ESL by the end of 8th grade. (K-19)

The students often consciously cultivated friends who did not speak their language, in order to learn English better.

> I avoided speaking Korean as much as I could. I started hanging out with people to whom I could speak English. (K-31)
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> There were a few Koreans who hanged around together and spoke Korean only. I thought I couldn't be able to speak English quickly if I started to hang around with those Koreans.

> So I played with English-speaking friends—mainly Chinese and Americans. (K-21).

In the zeal of the incoming children to learn English, sometimes mistakes were made:

> I can still recall that during the first few weeks in my new school, I befriended a group of Vietnamese kids. Because I did not understand what they were saying, and that they looked Asian, I mistakenly assumed that they were ABCs (American-Born-Chinese) who couldn't speak any Chinese. So, in my ignorance, I started to learn from them what I thought was English. (I did wonder why the "English" I was picking up from them sounded different from the one I was simultaneously learning in the classroom.) Not until later on in the semester, when I met a fellow Taiwanese immigrant, did he point out to me that my group of friends were speaking Vietnamese instead of English! (C-43)

Family involvement in the chiId's learning of English. The family helps the children fight their battle toward English fluency. Siblings play an especially important role in English acquisition: younger siblings always learn English at an earlier age than older siblings, because the older siblings teach the younger ones.

> I have two older sisters who started school before me, and my oldest sister still has memories of first starting school and not knowing the language. By the time I started school, it is possible that I had already learned to speak English from my sisters who had learned it at school, because I can't particularly remember being teased for not speaking English when I started preschool. . . . Therefore, I am certain that I picked up English before I started formal schooling thanks to the precedent of my two older sisters. (K-26)

Since (as will be shown below) the use of the heritage language at home is an important factor in children retaining that language, parents have a conflict in whether to use English at home or not. Even if they have not made a conscious decision to use the heritage language at home for language maintenance purposes, they have other reasons not to use English. They may not know English themselves or may speak with a heavy accent and grammatical errors that they fear would be picked up by their children. Or, they may not know English well enough to allow the intimate level of communication families enjoy. But while some families opt against the use of English at home, others play a big role in their children's English education—and of course all families support their children in whatever way they can toward the goal of English fluency.

> [D]uring my early years in L.A., my parents encouraged the use of English at home, both to help me, and to help themselves. Actually, my father didn't need much assistance—he was an English major in college, who actually considered teaching it in Korea. He was, and still is, a nearly perfect bilingual. My mother, on the other hand, was a completely different story. Being an extremely intelligent and proud woman, she didn't like the idea of her being "ignorant" in English. Thus, she watched cartoons and PBS shows like *Sesame Street* and *The Electric Company* with me. We were essentially learning English together.
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> By the second grade, my English skills were proficient enough to enable me to skip the third grade. My parents had a lot to do with it. Even my mother's faculty in English had grown by leaps and bounds. She served at my elementary school as a teacher's aide, for my class in fact. So, she and I would go to school together and spend the whole day in each other's company. Our entire family was slowly, but surely, becoming a bilingual team. (K-23, arr. age 6)

First-language attrition. While some students, especially those that came as teenagers, still struggle to perfect their English even at college, most of their worst difficulties with the language are behind them, and they certainly know English well enough to have been admitted to a top American university. The majority of the students are dominant in English at this point in their lives but find that their heritage language has suffered. These heart-felt reminiscences are in keeping with findings at the other end of childhood by Wong Fillmore (1991), who looks at the stage when language attrition begins. This phenomenon of first-language attrition is discussed in almost everyone's writing about their personal language history. Here are a few statements about language loss selected out of dozens.

> My family immigrated to the United States on a summer's night of 1980 in search of the American dream. I remember that night clearly because as I stepped foot on to "American soil," I clung to my mother's arms and cried. Years later, my mother told me I

wept, “Let’s go home, let’s go home.” That was fourteen years ago; home is now Torrance, California, Korea is now a place I vaguely remember and the Korean language is slowly slipping away from my tongue, day by day. (K-13, arrived age 6)

By the end of my first year in the U.S., I spoke English semi-fluently. And by the second year, I was totally “anglicized,” with no joy from my parents because at the same time, my Korean speaking and writing ability was slowly deteriorating. (K-10, arrived age 8 or 9)

I can still vaguely remember possessing a stunning comprehension of Mandarin before I started school, but now, it has mostly left me. Often, since I have such perfect examples of pronunciation and grammar before me, I can mentally play a wonderful copy of what I want to say; when it comes out of my mouth, though, I can hear a semi-terrible American accent distorting my words. Sometimes I put words in the wrong order, which gives my messages a much different meaning than what I originally intended. (C-12)

I noticed that I began to think more and more in English. Now, the only thing that is still Chinese in my mind is the multiplication table. I wish I had kept up with my reading skills in Chinese. It felt as though my Chinese heritage was fading away with my Chinese literacy. (C-19)

Before I learned English, I felt comfortable, secure, and confident speaking Mandarin because Mandarin was my only communication language. As I learned English, I spoke Mandarin grammatically incorrect and pronounced each word with a foreign accent. (C-28)

It was also during this crucial period of my life that I had gradually lost contact with my Chinese culture. Unlike Taiwan, the American public schools didn’t teach the Chinese language, history, art, or culture. But rather, more emphasis were placed on European History instead. Eventually I also abandoned many forms of Chinese entertainment such as music, cartoons, or movies in my personal life. Since my family had no other relatives living in the US with us, I felt it unnecessary to keep my native tongue of Taiwanese. Due to these factors, my writing and reading skills diminished dramatically in just three brief years. (C-5)

> Just recently I realized how much Cantonese I have forgotten. Last week, I went over to my relatives' house to celebrate Chinese New Year in San Jose. I have not seen them for about five years now. When I was there, I could not communicate with them very well because they speak Cantonese and a little English. Even when I was able to figure out what they were saying to me, I could not answer them back in Cantonese because I did not know how. Instead, I replied in English hoping they would figure out what I was saying. At times, my younger cousins serve as translator for me since they were able to remember more Cantonese than I. (C-70)
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> My fluency in Gujrati has diminished tremendously since the age of five. At home, both my sisters and I speak in English with our parents. I am unable to read or write Gujrati, and can only speak a few words, phrases, and sentences. (I-1)
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> The feeling of knowing what to say in one language, but not in the language being spoken, still remains. Now, the situation is often reversed. My proficiency with Hindi today is comparable to my ability in English when I was in second grade. While I can understand almost all levels of spoken Hindi, when I converse with my grandmother, who can only understand Hindi, I often find myself groping for the right words and incorrectly conjugating Hindi verbs; I listen enviously to recordings of myself speaking fluent Hindi as a four year old child. Unfortunately, now that I am older, it is much harder to regain the familiarity with speaking Hindi I once took for granted. (I-4)
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> Despite my parents' constant efforts in preserving the use of Tagalog in our household, my older brother, my younger sister, and I still cannot communicate to our parents in "their" language. However, we can clearly understand every word that is communicated to us in Tagalog. I have discovered that the same holds true for many of my fellow Filipino-American friends. Some of them do not even understand a single word spoken to them in Tagalog. I have also observed that together we have one major thing in common; we are all second generation Filipino-Americans. (P-4)

Passive knowledge. One typical outcome is that children get to the point where they can understand the home language in a basic way but cannot speak as well as they understand.

> The languages that I heard spoken in my household as a child were English, Telegu, and Hindi. The only language I can speak fluently is English. I understand Telegu completely, but I do not speak it. If I tried with effort I could probably be able to speak it. Hindi is not spoken as frequently as Telegu or English in my household, so I only understand a few words of it. I use English every day. It is the only language that I can use to communicate without having to think about what I am saying. (I-9)
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> [M]y parents and I ventured for a better life in the United States when I was two years old. During the formative years between five and twelve, I was primarily exposed to English due to my enrollment in school. While English was being imprinted onto my psyche, my parents fluently spoke Tagalog at home. Due to my home life, I strangely was able to understand almost everything my parents spoke in Tagalog but could not speak nor write it. This situation has boggled my mind for years. I have always wondered how I can be exposed to the sound of Tagalog words for so long and not be able to speak a word of it. To this day I still cannot speak nor write in my native language. (P-3)

Mixing languages. Another typical outcome is that the children speak a mixed language. Mixed Korean and English is often called "Konglish" or "Korenglish," as one student prefers to call it—spin-offs on the first word in this genre, "Spanglish." Chinese-English mixing is sometimes called "Chinglish," and so on.

> I spoke only English in school and progressively spoke less and less Chinese at home. I actually started my own language, "Chinglish," which is a mix of Chinese and English. I only spoke this way to my parents and my brother who always laughed whenever I spoke it. My Chinglish started off innocently enough, but more and more English got thrown into my conversations. The reason for this is that I forgot how to say certain words in Chinese and didn't want to bother giving it much thought. (C-23)
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> It wasn't long until, I interchanged words in Cantonese for words in English. It was my mother who always called it "half broken English" and "half broken Chinese." According to her, I was changing into a "white ghost," a literal transaction of the word, Caucasian. (C-24)

> Although I have been speaking Cantonese all through my life, sometimes I find that I can no longer converse at total ease with others without mixing my speech with one or two English words. When talking to my Cantonese Speaking friends here in the States, we usually use "Chinglish." Sometimes it is easier to express something in English while at other times we just cannot express some feelings in any language but Cantonese. (C-40)

USE OF MIXED LANGUAGE AS MAIN LANGUAGE OF HOME. Sometimes, this mixed language actually becomes the main language used at home.

> [M]y family and I still speak more English than Hindi at home. We have even developed a sort of "Hinglish," which often consists of a mixture of the two languages. "Mom, is *khana* (food) ready yet?" (I-3)

> My father is the only one in the family who speaks Chiou-Chou without switching to other languages, but lack of communication with him has put me out of practice. It is an unspoken rule in our family that out of respect, all of us switch to Chiou-Chou when addressing our father; otherwise, our conversation with each other is a mixture of English, Vietnamese, Chiou-Chou, and occasionally some Mandarin and Cantonese. (C-69)

> Sadly, I use my Chinese rather sparingly these days. Even with my parents I speak English. Interestingly enough, they use just as much English as Chinese when talking to me (I like to call the mixture "Chinglish.") I think this is an effort (either conscious or unconscious) on their part to reduce the generation gap that has widened because of the cultural gap resulting from having grown up in different countries. (C-33)

INVOLUNTARY CODE-MIXING. The literature on code-mixing often fails to distinguish between the stylistic switching done by balanced bilinguals and the involuntary mixing done by people who command one language better than the other. The majority of students in this corpus are only semi-speakers of their heritage language and report language mixing as the best they can do with their language. This "involuntary code-switching" is often used with their Asian-language dominant parents.

> When I communicated with my siblings, I usually used mixture of Korean and English referred to [by] many Korean Americans

> as "Konglish." I basically felt insecure with both languages that I wasn't fluent with either Korean or English. (K-11)

> Although I speak English fluently, I speak to my parents only in Korean. Well, actually, I speak a sort of mixed language that, apparently, was developed from Korean speakers like me who do not speak Korean so well. Many people refer to it as Konglish (Korean-English). Konglish is when people say some words in Korean and some words in English all in one sentence. Speaking Konglish is quite fun but I know it grieves my poor old father when I pervert his native language when I speak. Konglish is spoken by many people especially among the Koreans of Los Angeles (I am from Los Angeles). (K-25)

> My native language became harder and harder to speak and understand. It was often too difficult for me to communicate with my parents purely in Korean, so a new mixed language, Konglish, began to be used around the house. "Um-ma (mom), when's juh-nuk (dinner)?" "Um-ma, I'm going to haac-gyo (school) now!" Without a second thought, my sisters and I were speaking by interconnecting words from two varying languages, and my parents were starting to actually understand us!! (K-28)

> [W]ithout me even noticing, I was starting to forget Korean. By the time I was in sixth grade, I was speaking in Konglish, which is a mixture of Korean and English combined in speaking. Thus, when I got home from school, I would tell my mom, *"Um-ma,* I'm home, but *na ching-gu-naa* house *gal-gu-ya,"* or translated "Mom, I'm home, but I'm going to my friend's house." However, Konglish was not a convenience, but a necessity. My parents and grandparents did not speak English too well, but they did know enough of the basic English vocabulary to roughly communicate with other Americans. At the same time, I was fluent in English, but I had lost fluency in the Korean language. Thus, in order to communicate with my parents and grandparents, I spoke in Korean but substituted very few words, but as the years went by, more and more words were substituted. (K-36)

> The degree to which I am proficient in English is quite high but my command of Tagalog is if anything but flawless. I can understand a majority of the vocabulary but putting together phrases and sentences is something I find difficult. The only

> time I am required to use my knowledge of Tagalog is when I speak with my "Tagalog only" fluent great-grandmother. My communication with her is a comedy in itself since I mix together Tagalog, English, and my own ad-libbed version of sign language. (P-6)

Illiteracy. Even when children can speak their heritage language, they are usually unable to read and write in their language unless they came over at a late age.

> The problem I face now is that I have difficulty with the Korean language. My reading skills are equivalent to a first grader in Korea, and my writing skills are even worse. In order of what I can do best to what I am worst at would be that my understanding is the best, followed by speaking, then reading, and finally writing. (K-26)
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> Even though I can speak one Chinese dialect and understand a little of another, I never learned to read or write the Chinese language. (C-3)
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> The languages that I speak are Hindhi and Punjabi at home I speak Punjabi much more fluently and better than Hindhi. Regretfully I cannot write in either language. (I-2)
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> Although I am fluent when it comes to speaking Vietnamese, I never had the chance to master its written language. (V-4)

Problems created by first language attrition. Heritage language attrition creates many problems for the child, who finds him- or herself personally frustrated, unable to communicate effectively with relatives, alienated from peers in the old country, and humiliated in front of visitors to the home.

> Unfortunately, at this point in my life, my lack of versatility in Mandarin is probably one of my greatest regrets. For one thing, while I can communicate with grandparents and relatives, it's not unlike stuttering every few words trying to get a few simple ideas across. In addition, hot having the language at my disposal limits my options for the future, although I plan to take some classes and try to use Mandarin with friends. One of the most significant aspects of my lack of fluency in the language is the fact that China is one of the major players in world politics

today, and I have less potential at this point to effect the outcome of the nation. In the end, I realize that I missed a golden opportunity in not learning the language well. (C-36)

There were three staff writers (at a Korean-American newspaper) who knew as much Korean as Dan Quayle knew Tagalog. Needless to say, they were constantly insulted and ostracized by the other workers. These writers themselves felt a strong sense of shame in their inability to speak their native language. No matter how well they wrote in English, they told me, they would never be accepted as an "American," because on the outside they were obviously "Korean." They told me that they would do anything to be able to go back and study Korean when they were younger. (K-23)

I know that I have been extremely fortunate to have been able to learn English so easily, but I have paid a dear price in exchange. I began my English education with the basics, starting in first grade. As a result, I had to end my Chinese education at that time. I have forsaken my own language in order to become "American." I no longer read or write Chinese. I am ashamed and feel as if I am a statistic adding a burden and lowering the status quo of the Asian community as an illiterate of the Chinese language. (C-7)

Logically, one would assume I had been chastised and ridiculed for my ignorance while I visited Sri Lanka. This then led to humiliation which progressed to such remorse that bodily deformation became a fair price for the instant knowledge of Singhalese. However, I encountered only kindness and respect from the people. In addition, knowledge of the language is not vital for survival in Sri Lanka since so many of the natives are bilingual. So why such anguish? One of the saddest feelings I have experienced in my eighteen years is to feel a tourist in my own country, Sri Lanka. Already a "Westerner," language was perhaps the only real and significant bond I could share with the people there. Unlike some others, religion and physical similarity did not create enough of a bond for me. I found it profoundly sad to witness such a breathless beauty and experience such rich culture, yet realize I had no rightful claim to it. (I-7)

I regret, however, that I was not able to learn any of my native Filipino languages fluently. I believe that I am missing out

> on an important part of my own cultural identity by not being able to speak Tagalog or Bicol. (P-1)
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> If there is one regret in my life thus far it would be my inability to speak the language of my parents, grandparents, and ethnicity for that matter, Tagalog. (P-6)
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> "I believe in immersing the Indians in our civilization and, when we get them under, holding them there until they are thoroughly soaked" [quote of a previous BIA commissioner; Crawford 1992: 44]. The problem was that many students drowned in the process. I, too, have been drowned in the process of Americanization and Anglicization. But, unlike the Native Americans, I was not dragged into the water by the throat and submerged. I made the choice myself to plunge into the pool. It was my decision to commit this suicide-of-sorts. (P-8)

POOR COMMUNICATION BETWEEN GENERATIONS. One of the worst problems that comes about with first language attrition is its impact on communication in the family.

> Trying to speak proper Korean to adults when one can barely speak the language can be extremely embarrassing. My family is very involved in a Korean church, and many times the reverend, elders, and deacons come to visit. When I find myself stuck at home on these unfortunate nights when guests are over, I have to introduce myself and speak to them in Korean. The trouble really begins when they talk to me and ask me questions—I'm usually stuck there in a most awkward position, trying to understand what they are saying, and trying to answer back in the most polite way possible. What usually comes out of my mouth is a mixture of English and informal Korean, which causes all the adults to laugh at me. (K-15)
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> There are a lot of things that my parents say in Haka that I do not understand, and my parents, despite having immigrated to the United States some twenty-five years ago, are not fluent in English. My father understands a little more English than my mother, so sometimes when my mother and I don't understand what the other is trying to say, we have my father translate for us. (2nd-generation student autobiography [C-3])
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> To this day, I cannot speak the Chinese language fluently. A guilty conscience has ruled over me ever since I lost part of

my culture. Every time I visit my Chinese-speaking grandparents, I have a greater desire to regain my ability to speak Chinese fluently because I barely understand a word they say. There has been a tremendous communication gap between my grandparents and I for most of my life. When I communicate with my Chinese-speaking father who understands very little English, my mother often plays the role of the translator. My communication with my father is a combination of Chinese and English words due to my ignorance of my native language.

To regain this vital part of my lost culture is very important to me. I would like to break the communication barrier and gain more access to my grandparent's lives and experiences. . . . Becoming familiar with the Chinese language would also help my relationship with my father. (2nd-generation student [C-4])

My parents often emphasized to me the social and economical advantages of knowing dual languages, but I seldom paid little attention to their advice. Little did I realize this, until I saw the ineffectiveness and the lack of coherency in my speech. I was no longer able to even communicate to my parents basic, everyday Cantonese. The only way they could understand me was for them to decipher my English using what little English they knew. (C-24)

This has been the base of a minor communication problem in our family. For although I can have an intricate and serious discussion with my parents, my sister is limited to casual conversations with my parents, who, even though they can speak English, can never have the same fluency and grasp on the language as my sister due to the fact that they came here at an age when learning a new tongue was difficult. And my sister's lack of proficiency in Chinese hinders her from expressing herself fully in front of my parents. I feel that this language barrier has been the basis of many unnecessary misunderstandings. (C-43)

Even with the Chinese that I can speak, I am limited to the normal yet shallow "everyday" conversations I have with my parents and do not have enough of a vocabulary to have meaningful talks with them. Such was the case just the other night when they asked me what my major at Berkeley was but I did not know the words or phrase for "Biology," much less, "Molecular and Cellular Biology." The best I could manage was "Science" in Chinese and explained the rest in English; I could not

> communicate to them why I selected this major, what I was going to do with it, and so forth—we ended this discussion by changing the subject. (C-76)

INTERGENERATIONAL CONFLICT. For many students, parental insistence on retaining the language and values of the old country has become a very sore point in the household, and has become the source of real intergenerational conflict.

> Between my parents and my siblings and myself, there has been constant tension—a pressure that is always existent, though perhaps not visible or audible—for my younger sister, younger brother, and me to use Korean among ourselves and with our parents at least when we're in the house. Yet, we neglect it and use the more comfortable English . . . until we hear another lecture. (K-29)
>
> The cultural values of both ethnic groups are at opposite extremes. What I acquire at school and what I am taught at home are completely contradictory. My teachers at school discourage me to speak Korean because they feel that it might have a negative effect on my ability to become a well-spoken intellectual. In contrast, my parents stress that I should not conform to the American ways. If I follow the American way of life, they feel that I might drift away from my actual roots and lose my Korean cultural values. They constantly emphasize that I should retain my Korean linguistic skills. Furthermore, my parents constantly reiterate that their sole reason for coming to the States was to provide me with an opportunity for a better education. Because I am being taught by the American educational system, I am destined to learn the American ways which my parents resent so much. As a Korean student attending an American school, I should be left alone to make my own choices. (K-38)

CRITICISMS FROM RELATIVES AND ACQUAINTANCES. Young people who have lost their first language are also subject to the embarrassment of criticism from other people from their home country.

> I cannot begin to count how many times people have ridiculed my language and my ethnicity by making fun of how spoken Chinese sounds and by mimicking a "Chinese accent" when speaking English. On the other hand I have also experienced linguistic prejudice from Chinese people because I am of Chinese descent but

> do not speak the language very well and must resort to English when talking to these people. (2nd-generation student [C-3])
>
> To [people of my parents' generation] my command of the Korean language showed whether or not I was a true Korean or just a yellow-skinned boy without a cultural identity or pride. And did I resent that attitude. Whenever relatives would visit I'd always get the same show; first the initial looks of surprise, second the question (Don't you know how to speak Korean?), and finally reprimands of shame and pity from anyone and everyone, even my younger, Korean-speaking cousins. The thing that bothered me the most was that I felt I could do so little about my problem. (K-32)
>
> "Your Chinese is *awful!"* An elder cousin whom I had not seen for eight years directed this comment to me several summers ago while we both were in my parents' presence. I was filled with indignation as I thought to myself where this jerk got off at telling me about my Chinese deficiencies and how eight years was too short of a time to see this creep again. Of course, this cousin wrote and spoke Cantonese, the dialect of Chinese my family spoke fluently. "Can't you learn more?" he added. After that one, I thought that I had discovered the so-called Missing Link of the evolutionary process between ape and man. I glanced over to where my parents were sitting only to see them nod in agreement. They not only thought he was right, they knew he was right; but for that matter, so did I. Moreover, these were the same comments my parents themselves made to me ever since my family moved from Hong Kong to San Francisco in 1978. My cousin's comments served a reminder to me from that day of a language's potential to be a barrier or a bridge. (C-76)
>
> I have even encountered prejudice from Filipinos because of my linguistic background. Sometimes, even my peers' parents and other elders look down on me for not speaking in a native tongue. (P-1)

People in the home country also feel strongly that people who come to America should not forget their heritage.

> When I went to Korea during my summers, I felt proud that I could speak well and easily. In Korea the society used to look

> up to those who lived in America and could speak English, however, at present they are disappointed by the many youths who have become "Americanized," and have forgotten their heritage. (K-35)

Factors relating to first language retention and attrition. What happened that created this language shift, against the will of the family and, often, to the ultimate regret of the child? In this section, I discuss the factors that might tip the balance one way or another in attrition or retention of the heritage language.

The language of the home. There is a direct connection between fluency in a language and the degree to which that language is used. In the effort to help their children assimilate to the new country and learn English, the parents have a dilemma: To what extent should they speak English with their children? Should they speed their children's English education by speaking it with them, or would that hurt their children's chances of retaining the heritage language? This is a painful choice, for it is clear that children who don't know English suffer emotionally and educationally, at least for the first year or so; and often schools strongly encourage parents to use English at home. Yet while parents who decide to use English at home find that their children learn English faster, the student autobiographies show very clearly that at the same time, knowledge of the heritage language never develops or else deteriorates rapidly once the English-at-home policy is introduced.

> My parents took the liberty to teach me English as I grew up, as opposed to Korean like most of my cousins. At the age of five, only after my ear and mind completely operated in English did they then decide that it might be time to mix it up. They tried speaking to me in English in public while speaking to me in Korean at home. Soon they realized, though, that I would never truly be bilingual. (K-32)
>
> I have asked my parents many times why they did not teach me to speak Marathi fluently, and this is what they always tell me. While growing up, my parents wanted my sister and I to be able to speak English like all of the other children. They had heard stories about Indian parents only speaking the Indian language at home, and their children not learning proper, conversational English. My parents did not want this to happen to us, so they limited how much they spoke Marathi around us. I would say this has worked to my advantage and to my disadvantage. All throughout my past education, I have felt that I can speak

> English just as well as all of my classmates. Not once have I felt that I lacked any English-speaking abilities. The drawback though is that I do not know Marathi fluently. I can understand most of what is spoken in Marathi, but I can probably only speak as well as a first or second grader. I am basically illiterate also, and cannot read or write the language. (I-11)

Those children who retained fluency or near-fluency in their native tongue come from homes where the heritage language was spoken by matter of policy. These quotes are all from children born here who became bilingual.

> My parents taught me Cantonese first, and English was something I learned later on in school. My parents constantly insisted that I learn Chinese until I was in second grade, because they felt that they might want to return to Hong Kong after my father got his Ph.D. from UCLA. They even went to great lengths to teach me the language. My parents acted as part-time teachers, having ordered a set of language books from China. They taught me enough to allow me to survive if I had to return to schools in Hong Kong. These lessons not only taught me the language, but also taught me a lot about the history and culture of China. From these books I learned more about Chinese values as well. (C-45)
>
> Chinese was still the dominant language in our household; English was a forbidden taboo. My parents had wanted to ensure the fact that I would never forget my language and culture. (C-66)
>
> As a preschooler, I was not familiar with any English at all. My parents had chosen to teach me Hindi first, because they knew I would inevitably learn fluent English in school. Being born and reared in the United States, I value what my parents did for me, because it has enabled me to stay fluent in Hindi, the only language I spoke for the first three years of my life. (I-3)
>
> My parents have always felt that its harder to learn Punjabi because in our everyday lives in the United States we are not as exposed to it, except in the home. If they could succeed in teaching us Punjabi at home, we would easily pick up English at school. This was absolutely true. I began school knowing hardly any English and I picked it up quickly. I soon became

> completely fluent in both Punjabi and English and speak both without an accent. (I-8)
>
> I learned English in nursery school and from listening to my older siblings practice their English at the dinner table. On the other hand, I learned Vietnamese through my parents. I was forbidden to speak to them in anything other than Vietnamese. This was because my parents were afraid that I would grow up to forget my roots. All in all, I consider myself to be equally fluent when it comes to both languages. (V-4)

Insufficiency of parents as sole source of heritage language. The parents' decision to use the heritage language at home is a necessary condition for raising a bilingual child, but it is not sufficient. Many of the families of the students who wrote these autobiographies in fact did choose to use the heritage language at home, and yet still found that their children were losing fluency. With siblings starting to talk to each other and even answer their parents in English, the home language begins to slip away.

> My first memory is of learning the correct way of pronounce "Kung Hee Fat Choy," the Cantonese way of saying "Happy New Year," with the intent to charm the socks off the listener and cause him to give me a packet of lucky money. My mother tells me I was a paragon of a baby, usually silent, but when I spoke, I spoke in Chinese. I got along will with all the relatives who visited from Hong Kong (or at least the ones I wanted to get along with by enchanting them with my baby-talk).
>
> This delightful time when I was the perfect Chinese daughter did not last long. Spending time with my older siblings and hearing them speak in English, I soon began to lose my first language. I, in turn, helped speed the deterioration of Chinese in my baby sister. My older siblings first learned English when they started formal education. In contrast, by the time I entered kindergarten, I had no trouble making friends by using this new second language. I also began using the derogatory term "F.O.B" (fresh off the boat) to describe peers who spoke only their native Oriental tongue because they had not been in Hawaii long enough to know better. (C-11)
>
> After graduating from elementary school, I made a lot of new friends. All the friends that I made were English speaking people, so for about six years my main language was English. Only time I spoke Korean was at home because my parents

> didn't speak any English. . . . I imagined myself always retaining the Korean language, but to my surprise I almost forgot 50% of the language. (K-2, arrived age 11)

ONE PARENT, ONE LANGUAGE. A fairly common approach for families trying to raise bilingual children is the "one parent, one language" approach. It is a good compromise for families who want their children to be bilingual but at the same time want to keep them from suffering by arriving at school not knowing English. Dopke (1992) (whose study took place in Australia) reports that the one-parent, one-language approach worked in some families but not in others. She points out that those families whose children did succeed in maintaining fluent bilingualism throughout the period of the study differed from the others in two key ways. First, the parents were consistent about the approach and most importantly did not let the children respond to them in the inappropriate language. If the child responded to the heritage-language-speaking parent in English, the parent might just say "What?" until the child repeated the message in the heritage language. Second, the successfully bilingual child had other people to talk to in the heritage language besides the parents. Other relatives, or neighbors, or social or religious groups that use the heritage language provide necessary language support that provides both further exposure and motivation to the child. Several students in my classes reported the "one parent, one language" policy in their homes.

> Gujrati was the first language I learned, and spoke fluently until the age of five. At home, my mother would speak to me in Gujrati, and my father would speak to me in English. . . . Thus, when I attended preschool at the age of three, I didn't have a problem learning English. Before I entered kindergarten, I was completely fluent in both Gujrati and English. (I-1)

Of course, this approach can be found anywhere in the world where two languages are important. One trilingual student recalls her parents employing this method when she was a child in Taiwan:

> As a child, I spoke Mandarin and Taiwanese at home. Sometimes it was very confusing to know two names for every item so in an attempt to diminish the confusion in my young mind, my father only spoke in Mandarin while my mother spoke Taiwanese. (C-57)

Language rejection. A factor that may be even more important in language attrition than any of the above is language rejection by the children themselves. The children are subjected to tough assimilative pressures at school, mainly from their classmates. They are made to feel “different” and “not normal,” and their language or their accent is ridiculed. The children begin to develop a strong sense of shame about their language and their heritage culture and accordingly make every attempt to suppress it.

> It was the Korean language, and “Korean-ness’ in general, as the ugly monster that kept me from being “normal,” isolated me from my peers, and ate away every opportunity to “belong” with people my age. . . . I learned to hate hanging out with my family because they reminded me that I wasn’t “American.” I had learned to hate being a “foreigner” and I saw no reason to speak Korean except to keep my parents content enough to leave me relatively alone. (K-27)

PEER GROUP PRESSURE TOWARD LANGUAGE REJECTION. The most important factor causing language rejection among children is peer pressure. Children can be heartless teases, and most immigrant children have tales of the cruelty that was aimed at them for being “different.” Just a small sample:

> It was two heartless comments, from a group of small boys in my “white” neighborhood for me to want to deny my language let alone my culture, as well. How was I to react to a racist comment of “Ching chong chooey go back home to where you belong. You can’t even speak English right.” Sixteen small words which possessed so much strength and contained so much power caused a small, naive child to want to lose her heritage—to lose what made her. (C-2)
>
> I didn’t use Korean whenever possible, as I tried to become as Americanized as I could, as well as avoid the cruel comments kids could inflict on Asian languages. (K-1)
>
> [T]he Caucasians would try to mock us with the incomprehensible jumble of sounds, trying to mimic our language. (K-3)
>
> One thing I remember experiencing was that I was always picked on because I couldn’t speak English well, but then, I used to let my fists do all the talking. Many of my childhood acts of violence were results of linguistic harassment’s or misunderstandings. (K-9)
>
> “Gook.”
>
> “Chink.”

> "Flat-nosed Oriental."
>
> "How do you blind-fold a Chinese person?" "You use dental floss."
>
> "Ha, ha, ha . . ."
>
> (Back in the 1980s, *every* Asian was believed to be Chinese.)
>
> Taunting and ridiculing, the harsh voices of my worst memories belonged to small elementary children who found diversity just as unfavorable as I did. . . . My sisters and I spent two years attending [school name] that was mainly dominated by Anglo-American students. Our ears burned daily from their words of malicious content, but somehow, this stirred up our motivation to grasp the English language even faster. (K-28)
>
> My painful road to achieving fluency in English took a few years, during which I sometimes felt alienated from the society around me. I discovered the disrespect, that antipathy, and the hatred that could be directed on a non-English speaking and non-white immigrant. It was then, after countless mockeries from American kids in school and other uncomforting episodes that I became convinced that America, despite the Statue of Liberty, the Constitution's proclamation for equality of all men, and its advertising as a melting pot and a land of freedom and opportunity, was a racist and xenophobic nation. (C-43)

Teaching respect for cultural diversity in the school. On a more hopeful note, there are a few Asian-American students who went to schools that were able to instill respect for cultural diversity among their students; these students remember positive experiences instead of peer discrimination and ostracism.

> At Independence High School, cultural diversity was cherished. Every year a multi-cultural assembly and a food fair is held to celebrate and to promote the diverse cultures at Independence as well as to teach students to respect and appreciate cultures different from their own. With respect to the history of race and language in the United States, I was very fortunate in that I did not encounter any discriminations. Prior to the 1980s immigrants and "racially inferior" people were discriminated and denied of opportunities enjoyed by others. All the credits can be attributed to earlier African Americans, Hispanics, and

> other ethnic groups who had fought a long struggle to win equal rights for everyone. (V-8)

MAINTAINING PRIDE IN HERITAGE. Some children managed, through the help of their parents and grandparents, to maintain pride in their heritage despite the teasing and rejection of their peers.

> When I was younger I felt embarrassed to speak my native languages in the fear of being mocked or ridiculed. It was bad enough that I was an immigrant but speaking such a hideous languages was incomprehensible and rude to other "American" children. However, I learned to deal with all the mocking because my parents taught me to be proud because I was a unique person in knowing such beautiful languages. I could speak three languages at the age of six while my friends only knew one. I felt gifted and soon was no longer was being ridiculed but envied. (I-2)
>
> My parents had just moved the family from Taiwan to America. Even though the Mandarin Chinese I had grown up speaking seemed useless now, I felt no remorse because I couldn't speak English. I knew I was part of the rich, beautiful, and complex Chinese culture, a culture that has taken thousands of years to develop. And my grandparents had told me many times that I belonged to a proud family. (C-15)

THE DRIVE TO ASSIMILATE. But for most, attempts to "fit in" are as paramount in immigrant children's minds as they are with any other child. Thus the drive toward complete assimilation is overwhelming, and rejection of the heritage language is associated with that drive.

> In the effort to assimilate into American society, especially in a place such as Lincoln where cultural diversity was extremely small, however, I found myself trying to shed my linguistic background in order to overcome alienation and teasing. Although I do not specifically recall isolated incidents, I am confident that my parents pushed me to excel in English in order that I would not encounter the difficulties they did due to their limited competence in English. (C-44)
>
> To get rid of my accent and speak perfect Californian-surfer-English is my proudest accomplishment in life, since it demonstrated not only my hard work, but also my acceptance by my peers. (C-61)

> I spent the next few years trying desperately to linguistically assimilate into my new society. I did not want to sound like an immigrant in public and tried my hardest to sound "American." I did not realize my clear neglect to maintain my native tongue. During that time, I did not mind because I knew I was not going back to the Philippines anytime soon and I wanted to quickly integrate myself to my new country and learning how to speak the language without an obvious accent was a preliminary step. I believe that the wish to "speak" like the majority is a common desire for most foreign country immigrants coming into the United States. Proficiency in English is somehow connected to upward social mobility and a higher class status. It is the goal to have a "better life" than the lives they had in the country they fled from that drives immigrants to learn English. This is when newcomers, especially the younger people, begin to forget their native language. This pattern certainly happened to me and will continue to repeat itself in the years to come. (P-2)
>
> I can see how my eagerness to Americanize and my quick pace to Anglicize (which began from my younger days in the Philippines) killed the Filipino in me. (P-8)

Feelings of shame. Being an immigrant, looking different, and speaking English with an accent are all sources of shame to children. They become deeply ashamed of their heritage language and cannot bear to speak it in public with their families. At the same time, they are ashamed in front of their relatives and relatives' friends because they do not know their heritage language and culture. They blame themselves for all these problems.

> I wish I can tell you that I'm a fifth generation Chinese American. I wish I can say that my ancestors have been here just as long as your ancestors have, and therefore I am as much an "American" as you are. I wish my Asian Cultures teachers would stop assuming that I am a living Asian History textbook because I'm Chinese. I wish my fellow classmates would quit picking on me because I'm different from them. I wish I can somehow reassure myself that it isn't my fault that I am ignorant of my own culture. But I can't. There is certainly no reason that I can't recall a single event in the Chinese history. There is absolutely no excuse for me to speak Chinese with a horrible accent since I've only lived in the States for a decade. (C-5)

Shame about parents. The awareness of being "different" has a profound effect on the immigrant child's feelings about his or her heritage. They also become very self conscious of their parents' lack of fluency in English (if such is the case).

> The fact that my parents do struggle with English has been at times difficult for me to grow up with. Many times I have even been ashamed of them. . . . This is an illustration of the effects of immigrating to a different country, and some of the social "problems" that have to be dealt with. (K-26)
>
> When I entered [name] Junior High School, my attitude toward the Chinese language changed dramatically, partially because I was no longer protected by the innocence of childhood and partially because [name] was located in a less racially diverse neighborhood. When some of my classmates began to ridicule and throw racist remarks at Chinese people, I began to distance myself away from Chinese culture. I felt ashamed when my parents spoke to me in Cantonese at a supermarket. I got into heated arguments about why only English should be spoken at home. My dad was fluent in English but my mom had this heavy accent and I began to question my mom on why she would not learn English as well as my dad did, even though I knew perfectly well—she did not go to school here like my dad did. I continuously tried to fit in, even if it meant abandoning culture and identity. I was probably most hostile to my background during those years in junior high. (C-45)
>
> Not only was I obviously different in my physical appearance, but I had to deal with a separate culture as well. And my linguistic background was one of the only things I could suppress, by speaking only in English. I used to get so embarrassed whenever anyone asked me what language I spoke, or for that matter, even brought up anything Indian. I mean *really* embarrassed. My face would get very hot. I learned to change the subject faster than anyone else I knew. (And I have to say that that has been a very useful skill!) (I-12)
>
> I believed in the superiority of American English. Indeed, I even went further as to believe in the superiority of the white man. It is no wonder that I am more fluent in English than I am in my native language, Tagalog. (P-11)

LANGUAGE SHYNESS. In a kind of "reverse shame," language rejection may also occur or be intensified as a result of discouragement over one's lack of knowledge of the heritage language; non-fluent children try not to speak the language at all for fear of being criticized or laughed at by those who speak it better. This is called "language shyness" by Krashen (1998).

> [M]y American accent has in a way, made me less willing to speak my native language. One of the bad experiences that I have encountered was when my family and I went over to Hong Kong and Macao to visit relatives. Naturally, I had to speak Chinese throughout the entire visit. My aunts and uncles soon found me to be a great form of entertainment because my Chinese sounded so funny to them. To them I was their niece, the "toa-gee," which simply means that I was born in America or they would get really creative and call me an "A-B-C" which is an acronym for "American-Born-Chinese." I was really offended by their constant harassing, but I soon got over it when I realized my Chinese sounded to them much their English sounded to me—bad. (C-23)
>
> I am even afraid of re-learning Filipino. (I tried last year here at Berkeley.) I wish that I could at least answer my mother in Filipino. I try, but what results is an English-Filipino mix that makes me feel like a fool. (P-8)

FEELINGS OF USELESSNESS OF FIRST-LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE. For a smaller number of students, language rejection is less emotional and more pragmatic. Students who have lived in the United States most or all of their lives often simply see no use in using their heritage language.

> In terms of my values, I think that perhaps I have lost zeal for Korean because I don't see so much a practical use for it as I do for English. I no longer see speaking Korean as a "part" of my identity, although my parents would probably be crushed to hear such a thing. (K-29)
>
> I am more fluent in English than in Taiwanese. My other dialect, Mandarin, is almost nonexistent. A part of me wants to keep my language alive, but a big part of me wonders if it really matters. I am sure I'll be living in American for the rest of my life. I guess I just don't really care. (C-22)

Efforts at language maintenance. When parents see their children losing their heritage language, they often make strong efforts to remedy the situation.

> Though I came to America when I was little over a year old, I am fully fluent in my mother-tongue (Bengali). Ever since a young age my father has stressed the importance in retaining my culture and rich heritage. To this end, he has spent much time and effort educating me on aspects of my culture which I cannot learn in school. (I-10)

The two most common means of trying to stem the loss of the language is through increased insistence on language use at home, and sending the kids to language school. But in general, these remedies are "too little, too late."

Increased insistence on language use at home. The autobiographies describe parents as punishing, lecturing, cajoling, or doing whatever they can to get their child to speak the heritage language at home.

> This trend [of becoming a balanced bilingual] took a turn for the worse when my knowledge and fluency in English started to usurp that of Korean. My Korean friends had long ago abandoned the Korean language for English. Thus, my parents no longer had assurance that I would maintain respect for my mother tongue. They drastically reversed their stance on language in 1987, when I was in the seventh grade. I was prohibited from using English at home. If I asked my parents for anything in English, my request would fall on deaf ears. I had to ask for water in Korean, otherwise I would die of thirst. The emphasis had shifted from learning English to salvaging what little I remembered of Korean. From the local Korean bookstores in the neighborhood, my parents bought me tons of Korean magazines, noels, and comic books. Every day after school, my mother and I would sit and read Korean stories together. Whatever words I didn't understand, she would make me look up in the English-Korean dictionary. And late at night, the three of us watched the Korean station on television. They made me view everything from sit coms to cooking shows, hoping I would learn the language through hearing it spoken. The language war was on. My parents' ultimatum was, quite simply, "English at school, Korean at home." (K-23)

Language schools. A great many immigrant children are sent by their parents to a language school—"Chinese school," "Korean school," and so on. These schools teach literacy and oral skills in the heritage language as well as values and culture. Children go to these schools after regular school or else on Saturdays.

> As a child, I was taught both English and Mandarin. I went to a Chinese school in the San Fernando Valley every Saturday with many other children, teenagers, and adults who were there to learn Mandarin or Cantonese. I attended this form of schooling for many years, but because of the little time we spent each week actually learning the language, most of us never fully got a grasp of the technical skills. (C-38)

A small minority of children have positive memories of their language school experiences:

> Although I lived a typical American kid life, my parents began to feel that my first language, Chinese, would be lost since my daily interactions evolved around English. In order to preserve my Chinese culture, my parents enrolled me in a Chinese school in L.A. Chinatown. At the age of eight, I began attending Chinese school every weekend. There I learned two dialects of Chinese, Cantonese and Mandarin. Although I was very young at the time, I found myself very interested in learning my ancestral language and culture. So for eight years, I continuously went to school seven days a week, learning both languages. After graduating from Chinese school at the junior high level, I was able to read and write in Chinese fluently. (C-55)
>
> [M]y Korean began to deteriorate, and almost died had it not been for my parents who sent me to Korean school for a couple of months. Even though I attended only a short while, those couple of months are greatly responsible for my ability to speak and to some degree read and write Korean today. (K-1)

Most of the students were sent against their will; but many are glad in retrospect that their parents insisted that they go:

> [My parents] sent me to a Korean language school when I was seven years old; in the beginning, I remember dreading the thought of going to school on Saturdays for two hours, being completely at the mercy of a strict teacher who punished his

> pupils for getting an answer wrong with a sharp hit on the wrist. Although I only ended up attending the school for three months, I owe my ability to read and write in Korean to the twelve, two-hour sessions I attended with that time as well as to my parents' insistence that I attend Korean language school.

But most students found these Saturday schools or after-school programs boring or useless, and whether they stuck with the school or not, felt they did not learn a great deal.

> Against my appeal, my mother coerced me to go to Korean school at my church. Every Sunday I practiced my alphabets with children three or four years my younger. Back then, I didn't realize the great importance of keeping the Korean language in me, all I knew was the frustration of having to learn a language I felt was insignificant in my life and the awkwardness of being stuck with younger kids. I quit after two years, an action I now regret. (K-13)
>
> At the ages of ten and eight, my older siblings were placed into Chinese school, which met for two hours every day after school. Even now, they talk about the sheer boredom and strictness they were forced to endure in mixed tones of amusement and dread. (C-11)
>
> My parents made me go to Chinese school but I didn't learn much. Every week for about five years I went. Once a week doesn't help but to learn a few phrases. Chinese school was a waste of time. I probably won't send my children to Chinese school. I didn't get much out of it, and I feel that they won't either. (C-22)
>
> It wasn't that we were discarding our heritage, but rather we were unhappy for being forced to attend Chinese school on Saturday mornings, instead of being allowed to watch the Saturday morning cartoons, or of being able to go out to play. This mental block caused me to forget much of the Chinese which I had learned as a child, and ever since then it has been difficult for me to return to the level of Chinese I was at before, low as it may appear. (C-41)
>
> My life followed a pattern. English at school and with my friends; Chinese at home with my parents. I was by now

> comfortable with both languages and no longer confusedly mixed the two in my sentences, as I had done in my earlier years. At about this time, when my parents saw the ease at which I had become accustomed to both languages, promptly enrolled me in Chinese school to learn how to write in Chinese so that I would be able to write to my relatives. I suppose my parents had only been doing what was right, but at the time, I had not been so sure. English had become my first language, pushing Chinese into second place. I had no desire nor saw any need to waste all my Saturdays at Chinese school. In other words, I was becoming "Americanized." After a school year of learning to write Chinese, I was blissfully rewarded with a summer break. But to my parents' shock and to my dismay, the results of the registration tests in September showed that I had to start all over again in Class 1. Apparently the summer break of writing absolutely no Chinese had its consequences. After three more years of Class 1, I was thankfully given a reprieve as my parents gave up on me. Besides, I had been at the beginning of my teenage years, and felt that there were more important things in life than learning something that I felt I would never use. (C-66)

Some refused to go altogether.

> Throughout middle school and high school, my mom would always urge and sometimes even force me to attend Mandarin school or write Chinese characters at home. But I would never take her seriously and rebelled against the language. I would tell her Taiwanese was all I needed. During those years, I wanted to fit in American society and in my narrow point of view, learning Mandarin would only distance me from the rest of the crowd, I deeply regret my decision back then. (C-25)

Television again. Television, cited by so many as the great teacher of English, also sometimes helps in the maintenance or improvement of the home language:

> Even though I had an effortless time understanding Mandarin, this did not mean that I was fluent and comfortable with it. The accents of people from Mainland China were quite different from those from Taiwan. People from Mainland China appeared to curl their tongue more, making the words that come out more incomprehensible. Television again came to the res-

> cue. It was the medium that lead me to become more fluent and confident with Mandarin since most Chinese television shows on TV were spoken in Mandarin. (C-74)

Ethnic community. An important factor in language maintenance is having peers with whom one can speak the language. Earlier in this chapter, I quoted students who were glad to attend schools that had few other students of their ethnicity, because it allowed them to learn English more quickly. Yet we have also seen a darker side of that story, in the discrimination and shame suffered by the students in all-white schools. Another problem with living in white neighborhoods and attending white schools is that children begin to think that their heritage language has no use. This student is very glad he attended a high school with a large minority representation, where he was able to develop a sense of ethnic pride as well as tolerance for others:

> Looking back at my use of language historically, I am now careful to look at things differently. I will now even question things which I usually take for granted such as my choice of language. I have gradually changed my perspective. Fortunately, I went to a high school where the majority of the students were minorities. Many of the misconceptions I had about other minorities were shattered because I went to school with them every day. I ate lunch with them, played music with them, talked politics and debated over it with them. I think that it is only through living together can we truly understand each other. As a result, I began to lose the shame I had for speaking Tagalog. I spoke Tagalog with friends at school whenever I could and began speaking Tagalog to my parents instead of answering in English. Today, I love telling ghost stories in Tagalog with my cousins. (P-11)

In the same vein, students who grew up in an ethnic enclave with neighbors who spoke their language were much better able to retain their heritage language.

> Coming from an immigrant family, Cantonese was the first language I learned. My learning was greatly reinforced since I lived in San Francisco's Chinatown and attended a Bilingual day care center. (C-23)

Nevertheless, intensive early childhood learning of the language does not mean that the language will be retained without continued reinforcement throughout childhood. The student quoted above moved out of Chinatown later and her Cantonese began to go downhill.

Some students have had membership in churches or clubs whose membership is primarily ethnically defined. These organizations provide an important social motive for keeping the heritage language strong and also allow more exposure to and practice with the language.

> Even while living in the United States, my parents always encouraged my siblings and I to speak Korean in the home so that we wouldn't forget our native language. Thanks to my parents, I can proudly say that all three of us are fully bilingual. . . . There are many opportunities for me to practice Korean. I attend a Korean church, so I always speak in Korean to the older members of the church and also to the very young members when I teach Sunday School. I also taught at a Korean language school for a while, and through this, I not only had the chance to test and improve my own knowledge of Korean, but also to teach it to the younger kids who were just learning. (K-4, arrived age 7)

Lacking school support of bilingual development, the retention of the heritage language is up to the family, and as we have seen, success is rare. All in all, it appears that heritage language retention is successful only if there are multiple situations where the language is being used, which not only allows for sufficient input for continued language development but also helps the child realize the usefulness of the language and keeps his or her motivation high.

Visits to the homeland. There is certainly nothing better for family retention of the heritage language than being able to make return trips to the homeland. For most immigrants, this is probably impossible, either due to economic considerations or in other cases political problems in the homeland. However, some families are wealthy enough to make occasional or even regular visits to the old country a reality. Those families able to retain these close ties are those where bilingualism is most likely to thrive.

> Learning English was tough; however, because the environment assists me in learning English, I began to catch up quickly. After moving to the United States, I still go back to Taiwan about once a year. Through these experiences, I retain my ability to speak Mandarin and the little bits of "Ka-Cha-Hwa" and Taiwanese. After years of study, I became more fluent in English. Now I have become bilingual. This fact changes

> my perspective on languages. Now I can communicate with two groups of people of totally different language and culture. The newly acquired ability made me think that Mandarin should not be my only language [besides English]. I should learn as many languages as possible. (C-32)

After years of living in the United States where the heritage languages are not valued, we have seen that Asian-American children tend to reject their language. Sometimes a visit to the homeland is a wakeup call that gives them a new motivation to learn.

> Of the many activities and events I have taken part in to retain my "Indianness," it is one in particular which stays most on my mind: a journey through parts of India. (I-10)
>
> In 1988, we visited Korea . . . to view the Olympic Games. . . . My three months in Korea were really bizarre. To survive, I had to speak Korean. Actually, my knowledge of Korean has always been sufficient enough to keep me alive. I didn't have a difficult time of communicating with people; I just had a tough time adjusting to the harsh reality that I had to use it ALL THE TIME. But I can't tell you how much my Korean improved under such demanding conditions. My anglicized accent disappeared, my vocabulary increased tremendously, and my writing skills were honed and sharpened. (K-23)
>
> I always felt different from everyone else. It wasn't until two years ago, when I returned to Taiwan that I came to learn about my heritage and come to appreciate it. It was then that I came to realize that I wasn't simply Chinese or American. I was Chinese-American and that mix was in its own right, an advantage. (C-56)

Many students report their deep chagrin upon returning to the old country only to find that they can no longer communicate in their heritage language.

> After my trip to Taiwan this past winter break, I discovered that my Taiwanese was no longer what it used to be. My Mandarin was a complete joke. It is not hard to imagine what a difficult time I had communicating, even with my own family and relatives. I broke a sweat after each conversation and dreaded being asked questions by family friends, who assumed I was fluent in Taiwanese and Mandarin. I can't count how many times I felt

> embarrassed because I couldn't complete a sentence and had to resort to English to bail me out. I was truly a foreigner among my own people. I decided that I needed to learn Mandarin, since it is the dialect taught everywhere. I want and need to rediscover my roots, and the basis for doing that would be to learn the necessary language, plain and simple. (C-25)

While for most students, a trip to the homeland resulted in greater motivation to maintain their heritage language, it also made some of the same students realize how much they loved the English language:

> [After visiting other Korean-American friends in Korea] long after we went our separate ways, I was reminded of my love for English. I began to yearn for MTV, "Saturday Night Live," and "Monday Night Football." I had had enough of Korean melodramas, documentaries, and movies. By the end of August, I was dying to read American novels. . . . It got so bad that I wanted to return to my junior high school in a suburb of L.A. known as the San Fernando Valley (the birthplace of "valley girl talk")! (K-23)

And for a few, the trip was more like the closing of a door on their homeland, making the student realize that s/he didn't belong there anymore.

> [student first mentions Korean customs that he found he disliked]. . . . Finally, I was incapable of communicating with the teenagers in Korea. The slangs and jargons that were used by everyone sounded very strange to me. Although I spoke Korean quite well, there were several times when I couldn't understand what my friends were saying. From these experiences, I realized that I can no longer find any means of fully relating to the customs of my own people because I have already been greatly affected by the American way of life. (K-38)

The university. These students, all at the University of California at the time they wrote their autobiographies, found when they came here a richly diverse student body, with a strong impetus toward learning about their heritage. Campus clubs and nearby church groups allow the students to form bonds with people of a similar background. A large number of the students have found groups of friends of similar ethnic identity and language background, which awakened a new desire to improve their skills in the heritage language. Also, for the first time, most of them were at a school where their languages were taught, so it was their first opportunity (other than the dreaded language schools mentioned above) to take classes in their language. Here are a few out of scores of comments by students newly-awakened to the pleasures of their heritage:

> Although my parents saw their goal accomplished when my brother, then I, entered U.C. Berkeley, and though I made my goal of becoming fluent in English, the cost for all of us has been emotionally painful. One of my great goals in college is to get close to my family and show them my support by getting in touch with my native culture and becoming as learned as possible in the Korean language. (K-28)
>
> Not until I came to college was I able to speak Korean fluently. I was very glad of what the new college environment brought me, my old language. . . . Now after attending college for two years I am becoming very fluent in Korean, as fluent as English. Most of the time I can talk in Korean or in English but I still search for words to speak in Korean. The new experience of coming to a new country and learning a new language will always stay with me, but the one thing that will keep me intact is the times I almost forgot my first language. (K-2)
>
> After beginning my studies at Cal, a richly diverse campus and community, I began to realize that my “lost” Chinese would have been very handy to me. I joined a Chinese club, to regain what I “lost” and to retain what I still had left in me, which was not very much. . . . The majority of the students in the club spoke Cantonese and thus led me to feel very handicapped since I could not hold a very long conversation without having to revert to English. This was the point at which I told myself that I would try to learn Chinese again. Now if an opportunity is given to me, I will try to utilize what I can of my native language, but obviously, regardless of how “Americanized” or “Chinglish” I sound, I am aware of the necessity to maintain and practice one’s own culture. . . . I think I found my motivation here at [the university]. (C-1)
>
> I come from a linguistically diverse family, I wish I had been able to learn more from them, but now I constantly hear the nagging voice screaming—It’s too late! Now with the pressures of school, I really don’t have time. I’ve tried to enroll in classes here at Cal, but I’ve been on the waiting list for the fourth semester now and still I have been unable to get in. (C-7)

> Recently, I have become interested in Vietnamese again. I am interested in learning to read and write in Vietnamese; next year, I am considering to take a Vietnamese class at Berkeley. Thanks to my godbrother, I have gotten the confidence to practice my Vietnamese and renew my primary language. (C-73)
>
> I'd like to take a Hindi-Urdu class at Berkeley next year, to enable me to understand the language in greater depth. Learning the alphabet and scripture will open up more doors in comprehending the language. (I-3)
>
> Nevertheless, it was only until college that I started to actively seek my true culture; valuing Tagalog came hand in hand. Before this time, I did not know any better; and although I knew I would never let go of my Pilipino heritage, it was not until college that I could tell anyone why.

This change of attitude that takes place at college, and the subsequent drive to take courses in one's heritage language is not unique to the University of California. Universities around the nation cannot help but be aware that a large proportion of students taking courses in Asian languages and some of the Middle Eastern languages, and also a large proportion of students taking Spanish, are students who have had some exposure to the language at home. Some come to class fluent but illiterate; some come with knowledge of only some phrases and idioms, but with excellent pronunciation, comprehension, and mimicking abilities. Language teachers agonize over how to balance the needs of the heritage language students and the true beginners in the same classroom. Heritage language students cannot begin in an advanced class despite their background, because their grammar and literacy skills are usually too low, and yet they are miles ahead of the beginners. The larger departments have begun to have special sections for "heritage language" students. In the Spanish department at Berkeley, for example, there is one track for beginners with no home background, another for "Spanglish" speakers, who speak Spanish but cannot avoid dropping English words in, and another for fluent home speakers (who still need a great deal of education in grammar, reading and writing). Similarly, there are special classes for Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Korean, and Tagalog heritage speakers, who now form the majority of students taking those languages.

Benefits of bilingualism. We have seen that some first- and second-generation young people feel that retaining their first language has no practical value. On the other hand, those students who are fluent in their heritage language have found that their bilingualism is a great benefit to them. There is a feedback relationship between being bilingual and finding bilingualism useful; each begets more of the other. Here is a sample of the dozens of statements about the benefits of bilingualism.

> I feel that my linguistic background is something to be proud of and that there are many advantages of being bilingual. Being bilingual allows me to be able to communicate with people of two different countries, to experience and understand the cultures of two lands, and as an added bonus, if I ever get tired of speaking in one language, I have the option of switching to the other one! In addition, I can enjoy Korean TV programs and Korean music a well as American TV programs and music, I have the opportunity to read old Korean folk tales in the original language, and I've been useful as an interpreter when needed, because of my ability to speak two languages. (K-4)
>
> The usefulness of languages are infinite, but the most useful form of it to me has been either to help others or myself. One of the more grateful memories that I have to my ability to speak Korean was during a summer in Seoul. My friends and I needed to take a taxi. Well it is known to happen that if a taxi driver suspects that he is driving a group of non-native students, he will drive and extra long route to get where one needs to go. Luckily, my accent was decent enough to get us to our destination in reasonable time. A more satisfying use for languages has been at the times when I can help people with translations at stores, or other places. It is this which has motivated me to volunteer to help translations for immigrants and tutor English to Korean students as well. (K-35)
>
> Many times, I do play the role of translator and go-between for my family. For example, even though my father can read and understand simple letters, when he receives documents or little more complex letters in the mail, I attempt to translated it for him. . . . Bilingualism also helped me in other ways. Since I live in an area that is heavily populated with Koreans back at Home, my proficiency in Korean becomes significantly useful. Last summer, I worked in a Korean American community center. The agency deals with many Koreans as well as other ethnic groups. Whenever I received a phone call from someone, either Korean or non-Korean, who was in need of assistance, I used my language skills to communicate with that person so that I can help in any way possible. (K-11)

Learning Korean can be very beneficial. Speaking two languages is definitely better than speaking one. Also, I have a certain interest in International Business, particularly concerning U.S. and Korean affairs. (K-15)

After the recent L.A. riots, many people were devastated, specifically Korean-American store owners. Many were hopeless and confused as they faced their burnt establishments and the endless insurance reports. Confronted with this unexpected dilemma, hundreds of non-English speaking Koreans sought help from bilingual interpreters. Last year, I had an opportunity to put my bilingual tongue to constructive use. Even with my Konglish, I was able to aid many people in those desperate times. With such great diversity in the U.S. today, multilingualism, with English as one of the languages, is a useful tool in communication. (K-28)

I strongly feel that the more languages you know, the more advantageous it is. For me, I am planning to establish businesses in Burma and Japan. Hopefully, my knowledge of their languages would help me in the future. I think that when we learn a country's language, we also get to understand its culture better, thus, broadening our minds. As a result, we would become more able to communicate and associate with different kinds of people and form many different kinds of friends. Since I feel that the knowledge of a language is so valuable, I will definitely encourage my children to learn as many as possible. (C-54)

In my situation, my ability to speak Cantonese fluently has enabled me to have a very close relationship with my family and all my relatives. (C-55)

Through all nineteen years of my life I never thought that learning Chiou Chou was for acceptance in my family. It was not until I wrote this essay that the thought struck me. From the use of Chiou Chou, the relationship between my family and I has been very close. We usually joke around, tell stories, or where our experiences at dinner time. My acceptance into my family proved to be very rewarding. Because America is a land of prejudices and not everyone is willing to lend a helping hand, one must stick together with one's family to help each other out. For me, I like to learn new languages to be accepted by other groups, but I would never alienate myself from my

> family. Because learning Chiou Chou has brought my family and I so close together, learning any new language to be accepted by any group can never break us apart. (C-71)

Love of the heritage language. At this point in their lives, most first and second generation students who have come to the university, whether they are bilingual or whether they are limited in their first language, and whether or not they underwent language rejection at one time, now have a sense of love for their heritage language.

> As for English, I do speak the language but I don't think I'll ever talk it. English is the language that flows from the mind to the tongue and then to the pages of books. It is like a box of Plato blocks which allows you to make anything. But a Plato house cannot shelter human lives and a Plato robot cannot feel! I only talk Vietnamese. I talk it with all my senses. Vietnamese does not stop on my tongue, but it flows with the warm, soothing lotus tea down my throat like a river, giving life to the landscape in her path. It rises to my mind along with the vivid images of my grandmother's house and of my grandmother. It enters my ears in the poetry of *The Tale of Kieu,* singing in the voice of my Northern Vietnamese grandmother. It appears before my eyes in the faces of my aunt and cousins as they smile with such palpable joy. And it saturates my every nerves with healing warmth like effect of a piece of sugared ginger in a cold night. And that is how I only talk Vietnamese. (V-1)

Searching for identity. Asian-American students undergo an intense and poignant effort to reconcile the conflicting forces in their lives and find a comfortable sense of identity. Some Asian Americans who have spent their lives becoming as "Americanized" as possible still feel that racial attitudes in the United States keep them from assimilating completely.

> I am Korean-American. Not American or even American-Korean, but simply Korean-American. I have black hair, brown eyes, and a yellowish complexion. No matter what I did to my outside appearance, my inherent outer characteristics did not allow me to be purely American like Caucasians. I tried to hide some of the differences in my appearance and culture and tried to be American-Korean, but as I got older, I realized I could not ignore my heritage.(K-36)

> I realize that the color of my skin already paves a road of not being accepted one hundred percent in the American society. In general, monolingual Americans look at me and already presume that I am illiterate in English. Suddenly, they raise their voice when speaking, slow down the speed and enunciate every syllable. I feel like saying, "I'm Korean, not hard of hearing!" Then, when people realize I speak fluently, they would stop screaming but start talking in simple English as though my comprehension level is that of a second grader. Sometimes these little things would insult me but generally, I am amused. This is also the reason why no matter how much "American" I become, I am still Korean because my skin can't . . . more importantly, won't hide what I am. (K-13)
>
> An important question popped in my mind, "Do I want to live the rest of my live feeling unattached from my first spoken language? to the culture that passed down in my family for generations? Do I actually belong in any culture?" True, I guess to the last question, I feel that I do belong to a culture, one that consists of individuals who feel most identified with America. Yet do Anglo-Americans accept this fact? Many may not because although we all share the same culture, we look drastically different in appearance. I might consider myself an American, but will they? This is not a sign of insecurity, but instead a reality faced by an Asian-American in a white, male-dominated society. (C-35)
>
> My English speech background has definitely made me more comfortable in society. I feel it protects me, in some ways, from those who don't look upon the Chinese in a favorable light. Verbal abuse or remarks are still expressed every now and then, and it almost takes me by surprise. It's sad to realize that there are still many people who choose to be racist in society. It simply shows that society is still trapped by racism and its progress is not as developed as some may think. (C-38)

The college years are often a time when students begin to look at their heritage identity positively and make efforts to reclaim it.

> About my senior year in high school, I began to realize what a shame it was that I did not know my own native language well enough to even communicate easily with my parents and grandparents. When I thought about it more, I realized I did not even

> know my own culture that well either. I had totally neglected my own heritage. Thus, I am now in the process of learning my own language and culture again. However, this does not mean I will forsake all the things I am now; I am only seeking a modification. I count my American culture important too. (K-36)
>
> In my junior year, I began to realize the importance of my culture. Being Korean is part of my identity. I saw the folly of anglicizing my name and at that point I made a mental note to change my name back to [Korean name] in college. Now, thinking of my parents who had immigrated to find a better life in America, I find my parents' decision to cross over to be tragic. By coming here, they had risked the losing of my own cultural identity and theirs as well. Looking ahead into my own future as a near adult, I determinedly know that no matter how long I stay in America, I will always be a Korean. Nevertheless I feel a need to return to Korea. I know that I can study hard and soon become equally fluent in both languages, and by then, I will return and live in Korea. (K-3)
>
> One of my innermost desires is to learn how to speak the language of my heritage. There are several reasons for my passionate desire to learn Tagalog. For one thing, I feel like a complete stranger in my own house; I would like to communicate with my parents without speaking English. Secondly, I would like to be able to communicate with my relatives in "their" language whenever a visit to the Philippines is possible. Thirdly, I would like to be proficient in two languages rather than one. Last but certainly not least, I would like to preserve the language that has been a part of my cultural heritage for years. (P-4)

Some strongly embrace their American identity but argue that knowing other languages is not "un-American" and are very happy to be bilingual, or sad if they aren't.

> I don't have the blond hair nor the white skin; I had lived three fifths of my life in Korea, not in the U.S.A.; and also, I definitely speak better Korean than English. All of these segregate me from being a white American. However, who are the true Americans? Isn't the U.S.A. a country for everyone? I truly believe that being a white American is not the only reason that makes a person a true American. It's the willingness. If a person

> is willing to be an American, obeys all the laws, and takes the responsibilities as an American, he/she should be called as a true American. Speaking another language other than English is the matter beyond Americanism and I think it is a very good advantage for the persons. (K-21)

While the examples show that students struggling with English care more about improving their English skills and less about their skills in the heritage language, many of those who have lost or never attained fluency in their heritage language feel ashamed and incomplete. Those who are satisfied with their language skills in both languages tend to have a more positive self-image.

> Being bilingual in Korean and English has truly made me feel fortunate for several very important reasons. Not only do I not have to worry about serious language barriers between my parents and I, but I do not feel a sense of shame or even a void in my life because I am somewhat fluent in my native language. (K-22)

First and second generation Asian-American students at the university are struggling to define their identity. The internal conflicts that some of them are still waging is clearly present in their writings.

> So growing up as a Korean-American has had its disadvantages, but it also has advantages, that I can now speak two languages proficiently. I don't wish to abandon my culture and heritage, and neither do I want to be a separatist. My great struggle will be to find the balance between these two conflicting halves of my self. (K-26)
>
> I find it alarming that with this loss of language, I might also be losing a part of my cultural identity. I don't feel like I'm truly Chinese and I don't feel like I'm completely American either. (C-75)
>
> When I go back to India for visits people tell my parents that I am "Americanized" but they appreciate that I am still fluent in my native Indian language. For my generation, the bridging between our old culture and the American culture is difficult and sometimes we feel like we are a part of neither. This feeling of being an alien raises the question "Who am I?" and the need to seek and identify becomes apparent. The Hindi language helps reaffirm my identity in that group and it is yet

> another means of expressing my East Indian culture, whose preservation is essential to me. (I-5)

For some, the rejection of heritage language and culture still stands, and they see themselves not as Asian-Americans, but simply as Americans.

> My father once told me that America is now his country and that his allegiance belongs to America, yet the only thing that gives him his identity and affiliation to being Korean is his language. I do not know the land where I was born, and, personally, I do not care to. I was raised here in America and my allegiance belongs to America. . . .
>
> I write, speak, converse, and dream in nothing but English and I know no other way of doing these things. (K-25)

Many see themselves as having a dual identity, and seek to find the balance between them.

> In truth, I consider myself "Korean-American." It's true I was born in Korea and I'm not a U.S. citizen yet but I've spent most of my life here. I probably won't be able to "survive" back in Korea anymore. I'm a Korean with American values, lifestyle, and mind. To me, being a Korean-American means to nurture Korean traditions and customs but also to assimilate into the American culture as much as possible. (K-10)
>
> The loss of one's cultural language symbolized the loss of one's cultural identity. Many Asian Americans pride themselves for successfully turning their kids into "complete" Americans who speak English in flawless American accent. In my perspective, this actually is something that they should be ashamed of. Without doubt, fitting oneself into the mainstream is important; yet retaining one's cultural language is not at all trivial. To me, I will try my best to excel both in English and my mother tongue, Cantonese. (C-26)
>
> I feel very lucky and enriched to have parents who believed in teaching their children how to speak their native languages. Many of my Chinese-American friends cannot speak their native language. I am proud to be Chinese (Taiwanese) and am very thankful that I do speak my native languages fluently. I feel that knowing my native languages has helped me as a person

and has reaffirmed my ties of being Chinese. Language plays an important role in a person's history, background, culture, and ethnicity. It enables the person to understand themselves or other people better. Learning a language at a young age takes the work out of this otherwise tedious task. I was fortunate enough to grow up in household full of people with versatile tongues. I am proud to be Taiwanese, Chinese, and as an American citizen, I am also proud to be American. (C-30)

I do regard multilingualism, or at least bilingualism, as an important part of anyone's lives. I am an American, but we all have our heritage to maintain. Each one of us is filled with a mixture of various cultures and ethnicities; this is what makes America so unique. If we all blend as one, there is nothing to separate our individual lives. There must be something which sets us apart from everyone else, something which allows us to stand out, and this is our ethnicity. We are all Americans, but to me, being an American means that we are all individuals from numerous ethnic backgrounds which have come together to live in peace and harmony. (C-41)

Learning the universal language and a native language ensures that no one person will grow up ignorant of their cultural identity. In America, knowledge of English is necessary to succeed, but each individual should not be forced to abandon his/her cultural roots. The United States, though standing for equality and democracy, has often been blinded by prejudices and racism into believing that linguistic minorities should abandon their heritage and become "Americanized" in order to prove their loyalty or else be excluded from society. But America should not become a "melting pot" where each person loses his/her identity while conforming to the majority. Rather America should become a "salad bowl" where cultural differences are appreciated and not oppressed by mixing cultures in which each retains a unique flavor and creates an enriched society. (C-64)

I have experienced prejudices because of speaking the Indian language in the public. When my family and I go to a public place and speak languages other than English we are given glares and rude stares. Majority of the American society feel it is rude of us not to speak English when we are out of our homes and associating with "Americans." They feel uncomfortable be-

> cause they think we are talking about them. They have often said that this is America and not India and that we should only speak English. I feel that is not what America is. It is a land of freedom and everyone has the right to free speech as long it does not hurt other people. We came to this wonderful country precisely for those rights. It is not fair tell Americans to speak *only* the language of a country that they are visiting or living in. If we are not hurting anyone than we have the right to speak any language that we please. That is America. (I-2)

Thoughts for future generations. Although there was a great deal of variation in heritage language fluency among the students and many different views about identity, almost everyone agreed that they wanted their children to know the heritage language if at all possible.

> I hope that when I have children of my own, they would appreciate the Chinese language as much as I do. Although they will be much more Americanized, I wish that beside English, they would also learn the Chinese language, without one more dominant over the other. I fear that if they only know English, they would lose a part of their culture identity. And not only that, there will be a tremendous communication gap between them and my parents. And at that time, I would have to play the role of a translator between my kids and my parents. That will be horrible! (C-13)
>
> I'm scared to lose a part of who I am. But more importantly, I realize that I have the awesome responsibility of one day passing on a precious language, that really is more than just a language, to my own children. (C-25)
>
> I was determined to teach my kids only English so that they would not have to go through this bilingual experience. But in hindsight, I think this experience was more positive than negative. I am lucky to be able to speak both Cantonese and English fluently. (C-45)
>
> Now I am having second thoughts about teaching my kids only English, because Cantonese for me was a source of identity. Bilingualism to me means dual identity. If I do not teach my kids culture a great part of which is language, then I will be breaking this vital link that has held generations of my family together. (C-45)

> I want to teach my children Cantonese because I want them to preserve some of our ancestral culture. In essence, I want my children to know and understand who they are. I do not ever want them to lose their Chinese identity even if they become completely Americanized. (C-70)

Conclusions. The changes in language attitudes that these students report are in keeping with Tse (1998), who discusses three stages of ethnic identity formation: (1) unawareness, (2) ethnic ambivalence or evasion, (3) ethnic emergence, and (4) ethnic identity incorporation. Most of the people writing these autobiographies are in stage 3 or 4, but the language journey for these college students is far from complete. Most will probably continue to go through different periods of life when their heritage language is more important to them and others when their heritage language is less important. Some will go on to careers where their contacts with the homeland are enhanced or where their heritage language plays a role, others will not. Some will marry people of the same language background, others will not. While almost all the students write that they hope to help their own children grow up bilingual, we know from past experience that second-generation and third-generation Americans are increasingly likely to know very little or nothing of their heritage language, and so the intergenerational struggle so clear in these autobiographies is likely to be repeated between these students and their children, or else the families will "surrender" to English.

Policy implications. The response of some to the points I have made here will be that it is a good thing that language shift is occurring so rapidly, and that the United States should be comforted by this fact. It is good for our country that immigrants are abandoning their languages, they will say. And after all, these are successful students, now in the university—so if they rejected their language, it seems like it must have done them good. But we need to look at the human cost of what is happening. As this paper has shown, the first language loss that so many students have experienced has been accompanied by a loss of family intimacy and communication, a sense of bitterness toward a system and people that the students have come to see as racist, and a sense of personal inadequacy. The bitterness in the student autobiographies is clear. These students have learned English, but they have grown up with a sense that no matter what they do, they are not being accepted as Americans. They have grown up with a strong feeling that this is a racist country that does not want to make room for them. Is this sense of bitterness and alienation good for our country?

There is no doubt that the school experience in the United States is the most important factor in the pressure on children to abandon their heritage language. We have seen in this paper that peer group teasing and ostracism is the pressure of which the immigrant youths are most aware. But implicit policies of the schools back up this pressure in many ways, not the least of which is the fact that school teachers and officials turn a blind eye to students' racist slurs (Benjamin 1997). In Benjamin's study of Spanish at an elementary school in New Mexico, she writes "The older siblings [of the students in the study] recounted the terrible experiences they had had in middle and high school. For those who were unwilling or unable to shift to English or conform to a more assimilated identity, the consequences were frequently rejection, suspension and even expulsion." Thus, although there is no necessary direct relationship between first language abandonment and success in education, the peer-group ostracism suffered by minority students works against success in the education system by students with a strong sense of ethnic identity—the very students who would be most likely to retain their heritage language. The one student who came from a school that celebrated multiculturalism could serve as a model for how our schools might begin to combat the intolerance that creates this bitterness.

Immigrant families are offering the United States a great resource of bilingual offspring, which the United States is rejecting, not only through the schools, but also through political intolerance within the government (witness the congressional efforts to make English the official language and the present legislative attacks against bilingual education and other bilingual services). And yet, bilingual citizens are increasingly needed as we become more involved with other nations diplomatically and economically. It would appear to be in the interest of the United States to foster and encourage bilingualism, through such programs as strong maintenance-oriented bilingual education programs (a hopeless thought, in the wake of California's Unz Initiative). Nor should America fear the development of the dual identity that many of these students are attempting to work out. The desire to be an American is not diminished by the desire to maintain a sense of identity with one's ethnic heritage. To end with a final quote from one of the student autobiographies:

> The lesson that I have learned is the value of language. It identifies the character and heritage of an entire group of people, and serves to bind them together. It is a precious gift that withers away if it is not used. It is often said that a mind is a terrible thing to waste. The same can be said about a language. (C-9)

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NOTE

1. Numbers following each quote reference the particular autobiography. "C-6" stands for Chinese autobiography #6, etc. K= Korea, I= India, P = Philippines, V = Vietnam.