

Title: Korean Heritage Children and the Linguistic Strategies for Overcoming Low Proficiency
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Second-generation speakers at very low levels of heritage language (HL) proficiency often do not receive focus in the literature because of their at-chance performance on many tasks, their level of (dis)comfort with the HL, and lack of self-selection in HL studies. However, studying low proficiency heritage speakers—emergent heritage speakers, henceforth—provides us with novel linguistic strategies that may not often be seen at higher levels of proficiency. In the present study, we investigate the productive oral skills of emergent Korean heritage speakers living in the US. Our goal was to investigate (1) what areas of the heritage language provided the most difficulty in production of a narrative, and (2) what linguistic strategies emergent heritage speakers of Korean use when faced with a task requiring their HL. Thirteen second-generation Korean heritage speakers ages 7-13 were recruited to participate in a story elicitation. The students in this study were English-dominant heritage speakers with low levels of proficiency in Korean. The students attended a weekend Korean heritage school as their only source of formal Korean instruction; all students came from homes where Korean is spoken occasionally but for not as the primary and only home language. In a one-on-one task, each participant was asked to orally narrate 3-5 simple stories in Korean based on a sequence of pictures. Findings indicated that even with low proficiency emergent heritage speakers, larger syntactic elements like SOV word order and agglutinative morphology was not compromised. The area that provided the most difficulty with overall fluency is vocabulary; not having sufficient vocabulary created the largest hindrance to completing the task and provided the most frustration for the student. Students used the following strategies to overcome these difficulties: (a) code-switching, (b) using semantically similar words, and (c) creating new words out of existing Korean words (e.g., creating the word “play” from a combination of “fun” and “make”). Most notably, despite their apparent struggle with their HL, participants made every effort to conduct the task in Korean in the presence of the Korean speaking researcher, demonstrating keen awareness of interlocutor preference and social expectation. Although heritage language studies historically focus on how this population falls short of native speakers, these findings provide examples of what they *can* do despite the odds, challenging some of the deficit perspectives within our field.