



**ARE KOREAN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS A RACELESS SPACE? :
DISCUSSING RACE, IDENTITIES, AND POWER IN KOREAN
LANGUAGE EDUCATION**

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Abstract

The main goals of this paper are to identify race in Korean language classrooms; articulate the connection between Korean language learners' racial identities and Korean language learning; and discuss implications for Korean language educators. In order to do this, I first examine literature on English language education to glean themes related to race, language, and power. Next, I illustrate how race and Koreanness play a role in Korean education. Then, utilizing themes from the first two sections, I investigate the field of Korean language education in Korea and in the US. The final section presents implications for Korean language education.

Keywords: race; Koreanness; Korean language education; Korean language learner; language learner racial identities.

1. Introduction

K-pop, K-drama and “K-culture” (Korean popular culture) has grown increasingly popular worldwide, and so has Korean language education. According to a report by Duolingo (2020), the world’s most downloaded education app, Korean was the seventh most popular language to study on

the app. The number of King Sejong Institutes have increased as well (R. Kim, 2021). Compared to 2007, when there were only 13 Sejong Institutes operating across three countries, there were 213 institutes across 76 countries in 2020. In addition, the number of Korean language courses has been increasing in schools and universities globally. Vietnam has designated Korean as one of their first foreign languages, and Korean has begun to be offered in primary schools and above starting August 2021 (G. Oh, 2021). Furthermore, the Korean government has partnered with universities and K-pop agencies to promote the Korean language as a catalyst to spread Korean culture around the world (Kwak, 2020).

Among languages worldwide, Korean is the fourteenth most widely used language, and 77.3 million speakers are currently using Korean as their first language (Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, 2020, as cited in Kwak, 2020). However, in the United States, Korean is designated as one of the Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTLs). As of 2014, there were only 162 higher education institutions that offered Korean language classes in the United States (Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition, 2019), which was well below the most studied languages in U.S. higher education institutions such as Japanese, Chinese, and Arabic (Gordon 2015). Nevertheless, the number of U.S. university students learning Korean has nearly doubled in the past decade (Savillo, 2019). Given this context of an increasing and diversifying Korean language learner population, it is crucial to examine race, identities, and belonging of Korean language learners.

There has been a growing body of research on motivations of Korean language learners. Globally, Korean language learner motivation and language learning strategies have been examined in relation to Korean popular culture and Hallyu (Kirkpatrick & Liddicoat, 2019). In the United States, many studies have explored Korean language learner motivation through the lens of Korean heritage language education and ethnic identity development among immigrant Korean communities (Hsieh, Kim, Protzel, Caraballo, & Martinez, 2020; Shin, 2016). This is, in part, because the Korean language is a significant factor that constructs the Korean identity and Korean race. The Korean Ministry of Education (2017) announced that there were over 100,000 *damunhwa* (multicultural) students in the Korean public school system and over 120,000 preschool-aged children who were of *damunhwa* backgrounds, emphasizing “for students with multicultural backgrounds, above all else, reaching a certain level of Korean language communication skills in important to adjust well in Korean public schools and grow as a member of the Korean society”. Relatedly, one of the major factors to assert a ‘Korean’ identity and to be acknowledged as ‘Korean’, is to be a native Korean speaker, or at least have achieved a near-native level of proficiency. For example, there is a societal expectation that Korean diaspora (i.e. overseas Koreans) should possess a high level of linguistic and cultural competence lest they be positioned as “defective citizens” or “inauthentic and illegitimate South Koreans” (Lo & Kim, 2011).

While extensive literature investigates learner motivations, teaching and learning strategies, belonging and imagined communities of learners; there is a paucity of literature that examine Korean

language learners' racial identities and the dynamics of race within the Korean language classrooms. As an educator who has been in the field of Korean language and culture education in both Korea and the US, I understand and am aware of the increasing number and growing diversity of Korean language learners, as well as the need for anti-racist education and culturally responsive teaching. However, I wanted to understand more about the intersection of Korean language and race, identify the role of race within Korean language classrooms, and ultimately, challenge and motivate myself to become a more critical, anti-racist, culturally responsive, and inclusive educator. As a consequence, the aim of this study emerged from the need to address the issue of, "Are Korean language classrooms a raceless space?" This led to three main goals of this paper, which is to identify race in Korean language classrooms; articulate the connection between Korean language learners' racial identities and Korean language learning; and discuss implications for Korean language teachers and educators.

In order to do this, I first examine literature on English language education (e.g. English Language Learner/ELL, English as a Foreign Language/EFL) to glean essential themes related to race, identities, and power in English language learning settings. I chose to examine English language education because there have been critical discussions about race, identities, and power within the English education field and scholarly realm (Bonilla-Medina, 2018; Curtis & Romney, 2019; Motha, 2014), and there are tools, training, and resources available for English language educators to promote social justice in their classrooms through anti-racist pedagogical practices, advocacy-oriented pedagogies curricula, and culturally responsive teaching (Motha, 2014; Poteau & Winkle, 2021). In the second section, I illustrate how race and Koreanness play a role in the Korean education setting in order to better understand the context in which Korean language education is situated. Then, utilizing the main themes and frameworks of the first and second sections, I investigate the field of Korean language education in Korea and in the US. If Korean language classrooms are a *raced* space—how do they play a role in Korean language learners' (racial) identities and belonging? The final section integrates the research presented to illustrate the implications for practice and recommendations for Korean language educators

2. Themes from English Language Education

In the field of English language education, race has been examined from various angles and frameworks; generally in a context where race refers to people or students of color, and racism operates invisibly. In this paper, I borrow Barkhuizen's (2017) definition of race: "[race] reference not any biological difference but rather to subjectively and socially constructed understandings of racial identity and identification that perpetuate systems of categorization and social boundaries, such as boundaries between 'minority' and 'White'... boundaries between 'native' and 'non-native'" (p. 218). Race permeates and operates on all levels in the field of English teaching and learning. Motha (2014) points

to the fact that “racism has become so naturalized within the project of teaching English that its presence is no longer noticeable” (p. 37).

One of the major issues that emerges in the English language education sphere, as it relates to race (e.g. Critical Whiteness scholarship in English education), is the normalcy of Whiteness and the perpetuation of White supremacy in English language classrooms. Standard English and mainstream English have been equivalent to “coded phrases that connote Whiteness” (Grant & Lee, 2009, p. 55) as has been associated with native speakerness. In other words, there is a tendency to equate native English speakers with White and nonnative English speakers with non-White. Tanner (2019) echoes this by expressing that “the problem of Whiteness lives and breathes in our English classrooms and the field of English education” (p. 194), and further provokes “the field of English education to think of White people as having a race” (p.192).

The pattern of White supremacy and White as norm pervades the English education sphere outside the US as well. In Korea, as well as other countries “where a fertile environment for learning English is present, the variety spoken by White Americans is considered to be standard or target” (Grant & Lee, 2009, p. 55). Discrimination against nonnative professionals, many of whom are people of color, suffer from this false belief that White speakers are native English speakers:

“...essentialized dichotomy (i.e., *native speaker = Standard English speaker = White* versus *nonnative speaker = non-Standard English speaker = non-White*) has tended to blind us to the discrimination experienced by teachers who do not fit this formula (e.g., Asian or Black native speaker of English, White native speaker with a Southern U.S. accent)” (Lin & Kubota, 2009, p. 8).

Similarly, a study by Jenks (2017) illustrates racial and linguistic discrimination and racialized discourse in the English Language Teaching (ELT) profession in Korea. Jenks finds that White normativity—an ideological commitment and form of racialized discourse based on White privilege, saviorism, and neoliberalism—is prevalent in the system of Korean social structures and English education. Relatedly, blatant racism is common in recruitment of English teachers as well. Many educational institutions and organizations in Korea will only hire White English teachers, while refusing to hire non-White (especially Black) English teachers (J. Kim, 2014).

Racial identities of English language teachers is another important theme. While intersectionality helps us recognize how identities are complex and multifaceted, the field of psychology and education has documented how racial membership plays a significant role in perceptions of oneself and the environment they live in (Helms, 1993; Tatum, 2003). Motha (2006) investigated English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teacher identities and explained, “I consider linguistic identities to be inextricable from racial identities because I believe Whiteness to be an intrinsic but veiled element of the construct of mainstream English” (p. 497). While reflections on individual teacher identities are important, the racialized and colonized identities that become embodied in teachers through the ELT profession itself must be examined as well (Barkhuizen, 2017).

Racial stereotypes in English language textbooks (e.g. EFL textbooks) is another theme that is widely discussed in English language education. In various English textbooks and educational materials, there are patterns in which people/characters of different races are portrayed as being native or nonnative speakers of English (e.g. White character as native speaker of English). Furthermore, various social and professional roles are assigned to people of different races as well (e.g. White character as university English professor) (Curtis & Romney, 2019). Motha (as cited in Barkhuizen, 2017) illustrates how “meanings of English—often constructed in media, textbooks, and other discourses as associated with wealth, power, cosmopolitanism, modernity, coolness, and Whiteness—cannot be separated from representations of English speakers, most powerfully inscribed by images of English teachers” (p. 218). In other words, stereotyped portrayals of different groups of people in textbooks and instructional materials may perpetuate generalizations of both White and people of color in dominant cultures, further fueling a culture of discrimination.

Finally, racial identities of ELLs is another theme that emerges in ESL and EFL literature. When a learner uses another language, it involves communication with native speakers, organization of meanings about who the learners themselves are, and an understanding of their relation to the social world; thus, language learners’ identities cannot be separated from language since language is intrinsic in the identity of the individual (Norton, 2013). That is to say, racial identities are implicit in language learning due to the connections that coexist in language and identity (Bonilla-Medina, 2018). For example, Bonilla-Medina, Varela, and Garcia (2021) examined ELLs in Colombia and found that learners’ identities were shaped by an initial sentiment of attraction to the language and speakers of the language, which were generally transmitted unconsciously through media. The findings of their study also showed that learners’ perception of the foreign culture as well as the image that they have of themselves were influenced by the imaginary of English and its speakers. In addition, learners also appeared to model and shift their identities based on the characteristics that were provided by the environment and social conditions. This further illustrates how English language learners continue to create, recreate, negotiate, and transform their identities through their language learning journeys.

3. Themes from English Language Education Race and Koreanness in Korean Education

The U.S. government officially recognizes and uses systematic racial categories to determine and understand the demographic fabric of the country. In Korea, however, race and racial categories are not clearly delineated and officially utilized as in the US. Nevertheless, there is a system that operates to privilege majority and minority groups, and a social structure of inequality, power, and stratification based on skin color and physical features. Whiteness and White racial identity is normalized in the US, with White supremacy and White privilege prevalent and pervasive in all layers of life. Similarly, “Koreanness” (H. Kim, 2020)—belonging or to have Korean skin color, and the ideologies of Korean racial dominance centered on this construct—and Korean privilege permeates Korean society and

culture. Colorism, coupled with the structural and systemic inequality based on Koreanness, leads to a tri-racial hierarchy that consists of ‘Koreans’ at the top, ‘honorary Koreans’ as the intermediary group, and ‘the collective dark’ at the bottom (H. Kim, 2020). This racial stratification is evident in media and popular culture, especially, where the majority of non-Korean or mixed race Korean representation is those of lighter skin. For example, over 80 percent of non-Korean marriage partners (i.e. foreign wives and husbands) are from China, Vietnam, Philippines, Cambodia, Thailand, Mongolia; however, the majority of interracial couples shown in media and popular culture are Korean-White couples with mixed race Korean-White children (Alper, 2015).

Racism and colorism in Korea is endemic in the Korean education field where Koreanness is legitimized. Korean supremacy and systemic racism infiltrates the Korean curriculum, assumptions, messages, and practices. The hidden curriculum of Koreanness and colorism, harmful racial stereotypes, and offensive racist imagery manifests in Korean textbooks. In an analysis of over 90 different textbooks, the National Human Rights Commission of Korea found content that was problematic; specifically content maintaining cultural and racial hegemony and values of racial segregation. In the images used in textbooks, American children were portrayed to be White, with blond or orange hair, wearing formal clothes. On the contrary, Kenyan children were illustrated to be Black, with no clothes but leaves covering their bodies, shouting “Jambo! Mambo!” (Lee, Cho, & Kim, 2016).

In another example, the ‘Judge correctly without bias’ unit of a 4th grade Korean Ethics textbook shows how Korean supremacy and racial bias are widespread in mainstream Korean education. The unit is designed for students to watch a 4-minute animation video that shows the interaction between a Korean student, her Korean mother, and a “multicultural” Filipino student to (ironically) ‘judge correctly without bias’ (Nam, 2021). In the video, a Filipino student, Seongmin, visits his Korean friend, Hyunju’s house. When Hyunju’s mother hears that Seongmin received 60 points (out of 100 points) on his Korean language dictation test, Hyunju’s mother comments, “60 points? Awhew... even if your mom is from the Philippines, you shouldn’t only get 60 points.” When Hyunju’s mother meets Seongmin’s mother at school by chance, she rudely comments that Seongmin should study Korean rather than English. The video ends with the narrator narrating that Hyunju’s mother, who had looked down on Seongmin’s mother, was flustered, as she realized Seongmin’s mother was an elementary school teacher in the Philippines. This 4-minute video was “filled with all kinds of discrimination and hatred” (Nam, 2021); furthering harm and hurt to minoritized students and completely missing the purpose of the unit, which was anti-racist teaching.

Blatant racial discrimination is widespread within the school systems as well. According to a report conducted by the National Human Rights Commission of Korea (2019), 17.9 percent of immigrants to Korea experienced discrimination at schools, kindergartens, and childcare centers “more than occasionally” based on their racial and ethnic background. For example, a Korean kindergarten teacher was sued for using racial slurs and swear words such as *gumdungi* (N-word) to a fellow teacher from India (Chae, 2021). It was later found that the Indian teacher tried reporting the discriminatory

incident to the school, but the school decided to ignore his claims and remained silent. This incident highlights overt racism, implicit and explicit racial attitudes, as well as institutional racism. In addition, this illustrates the need for anti-racism training for teachers, staff, and school leadership, as well as transformative teaching programs to help educators develop anti-racist social justice practice. While there have been some attempts to incorporate anti-discrimination as a part of multicultural education in teacher training in Korea, “multicultural competency” is narrowly understood as a requirement for teachers to manage “the increasing of multicultural students” (Kim & Hyun, 2018). Efforts to actualize anti-racist education and culturally responsive pedagogy in classrooms—have been growing, but remains fragmentary.

The lack of anti-racism and social justice education by Korean parents further perpetuates racial stereotypes, bias, racism, and colorism. For instance, in the city of Hongseong, in Chungnam Province, there has been a recent increase of *Goryeoin* immigrants (ethnic Koreans in post-Soviet states) from countries like Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Despite opportunities made to have the Korean students mingle with the newly immigrated students, Korean parents did not engage, and instead told their children “not to get close with the foreigners” (Kim & Kim, 2018). It was also reported that Korean parents deliberately exclude non-Korean parents in information-sharing communities or group chat rooms. In a separate case, a Vietnamese immigrant student attending a Korean public elementary school, was ostracized, bullied, and received comments from Korean peers like, “My mom told me not to play with you” and “I’m scared of you because I don’t know what you’ll do” (Hong & Oh, 2021). These examples emphasize the need for parents to recognize and reconcile their own biases (including the legacy of Korean racism), and further help children be socially-conscious, anti-racist, compassionate, and justice-minded (Baxley, 2021).

Non-mainstream students (e.g. mixed race Korean students, *damunhwa* students) face racist barriers and discrimination on a daily basis inside and outside of schools. The very term, *damunhwa*, refers to multiple cultures or multiculturalism; however, in mainstream Korean culture, it has been widely used to label mixed race Koreans, immigrants, North Korean refugees, and ethnic Korean (e.g. Korean Chinese) students in Korea, especially those who are darker-skinned. While terminology such as *damunhwa* or *honhyul* (i.e. mixed race) has become a part of everyday words and phrases, it speaks to the unconscious history of racism and segregation, furthering the divide and Othering between Koreans and non-mainstream Koreans/foreigners. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic fueled xenophobia, racial slurs and threats towards those who do not visibly *appear* to be racially Korean. For instance, a mixed race Bangladeshi-Korean student, whose father is Bangladeshi and mother is Korean, received comments such as “Hey, corona!” and “These people are all illegal immigrants. Why are you coming to someone else’s country and living an unnecessarily difficult life?” because of the color of her skin (Park, 2021).

The growing significance of Korean multiculturalism in research has spurred increased scholarly attention on the experiences of non-mainstream students and their identities. For example,

identity formation and identity development of *damunhwa* students have been highlighted in prior studies in multicultural education. S. Oh (2019) explored six students from multicultural backgrounds and the significance of their experiences in the context of school education. The findings showed that *damunhwa* students contemplated their identities and which nationality they belonged to, while constantly facing prejudices at school and Korean society. In a different study, Heo and Kim (2021) examined children from multicultural families and their national and dual identity development, looking into specifically how social support network and experiences of discrimination influenced them (Heo & Kim, 2021). Heo and Kim suggest that being discriminated against by peers and having a large network of friends may lead multicultural students to have dual identities, and a strong national identity is achieved when they have well-established relationships with family, parents, and other adults. One noteworthy point from this study is that when students had an adult to turn to at school, they felt more comfortable about their dual identities. As seen above, most studies are centered on aspects of Korean *damunhwa* students' national, ethnic, cultural, and "multicultural" identities; research that explores the *racial* identities of mixed race students has received less attention.

4. Examining Korean Language Education

Despite growing research about Korean language education (e.g. language acquisition, teaching strategies, imagined communities of learners), there is very little research that maps race, identities, and power in Korean language classrooms. Numerous themes could be gleaned from research in the field of English language education on how race and racial privilege (e.g. Whiteness) permeates language classrooms, the racialized dichotomy of native-nonnative speakers, importance of English teachers' racial identities in teaching practices, and how race plays a role in language learning settings that influence learners' identities. There are themes and topics that may be derived from previous research studies in Korean education that inform analysis on Korean language education including hidden curriculum with hegemonic Koreanness, racism in school systems and classrooms, a need for anti-racism education by Korean parents, and identities of mixed race Korean and *damunhwa* students.

The (in)visible norm of the Korean racial identity and the racialized dichotomy of native Korean-nonnative Korean speakers has been widespread in Korean language education, both inside and outside of Korea. According to Kwon (2014), there are five types of Korean language: Korean as a foreign language; Korean as a second language; Korean as a dialect; Korean as a mother tongue; and Korean as a heritage language (see Table 1). Due to the scope of this article, three major types of Korean language—Korean as a Foreign Language in Korea and the US, Korean as a Second Language in Korea, and Korean as a Heritage Language in the US—will be discussed. This very categorization proposed by Kwon (2014) shows the racialized nature of the Korean language. The Korean Ministry of Education (2017) announced that there were over 100,000 *damunhwa* students in the Korean public school system and over 120,000 preschool-aged children who were of *damunhwa* backgrounds, emphasizing the need

for these students to “have a consistent level of Korean language communication skills...to adjust well in Korean public schools and grow as a member of the Korean society”. *Damunhwa* students in Korea, although they may have more than one mother tongue/native language including Korean, are classified as using Korean as a *second* language. This is due to the assumption that mixed race Koreans may be of dual/multiple heritages, but may only have one mother tongue/native language, which is not Korean. For this reason, the extremely diverse population of learners who are classified as *damunhwa* in Korean society (e.g. Vietnamese immigrant, mixed race Korean-Black, North Korean refugee, *Goryeoin*), may not only regularly encounter racism and unequal treatment in schools, but also linguistic discrimination within Korean language classrooms. Similarly, in the US, despite the growing racial diversity among Korean language learners, mixed race Korean Americans often are not recognized as learning their *heritage* language while Korean diaspora (e.g. Korean Americans) are (H. Kim, 2021).

Table 1 Types of Korean Language

Inside/ Outside Korea	Type of Korean Language	Note
	Korean as a Foreign Language	Korean language that foreigners learn
	Korean as a Second Language	Korean language of learners of multicultural backgrounds
Inside Korea	Korean as a <i>Bangeon</i> (Dialect)	Korean language related to a divided Korea (i.e. <i>Bukhan-eo</i> , <i>Joseon-eo</i>), Korean that keeps unification in mind
	Korean as Mother Tongue /Native Language	<i>Gugeo</i> (Korean language arts)
	Korean as a Foreign Language	Korean language that foreigners learn
	Korean as Mother Tongue /Native Language	Korean language of Korean students studying abroad, 1st-generation Korean immigrants, 1.5-generation Korean immigrants
Outside Korea	Korean as Heritage Language	<i>Goryeo-eo</i> (Korean language used by ethnic Koreans in post-Soviet states), <i>Joseon-eo</i> (Korean language used by North Koreans), <i>Gyomin Hangukeo</i> (Korean used by Korean diaspora), etc.

Note. Translated from Kwon, 2014.

Relatedly, in the US, there has been a tendency to classify Korean language learners by their race: Korean diaspora learners (who are racially Korean) and *tainjong* (other-race), racially non-Korean learners. In Korean language classrooms in U.S. public schools, over 75 percent of learners are not of Korean heritage (i.e. racially Korean), but are “*tainjong*” (Jang, 2017). There is a discrepancy between the Korean and American community in how (racially) non-Korean learners are viewed as well. For example, the eligibility of contestants of the First Midwest Korean Speech Contest state that “Contestants should be a college student who is currently taking or has taken within a year a Korean language course at a college or university in the Midwest area” (Chicago Korean Education Center, 2019); the call for contestants does not mention race, nationality, or ethnic background. However, in a report about this event, a Korean newspaper stated that this was a contest where “*tainjong* university students” showed off their Korean language skills (Hong, 2019), implying the racial background of contestants.

The racialized nature of Korean language is also evident in training, development, and education of Korean language teachers. For instance, there are two completely separate tracks in higher education institutions for Korean language teacher certification for “*Hangukin* (Koreans)” and “*Wegukin* (foreigners)” (e.g. Yonsei University’s The Institute for Training Korean Language Instructors). However, nationality alone can not be a determinant for whether one is a Korean native speaker or not. For example, if a Korean American, who is fluent in Korean and is a U.S. citizen, desired to receive training in Korean language teaching, would they fall under the “Korean” track or “foreigner” track? Similarly, would a racially non-Korean (e.g. Vietnamese), who is a naturalized citizen to Korea, and fluent in Korean, fall under the “Korean” track or “foreigner” track? These examples explain and illustrate the cultural affinity and racial association between the Korean language and its speakers.

Another prominent example of the racialization of Korean language is the 2021 *Sege Hangukeo gyoyukjadaehwe* (World Korean Educators Conference) in which there were more than 450 Korean language educators from over 44 different countries (Yu, 2021). Participants and presenters of this conference were predominantly racially Korean, discussing topics such as teaching Korean culture during the COVID-19 pandemic, using AI in Korean language education, and other teaching demonstrations (Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, 2021). Despite the surge in Korean language classes and the diversification of the Korean language learner population, workshops or sessions about anti-racist pedagogy, training on unconscious bias, or culturally responsive teaching were not present.

Koreanness and the ‘Korean as native’ formula is a standard indicator in many Korean language educational resources, including in Korean language textbooks (e.g. Korean as a Second Language, Korean as a Foreign Language textbooks). In a study of Korean language textbooks over the past 120 years, D. Lee (2020) found how racial discrimination is evident in Korean language textbooks and how biological justification is used for this racial prejudice. In addition, racially Korean characters in textbooks were represented as a clear majority, while White characters, especially from powerful colonial countries” were overrepresented (D. Lee, 2020, xxxiii). The illustrations of *waegukin*

(foreigner) almost always portrayed a White, male, while showing the only comparable language to Korean as English.

Visual images and written texts in Korean language textbooks lack appropriate representation of racial and linguistic diversity of modern Korea, while racial and gender stereotyping representations of non-Korean people of color. In many Korean language textbooks (e.g. Sogang University Korean), one of the very first vocabulary words is nationality, and the pictures that portray those nationalities have certain racial features. Americans, Canadians, and Germans are represented as White, male characters with blue eyes, while Chinese, and Vietnamese characters are portrayed as darker-skinned, female characters. In a Korean government textbook that is used for social integration program for immigrants, which was published by the Ministry of Justice and National Institute of Korean Language, a Filipino immigrant was illustrated a female with darker skin, who is a housewife, while a Russian immigrant was illustrated a White female with blue eyes, who is in Korea as an international student to learn Korean (C. Lee, 2016). This pattern exists in Korean language textbooks for immigrants as well, where darker skinned female characters are used to illustrate verbs like ‘to cook’ and Korean male characters are used to illustrate verbs such as ‘to work’ (C. Lee, 2016). The issues with biased materials extend beyond textbooks, however, given that teachers may use popular culture (e.g. K-pop, K-drama, films, webtoons) as a supplement to instruction, which may be problematic and stereotypical as well.

Race is often intertwined with culture and language in complex ways (Shuck, 2006), and since racism surfaces in Korean language classrooms in a myriad of ways, it is important to understand how race is inextricably tied to learners’ identities and learning experiences. While there are many studies highlighting Korean language learners’ *ethnic* identities, there are few studies that explore learners’ *racial* identities or how learners make sense of race in their worlds. For instance, Shin’s (2016) study examined 1.5 generation and 2nd-generation Korean Canadians and how they constructed their hyphenated identities within the heritage language learning context. The findings of the study showed that 1.5-generation Korean learners accepted their race, ethnicity, or hyphenated identities without evaluating from the perspective of the White dominant group, while 2nd-generation Korean learners experienced racial and ethnic exclusion in a White dominant society. It was also found that 2nd-generation learners unconsciously internalized Whiteness as well as self-Orientalizing their Koreanness.

With regards to mixed race Korean Americans, several prior research efforts have found that the Korean language and the language learning context were important factors in mixed race Korean identity development (Kim, 2016; 2021). Findings of a study of eleven mixed race Korean American university students showed that Korean language classes at a U.S. university and community-based Korean language classes provided an important ecology for mixed race Korean learners’ identities (Kim, 2016). In a separate study, it was found that Korean immigrant churches in the US and church-based Korean heritage language classes significantly influenced mixed race Korean American learners’ identities and their race consciousness (Kim, 2021). A noteworthy point is that most research that examines Korean language learners’ identities focus on *Korean* heritage language learners; research on

mixed race Korean learners and non-Korean, foreign learners and how they negotiate and reconcile multiple identities as it relates to Korean language education, remains scarce. While interest in Korean language learners' identities are increasing, little research focuses on KSL or KFL learners who are not racially Korean and how Korean language learning plays a role in their identities.

5. Implications for Korean Language Education

The explosion of Hallyu around the world has brought global attention to Korean culture and Korean language. Everyday, there are more Korean language learners, especially those who are not racially Korean. For example, over 75 percent of Korean language learners in the US public school system are not racially Korean or of Korean heritage, classified as *tainjong* (other-race) (Jang, 2017). While *munhwa* (culture) and *gukjeok* (nationality) have been used as lenses to understand the diversifying student population with relation to various aspects of Korean education, *injong* (race) and *pibusaek* (skin color) have not been used for analytical purposes. However, race is important because “world history has, arguably, been racialized at least since the rise of the modern world system; racial hierarchy remains global even in the postcolonial present; and popular concepts of race, however variegated, remain in general everyday use almost everywhere” (Winant, 2000, p. 170). The themes in previous studies in English language education and Korean education inform us how to analyze Korean language education. Prior research and related studies suggest that the (in)visible norm of Korean permeates Korean language education in the categorization of the types of Korean language education itself, the racialized native-nonnative Korean speaker dichotomy, the racialized nature of teacher training, generalizations and stereotypes centered on Koreanness in educational resources (e.g. textbooks), and the significance of Korean language education in Korean language learner identities. In other words, raciolinguistic ideologies of “looking like a language, sounding like a race” (Rosa, 2019) is prevalent in Korean language education; thus, Korean language classrooms are indeed a *raced* space. If this is the case, then, what are the implications for Korean language education?

Teachers' feelings, assumptions, and misconceptions toward students of different racial backgrounds translate into action and non-action (e.g. colorblindness, non-accommodation) (Herrera & Morales, 2009). As with colorblind English language teachers, colorblind or difference-blind Korean teachers choose to overlook differences among students and how racial hierarchies are embedded in Korean culture (including linguistics setting), continue to engage in nonaccommodation in students' diverse linguistic, sociocultural, cognitive, and academic needs, which have negative implications for students' learning and Korean language development. Teachers must be equipped with cultural competence training and culturally responsive methods specific to Korean language acquisition. In relation, deficit thinking/deficit mindset and microaggressions of teachers towards their students appears to be a major concern in Korean language education. For example, in a unit on Sino-Korean numbers, Korean language teachers may fall into misunderstandings, low expectations, or labeling of mixed race

Black-Korean students or Vietnamese immigrant students, as opposed to Chinese international students. When teachers hold deficit perspectives, they maintain negative assumptions about students and presume certain students cannot succeed because of certain attributes (e.g. they are dark-skinned, nonnative Korean). For instance, a middle school *gugeo* (Korean language) teacher called a Vietnamese immigrant student “*damunhwa*” in front of the whole class and humiliated the student’s Korean homework as “nonsense” (Kim & Kim, 2018). Thus, the first step would be for teachers to challenge the colorblind perspective and acknowledge racial, cultural, linguistic differences among students. Korean language teachers must also practice mutual accommodation (Nieto, 1992), where culturally competent teachers take into account various communication styles and experiences students have in their home and communities as the basis for learning, as well as work with students together to determine the most appropriate strategies and structures compatible with the disposition of each, for academic success with cultural integrity.

Korean language learner identities and Korean teacher identities—especially racial identities—are crucial to the language learning context, and must be discussed within all institutions that offer Korean language education. Many studies have supported the role of race and teachers’ meaning perspectives toward students of color, and how that impacts students’ identity formation and teachers’ professional practices at schools. In a context where “race is central to the way one interprets his or her identity and reality as well as the identity and reality of others” (Mezirow, as cited in Herrera & Morales, 2009, p. 208), it is essential to examine teacher and learner identities within Korean language learning. Reflecting on Korean teacher identity is important because racially Korean, Korean language teachers could be disadvantaging the very students they seek to empower by not knowing how their racial or cultural memberships inform the decisions they make about teaching (Liggett, 2007). Korean language teachers must be mindful of the aspects and assumptions of Korean culture and the influence these factors have on the way certain knowledge systems are validated because this could result in teachers’ inaccurate evaluations of their students. In the field of Korean language education, there is little research on how Korean language teachers negotiate the meaning of their Korean identities and how these influence their perspectives and beliefs about teaching. Currently, in many Korean language teacher education programs, the focus is mostly on teaching strategies and curricula; pre-service or in-service training on anti-racism or anti-racist pedagogy is not a requirement. Korean language teacher education must incorporate race and Korean language teachers must be conscious of how their personal, pedagogical, and professional identities are racialized.

Meanings of Korean, which are often constructed in Korean contemporary culture, Hallyu, media, textbooks, and educational resources must be critically analyzed. Learners’ identities are shaped by attraction to the language and speakers of the language, which are generally transmitted unconsciously through media (Bonilla-Medina, Varela, & Garcia, 2021). Much like how socioeconomic and geopolitical dynamics help ensure U.S. domination and the spread of English (Grant & Lee, 2009), the rise in the Korean economy and spread of Korean popular culture has increased the spread of the

Korean language. As Korean language education globalizes, textbooks must be revisited to not only reflect the growing diversity, but help students develop an understanding of complex cultures of different groups. Essentialized portrayals of Other, stereotypes, and cultural appropriation must be challenged in order to advance racial justice within Korean language classrooms.

Further research is also needed on the racialized identities of Korean language learners of all backgrounds in Korean language classrooms. Specifically, the messages reflecting racist sentiments, explicit forms of racism, linguistic imperialism, devaluation of students' heritage languages that are present in Korean language classrooms must be interrogated. Finally, utilizing critical frameworks as tools will help dismantle and deconstruct hegemonic worldviews and encourage both teachers and learners to examine the implications of race in the development of power and privilege (Kubota, 2004). Bringing together theory, research, and practice in the transformation of Korean language education towards racial justice will be a long and complex process, but like the Korean saying, '*chulligildo hangeoreumbuteo*' (A journey of a thousand miles begins with one step), small and steady steps will make great and lasting changes.

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