1. Introduction

As Korea’s role as a global leader continues to grow at the outset of the 21st century, so does the role of Korean language education. Due in part to a growing diaspora, the geographic range in which Korean is spoken has extended well beyond the Korean peninsula. Each wave of émigrés brings a desire to provide language education, not only to serve the community’s children, but also to respond to ever increasing recognition of Korea’s growing economic, political, and cultural status. Korean is, after all, the one of the 20 most commonly spoken languages in the world today, with the number of speakers estimated between 67–78 million (Encarta 2007, Ethnologue 2007, Vistawide 2007), and the official language of one of the world’s largest and fastest growing economies (International Monetary Fund 2007).

In this paper, we consider the current state of Korean language education, with a focus on colleges and universities in the United States. As a compilation of demographics drawn from existing sources, this work is intended to provide Korean language professionals with a sense of the place that Korean occupies in the larger linguistic landscape of the United States. In providing this context, the work revisits questions regarding who does–and does not–study Korean at the college level, and considers possible explanations for the observed trends. The stance that I assume as author is admittedly personal: as an American interested in Korea, I have opted to consider these issues as they relate to my home country. In doing so, I occasionally proffer opinions in the hope of providing useful insights for those developing opportunities for learning the language. Finally, this paper should be construed less as a piece of original research, and more as a catalyst for on-going discussions of

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* This paper is a revision of a 2004 talk given at the “Korean Language Education & Korean Literature Study Worldwide” symposium, Kookmin University. I wish to thank the AATK leadership for allowing me to revitalize the work. I am likewise grateful for the input of two anonymous reviewers, as well as the information about language programs overseen by the College Board provided by Dr. Carmen Tesser.

1 I am hopeful that this work will be seen as a modest complement to publications by Chin Wu Kim (1996) and Ross King (to appear), both of which speak eloquently to the role played by the Korean language and Korean language education in the global context. I would also acknowledge the contribution to this discussion recently made by Sungdai Cho, Insook Chung, and Mark Peterson (2006), which has recently been brought to my attention.
what can be done to encourage more interest in Korean among American college students. As such, it is neither definitive nor comprehensive. It is, however, intended to be provocative in a productive and non-confrontational sense.

2. The Korean Language in the United States

Prior to assessing the state of Korean language education in the United States, it behooves us to examine the context in which the teaching of Korean operates, particularly in terms of demographics regarding foreign language use and pedagogy.

2.1. How many U.S. residents speak a foreign language at home?

While many both inside and outside the United States have characterized the nation and its people as largely (even proudly or hopelessly) monolingual, there is a sizeable minority of residents who do not regularly speak English. According to the 2000 national census, the proportion of people in the United States who routinely spoke a language other than English at home was approximately 18%. As we see in Table 1, the majority of non-English speakers were speakers of Spanish. As for Korean, it ranks number 8, with nearly 900,000 speakers.

Further examination of Table 1 reveals striking changes in the numbers of non-English speakers from 1990 to 2000. Languages associated with cultures centered in Europe (French, German, Italian and Polish) are on the decline, while languages with cultural centers elsewhere (Latin America and Asia) have seen increases. The exception appears to be Russian, which experienced growth in the United States due primarily to the collapse of the former Soviet Union at the end of the 20th century.

Table 1: Language Most Frequently Spoken at Home in the U.S. (1990 vs. 2000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>% change(90-'00)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total U.S. Population</td>
<td>230,445,777</td>
<td>262,375,152</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-English Speakers</td>
<td>31,844,979</td>
<td>46,951,595</td>
<td>47.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Spanish</td>
<td>17,339,172</td>
<td>28,101,052</td>
<td>62.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Chinese</td>
<td>1,249,213</td>
<td>2,022,143</td>
<td>61.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. French</td>
<td>1,702,176</td>
<td>1,643,838</td>
<td>-3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. German</td>
<td>1,547,099</td>
<td>1,382,613</td>
<td>-10.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Tagalog</td>
<td>843,251</td>
<td>1,224,241</td>
<td>45.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Vietnamese</td>
<td>507,069</td>
<td>1,009,627</td>
<td>99.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Italian</td>
<td>1,308,648</td>
<td>1,008,370</td>
<td>-22.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8. Korean</strong></td>
<td><strong>626,478</strong></td>
<td><strong>894,063</strong></td>
<td><strong>42.7%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Russian</td>
<td>241,798</td>
<td>706,242</td>
<td>192.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Polish</td>
<td>723,483</td>
<td>667,414</td>
<td>-7.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Rankings are based on the figures for 2000.
Likewise noteworthy is how the distribution of non-English speaking U.S. residents does not fully correspond to current foreign language teaching trends in the country.

2.2. How many U.S. students study a foreign language?

Whereas nearly 100% of students in Korean high schools and universities study a foreign language, the majority of American students have no formal foreign-language learning experience.

2.2.1. Secondary school foreign language Study. In 2000, the percentage of U.S. high school students who studied a foreign language was 44% (Draper and Hicks 2002:1). Of these, 69% were studying Spanish, with 18% studying French and 5% studying German. The remaining 8% studied a handful of other languages, including Latin, Chinese, Japanese, Russian, and Korean. Given America’s socio-political history, it comes as no surprise that the most commonly-taught languages reflect an strong Indo-European bias, with Asian languages playing a marginal (albeit increasing) role. It is worth noting, however, that the preeminence of Spanish in this context is not simply a matter of the nation’s recent / current immigration history; as Leeman (to appear) explains, the community of Spanish language, literature and culture scholars engaged in a concerted effort to establish a Spanish as an academic subject worthy of full consideration, on an intellectual and cultural par with French, German, Latin and Greek – languages that had previously dominated the foreign language landscape. As such, we have evidence that the nation’s current language profile is shaped by both internal and external forces – a point to which we will return below.

The limited range of foreign language options for American high school students is further reflected in available standardized testing options, particularly through the SAT® and Advanced Placement® programs. In 2006, for example, the SAT program offered 12 foreign language examinations covering nine languages, with Spanish being the most popular (Table 1). Of the 74,000-plus college-bound seniors who sat for both the SAT reasoning test and at least one SAT-II language examination, over 55% took one of the two Spanish-language options. For our purposes, it is worth noting that while only 5.2% of these language-exam takers sat for the Korean SAT-II (3,888 examinees), this number was sufficient to make the Korean examination the fifth most taken of the language tests.

A similar Indo-European bias has long been the case for AP® examinations: until 2007, the AP Program offered language tests only for Western European languages (Spanish, French, German, Latin, and Italian), with the overwhelming majority of test-takers in 2006 sitting for one of the organization’s two Spanish exams (Table 2).
Table 2: Number of College-Bound Seniors who sat for both the SAT Reasoning Examination and a Foreign Language Examination (2006)
http://www.collegeboard.com/about/news_info/cbsenior/yr2006/reports.html

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>32,919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>11,761</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish w/ listening</td>
<td>8,252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese w/ listening</td>
<td>6,166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Korean w/ listening</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,888</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French w/ listening</td>
<td>3,358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>3,104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese w/ listening</td>
<td>1,683</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German w/ listening</td>
<td>1,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern Hebrew</td>
<td>513</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>74,170</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Number of Students Sitting for Advanced Placement Language Examinations (2006)
http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/members/program/research/index.html

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spanish Language</td>
<td>101,473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French Language</td>
<td>21,572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish Literature</td>
<td>14,287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German Language</td>
<td>5,139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin: Virgil</td>
<td>4,844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin Literature</td>
<td>3,333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French Literature</td>
<td>2,009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian Language &amp; Culture</td>
<td>1,597</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Number of Examinations Taken</strong></td>
<td><strong>154,254</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Language &amp; Culture</td>
<td><em>new in '07</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese Language &amp; Culture</td>
<td><em>new in '07</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian Language &amp; Culture</td>
<td><em>in development</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The spring of 2007 has brought changes to the AP program, as it marks the first time that the agency has administered examinations for Chinese and Japanese. In addition, an AP Russian exam is in the works. Missing from this discussion, however, is mention of a Korean AP examination. The issue of what the AP program can bring to the future of Korean language study in the United States is critical, as an AP Exam implies the existence of a vetted high-school curriculum, complete with teacher-training workshops, sample syllabi, course guides, etc. Moreover, the presence of an AP program for a particular subject in the panorama of American secondary education confers upon that subject a heightened sense of importance and legitimacy. As such, it would seem well worth the effort to engage the appropriate entities regarding the possibility of establishing an AP program for Korean.2

2.2.2 Post-Secondary foreign language study. While most Korean students continue their foreign language study in university, such is not the case in the United States. As reported by Welles (2004), during the fall of 2002, only 8.6% of all students at U.S. colleges and universities studied a modern foreign language (1,347,036 out of 15,608,000). Once again, the majority were studying Spanish (~746,000 or 53%), while 14.5% were studying French and 7.5% where studying German. Only 5,211 had elected to study Korean (representing 0.4% of all university-level modern foreign language students), ranking Korean as the 12th most popular offering. It is important to emphasize that this figure represents an impressive increase in the number of students studying Korean (Figure 1). Since 1960, the population of college-level Korean-language students has increased 31 times over, with the largest gains made during the 1980’s. More recent increases include a doubling of students between 1990 and 2002. While overall number of students taking Korean language courses is still comparatively small, enrollments are rising. The question to be asked, then, is this: Will enrollments continue to rise into the next decade, or will we see a plateau? Ancillary questions would consider the relationship between the number of students studying Korean and their opportunities to do so, and how program development (both at individual institutions and among membership of larger organizations such as the AATK) relates to enrollment statistics.

2 Some colleagues have suggested that there have been unofficial discussions between members of a newly-formed Korean Special Interest Group of ACTFL and the College Board. An interview with the chair of the World Languages Advisory Committee of the Academic Council, however, has revealed that no official discussions about a Korean AP program have taken place. Prospects for developing such a curriculum in the short- or mid-term would appear dim, as the College Board has yet to assess the success of the exams in Chinese and Japanese. Moreover, I have been told that there are a number of prerequisites that would need to be addressed before any discussion about a Korean AP program could move forward, including assurances that a minimum number of students would sit for the exam in the first year; according to my source, approximately 6,000 exam-takers are required to make developing a multi-million dollar AP program fiscally feasible.

Having determined how Korean fits into the broader picture of foreign language study in the United States, let us now look at where Korean is taught, who takes Korean classes, and the reasons why these students have chosen to learn Korean.

3.1. Where is Korean taught?

Learning Korean at an American university is made difficult for one simple reason: most U.S. universities do not offer Korean language courses. According to Welles (2004:18), in 1998 there were 76 institutions offering Korean classes; in 2002, this number rose to 91 institutions, an increase of approximately 20%. While this increase is laudable, it is still the case that a very small percentage of colleges/universities in the U.S. offer Korean: 91 out of approximately 2,900, or a mere 3%.

According to the American Association of Teachers of Korean website, the number of universities offering Korean is in the low- to mid-eighties: 85 in 2004 and 82 in 2007. A breakdown of the levels offered at these schools (as collated and presented by the AATK) appears in Figure 2.
Exacerbating the problem of narrow availability is geography: the location of schools at which Korean is offered is limited. According to Welles (2004:25), about half of the students studying Korean in the United States were attending schools on the Pacific Coast (California, Hawaii, Oregon, and Washington). Another 23% were studying Korean the Northeast (New England plus New York, New Jersey, Delaware, and Pennsylvania) with the remaining students learning Korean elsewhere in the country. 2007 AATK statistics paint a slightly different picture, with 23% of programs located on the Pacific coast (13 in California), 34% in the Northeast (including D.C. and Maryland), 16% in a Great Lakes state, and the remainder scattered about the American south. In short, if a student wishes to access an organized Korean language program, s/he is best served by attending a school on either the East or West Coast.

The figures reported here do not systematically include institutions that offer Korean in a non-traditional basis: as a “Critical Language,” Korean instruction is at times offered in the context of a SILP, a Self-Instructional Language Program. In some cases, up to three levels of Korean are offered as SILP courses on a regular basis; in other cases, Korean classes are provided to students only as demand warrants. According to the headquarters for the National Association of Self-Instructional Language Programs (NASLIP), Korean is currently the 9th most commonly offered SILP language, preceded by Arabic (the most common SILP offering), Japanese (second most common), Mandarin (third), Russian, Portuguese, Hindi, Swahili, and Vietnamese (Alex Dunkel, p.c.).
3.2. Who studies Korean?

My own observations of students in Korean language classes suggest that there are four types of learners: heritage learners, true novices, mixed-heritage / adopted students, and speakers of other East Asian languages (native and non-native speakers alike). Each type of student enters into the language-learning endeavor with differing personal, socio-cultural, and educational experiences, as well as distinct motivations and expectations, all of which should inform curricular decisions.

3.2.1. Heritage students. The largest group of Korean language students is made up of Korean-Americans, both those who were born in the United States and raised by Korean-speaking parents and those who were born in Korea but immigrated to the United States, often at a young age. Many of these heritage learners are either bona fide native speakers or quasi-native speakers of Korean, as they have been active users of the language at home or in their communities. While these students claim some proficiency in the language, they come to class with a wide range of abilities: while some are very fluent, others have basic communicative competence but lack the skills of a mature speaker. In addition, many of these students arrive at college knowing how to read and write Korean script, as they have attended han’geul hakkyo (‘Korean School’), sponsored by Korean churches and cultural associations.

Given the skills that they bring with them to university, many heritage learners do not have much to gain by enrolling in lower level courses; rather, they require specially developed sections in which they can transition from “child-like” speakers of Korean to “adult-like” users of the language. More specifically, they need to expand their vocabulary (especially career-specific lexical items); learn and use a wider range of grammatical forms; become more comfortable using formal speech styles; and acquire adult-like rhetoric. Unfortunately, accommodating the needs of heritage learners is often beyond the budgetary resources of many programs; given the relatively low demand for Korean language classes at many institutions, setting up special “heritage learner sections” is not viable. This situation creates conflict at many schools. In some cases, heritage students might be deprived of an opportunity to develop their language proficiency as they are prevented from enrolling in Korean language classes (under the assumption that their skills already exceed what it taught in a very limited one- or two-year sequence). In other cases, heritage students are placed in courses with less experienced students, thereby creating tension in the classroom, directly contributing to a widely-remarked-upon attrition of non-heritage students in second-semester.

3 The characterizations advanced in this section are wholly my own. That said, I have received feedback from colleagues who inform me that these descriptions ring true. I believe it would be worthwhile to organize a nationwide survey of Korean-language learners to help us learn more about who studies Korean and why they do so. I heartily endorse any such effort.
3.2.2. True novices. The second group of students includes non-Koreans who have decided to learn the language. In many years of working such students, I have learned that most of them decide to take Korean language classes because they have enjoyed positive, direct associations with Korean people. In some cases, they have had close friends who were Korean. In other cases, they may have been to Korea for business, military, or missionary work, and decided to invest time and effort into learning more about the culture. Finally, there is what can be labeled the "tae kwon do effect": an interest in Korea that comes from a student’s study of Korean martial arts. What better way to connect more fully with the heart and soul of tae kwon do than to become more aware of the source language?

What is perhaps most important to realize about such students is that their decision to study Korean is based on a retrospective (or current) connection with Korean that is personal and heartfelt, perhaps even intimate. To my knowledge, few students decide to study Korean without such prior direct experience. This point is critical, as it suggests how Korean language study differs from that of Chinese or Japanese, as many students who decide to study these languages often do so in a less personal and more prospective manner: Even though they have never been to China or Japan, or had any significant personal contact with either culture, they trust that knowledge of these particular languages will help them in the future. Unfortunately for those of us interested in Korean studies, examples of students deciding to take Korean language classes on the basis of such “faith” are rare.5

3.2.3. Mixed-heritage / Adopted students. The third group includes primarily students who are of mixed parentage (Korean and non-Korean) and are raised in the United States. In terms of cultural self-identification and language skills, these students comprise the most heterogeneous group. The most serious issue confronting many of these mixed-heritage students is a conflict of identity: many sense that they belong not to both cultures, but rather, to neither. While most of these students are Americanized from a cultural perspective, they struggle with the presuppositions that “fellow Americans” make about them, chief among these, that they are foreigners.

4 I am such a student. My initial efforts to study Korean ended after one semester, as I felt out of place as the only student of European extraction in my beginning course, which was populated by approximately 25 other students, all but one of Korean heritage. With neither the cultural nor the linguistic advantages of a heritage learner at my disposal, I felt uncomfortable, alienated, and ultimately unsuccessful. Subsequent efforts as a Korean-language learner were dramatically different, as I next studied the language via independent-study and then at Yonsei University’s Korean Language Institute, with classmates who were at my level of proficiency.

5 Worthy of mention are federally-supported language programs operated by the U.S. Department of State and Department of Defense, which are responsible for providing Korean language education for large numbers of non-heritage students. Taking advantage of these opportunities is not an option for most U.S. residents, however, as they require the personal and professional commitments that come with employment in each agency.
(One mixed-heritage student has told me how tired she has become when people complimented her English; her language proficiency is hardly surprising, given that she was raised and educated in the United States. It just so happens that her mother is Korean.) These students are sometimes aware of and engaged in Korean cultural praxis, regardless of their language proficiency; they might, for example, be familiar with Korean cuisine or appreciate Korean social norms of deference to authority and age. Given that their exposure to Koreana varies, some mixed-heritage students find themselves more closely aligned with students in group one (Korean-oriented) while others share more in common with those in group two (American-oriented). Unsurprisingly, linguistic proficiency and personal expectations regarding Korean language study likewise vary, from “some” to “none.”

A sub-group of this third type of student includes those born to Korean parents but subsequently adopted by non-Koreans and raised in the U.S. These students deserve special mention as they may come to Korean language classes with hopes and concerns that are emotionally charged. Although they present a Korean physical appearance, these students typically have no significant understanding of Korean culture. Indeed, they often decide to take Korean language courses to reconnect with their lost heritage. Despite this desire, problems often arise because of a disconnect between the student’s appearance and language abilities: some carry feelings of guilt or shame for not knowing their “native language.” Many have been teased or harassed by their Korean-speaking counterparts for not appropriately “acting the part” of a Korean. As one student lamented, “I feel a lot of pressure to ‘be more Asian,’ but I have no idea what that means.” Despite outward appearances, these Korean adoptees must not be considered heritage learners, but true novices.

3.2.4. Speakers of Other East Asian languages. The final group comprises those who already speak an Asian language, often as native speakers. They have opted to study Korean either because they have enjoyed a positive personal experience with a Korean person (such as those in group two) or because they believe that learning Korean will be an easy, practical means of expanding their communicative abilities in the East Asian context. Linguistically, these students are most like true novices. All the same, they bring two key advantages to the Korean classroom: (1) an understanding of East Asian cultural mores and (2) familiarity with Chinese-based writing and vocabulary. As such, these students perform differently than those in each of the previous three groups. They do not possess the language-specific experiences of most heritage learners and so can not compete directly with them; these students do, however, typically outperform the true novices and more Americanized mixed-heritage students.

As we see, many Korean language teachers in the United States face a serious challenge in the classroom: how to deliver effective instruction to students with disparate experiences and expectations. Further complicating this difficulty are the differing motivations that students bring to the Korean language classroom.
4. Motivation

4.1. Why do students choose to study Korean?

When we consider the reasons behind each group’s desire to study Korean, two familiar motivations emerge: instrumental and integrative. For students in groups one, two, and three, the primary motivation to study Korean appears to be integrative: to strengthen personal and social ties to the Korean community. To ascribe an exclusively integrative motivation to the students in these three groups, however, is an oversimplification. For some, particularly many of the heritage students in group one, there is a strong instrumental drive to study Korean (as opposed to another language): to fulfill an academic requirement. As nearly every Korean teacher in the United States will admit, reasonably fluent Korean speakers will occasionally place themselves (or at least attempt to place themselves) in a first-level class with less than noble intentions: to fulfill the language requirement quickly, easily, and with an “A.” As noted above, however, the presence of these linguistically competent students in low-level courses poses larger scale curricular problems, particularly in terms of how they are perceived by true novices.

Instrumental motivations for studying Korean also extend to those who already control an Asian language. Many choose to learn Korean for personal enrichment or economic advantage: knowing Korean in addition to another of regional language increases their chances of securing certain types of employment, particularly with firms conducting business in multiple Asian countries. Many of these students also realize the degree to which their personal experiences can facilitate their acquisition of Korean, thereby lending further instrumental motivation to study the language.

In an parallel framework, we can differentiate between the Symbolic Capital conferred by a knowledge of Korean—identifying with the target culture, thereby laying (more legitimate) claim to membership in the Korean community—and the Economic Commodification of the language—studying the language to improve prospects for career success either directly (proffering a knowledge of the language as vital job skill) or indirectly (earning the “easy A” to raise one’s GPA, thereby improving admission chances to graduate or professional school, etc.). All of these issues notwithstanding, there is no denying that the pool of students pursuing Korean-language study remains relatively small. The question then arises as to why.

4.2. Why do so few students study Korean?

When considering the relative dearth of Korean-language students, particularly the very small number of “true novices,” one might consider at least five barriers.

The first reason has already been discussed: a lack of opportunity. Since fewer than one in twenty-five of U.S. colleges offer Korean, studying the language is not an option for most American students. At those institutions that do offer Korean, there is sometimes the additional issue of “equal access,” that is, the near-ubiquitous
need to provide separate sections for heritage students and non-heritage students. Ross King (p.c.) has suggested that when such a differentiation is made, an underlying demand can, in fact, emerge. As mentioned above, however, the limiting factor is often a scarcity of resources, which precludes the creation of “extra” sections and hiring of “additional” teachers.

The second reason is the relative difficulty inherent in learning the language (that is, for those whose native language is an Indo-European tongue). A Foreign Service Institute Category IV language, Korean is exceptionally difficult for native speakers of English, requiring nearly two years of full-time study to reach a the level of “General Professional Proficiency” (http://www.nvtc.gov/lotw/months/november/learningExpectations.html). Moreover, achieving this level of proficiency can be best achieved when students study the language in-country, thereby increasing the personal and economic investment required to achieve their desired linguistic goals.

These two points converge, as there are linguistic and affective advantages conferred upon students who can secure the resources to enhance their experience by living in-country. As one reviewer has suggested, whether or not one opts to live in Korea early on in his language-learning career may make a difference in whether or not he successfully negotiates the “first-year hurdle.” If this is true, then we have evidence that providing students financial support to study the language in-country (e.g., scholarships offered by the Korea Foundation) may improve retention. While such a claim is intuitively appealing, it merits systematic tracking and assessment.

The third barrier is related to the second: a perceived lack of future benefit relative to the required investment. For true novices, studying Korean is a costly endeavor that may yield relatively low payoff, particularly in light of the large number of Korean-American heritage speakers who come to the table with considerably greater chances of attaining the status of true, balanced bilinguals. In the end, a true novice considering Korean as a foreign language option might wonder, “Why choose Korean? What good will it do me? How can I possibly compete?”

Reason number four is, in turn, related to three: a perceived lack of benefit is easily coupled with a perceived lack of need. “Why bother learning Korean,” one might ask, “given that most educated Koreans speak English?” This perception is reinforced by the misapprehension that since all Koreans study English, all Koreans speak English. Not so. Experience informs me that my control of Korean is almost always less well-developed that my Korean colleagues’ control of English, their protestations notwithstanding. As such, it is not unusual for a conversation to revert to English as a means of accommodating the presence of even a minority of English

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[6] Many of Koreans are quick to dispel this myth; I am frequently told by newly arrived students that the English that they have studied for some 12 years seems nothing like the English they encounter on a daily basis in the United States. I suspect that these concerns are further compounded by dialect issues: I would be surprised to discover that Korean students have learned the variety of English routinely spoken by residents of north-central Texas.
speakers. Any use of Korean becomes largely symbolic (and, I have found, much appreciated, regardless of the foreign interlocutor’s level of proficiency).

Finally, there is a widespread lack of awareness of Korea and things Korean among Americans. Alas, stereotypes of all Asian people being a homogeneous group (usually “Chinese”) persist. I can vouch for the fact that the majority of Americans—including those with advanced university degrees—are surprised to learn that the Korean language is not directly related to Chinese and that Korean is written with its own alphabet. Moreover, any first-person awareness of Korea that came from U.S. involvement in the Korean Conflict has declined sharply in recent years, as the soldiers who fought there in the 1950’s pass away. And while Korean consumer goods are increasingly common in American homes (e.g., Hyundai automobiles and Samsung electronics), many Americans do not recognize these articles as Korean. Simply put, for the vast majority of Americans, Korea is not on the radar screen.

5. The Branding of Korea

The contention that Korean suffers from a lack of clear “brand recognition” among Americans is by no means novel. Consider the following passage taken from a 2005 weblog published by WhisperBrand:

**Korea is a nation in search of a new image.** As reported in the Korea Herald, Korea senses the need to stand out in the global marketplace: While Japan is known for its sushi, Sony Walkman and Tokyo’s Ginza district and China is famous for Kung Fu and the Great Wall, Korea is recognized for - well, it’s hard to say. Branding uncovers the best key point of difference of a product or place. Finding that one key difference, that one thing, is difficult work. Unless the new brand image points to a difference no other nation may logically own, what you see is advertising rather than branding. … A new brand image, effectively developed, by itself becomes a significant economic driver for Korea.

(http://www.whisperbrand.com/blog/2005/01/korea-brand-image/; January 18, 2005)

This observation is worth considering in light of Korean efforts to establish and promote a successful brand image. Consider, for example, the “Dynamic Korea” campaign, originally launched in 2004 and updated in 2007.

![Figure 3. The logo for the “Dynamic Korea” campaign](image-url)
“Dynamic Korea” has been an effort to promote the nation as a vital, technologically and socially forward-looking community, embracing the 21st century as a global leader in education, science, economics, and politics. The campaign’s website describes its logo, which:

… represents a contemporary interpretation of the traditional Korean taegeuk (yin and yang) pattern and expresses ‘new waves’ that symbolize an ever-continuing process of change and creation. The logo further conveys the belief that all changes begin from the roots and the image of a dynamic and forward-looking Korea.
(http://www.korea.net/news/issues/issueDetailView.asp?board_no=342)

More recently, the Korean Ministry of Tourism has launched its own tourism brand (showcased at the AATK meeting on June 15, 2007): “Korea, Sparkling.”

![Korea Sparkling Logo](image)

**Figure 4.** The logo for the “Korea, Sparkling” campaign

Unveiled in April 2007, “Korea, Sparkling” is an effort to generate interest in Korea as a tourist destination for a range of potential visitors, be they interested in history, shopping, golf, hiking, or other activities. The graphic image is (arguably) difficult to decipher. Fortunately, one finds guidance on the agency’s official website:

The visual identity symbolizing “Korea, Sparkling” is based on the image of two overlapping windows. It was designed to depict the beauty of Korea, where both traditional and modern elements coexist in harmony. The empty space in the center of the image represents the unlimited possibility of individual experience available to each tourist visiting Korea.
(http://english.tour2korea.com/12Home/Notice_Read.asp?oid=3363&nCategoryID=2&iPageToGo=1)

As these examples suggest, there has been no small effort invested in attempting to establish an image that can be immediately and uniquely associated with Korea. Whether these efforts ultimately yield fruit remains to be discerned. Intending no disrespect to the agencies that have developed and advanced each of these two campaigns, I hesitate to express tremendous enthusiasm for either, particularly in light of the more organically-emerged “brand images” associated with China and Japan (e.g., the Great Wall and the Ginza). In these cases, it is the consumer base
that has come to apparent consensus upon the synecdochic relationship in each case—“China = Great Wall,” etc.—and not an official entity driving the relationship between brand and product. The extent to which this modern marketing approach works as Korea seeks a more clearly established brand identity remains to be seen.

Critical assessments aside, those interested in advancing the cause of Korean studies might be well served to consider how these brands might be embraced to foster a positive effect in shaping the future of Korean language programs. King (to appear) makes a similar point with regard to the recent phenomenon of hanlyu ‘Korean wave’: “…hanlyu should be exploited as much as possible for Korean [Language Spread Policy, or “LSP”], and is also an excellent example of how non-economic (affective and/or identity-related) factors can affect language status.” Branding not only matters, but can prove useful tool in for effective LSP.

6. Looking Forward

6.1. Programs, infrastructure, and superstructure

At this juncture, it is worth considering a national-level assessment of Korean language education in the U.S. As implied above, there has been considerable success in developing individual Korean language programs at various levels, from the establishment and maintenance of han’guel hakkyos, to the implementation a few high school programs, to the development of the Korean SAT-II, to SILP offerings, to 1-, 2-, 3-, or 4-year course sequences, to full-blown degree offerings in Korean. But as King (to appear) remarks, efforts thus far to promote the spread of Korean globally (i.e., South Korean LSP) has “been both meager and uncoordinated” (albeit sincere and imbued with much effort). From this point, then, which path makes the most sense: Maintaining the status quo? Consolidating or restructuring existing programs? Expanding the number of programs nationwide? Pursuing these questions at a national level is critical to the future success of Korean language education as doing so moves our collective efforts out of the realm of strategizing at just the program level, making further advances in the domain of “infrastructure,” and pursuing more aggressively matters of Korean language teaching “superstructure” (terms advanced in Brecht and Walton 1993).

Beyond the program level are key “Infrastructure Components,” including a research tradition, connections to area studies programs, resources for materials development, and institutions committed to the field on a long-term basis (Brecht and Walton 1993:7). Perhaps least well represented among the infrastructure components at this time is Brecht and Walton’s item 7: “rigorous field assessment and feedback mechanisms.” These, I believe, can be—and, indeed, must be—more fully developed and implemented to strengthen the field’s infrastructure.

Unifying programs and infrastructure is a meta-level of strategizing that Brecht and Walton refer to as “superstructure,” which comprises four components: an
Expertise Base (which certainly exists for Korean), a Language Learning Framework (i.e., collaboration in developing a reasonably unified curriculum), a strategic planning process for the development of the field (which begins with an awareness of where we are at and where we want to go), and field-based proactive organizations (such as the AATK and ACTFL). Making further inroads toward a vibrant superstructure for Korean language learning in the United States will require collaboration among language teachers, Korean studies scholars (including linguists, anthropologists, and pedagogical theorists), program directors, and academic administrators to assess, discuss, and plan. One specific suggestion would be to engage the developers of existing Advanced Placement language and culture programs (e.g., those involved in the recently implemented Chinese and Japanese curricula) and seek advice. Whether a Korean AP Exam is ultimately developed is arguably beside the point. Indeed, more to the point is the model that such a planning process can offer, a critical step toward determining needs and adjusting capacities.

6.2. Balancing needs with capacities

As Brecht and Walton suggest, the road to program success lies in reconciling needs with capacities, working toward an optimal balance. It is thus worth revisiting Brecht and Walton’s 1993 framework, which has us first define need in terms of three complementary perspectives. First there is the need for competence, “the capacity necessary to perform a range of occupationally or professionally relevant communicative tasks with member of another cultural and linguistic community using the language of that community…” (1993:2). In this respect, those interested in promoting Korean language study might pursue a “Critical Language” angle, whereby the study of Korean is attached to the nation’s pragmatic needs, be they diplomatic, military, business, etc. Second is an educational rationale for teaching Less Commonly Taught Languages. Here, teaching LTCLs can be construed as an explicit overture toward valuing a wider variety languages and cultures, particularly those beyond the European sphere. Third is the matter of ethnic demand, which “refer[s] to the obvious national need to deal domestically with an increasingly multicultural and polylinguial society, while at the same time ensuring that this segment of the population has at least the opportunity and necessary resources to preserve first-language skills for employment in international contexts” (1993:3). Under this rubric, we recognize the social, political, cultural, and economic power vested in non-Anglophone constituencies. Many would argue that a multilingual American populace–those controlling English plus a second language–is key to the nation’s future success on the international stage.

In response to these demands, the nation must be able to provide sufficient and appropriate capacity: “the ability to respond to constant or changing national needs as defined above” (Brecht and Walton 1993:3). Hence we must ask ourselves what role Korean language educators might play in providing this response, but not until
we have more fully understood the corresponding demands. This approach can be encapsulated graphically in terms of Brecht and Walton’s “Language Capacity Model” (figure 5), in which capacity drives supply, need drives demand, and supply and demand are adjusted such that they ultimately coincide.

**Figure 6.** National Foreign Language Center (NFLC) Language Capacity Model (Developed on Brecht and Walton 1993 and illustrated on the NFLC website)

7. Conclusions

As we look to the future of Korean in the United States, we must do so methodically and cooperatively. Without an organized effort, Korean language teaching will struggle to move itself out of the group of LTCLs with either no “substantial field architecture” (where Brecht and Walton situated Korean in 1993) or an “inchoate field architecture” and into the group of LTCLs with a more developed field architecture (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Russian, Hebrew). Part of such planning begins with understanding the broader context in which Korean language education takes place, and critically assessing success to this point. Fundamental to this effort is a comprehensive understanding of who studies Korean and why. As King (to appear) makes clear, part of these deliberations must acknowledge the fact that while Korean is clearly a world language, it does not qualify as what de Swaan (2001) refers to as a “Supercentral” or “Hypercentral” language. King writes:

No doubt many of my Korean colleagues in Korean language education will be disappointed, or perhaps even insulted, that Korean has not made the cut for “Supercentral” language in de Swaan’s system, but the characterization as “Central” seems fair. As hypercollective goods, languages are in some sense ‘free’, but learning them nonetheless requires investment, and Korean, in particular, requires a significant investment from its foreign learners. Korean may be making headway recently into the ranks of ‘world languages’, but an ‘international language’ it is not.

I suspect that King has struck an emotional chord. Nevertheless, one can argue that any effective strategy for promoting the study of Korean has no room for excessive ego or self-limiting nationalism. Complex challenges require complex solutions founded on empirical fact and reasoned analysis. Without a deliberate, systematic
effort, Korean language study may perpetuate a scenario that Brecht and Walton described for the majority of Less Commonly Taught Languages 14 years ago:

… [A] recognition of increasing needs from the demand side of LCTL competency coupled with renewed efforts to match these needs from the supply side, as evidenced by … recent efforts … by no means assures an effective match. Indeed, the attempt to match such supply to demands has been going on in one form or another since World War II, apparently without the desired results. (1993: 2)

These concerns have been addressed from a somewhat different perspective by Cho, Chung and Peterson, who argue that while Korean is a world language in “in terms of numbers and diversity of speakers” (2006:12), it has yet to attain world language status “with regard to national standards for learning languages and integrated performance assessment” (2006:15). Cho, Chung and Peterson enumerate six factors that “will help determine the degree to which the Korean language will be able to solidify its legitimacy as a world language” (2006:12); in doing so, they offer a less critical assessment of the current state of the discipline, adopting a stance that is arguably more optimistic than that advanced here. While it is important to hope that Korean language education can be started earlier (via elementary-school immersion programs), that an AP program can be developed, and that we can build on success at the post-secondary level, I would respectfully contend that we must take a more critical view of how capacity, supply, need and demand interact in ways that present us with the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that are specific to the goal of expanding Korean-language education in the United States.

I realize that some Korean academic, cultural, and business organizations believe that if we simply increase the number of opportunities to study Korean in the U.S., more students will elect to learn the language. I would respectfully disagree with this approach of “build it and they will come”: establishing more Korean programs without linking them to an explicit infrastructure and superstructure is not likely to yield long-term enrollment increases. Brecht and Walton would have us understand that doing so effects cures for problems that might not exist in ways that we believe them to. Instead, we must work together to make studying Korean more attractive to a wider range of students, thereby stimulating demand to justify an increase in supply and not vice-versa. To this end, we must (re-)initiate a cross-institutional, national-level discussion to promote awareness of Korean culture and make potential students see personal and economic advantages to learning Korean. We would be wise, for example, to play up potential learner motivations for pursuing Korean, be they integrative (“joining Korea as a major player on the world stage”) or instrumental (“proficiency in Korean as economic or social capital”). Connecting such efforts with on-going branding campaigns may prove symbiotic, with opportunities for language study generating interest in travel to and investment in Korea. Moreover, these efforts much be tailored to the specific demands and
expectations of the American audience—a constituency that, unlike many of those in Asia, has not embraced the “Korean wave.”

In pursuit of these goals, the AATK is uniquely positioned to assume a leadership role. There are, however, questions that require answers. For example, what would such an effort require from the AATK in terms of possible restructuring and investment? To what extent might the we continue to work in concert with appropriate constituencies both in Korea and the United States (e.g., the College Board, ACTFL, NASILP)? What support might the AATK provide to coordinate efforts to enhance the role of Korean studies in existing programs (area studies, core curriculum, etc.)? Finally, what might each of us do as AATK members to advance the cause? I would argue that we must come to consensus about working together toward shared goals, which are left to us to establish. While this paper admittedly fails to answer these questions satisfactorily, it is hoped that by presenting a number of relevant facts and figures, it will encourage (or better, reinvigorate) a fruitful dialogue on the matter of Korean language education in the United States.

References


As one reviewer suggested, looking to growth in the International Association for Korean Language Educations may prove enlightening. A comparison of IAKLE membership data from 1999 and 2003 indicates that the plurality of overseas members still live in the United States; since 1999, however, there have been marked increases in the number of members resident in China, Japan, and Russia. Whether this pattern indicates that “Korea is taking steps toward become a world language” (as the reviewer writes) merits longitudinal study.