



Research Study

Fostering Plurilingualism as a Strategic Tool for Better Learning: An Ethnic Korean High School in China

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ABSTRACT. This contribution reports how a pluralistic educational model (Coste et al., 2009) was implemented in a local context, especially through a trilingual education program at a high school for a minority nationality in the ethnic Korean community school (K-MNS) in northeast China, and how it affected students' discourses and representations of the value of plurilingualism for their lives and their future. Drawing from key findings from a four-year qualitative study of 22 teenaged plurilingual learners from the K-MNS, including ethnographic observation notes and semi-structured interviews, the focus is on how various complex and dynamic discourses concerning the importance of developing a *plurilingual repertoire* (Marshall & Moore, 2016) steered student participants towards the trilingual education program. Twenty-two teenaged plurilingual learners from the K-MNS participated in the study over a period of four years. The study reveals how plurilingualism and plurilingual pedagogy were valued as important resources and as initiatives that support both language learning and subject learning. Student participants considered their experiences of plurilingualism through schooling under the K-MNS educational system an important process that prepared them to be more competitive citizens of the world. Learning a foreign language as a third language (L3) at a K-MNS school is a strong contributor their academic success and career advancement. The study suggests plurilingual pedagogy supports students in developing key strategies for academic and career success.

RÉSUMÉ. Cette contribution rend compte de la mise en œuvre d'un modèle éducatif pluraliste (Coste et al., 2009) dans un contexte local, au travers d'un programme d'éducation trilingue dans un lycée de la communauté minoritaire de nationalité coréenne (K-MNS) dans le nord-est de la Chine. Les données de cette étude sont tirées des principales conclusions d'une étude qualitative de 4 ans avec vingt-deux apprenants plurilingues adolescents du K-MNS, comprenant des notes d'observation ethnographique et des entretiens semi-structurés. L'accent sera mis sur l'examen de la manière dont divers discours complexes et dynamiques sur les répertoires plurilingues (Marshall & Moore, 2016) ont orienté les étudiants participants vers le programme d'éducation trilingue. Cette étude révèle comment le plurilinguisme et la pédagogie plurilingue ont été considérés comme une ressource importante et une initiative pour soutenir autant l'apprentissage des langues que celui des disciplines. Les étudiants participants considèrent que leurs expériences de plurilinguisme à travers la scolarisation dans le cadre du système éducatif K-MNS constituent un processus important qui les a préparés à devenir des citoyens du monde plus compétitifs. L'apprentissage d'une langue étrangère (en L3) dans une école K-MNS est une



voie importante pour leur réussite scolaire et leur avancement professionnel. L'étude suggère l'importance d'approches plurilingues pour soutenir chez les élèves le développement de stratégies clés pour la réussite (académique / professionnelle).

Keywords: *plurilingualism, plurilingual pedagogy, third language learning.*

INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades, an increasing number of researchers and educators focusing on the acquisition of second (L2), third (L3), or foreign languages in formal education have been exploring ways to develop a pluralistic approach in language learning (Castellotti & Moore, 2010; Cenoz, 2009; Cummins, 2006; De Angelis & Dewaele, 2011; Gao, 2009; Hattori, 2016; Jessner, 2008; Kubota, 2014; Nan, 2008, 2015). Pluralistic education models tend to center on the learner and highlight the importance of individuals' prior knowledge and experience in learning. These funds of knowledge are constructed mainly through the individual's experiences and interactions with family, community, and the world. In this view, individuals learn better when they actively engage in learning by maximizing the use of multiple linguistic, cultural, and literacy resources. This "wholistic" view (Castellotti & Moore, 2010, p.1) of learning was initially developed and promoted in Europe by the Council of Europe (2001, 2010, 2018) (Moore & Gajo, 2009). Recently, various models using pluralistic approaches in education have been proposed and studied across many disciplines. Marshall and Moore (2016) recommend adopting "plurilingual pedagogy" (p.1) as a key tool for supporting an increased level of learner diversity in today's classrooms.

Plurilingual advocates argue that the strategic implementation of pluralistic approaches can facilitate and motivate students' deep learning, critical thinking, and academic achievement; it also helps in the active development of social skills, intercultural communication, and generally fosters more positive attitudes towards learning (Cummins, 2014; Lee & Marshall, 2012; Little et al., 2014; Moore, 2010). While plurilingualism is a common phenomenon and an essential part in the lives of many people today, its integration into formal education systems is, nevertheless, frequently questioned by educators, stakeholders, and policy makers—especially



those who support stereotyped monolingual orientations toward the competence of a plurilingual speaker (Moore & Gajo, 2009).

Plurilingual education challenges the ongoing tendency in mainstream academic discourses to assume that monolingualism is a norm for all individuals and societies (Lau & Van Viegen, 2020). The same can be said about minority nationality education in China, and the minority nationality school (MNS) education system in the ethnic Korean community (K-MNS) in northeast China.

This contribution reports some key findings from a four-year, longitudinal, qualitative study which aimed to explore how plurilingual learners engage and invest in multiple representations of languages, language learning, and learner identities (Moore & Py, 2011), in a time of transition (Byrd-Clark, 2010; also see Choi, 2001; Choi, 2004; Gao, 2009). This paper intends to give voice to students engaged in a specific K-MNS school that chose to adopt pluralistic pedagogies across learning. In particular, the study examined, from a student point of view, the complex issues that ethnic Korean plurilingual teenagers face when learning an FL at school, in this case either Japanese, which has historical links to the local community, or English, which is a global language. Participants were a group of 22 plurilingual teenagers who were learning Korean, Chinese, and either Japanese or English, as part of a mandatory trilingual education program at their school. An emphasis in my study is on examining how various complex and dynamic discourses about the value of plurilingualism and plurilingual repertoires (Coste et al., 2009; Marshall & Moore, 2016) steered these plurilingual youth towards the trilingual education program at K-MNS.

In the following sections, I first provide a brief review of relevant literature, research context, and methods. I then share some key findings.

PLURILINGUAL(ISM), THE *MULTI* IN THE *PLURI*

In the present study, I share Marshall and Moore's (2016) conceptualization of complexity involving the *multi* and the *pluri*. In their work, Marshall and Moore discuss where and how plurilingualism fits among other lingualisms, explore similarities and differences, and give an example of a plurilingual pedagogy in action from a university in Vancouver, Canada. As they highlight in this work:



Plurilingualism can be understood as the study of individuals' repertoires and agency in several languages, in different contexts, in which the individual is the locus and actor of contact; accordingly, a person's languages and cultures interrelate and change over time, depending on individual biographies, social trajectories, and life paths. The term 'plurilingual competence' adds emphasis on learners' agency, and constraints and opportunities in educational contexts. (Marshall & Moore, 2016, p.2)

In this study, I use the term multi with one main denotation: To indicate an individual's multiple repertoires of languages, cultures and literacy resources, including multilingualism, multiliteracies, and multimodal tools. This understanding conveys the plurilingual learner's unique and multiple competence in managing various resources in their dynamic repertoires (e.g., for better learning or communication). I also use the term multilingual(ism), as it better reflects the common usage in English, Korean, and Chinese by non-specialists in the fields of education and social sciences. Despite my emphasis on plurilingualism as a lens for understanding the new and fluid configurations of language practices and language learning, in the interviews with participants, I used the term multilingual(ism) to refer to both social and individual aspects of language and cultural practices.

Wholistic versus Holistic

In this study, I use the term *wholistic* (Castellotti & Moore, 2010), which has a similar meaning to *holistic*. With a *w*, wholistic refers to "a whole or whole body; taking into consideration the whole body or person" (p. 1). This term highlights the connectedness of a person's mind, body, and spirit. These two words can be used interchangeably.

Plurilingual Competences, Mobile Resources for Empowerment

The current study is based on the conceptual framework of plurilingualism and plurilingual competence. Plurilingualism does not describe separate competence in fixed and labeled languages, but rather builds language as a "mobile resource" (Blommaert, 2010, p. 43), within an integrated repertoire (Lüdi & Py, 2009) that can include translingual practices (Canagarajah, 2013). *Plurilingualism* (Council of Europe, 2001, 2010, 2018) can be understood as the study of individual repertoire



and agency in several languages in different contexts, in which an individual is the locus of, and actor in, the context. The plurilingual framework emphasizes that a person's language and culture are interrelated and change over time, depending on an individual's biography and social trajectories as well as their life path (Coste et al., 2009). A specific focus of this framework is on individual speakers' *plurilingual and pluricultural competence*, defined by Coste et al. (2009) as "the ability to use language for the purpose of communication, and to take part in intercultural interaction where a person, viewed as a social actor, has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures" (p. 11; also see Council of Europe, English version, 2001, p.168).

Most specifically, plurilingual learners engage in imaginative uses of their linguistic resources, constantly exploring and developing various strategies of managing the multi in their dynamic repertoires:

The speaker can throw in light or shade certain zones of his/her competence, (dis)activate, (re)invent and negotiate his/her multiple resources in context. Depending on how the speaker interprets and categorizes the situation of communication, she/he can be encouraged to use her/his repertoire as a bilingual or as a learner and sometimes, even, as a monolingual. (Moore & Gajo, 2009, p. 142)

This includes *translanguaging*, which is the plurilingual speaker's ability to "shuttle between languages, treating the diverse languages that form their repertoire as an integrated system" (Canagarajah, 2011, p. 401).

In this study, I give special consideration to the unique features of learners' linguistic and cultural competence, especially regarding the links between the languages they use in their daily lives, at school, and the new languages they are learning (Japanese, English). Of particular interest in this study are the complex ways participants view and intermesh sociolinguistic representations and language practices (e.g., Coste et al., 2009).



RESEARCH CONTEXT

Research Site: Peace Ethnic Korean Secondary School (PKSS)

With a population of almost 2 million, the ChaoXianZu in the People's Republic of China (hereafter, PRC or China) [ethnic Korean Chinese or ethnic Korean; “朝鲜族” in Chinese, Chosŏnjok “조선족” in Korean] community is the second largest overseas Korean diasporic community. It consists of almost 30% of the approximately 7 million total overseas Korean population in the world (MOFA, 2019). As a main minority nationality group in China, Koreans—along with Kazaks, Mongolians, Tibetans, and Uyghurs—have had writing systems that were broadly used even before the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, and have had regular bilingual education since then (Yang, 2005). In terms of the Min-han Jian-tong (民汉兼通; mastery of both ethnic language and Chinese language) bilingual education policy, similar to the case of Uyghurs before 2005 (see New China Daily 2006; Chinese Minzu Daily, 2015), there have been some changes in the policy. Based on the new policy, which was reinforced especially after 2005, some of the K-MNS schools in northeast China began to offer more Mandarin Chinese classes; as a cost, ethnic Korean class hours were reduced, and use Chinese as the main instructional medium of some school subjects (Ehlert, 2018). Nonetheless, the bilingual education system remains active in the case of the Korean community in Northeast China.

Since the 1990s, the ethnic Korean community in China has been in constant transition and transformation, marked by an increased level of mobility along with active internationalization, which has brought social, economic, and political changes to the community. Such changes have a strong connection to the rise of the ChaoXianZu community, especially through the K-MNS education system. The increased mobility has also been motivating and challenging educators to actively explore different strategies to support new generations of foreign language learners. The educators include teachers and administrators in the K-MNS, like the Peace ethnic Korean Secondary School (PKSS), which is the main research site for this study.



I now briefly introduce the main curriculum and pedagogical strategy that PKSS has implemented, to show the unique situation of this school within the K-MNS system. Then, I explain the background of the participants in the study.

Located in a small town in north-east China, PKSS is one of five ethnic Korean secondary schools in Mudanjiang region in the province of Heilongjiang, an area close to the former Soviet Russia and the Korean peninsula. PKSS has been actively developing various pedagogical approaches. Similar to many secondary schools in China, PKSS has been carrying out *YingShi JiaoYu* [应试教育] which is an exam-oriented education system since China re-started the university entrance exam in the late 1970s (Ehlert, 2018, pp.118-9). In recent years, students in the school have generally faced three main examinations: *ZhongKao* [中考; middle school graduation exam], *HuiKao* [会考; high school graduation exam], and *GaoKao* [高考; national college entrance exam]. Language programs play a key role in the exam-centred curriculum at PKSS, as revealed from the value of language subjects in its main programs.

The following two senior grades serve as an example:

- At Senior level 2 (grade 11), as students prepare for the *HuiKao*, 25% (10 sessions out of 40) of the main sessions in a week were given to language programs. This includes 4 sessions in an FL (Japanese or English), and 3 sessions each in Korean and Hanyu [Mandarin].
- At Senior level 3 (grade 12), as students prepare for the *GaoKao*, 33% (12 sessions out of 40) of the main sessions in a week are given to language programs. This includes 5 sessions in a foreign language, 3 sessions in Korean and 4 sessions in Hanyu.

Research Questions

Two main objectives underlie this work:

1. to understand, from the student participants' points of view, learners' practices and representations of the multi as part of plurilingual learners'



repertoires and resources, especially against the background of the complex situation of language politics in Northern China;

2. to identify how a strategic pedagogical implementation of the multi can better support and empower plurilingual speakers and learners in today's diverse classrooms.

In particular, this study aimed to investigate how a group of 22 *ChaoXianZu* plurilingual youth navigated the complexity and mobility of their multiple languages and identities. Three specific questions guided the investigation. I wanted to know:

1. What were the participants' experiences and representations of plurilingualism?
2. How did their experiences and representations of languages, language learning, and the value of plurilingualism affect their language learning?
3. How did their FL learning and the development of plurilingual resources affect their life trajectory and identities?

In this paper, the focus is primarily on sharing the key findings related to the first question. I also briefly talk about some outcomes concerning the third question. With the first question, I am interested in looking at *how teenagers become plurilingual* while engaging in multiple language and literacy practices at school, especially through a trilingual education for minorities program in the ethnic Korean minority nationality school system. In particular, I explore the learning context of a group of plurilingual teenagers and the way their experiences in a school that has adopted a plurilingual pedagogy in teaching might affect their (foreign language) learning. This includes an examination of these students' perspectives on trilingual education, with an emphasis on their schooling experiences at a K-MNS school, such as looking at how they practice the multi in their languages, cultures and literacies in and out of their classroom contexts. Some of the main topics explored during interviews focused on plurilingualism as a key strategy for success, and on learning an FL/L3 as an essential tool for easing transitions from one educational context to another.



METHODS

Data Sources

The main study was primarily based on data collected through ethnographic visual methods (Ehlert, 2018, pp.74–80), a combined method of *ethnographic* (Creswell, 2007) and *visual* (Rose, 2007) approaches, with a consideration of the strength of ethnographic research inquiry that allows this study to provide “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973) of my participants. This method enabled me to have a more nuanced understanding of their lived realities, as the researcher and research participants are seen as affiliates in the co-construction of meaning. Accordingly, “the ethnographer is the ultimate instrument of field work” (Heath & Street, 2008, p. 57). Employing visual research methods, on the other hand, helped me investigate the complexity and dynamics involved in the lives of the participants, especially as regards the use of various media tools and techniques to document or produce data that increases, enriches, or clarifies our knowledge of the social world.

I focused on analyzing how the teenagers conceptualized their *plurilingual resources* for L3 learning. They were invited to talk about their linguistic and literacy practices, social networks, language learning, Korean–Chinese–Japanese (or English) trilingual education system for ethnic Korean minorities in China, and their aspirations as users of multiple languages, as they were preparing to transition from high school to university. In essence, the data for the main study includes interview excerpts from individual and small group interviews, my observation notes from class visits and event participation, and analysis of textbooks and other curricular material, as well as screenshots of their communication records on social networking sites (SNS) such as the observation of students’ interaction on WeChat (a popular SNS site among people in China). During the school visits, I also looked at the main textbooks used by the classes at PKSS, as well as the data related to 2008–2013 graduates.

The data presented in this paper draws from a four-year study with a focus group of 22 ethnic Korean teenagers who attended a Korean and Chinese bilingual school in northeast China, Peace Korean Secondary School (PKSS). Most participants (14) studied Japanese as an FL, but eight studied English. In their complex linguistic repertoires, Japanese or English, respectively, was the third language they studied; it was their primary FL at PKSS. When I first started the study, the participants were



in grade 10. I followed them during their last three years attending high school. I then conducted another one-year follow-up interview after they entered university. To have a better picture of the participants, I also talked to their parents and teachers. Pseudonyms were used for purposes of confidentiality of the research site and the participants.

In upcoming sections, I share key findings, with particular focus on participants' attitudes toward trilingual education, to facilitate better understanding of both *why* and *how* students develop a plurilingual repertoire. A focus is placed on participant responses to questions concerning their views on schooling through a K-MNS like PKSS, such as how they feel about learning in a trilingual program, and how they value learning and using different languages in and out of the classroom. To provide broader context, I also share findings based on observations I conducted during school visits (e.g., in classes, events), as well as from interviews with not only students, but also administrators and teachers at PKSS.

KEY FINDINGS: MULTI AS AN ASSET IN LEARNING AND FOR BETTER TRANSITIONS

At PKSS, plurilingualism was the norm in students' daily lives. As mentioned previously, active practice of the multi, namely the strategic use of multilingual, multicultural, and multiliteracy resources, was considered an essential element by the administrators and teachers at PKSS, connecting students to better education and more promising career options. Thus, as mentioned previously, students were constantly exploring and developing various ways of utilizing multiple resources to create a wholistic educational culture at school. Along with the exam-centred curriculum, PKSS has been actively developing various pedagogical approaches. PKSS developed an exam-centered curriculum with plurality as the powerhouse, along with pedagogical strategies that foster the strategic use of multiple linguistic, cultural, and literacy resources. More specifically, *practices of the multi* were highly valued as a strategy for student empowerment. At PKSS, the plurilingual pedagogical strategy was mainly reflected in two areas:

1. Raising language awareness among students, as they learn, explore, and produce a range of new knowledge in different subject matters. This can be



- seen from the selection of textbooks and learning material, as well as the setup of instructional media, such as in the classroom language policies;
2. Motivating students' active development of their voices and identities as they develop and exercise their agency in learning different languages and cultures. This includes allowing them to explore various possibilities of selecting and using their multiple resources, which is essential for the development of their representations toward different languages.

As an outcome of this kind of pluricultural educational context, during interviews, participants confirmed that they understood that plurilingual competence and translanguaging practices are an asset. For them, plurilingualism is the norm in their daily lives. Recurrent characteristics of student participants' language use at school and in their daily lives were code-switching between Korean and Chinese and translanguaging (Canagarajah, 2013) between different linguistic and literacy codes while they were traveling across multiple spaces. They were constantly shuttling between different languages and semiotic codes, "treating the diverse languages that form their repertoire as an integrated system" (Canagarajah, 2011, p. 401). I observed this through several visits to PKSS, especially in classroom observations, as well as in interviews with students, teachers, and school administrators. I observed practices of multi as part of the students' daily lives. Through observations and interviews, it became clear, especially from their statements, that the plurilingual competence that these youths had developed through plurilingual education at the school was essential for the enrichment of their repertoire. These practices helped them enhance their "ability [which is mainly] comprised of language learning, language management and language maintenance skill" (Herdina & Jessner, 2002, p. 160). All 22 students reported that they were actively using different languages and cultural resources in class, as well as for out-of-school assignments and in various extracurricular activities. They expressed satisfaction with their experience of learning multiple languages.

In essence, participants highlighted plurality as an essential strategic tool for active learning, especially as they navigated life transitions. For them, plurilingualism was an essential form of *lifelong capital* (Castellotti & Moore, 2010) in the school. While aspiring through trilingual education in this K-MNS to build a better future, students were actively developing dynamic repertoires by navigating multiple languages in and out of classroom contexts. Additionally, some of them highlighted their



awareness of the complex politics involved in plurilingualism. This included their struggles in choosing between learning Japanese or English as their primary FL. For instance, as an EFL learner, Qing had a clear understanding of the power imbalance between English and Japanese. When I asked her what her main motive to choose to learn English instead of Japanese was, she answered:

英语的使用范围广，日语只是在特定的一个地方使用。英语呢？可在全世界다 통할 수 있는 그런 언어구 유학도 편하구, 그러니깐 选了。

[Well, English can be used in a wider range, but Japanese is restricted in a certain region. I chose to learn English because English is an international language, and it's helpful to study abroad.]

Pedagogical Strategies

Textbooks, instructional medium, & extra-curricular activities

Similar to many K-MNS schools in northeast China, the main textbooks used for the trilingual program at PKSS are mostly in Korean or in Chinese. Math and all science books are in Chinese, the same books that are used in the Han Chinese public schools. Textbooks for the *WenZong* classes (i.e., comprehensive arts and social sciences subjects such as political science, geography, and history) are generally in Korean, but they are translated versions from the original textbooks used in the Han Chinese public schools; these books are generally published by the *YanBian ChaoXianZu* publishing house (YCPC). Both *ChoSeon Euhmun* [Korean language arts] and *HanYu* [Modern Chinese language arts] textbooks are from the YCPC. As for the foreign language program, English–Chinese bilingual textbooks are used in EFL classes, while bilingual textbooks and learning materials are used in the JFL classes. For instance, both Japanese–Korean texts (as main textbooks) and Japanese–Chinese texts (e.g., as additional workbooks) are used in Japanese classes.

Active practices of plurilingualism in the school are also reflected in the case of choosing and developing the pedagogical strategies. This is seen in the fact that students' experiences of plurilingual pedagogy are colored by the strategic arrangement of the instructional medium, which was divided along three main lines:



1. *Mono- to bilingualism* in language arts, math, and science classes: As a strategy to support students' better transition to postsecondary institutions where Chinese is the medium of instruction, PKSS employed Chinese as a main instructional media in math and science classes; only a small number of instructors used Korean as a secondary language to help students' understanding of particular terminology. As for language arts, Korean language arts classes were 'purely' taught in Korean, and over 90% of *HanYu Putonghua* [Mandarin Chinese] classes were taught in Chinese.
2. *Korean-Chinese Bilingualism*: Korean and Chinese bilingualism in teaching the subjects of arts & social sciences [*WenZong*] has a relatively long history at PKSS. Especially since the GaoKao resumed in the late 1970s, Korean-Chinese bilingualism became a main strategy for the school to help students be successful. Teachers dictate the ratio of the two languages taught, and most of the teachers in the arts and social sciences division generally choose to use a textbook written in Korean and also to deliver their classes in Korean. They were intentionally creating a learning context for students to have more opportunity to use their heritage language while learning comprehensive social science knowledge. For example, Figure 1 illustrates how students actively use their multiple resources. As a Korean-Chinese-English trilingual learner, Ahn told me that she regularly used her multilingual skills. She shared some of her multilingual class notes. Figure 1 demonstrates how she used her knowledge of Korean and Chinese to take her class notes in her senior-level political science class, strategically code-switching between the two languages. She wrote down all key terms in Chinese but inserted related reflection notes in Korean.



the Vice-principal of Education, Mr. Song was also in charge of the general set-up of the foreign language programs in the school. During my visits to PKSS, I was fortunate to visit his classes multiple times. As a Korean-Chinese-Japanese trilingual, Mr. Song was constantly exploring several ways of utilizing multiple linguistic and cultural resources in his teaching. This can be seen from Figure 2, which illustrates how Mr. Song utilizes the multi in his dynamic repertoire to help students become more engaged in the learning of the target language (Japanese). This is a scene from his vocabulary lesson in a JFL class that I captured in one of his sessions in late spring 2013.

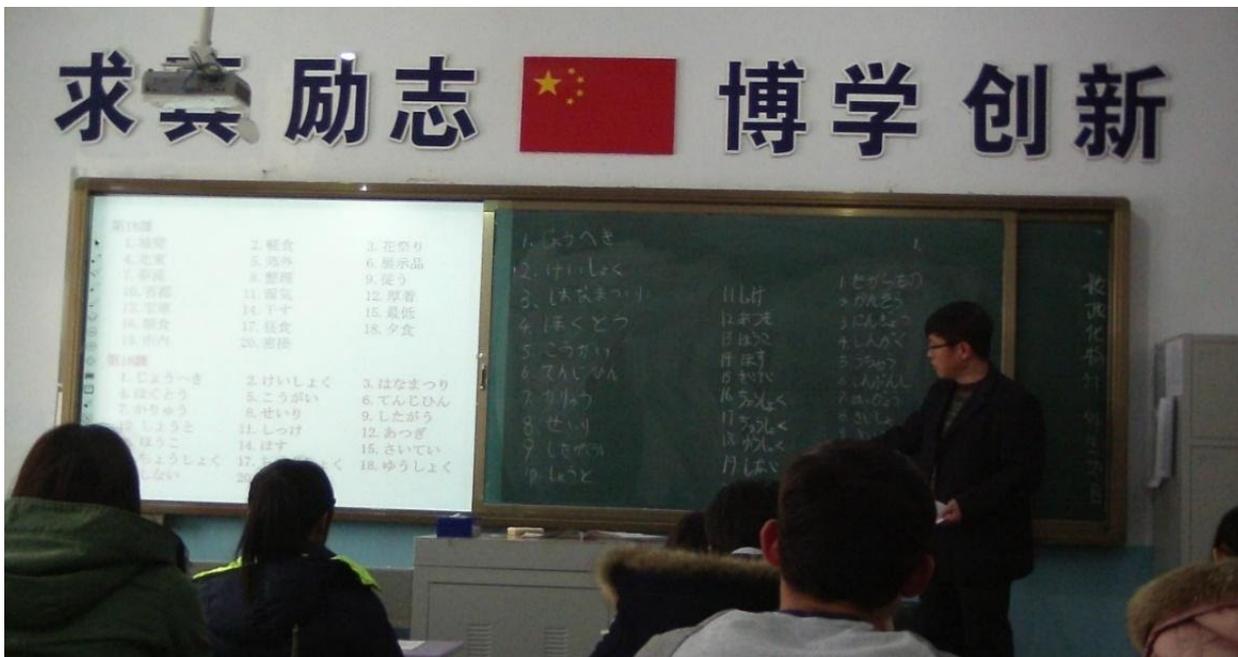


Figure 2. Trilingualism in a Senior level 2 JFL class

Mr. Song actively used all three languages throughout his session. During the session, he used Japanese around 50 percent of the time while alternating between Korean and Chinese as other mediums of instruction. In vocabulary practice, for instance, he started with *dictation*. A group of students were invited to write down on the blackboard the words they heard. Then came *self-marking*: Students were asked to work based on answer keys displayed on powerpoint slides. Finally, he employed a *commenting* strategy: Mr. Song asked students to comment on their



peers' work on the blackboard and made further comments on that work. In the class, Mr. Song actively used his linguistic capital in teaching. While all his powerpoint slides used Japanese and Chinese (e.g., new vocabulary in Japanese but with Chinese translations), Mr. Song's comments for further explanation were mostly in Korean. Mr. Song employed similar strategies for introducing new or complicated grammar points and reviewing difficult phrases.

Bilingualism of a non-Korean EFL teacher

As mentioned earlier, all the main EFL teachers at PKSS were Chinese and English speakers. They were supportive of the active practice of plurilingualism in class. Concurrently, they demonstrated their struggles in utilizing the students' heritage linguistic knowledge--Korean--which they are not familiar with. Tina (who indicated that she preferred to be referred to by her first name), the leading EFL teacher of the class of 2013 during Senior years 1-3, affirmed this. In an interview, she commented on my question about multilingualism in her class and her role as a non-Korean EFL teacher:

对我来说，一个在朝中工作的英语教师，汉族，无法用朝语沟通，不算是多语使用者；而学生相对来说，掌握至少3种语言，是多语使用者。...我在讲解英语知识点时，大多数用汉语，偶尔带几个英语专业术语；在进行阅读教学时，更多是针对文章，用英语提问。很多学生英语水平有限，会用汉语表达，私下里用朝语。我会帮助，鼓励他们英语。...平时呢一些简单的..嗯..可能能表达的我尽量用英语让他们说。但是在像解释一些知识点啊，嗯..更多的时候用汉语。...由于我们学生英语水平有限，所以在课堂上会经常用汉语。

[To me, an EFL teacher at a K-MNS with Han Chinese ethnicity, I cannot communicate in Korean, so I should not be considered a 'multilingual'; however, my students are 'multilingual' as they speak at least three languages. ... To explain key concepts in English, I mainly use Chinese with some English terminology; in reading sessions, I ask questions in English mainly about the content. Many students have a limited level of English



proficiency, so they express themselves in Chinese, and use Korean privately. I help and encourage them to use English. ...Generally, for simple expressions, I have them try to use English. But I use Mandarin Chinese more when explaining key learning points. ... Because our students have a limited level of English, I often use Hanyu [Chinese] in class.] (Tina Y, June 20, 2012).

During her interview, Tina mentioned that the combined use of Chinese and English is a conscious strategy in her classroom teaching. I observed such practice during my weekly classroom observations of Tina's EFL classes when I was doing fieldwork at PKSS. Tina was keen to try using mainly English as a medium of instruction, but many students experienced difficulties in understanding instructions. During the class, she would often remind her students to use English; however, only a few high-performing students would participate in the classroom discussions. I observed that most students were taking class notes in either Korean or a Korean-Chinese combination. Tina did not make any comments to encourage or discourage these students' practices of multi. Later on, in a follow up interview, I asked why she preferred her students use English in class. Tina explained that this was mainly for two reasons: (i) Her own insecurity in classroom management, due to her lack of knowledge of Korean; and (ii) Her belief in supporting English as the main language of communication during the class, as a way of helping students to learn the target language. For the main reason Tina provided, the other EFL teachers at PKSS were also trying to create more English-speaking spaces. On the other hand, similarly to how Mr. Song conducted the JFL class, the EFL teachers were trying to utilize the prior linguistic knowledge that students brought into the class.

Extra-curricular activities

The practice of multi (especially Korean and Chinese bilingualism) was also a norm in all extra-curricular activities at PKSS. Traditional Korean music and sports are the main components of these activities. As a K-MNS, the school has been investing a large amount of time and funds in these multicultural education programs, which is a good showcase of its contribution and role as a main gatekeeper (i.e., institution) not only for preserving traditional Korean cultural heritage but also for accessing trilingual education under China's public-school system. In an interview, Principal Zheng told me these activities are an important part of the school's curriculum, as they provide good opportunities for students to learn by doing. During fieldwork at



PKSS, I observed that all students at the school were encouraged to actively participate in different traditional Korean music and dance club activities, as well as various athletic activities. Figure 3 illustrates a scene which I captured from an opening ceremony for a major regional athletic event organized and hosted by the office of minority nationalities and religion [MinZongJu] in Mudanjiang regional government and Peace City.



Figure 3. The PKSS: Opening ceremony for an Athletic Day

In this wholistic educational culture at the PKSS, students aspired through trilingual education in this K-MNS to build a better future. As will be introduced in the next section, for them, plurilingualism is the norm in their daily lives. They were actively developing their dynamic multilingual repertoires in and out of classroom contexts.

Trilingualism: Learning the “Right” Foreign Language

To have a better understanding of the plurilingual youths’ representations of plurilingualism, I invited them to share their self-definitions of multilingual(ism). Through individual or group interviews, I asked them their perceptions about each of their languages.



Overall, they reported that learning in the trilingual educational program at PKSS was helpful, especially as they transition to university. In the interviews, most of them showed me their fondness for their experience at a K-MNS school and a strong awareness about the significant role that the school played for their preparation for an important exam like the GaoKao. They believed that this investment would ultimately connect them with academic success and career advancement. At the same time, they also reported their struggles with the language choice dilemma upon first entering PKSS, a K-MNS school, such as when they had to make the difficult decision of choosing between Japanese or English as their FL. For instance, the EFL learners (like Qing and Min) shared their initial dilemma in choosing to learn English over Japanese; they said it was because of the status of English, as the world language, compared to Japanese which they considered was a regional language within East Asia. Intrinsically, it seems their struggles are strongly related to their awareness about the different values attached to their languages, as is discussed in the following section.

Trilingualism

As for the definition of a multilingual, some students answered that one should speak at least two languages to be multilingual; other students said one should speak three or more languages to be multilingual. In terms of their understanding of required proficiency in each language for a multilingual speaker, answers varied. Some asserted that multilinguals must be fluent in each language, while the others answered that one does not have to be perfectly fluent in every language they know to be considered multilingual. Some students asserted that skill in reading and/or writing skill was not essential for communication, especially in casual settings.

Korean as L1 (HL) - “우리 글” “어머니 글”: Almost all students stated that Korean was their heritage language (HL), which they use as the primary language (L1) in their daily lives. They each affirmed their awareness of language as a key marker of their group identity and the role of the Korean language as a symbol that allows them to feel a sense of belonging to the Korean community. They all described Korean as *Uri Kuel* [우리글] (our language) or *MuYu* [母语] *Uhmerni* [어머니 글] (mother tongue), while highlighting the learning of their own heritage language to be an obligation as a member of the ethnic Korean community.



Chinese as L2 (NL) - “国语” “工作语”: Most students also affirmed their awareness of the increased power of HanYu [汉语 or Putonghua; Mandarin Chinese], not only as a ‘national language’ [国语]—a lingua franca between different minority nationality groups in China—but also as an international language. They believed their understanding of Chinese language can also be represented as *GongZuoYu* [工作语; work language] and *MuYu* [母语; mother tongue]. Some participants considered learning Chinese to be more important than learning a FL. For participants such as Rim, who is a Korean–Chinese–English trilingual learner, Chinese is a key tool for people who aspire to gain upper level social mobility in China: “汉语是必须的, 要在中国当官 发展腾达” [Learning Chinese is a must, to secure a higher social status and be successful in China] (Rim, May 2014).

Foreign Language as L3 - “스마트폰” [A smart phone]? Most focal plurilingual youth acknowledged the key role of foreign language in today’s globalized society. As a Korean–Chinese–English plurilingual, Min is a participant who showed great passion for learning multiple languages as well as learning English. When I first interviewed her at PKSS in early summer 2012, her level of English was high-beginner based on the College English Test. Improvements in her English were impressive when I met her for a follow up interview in the fall of 2014 in Shanghai; she had already passed the intermediate level College English Test. She had a unique view on plurilingualism, as illustrated in Interview Excerpt 1. Interestingly, Min compared foreign language learning to having a smartphone:

Interview Excerpt 1 (Min)

I: Min, 외국어对你有什么含义? [What does foreign language mean to you?]

M: 외국어는 .. 지금에 있어서 말하면 스마트폰. [Foreign language ... Nowadays, it is like a smartphone.]

I: 오~ (웃음) 스마트폰? [Okay (laughing) .. A smartphone?!]

M: 그러니까 스마트폰은 꼭 있어야 하는거는 아니잖아요. 예?! 근데 사람은 스마트폰을 갖고나면은 덩달아서 자기도 스마트해지는거 같아요. [I mean, a smartphone is



not a critical item that we must have. Right? But, it makes people feel smarter once we use it.]

I: (웃음) [Laughing]

M: 예, 재밌거든요. (웃음) 그니까 외국어를 갖춘다는건 스마트폰같죠. 스마트폰은 보통 핸드폰들중에서 데기 뛰어났잖아요. [Yeah, it's really fun. (Laughing). So learning a foreign language is like having a smartphone, the smartest one of all types of phones.]

I: 오~ [Okay]

M: 그래서 제가 같은 경쟁자들 사이에서 제가 외국어를 더 많이 장악하구 더 능숙하게 장악 하면 그 사람들속에서 제가 경쟁력이 더 돋보일거 같아요. [So learning a foreign language especially with a higher proficiency would help me to be more competitive among people in this competitive society.]

For Min, foreign language is like having a smartphone nowadays, an important asset that would enable her to be “more competitive among people in this competitive society” and promote upward social mobility. Like Min, similarly, most of the participants in this study believed that a good mastery of languages, including a powerful foreign language such as English or Japanese, would help their competitiveness in today’s increasingly globalized context. They upheld their strong awareness of the imbalanced power relationships between each of their languages, as noted in the earlier section about their views on Korean, Hanyu, and Foreign languages. These perceptions of languages and plurilingualism greatly influenced their language learning choices, as well as their development of plurilingual skills.

To learn Japanese or English?

As a whole, the development of the focal participants’ representations toward different languages is complex. Their perspectives on different languages and attitudes toward multilingual learning were diverse. All of them affirmed the positive role that knowledge of multiple languages plays in leading them to better their economic and employment opportunities. I found their view to be unique and inspiring. For example, Min made a creative connection between the key function of foreign language and having a “smart phone” as revealed in her statement in Interview Excerpt 1. Students highlighted the strategic practice of plurilingualism as an important asset in active learning. On the other hand, in the interviews, the



teenage participants also confirmed their awareness of the complex power relations between different languages at school and in the social world; most of them shared their experiences about the difficulty of having to choose to learn either Japanese or English at school.

Some of the 14 teenagers who chose to learn Japanese as their primary FL asserted that English is an “irrelevant” foreign language for their future. Zheng, a JFL learner, emphasized “Japanese as a competitive primary foreign language to learn.” The majority of JFL learners shared that their primary reason for learning Japanese was to earn a better score on the GaoKao. Participants who were EFL learners, on the other hand, said that their main reason for choosing to learn English was because of the possibility of visiting many different places. Perhaps due to these factors, I observed that the Japanese program was much stronger than the English program in the case of PKSS. A good example of this strength is the ratio between JFL learners (40) and EFL learners (17) in this K-MNS: The total number of learners in the Japanese program in the class of 2013 was two times more than the learners in the English program. Besides comments of the focal participants who are from the class of 2013, this is also affirmed by an analysis of the data from the graduates of year 2008–2013 provided by PKSS.

Multi as a Strategic Facilitator: Improvisation

Despite the complex politics involved in their linguistic repertoires, the focal plurilingual youths actively navigated multiple languages to learn and create new spaces. As mentioned previously, code-switching and translanguaging were main characteristics of their language and literacy practices in and out of school contexts. To have a better understanding of their attitudes toward plurilingualism and multilingual learning, I also asked each participant about their experiences using multiple languages in and out of a school context. What follows are some examples that illustrate why and how these youth choose and use multilingual resources. These examples show how they strategically throw into the light or shade certain zones of their competence. Sometimes they activate or deactivate, invent or reinvent, and negotiate their multiple resources in context, depending on different situations and contexts. Some examples, as shown in the statements of some students in Interview Excerpts 2 and 3 in this section, also highlight how these plurilingual youths use the multi (lingual, cultural, and literacy tools) as a strategic



facilitator through improvisation; in other words, how they make contingent decisions to enable or limit the use of single or multiple resources in different situations.

As is discussed in this section, students were mainly choosing between practicality, continuity of learning, and the desire to discover and learn languages. Through improvisation, the plurilingual speaker makes a contingent decision to use different languages as a key tool for negotiating their positionality in different contexts. The following examples illustrate such improvisation.

Writing or speaking in different languages is a good example of the focal participants' practice of the multi as a strategic tool. Three student participants' narratives around plurilingualism in Interview Excerpts 2 and 3 illustrate such a dynamic of language choice and language learning in and around their schools.

As a Korean–Chinese–English plurilingual, Qing actively utilizes different resources in her repertoire. She alternated efficiently between Korean and Chinese in her writing on a QQ (a social networking service) site. Qing generally uses Chinese on the QQ site as the common language with her peer group, whose members belong to both the Korean and Han Chinese communities. In an interview, Qing explained her preference for using Korean when she wanted to type faster because her typing skills in Korean were better than in Chinese. Interview Excerpt 2 illustrates her narratives about how she strategically used English in her interactions on QQ, but for different purposes—to keep her privacy or “secrecy” by using “indirect expressions”:

Interview Excerpt 2 (Qing)

R: 你什么时候用英文? [When do you use English?]

Q: 不想让别人看懂的时候。 [When I don't want to share {my feelings} directly with others]

R: 噢~ 能不能给举个例子? [Ah, I see. Can you give me an example?]



Q: 嗯.. 怎么说呢.. 就是.. 今天我跟谁谁谁吵架了, 然后我说他坏话하는데 就是不想直接表达的时候。然后, 我就绕着弯子表达就有意义一些。 [hum.., how should I say this, for example, when I had an argument with someone and especially when I wanted to express my resentment, but do not feel like speaking it out loudly. Then, I use an indirect way to talk about this.]

R: 那你不能举个具体的例子? [Do you have any specific examples?]

Q: 어..就是语言本身方面就是绕着弯子的这么说。我感觉他/她是日语生, 我是英语生的话 那就更绕弯子,直接看不懂。 [hum.., I mean that indirect expressions are available in language itself. Considering I am an English learner, this strategy works better when I speak to a Japanese [non-English] learner, as he/she would not understand {what I am saying} for sure]

R: 오~ 查字典也看不懂? [Really? ... You mean even with a dictionary?]

Q: 应该看不懂, 我们英语有个缩写吧! 他们看不懂, 找不出来应该。 [I guess so. Because, there are abbreviations in our English. So I think that they won't be able to {figure out my true intention} find it in a dictionary.]

Qing uses English when she feels like recording her feelings but is, at the same time, reluctant to share her secrets. English, a foreign language for her and her peers, permits her to express, and at the same time distance herself from, her feelings, using what she refers to as "indirect expressions." Sometimes Qing strategically used her knowledge of English when she was interacting with her friends who only know Japanese, for instance, in order to keep secrecy by preventing her peers from figuring out her true intention in her written messages on a SNS site.

Like Qing, other focal teenagers in this study also regularly used different languages for different purposes. Some students considered speaking in Korean gave them a feeling of gentleness and closeness with the listener, especially in the communication with the Korean speakers. On other hand, they considered speaking in Chinese to give them the feeling of being much "tougher" and more in control (as a speaker); speaking in a foreign language (Japanese or English) gave them the feeling of having more fun and being "foreign." Interview Excerpt 3 is a good



example to illustrate such dynamics, shared by Jinok and Yeon (a Korean, Chinese, and Japanese speaker):

Interview Excerpt 3 (Jinok & Yeon)

I: 你什么时候用日语呢? [When do you use Japanese?]

Jinok: 전화람 하루 막 친하무, 머.. もしもし 하구 그냥 그렇게 일어, 일어로 물어보구 그럼다. [When I talk on the phone with a close friend, I use Japanese, say "moshi moshi" {hello} and ask some questions.]

I: 뭐라고 물어보는데요? [what do you ask?]

Yeon: 어.. 「どこにいるの」 하구 물어두 보구. (笑) [Humm.. such as "Doko-ni iru-no" {where are you}] (laugh)

I: 오~ 그래~ [Ah, really?]

J: 예. 재밌습다 (笑) 친하니까 별루 그렇게 딱 따지지두 았구 하니까나. 그럼 더 친함다. [Yeah, that's really fun (laugh). As we are close friends and not very picky. So this {using some Japanese} makes us feel closer.]

I: 오~ 그래, 친해 보이는구나~ [Ah, I see. That makes you feel closer ~]

Jinok: 일어, 조선어, 한어 비기면은, 한어 좀 硬함다. 좀 딱딱해서, 좀, 데기 감정이 없어 보임다. [Compared to Japanese and Korean, speaking in Chinese makes me feel very harsh with no emotion.]

I: 오~ 그럼, 일본말은 조선말 다음에 감정이 있어 보여? [I see. So, do you feel emotion attached to the Japanese language, besides Korean?]

J: 예. 영 溫柔하쟁까. [Yeah. {Japanese is} Really soft, right?]

I: 오~ 그럼, Yeon이네? [How about you, Yeon?]

Yeon: 嗯.. 跟她差不多. 我也是.. 친구들이랑 같이 있을때, 다 조선말하구, 그리구서리는 한족말로 하면, 좀, 데게 싸가지 없어 보이구, 좀 그렇썸다. [Yep, I have similar feeling as hers. I too mainly speak Korean with friends. And, speaking in Chinese, I feel a little bit rude, something like that.]

In the above interview excerpts, both Jinok and Yeon mentioned their feelings and strategies of using their knowledge of Japanese in daily peer group interactions. For example, they often use some Japanese phrases, such as *moshi moshi*, *do ko ni i ru no?* [hello, where are you?] when they speak to their close friends. They said this is fun. Jinok and Yeon considered Korean the softest language, then Japanese, while



they thought that Chinese had a “harsh” feeling; this echoes other participants’ reference to Chinese as a “work language.” Other student participants shared similar feelings about the emotions attached to different languages.

In summary, the teenagers were actively and strategically using their *multiple* linguistic resources on a daily basis at home, in school, as well as in the community for better learning and communication. As shown in the interview excerpts, these plurilingual youths demonstrated their plurilingual competence and love of being plurilinguals who have the capability to utilize their knowledge in multiple languages and literacy tools to successfully cross different norms and codes in response to particular contexts and objectives (Canagarajah, 2013).

CONCLUSION: *MULTI FOR ALL*

The student participants in this study constantly capitalized on their experience of plurilingualism and multilingual resources in their daily lives and at school. This study supports previous research (e.g., Coste et al., 2009; Marshall & Moore, 2013, 2016; Nan, 2008) in that it demonstrates: i) The essential value of plurilingualism as an asset, and ii) The importance of students tapping into their experiences and multilingual resources outside of the classroom, as a trigger for a more engaged learning. As Moore et al. (2020) highlight,

Pluralistic approaches to languages and cultures propose explicit referential levels and descriptors to identify and develop competences and resources across the curriculum, based on the recognition that strategic skills combine knowledge in several [languages] and across languages, and that the multilingual knowledges and literacy practices learners bring into the classroom are learning resources. (p. 23)

This research points to the continued need to adopt a more complex view and critical approach to the conceptualisations of what constitutes the pluri in learners’ multiple languages and identities (Ehlert & Moore, 2014). In particular, teenagers’ perspectives on plurilingualism and multiple identities are rarely examined in research and it is necessary to remedy this oversight. With this in mind, in this study I put an emphasis on examining 1) *how* plurilingual ethnic Korean teenage learners construct their multilingual resources in old and new social contexts, and 2) *what*



value and meaning they assign to their multiple linguistic repertoires and to learning new languages.

Key findings of this study suggest that, due to various dynamic contributing factors, the new generation of plurilingual students exhibits complex repertoires and knowledges that should be viewed as contextual and complex co-construction of different sociolinguistic, political, economic, and cognitive factors, often interwoven with each other. Although these factors may not be relevant for all student participants in this study, they include but are not limited to some student participants' social identities, their peers' social identities, and the classroom and educational contexts, as well as the curriculum and pedagogical strategies that the teachers and educational institutions employ. In essence, this connects to some key issues concerning the third question of my main study—that is, how the students' FL learning and the development of plurilingual resources has affected their life trajectory and identities—which I could not explore in this paper due to the space limitation.

In conclusion, I contend that it is beneficial to actively explore and develop different strategies for capitalizing on the multi. This study brings further implications for teacher training and curriculum design, especially in terms of the value of plurilingual pedagogies in the classroom. More specifically, plurilingual pedagogies have the potential to (i) raise language awareness among students; (ii) motivate students' active development of voices and identities; and (iii) open up spaces for their active development and the use of the multi in learners' dynamic plurilingual repertoires as tools for learning. In this sense, when setting out to foster a more "democratic" educational "culture" (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 4) in an educational institution, strategic implementation of the pluralistic approach is important.

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