A Thematic Analysis of Korean Immigrant Young Adults' Lived Experiences with Language Brokering

by

Jennifer Lee

A dissertation accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

in Educational Leadership

Dissertation Committee:

Julie Alonzo , Chair

Heather McClure, Core Member

Ilana Umansky, Institutional Representative

University of Oregon

Spring 2026

© 2026 Jennifer Lee

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Jennifer Lee

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

Title: A Thematic Analysis of Korean Immigrant Young Adults' Lived Experiences with Language Brokering

This dissertation presents a qualitative study examining how young adults from Korean immigrant families make meaning of their childhood experiences as language brokers and what they believe schools could have done to better support them. Using a thematic analysis, the study is guided by the following research questions (a) how participants interpret their language brokering experiences over time, and (b) the implications of these experiences for school-based support. Participants included 10 young adults who engaged in language brokering during their middle school and high school years and met criteria related to Korean or Korean American identity, immigrant background, brokering experience, and age (18-25). Data were collected through semi-structured focus groups and analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings show that language brokering functioned as an ongoing, relational experience rather than a discrete act of translation, shaping participants' voice, responsibilities, and family roles. Participants described constrained voices as they communicated on behalf of others while managing accuracy, emotions, and relational expectations. These experiences involved emotional complexity and evolved over time as participants developed greater awareness of their parents' sacrifices, often accompanied by relational tension rather than increased closeness. At the same time, participants reframed these experiences as conditions of adaptive growth, highlighting gains in independence, problem-solving, and institutional navigation developed under limited support. School-based support was described as inconsistent and dependent on individual teachers rather than systematic structures. Participants emphasized the importance of relational, responsive practices

and identified gaps in language access and institutional awareness. This study contributes to the existing literature by conceptualizing language brokering as a relational condition that shapes voice and development over time. Implications highlight the need for more intentional, system-level supports that extend beyond individual teacher practices. Schools must strengthen communication structures to reduce reliance on students as translators while adopting culturally responsive approaches that attend to students' lived experiences. Creating opportunities for peer connection and shared reflection may also help make language brokering more visible and collectively understood. Overall, findings point to the importance of asset-based, system-wide efforts that recognize and support the complex roles students navigate within immigrant families.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Jennifer Lee

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene
University of Oregon, Eugene

DEGREES AWARDED:

Doctor of Education, Educational Leadership, 2026, University of Oregon
Master of Education in Curriculum and Teaching, 2018, University of Oregon
Bachelor of Science, Educational Studies, 2008, University of Oregon

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

English Language Development (ELD)
Bilingual Education
Korean American and Asian Immigrant student experiences

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

ELD Teacher, Beaverton School District, August 2024-Present

Elementary Teacher, Eugene School District, February 2023-June2024

ELD Teacher, Junction City School District, August 2018-June2022

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Julie Alonzo for her guidance and support throughout the development of this manuscript. I am also deeply thankful to Dr. Heather McClure and Dr. Ilana Umansky for sharing their expertise, guidance, and feedback throughout this process. I am especially grateful to my husband, Sy Kim, for his unwavering support throughout this journey. Your constant encouragement, flexibility, prayers, and countless support made it possible for me to continue this work. To my beautiful children, Tayeon and Seongtae, thank you for loving me through this journey with such patience and grace. Your coffees, gentle shoulder taps, quiet check-ins, and hugs gave me strength on the long days when I needed it most. To my mother—umma—thank you for believing in me from the very beginning, for planting the seed of this dream, and for continually encouraging me to pursue this doctoral degree. I am who I am because of your love, your prayers, and your faith in me. I also extend my heartfelt thanks to my father-in-law, Seon Bae Kim, and my mother-in-law, Wolsuk Kang, for modeling this path many years before me and for allowing your lives to speak to what it means to pursue a doctoral journey, while generously sharing your knowledge and support. I am deeply appreciative of the ten participants who generously shared their language brokering experiences. Your stories are at the heart of this work. Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to God and Jesus Christ, my Savior, who faithfully sustained and guided me through every moment of doubt and uncertainty. This work is also dedicated to all language brokers who serve as bridges between their families and the world, and to the educators who seek to support them with understanding and care.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	12
Definition of Language Brokering	14
An Overview of Korean Immigration to the United States	15
Korean-Speaking Communities in Oregon	16
Gaps in the Literature	17
Problem Statement	20
Purpose of Study	21
II. LITERATURE SYNTHESIS	23
Distinction Between Professional Interpretation and Child Language Brokering	23
Immigrant Generational Status, Acculturation, and Linguistic Adaptation	24
Children and Adolescents as Language Brokers	26
Developmental Stage: Emerging Adulthood	27
When Brokering Begins: Age Patterns and Early into the Role	28
Factors for Early Language Brokering Entry	29
Language Brokering in Schools: Policy, Law, and Technology	30
Emotional and Psychological Dimensions of Language Brokering	32
Emotional Risks: Burden, Stress, and Psychological Vulnerability	32
Emotional Benefits: Competence, Identity, and Relational Growth	34
Language Practices and Cultural Values of Korean Immigrants	37
Cultural Values Shaping Korean Immigrant Families	39

Chapter Page

Language Brokering in Korean American Families 41

Language Brokering in a Growing Immigrant Context 43

III. METHOD 45

Research Design and Rational 45

Setting 47

Demographic and Linguistic Context of Korean Immigrants in Oregon 48

Sampling Strategy and Recruitment 49

Participants 51

Data Sources and Instruments 52

Data Analysis Plan: Thematic Analysis 55

Step 1: Data Familiarization 57

Step 2: Initial Coding 57

Step 3: Searching for Themes 58

Step 4: Reviewing Themes 59

Step 5: Defining and Naming Themes 60

Step 6: Thematic Validation and Interpretation 61

Confidentiality and Data Disposal Plan 62

Researcher Positionality 63

IV. RESULT 67

Research Question 1 71

Challenges: Constrained Voice and Relational Complexity (Theme 1) 71

Constraints on Expression: Voice, Language, and Control 71

Chapter Page

Emotional Layering: Obligation, Guilt, and Burden 73

Ongoing Brokering and Evolving Relational Understanding 75

Opportunities: Brokering as Adaptive Growth Under Constraint (Theme 2).. 77

Reframing Constraint as Agency 78

Developing Responsibility, Competence, and Bilingual Awareness .. 79

Uneven Access to Developmental Opportunities 82

Cultural Mediation Beyond Language Brokering 84

Research Question 2..... 86

School Support as Relational and Contextual Process (Theme 3)... 86

Tensions Within Language Support..... 86

Teacher-Level Effort as Relational Compensation 89

Conceptual Model 91

V. DISCUSSION 95

Summary of Findings 95

Interpretations and Contribution to Literature 96

Living Responsibility: Constraint, Care, and Relational Meaning 97

Growth Through Experience..... 99

School Support as Conditional, Relational, and Incomplete 102

Implications for Practice 105

School Support for Language Brokers and Teachers 106

Translanguaging 109

Korean Language School and Heritage Schools..... 111

Chapter Page

Limitations 113

Future Studies 115

Conclusion 117

APPENDICES 119

A. Purposive Sampling Message 119

B. Recruitment Poster 121

C. Focus Group Questions 123

REFERENCES CITED 124

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure Page

1. Table 1 Participant Demographic Information 68

2. Figure 1 Word Cloud of Codes Generated During Thematic Analysis 70

3. Conceptual Map: Language Brokering as a Relational and Evolving System Among Korean Immigrant Young Adults 92

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

My family immigrated to Oregon from South Korea in 1999, when I was 14-years old. As a freshman in high school, I was learning to navigate an unfamiliar educational system, acquiring English, and adjusting to a new cultural environment. At the same time, I stepped into a responsibility I had never anticipated: serving as my mother's language broker.

Even though my mom was educated, capable, and deeply resourceful back in our home country, the structural barrier of language often constrained her independence in everyday life. Initially, she relied on her older sister, my *imo*, who had immigrated fifteen years earlier. As I became more comfortable using English, this responsibility gradually shifted to me. As the first-born daughter, I stepped into the role with little transition. What began as translating postcards and commercial mailings soon expanded to handling issues with greater significance such as assisting with important notices from government agencies, navigating school communications, and interpreting during parent-teacher conversations—often about me.

Even now, my brother and I continue to serve as language brokers in our mother's life with a sense of gratitude. Although the contexts have changed to supporting her as she established a business, making financial decisions, or scheduling medical appointments, the responsibility itself has remained constant. Language brokering was not a temporary task confined to adolescence; it became an enduring dimension of my identity. It shaped how I understand responsibility and relational obligation, and it influenced how I see my role across linguistic and cultural spaces. Over time, I came to see myself as a bridge, standing between worlds and helping others express themselves in new settings.

Now, as a high school English Language Development (ELD) teacher in a large, diverse suburban school district, I recognize this pattern in my students. For many multilingual students, language brokering becomes part of daily life. They interpret parent-teacher communication, explain school policies, accompany their parents to government offices, and translate official documents. Some help manage customer calls or business transactions, and at times, they speak directly with supervisors or public officials on behalf of their families. Even though government agencies and schools often provide translated materials, many parents continue to depend on their children for clarity, reassurance, and an understanding of the subtle meanings that go beyond written translation (Dorner et al, 2008; Martinez et al, 2009; Orellana et al., 2003). In this process, these students navigate institutional systems for their families while also managing their own academic and social development.

Despite the rapid growth of translation apps and AI-powered tools, language brokering continues across generations. Technology can help translate words with increasing accuracy, yet it reaches its limits in the deeper dimensions of family communication, including the trust between family members, the shared understanding of cultural context, and the emotional responsibility involved in translating for someone you care about. In my work with multilingual students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, I have witnessed how common language brokering is across immigrant communities. At the same time, my own lived experience has drawn me to look more closely at the experiences of Korean youth who grow up serving in this role. Language brokering is more than a practical task. It is a formative and relational experience within immigrant families, one that calls for deeper understanding through careful attention to individuals' lived experiences.

Definition of Language Brokering

Language brokering is defined as the informal translation and interpretation work carried out by children and adolescents in immigrant families on behalf of parents or other adults with limited proficiency in the dominant language (McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Morales & Hanson, 2005). This work extends beyond literal translation to include explaining, negotiating meaning, and mediating interactions across linguistic, cultural, and institutional context (Orellana, 2009).

The term *language brokering* was first introduced in an academic context by McQuillan and Tse (1995), who examined the cognitive, cultural, and literacy-related dimensions of children's translating practices in linguistic minority communities. Their work highlighted conceptualizing children's translation not as an isolated skill, but as a socially embedded practice shaped by family needs, institutional demands, and children's emerging bilingualisms. Since that time, language brokering has become the dominant term used in research spanning education, psychology, sociology, and applied linguistics (Kam & Lazarevic, 2014; Orellana & Phoenix, 2017).

Prior to the introduction of this term, related concepts appeared in the literature under different labels. One of the earliest is *natural translation* to describe translation performed spontaneously by bilingual individuals without formal training (Harris & Sherwood, 1978). This concept recognized everyday translation as a valid and meaningful linguistic practice, rather than framing it as a deficient or incomplete form of professional interpreting. Other studies have framed similar practices as *family interpreting*, emphasizing the relational and intergenerational dimensions of children's interpreting within immigrant households (Valdés, 2003). From this perspective, interpreting is understood as a family-based activity shaped by power relations, role expectations, and emotional ties, rather than by professional norms of neutrality or accuracy.

Similar to this, Orellana (2009) described children's translation work as a form of cultural brokering, highlighting how children mediate not only language but also institutional knowledge, expectations, and cultural norms as they assist family members in schools, healthcare settings, and public spaces.

Although these terms differ in emphasis, they align around a shared understanding that children in immigrant families commonly serve as linguistic and cultural bridges and how language brokering is a normal part of immigrants' family life (Corona et al., 2012; De Ment et al., 2005). Today, researchers use the term l*anguage brokerin*g, as it captures both the linguistic and social dimension of this work while acknowledging children's active role in the process.

An Overview of Korean Immigration to the United States

The first major wave of Korean immigration to the United States began in 1903, when laborers were recruited to work on sugar plantations in Hawaii. Between 1903 and 1905, more than 7,000 Koreans arrived, many leaving Korea due to political instability and economic hardship during the late Joseon Dynasty and the onset of Japanese colonial rule (Hurh, 1998). This migration declined sharply after the 1924 immigration restrictions limited Asian entry into the United States. A second wave of Korean immigration began after the Korean War (1950-1953). Although U.S. immigration quotas were still strict at that time, special policies allowed Korean war brides and adopted children to enter the United States. As a result, Korean migration increased slightly during the 1950s and early 1960s (Kim, 2012; Min, 2006). Unlike the earlier labor-based migration, movement during this period was shaped primarily by humanitarian reasons and family reunification.

The most significant change in Korean immigration occurred after the passage of the *Immigration and Nationality Act* in 1965. This law removed racially restrictive quotas and

created new opportunities for Asian immigrants to enter the United States. In the years following, Korean immigration increased rapidly and reshaped the demographic and socioeconomic profile of Korean-Americans (Hurh, 1998; Min, 2006). Many post-1965 immigrants were relatively well educated and entered professional sectors, while others pursued small business ownership as a pathway to economic stability. Researchers note that small business ownership became an important and defining feature of many Korean immigrant communities, especially in large cities such as Los Angeles and New York (Light & Bonacich, 1988; Min, 1996).

By the late 20th century, Korean-Americans had become one of the larger Asian-American subgroups in the United States. The Korean immigrant population grew steadily, reaching approximately 1.17 million by 2000, 1.63 million by 2010, and nearly 2 million by 2020 (Pew Research Center, 2025). These figures include both Korean immigrants and U.S-born individuals of Korean ancestry. This growth reflects more than an increase in numbers. It also marks a generational transition. A growing share of Korean Americans are now U.S born, coming of age within American schools and institutions while remaining connected to family migration histories. Their identities are shaped by both inherited cultural traditions and everyday experiences in English-speaking settings.

Korean-Speaking Communities in Oregon

In the Pacific Northwest, including Oregon, Korean immigrant populations expanded notably in the decades following changes to U.S. immigration policy in the 1960s, with settlement emerging in metropolitan areas such as Portland and Seattle beginning in the 1960s and continuing through the 1970s and 1980s (Migration Policy Institute, 2022; Korean American Historical Society records, 1985). These demographic patterns have produced intergenerational

households in which first-generation parents may have limited English proficiency, while second-generation children grow up fluent in English and embedded in U.S. schooling systems. Researchers have observed that such linguistic gaps frequently position children as cultural and language brokers within immigrant families (Choi, 2003; Min, 2006).

Gaps in the Literature

This study explores the lived experiences of Korean immigrant young adults who served as language brokers for their parents while growing up. This group is often included under broader categories in immigrant and Asian-American research, rather than studied in its own cultural context. Although language brokering has been widely researched, most of the existing studies focus on Latinx, and especially Mexican-origin, populations. Many foundational and frequently cited studies on brokering prevalence, psychological outcomes, and family processes were conducted primarily with Latinx youth (Anguiano, 2017; Martinez et al., 2009; Shen & Dennis, 2017; Tse, 1995; Weisskirch & Alva, 2002). A meta-analysis reviewing 65 studies on language brokering and youth well-being found that most participants across studies were Latinx, which limits culturally specific understanding and comparison across ethnic groups (Shen et al., 2022). Even qualitative studies that explore identity and meaning-making among adult or professional brokers continue to focus mainly on Latino participants (DuBord, 2025; López et al., 2019; Phoenix & Orellana, 2021).

In contrast, Korean immigrant families are rarely the central focus of language brokering research. One qualitative study, which included six parents and child pairs and focused on adolescents rather than young adults reflecting back on their childhood experiences, specifically noted a lack of research on Korean language brokering (Lee, 2023). Earlier work also pointed out that Korean American young adults' family experiences have received little attention,

offering one of the few retrospective examinations of this group (Kang et al., 2010). More often, Korean participants are grouped into broad "Asian" or "Asian American" categories within racially diverse samples (Guan et al., 2016; Higuera, 2024). This grouping can hide important cultural differences. Research on Korean American adolescents suggests that ethnic identity formation is closely tied to family communication patterns shaped by cultural norms and generational differences (Lee, 2011), yet little research has examined how language brokering functions within these identity negotiations over time.

There is also a geographic gap. Many language brokering studies were conducted in states with longstanding histories of immigrant arrivals. Earlier research on Latino language brokering took place in California schools (Tse, 1995; Weisskirch & Alva, 2002). Later qualitative and mixed-method studies were also based in Los Angeles and other California cities (Guan et al., 2016; Higuera, 2024). Longitudinal research on Mexican-origin adolescents has been carried out largely in Texas and other regions with large Latinx populations (Anguiano, 2017; Kim et al., 2024, 2025). Emerging-adult narratives have also been collected in Midwestern cities with substantial Latinx communities (DuBord, 2025). Dorantes (2021) similarly observed that much of the existing language brokering research involving Latinx populations has been concentrated in regions such as the Southwest, the Midwest, and parts of the East Coast. The author highlights the need to expand language brokering scholarship to additional geographic contexts, including states such as Oregon, where immigrant communities continue to grow but remain underrepresented in the research literature.

Kwon (2014) provides a retrospective narrative study of Korean immigrants' experiences with language broking, offering insight into how working-class Korean immigrants look back and interpret the responsibilities they carried in their families. The study contributes important

Korean-specific perspectives to the literature. However, most participants were recruited in and around a well-established Los Angeles Koreatown. Because of this geographic concentration, the findings mainly reflect experiences within a dense ethnic community and may not represent the realities of Korean immigrants living in more dispersed regions. In contrast, no identified study focuses on Korean language brokering in Oregon. More broadly, research rarely examines Korean brokers in smaller or more geographically dispersed communities, where access to interpreters, school supports, and ethnic institutions may differ from high-density immigrant areas (Guan et al., 2016; Shen et al., 2022).

Korean immigrant families remain underrepresented in brokering research, especially in states like Oregon where the Korean population is smaller and more dispersed. In such settings, the availability of professional interpreters, the strength of ethnic community networks, and school language support may shape brokering practices differently than in California or Texas. By focusing on Korean immigrant young adults in Oregon and inviting them to reflect on the emotional, relational, and developmental meaning of brokering across time, this study seeks to contribute culturally specific and contextually grounded knowledge to a field that has often generalized across immigrant groups and regions. For example, Dorantes (2021) suggests that Latino youth who regularly translated for their parented described language brokering as an emotionally complex experience involving feelings of responsibility, stress, pride, and family obligation. Participants often reported navigating adult conversations and institutional systems at a young age while attempting to accurately represent their parents' voices. Similarly, Martinez et al. (2009) examine language brokering contexts among Latino adolescents and highlight that brokering frequently occur in formal institutional environments

and was associated with both behavioral and emotional adjustment, suggesting that the experience can involve both challenges and developmental growth. Olsen (2019) documented how immigrant youth in the Pacific Northwest often act as cultural and linguistic mediators within their families, helping parents interpret not only language but also institutional expectations and social norms. This study emphasizes that language brokering is embedded within broader family responsibilities and immigrant adaptation processes. At the same time, the existing research in the region has largely centered on Latino immigrant populations. As a result, relatively little is known about how language brokering is experienced within other immigrant communities in the Pacific Northwest, including Korean immigrant families. This gap highlights the need for research that explores how Korean immigrant young adults interpret and reflect on their language brokering experiences within school and family contexts.

Problem Statement

Children in immigrant families frequently assume the role of interpreters and cultural brokers for their parents, mediating language, institutional systems, and cultural norms from an early age. However, much of this research has centered on Latinx populations and has often grouped Korean participants within broader Asian or Asian American categories, limiting culturally specific understanding. As a result, there is limited attention to how language brokering is experienced and interpreted within cultural contexts, and how individuals make meaning of these responsibilities over time. Research on Korean immigrant families remains especially sparse, and few studies have examined how Korean immigrant young adults reflect retrospectively on their childhood brokering experiences (Kim, 2019; Kwon, 2014; Lee, 2023). Without culturally and contextually grounded inquiry, the nuanced ways that language brokering

is shaped by cultural expectations, family roles, intergenerational dynamics, and community contexts may remain underexplored.

Addressing this gap is important not only for representing Korean immigrant families more accurately within the literature, but also for broadening the field's understanding of how language brokering may unfold differently across immigrant communities. A more culturally specific lens can deepen theoretical insight into the relational and developmental meanings of brokering and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of immigrant family experiences.

Purpose of Study

This qualitative study explores the lived experiences of young adults from Korean immigrant families who engaged in language brokering during childhood or adolescence. The study examines how these individuals acted as language brokers for their parents while navigating linguistic, cultural, and institutional boundaries in both everyday and high-stakes contexts. The central research questions guiding this study are: (a) How do young adults from Korean immigrant families reflect on and interpret their childhood experiences of serving as language brokers for their immigrant parents? and (b) Based on these experiences, how do Korean immigrant young adults believe middle and high schools could better support students who serve as language brokers for their families?

This study makes connections to K-12 education and educational practice. Understanding how student language brokers interpret their experiences can help educators recognize the complexity of students' lives beyond the classroom. These insights can inform more responsive and equitable school practices, including how teachers communicate with families, how schools provide consistent and accessible language support, and how educators interpret student behaviors such as participation, stress, or attendance. At the same time, this study expands the

conversation beyond K-12 education to include community-based educational spaces that play a significant role in Korean immigrant communities, such as Korean language schools, church-affiliated programs, and other community learning environments. These spaces often function as sites where heritage language, culture, and identity are maintained and negotiated across generations.

Research on Korean American youth suggests that community-based heritage language schools support not only heritage language learning but also culturally situated ways of communicating and the development of positive ethnic identity (Lee, 2002; You, 2005). In this sense, such environments may also reinforce bilingual and cross-cultural communicative practices closely related to the skills involved in language brokering. By attending to both school and community contexts, this study highlights the need for more coordinated and culturally responsive support across the multiple spaces in which students navigate language, culture, and family responsibility.

Although my personal experiences prompted this line of inquiry, they represent only one perspective within a broader and more complex set of experiences. With my study, I seek to explore how Korean American young adults reflect on and interpret their roles as language brokers, how they make sense of the responsibilities they assumed, and how these experiences have influenced their identity development in young adulthood. By centering the narratives of these individuals, the study offers a more culturally grounded understanding of immigrant family dynamics while also illuminating how these experiences extend beyond the home and into educational spaces.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE SYNTHESIS

In many immigrant families, children grow up helping their parents navigate English as part of everyday life. Immigrant parents arrive in the United States with a wider range of English proficiency shaped by their educational, social, and linguistic backgrounds in their home countries. Children who arrive at a young age, or who are born in the United States, often acquire English as they develop language skills. Through schools and social interaction, they frequently come to understand and use English more proficiently than their parents. Over time, this difference places children in the role of a language bridge, helping their families communicate in English and move through new systems.

Distinction Between Professional Interpretation and Child Language Brokering

Professional interpreters are formally trained, follow established ethical guidelines, and are expected to maintain neutrality and accuracy. In settings such as health care, education, and legal contexts, they complete specialized training, demonstrate strong bilingual proficiency, and adhere to formal codes of conduct (Angelelli, 2004; National Council on Interpreting in Health Care [NCIHC], 2004). Interpretation in these settings is treated as a regulated practice designed to ensure clear and accountable communication, especially in high stakes situations.

In contrast, studies on child language brokering show that children's interpreting takes place within close family relationships shaped by care, obligation, and interdependence. Dorner et al. (2008) found that immigrant youth do more than translate words accurately. They interpret meaning, tone, and institutional expectations as they help their families navigate schools and other systems. Many youths describe this work as simply helping their family, suggesting that it is woven into daily life even as it places them in positions of responsibility beyond their age.

Children also take on tasks that professional interpreters are trained to avoid. They may summarize information, soften difficult messages, offer advice, or decide which details to highlight or leave out (García-Sánchez, 2018). Kam and Lazarevic (2014) describe language brokering as involving emotional labor, shifting roles, and navigating power within families. Together, these studies show that child language brokering is shaped by relationships and responsibility rather than professional standards of neutrality, and that it can place children in vulnerable positions even when it is seen as normal within immigrant families.

Immigrant Generational Status, Acculturation, and Linguistic Adaptation

Research on immigrant assimilation has moved away from treating generational status as a simple label and instead understands it as something that shapes how people grow into language, identity, and relationships over time. Early work on assimilation drew a clear line between first- and second-generation immigrants, suggesting that over generations, children would naturally become more linguistically and culturally aligned with the mainstream than their parents (Gordon, 1964; Park & Burgess, 1921). Later scholarship expanded on this notion. Rumbaut (2004), for example, introduced the idea of the 1.5 generation to describe children who arrive during childhood and grow up between two cultural and linguistic worlds. Even within this group, experiences vary. Those who arrive at a younger age often come to resemble U.S. born peers in their schooling and language use, while those who arrive later may hold on more strongly to their heritage language and cultural ties. In a similar way, Zhou (1997) expanded the idea of the second generation to include both U.S born children and those who were born elsewhere but raised in the United States, emphasizing that their development is shaped by family, community, and school contexts.

These shifts in how generations are defined mirror broader changes in how assimilation itself is understood. Earlier models described assimilation as a straightforward, step-by-step process across generations (Gordon, 1964; Park & Burgess, 1921). More recent perspectives, including segmented assimilation theory, push back on this idea by showing that there is no single pathway. Instead, outcomes differ depending on factors such as socioeconomic conditions, racialization, and how welcoming the broader society is (Portes & Zhou, 1993). Within this framework, some youth experience upward mobility, while others face stagnation or even downward assimilation, especially when experiencing barriers such as poverty, discrimination, and limited educational opportunities. A key concept here is selective acculturation, where young people learn English and navigate mainstream institutions while still maintaining their home language and cultural practices. Holding onto both can be an important resource, often strengthening family relationships and supporting more positive developmental outcomes (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Portes & Zhou, 1993).

Thinking about generational status in this way also helps make sense of how language brokering is experienced. For many 1.5 generation youth, stronger skills in their heritage language can make brokering feel more natural on the surface, but the role itself can still be complex as they take on responsibilities that shift family dynamics. For second-generation youth, brokering may be less straightforward, especially if their heritage language skills are more limited, which can make high-stakes interactions more stressful. Looking at language brokering through the lens of generational status highlights that it is not just about translation but how young people and their families are navigating life across languages, cultures, and expectations in the process of settling into a new society.

Children and Adolescents as Language Brokers

Across studies, language brokering appears as a routine and embedded practice within the everyday lives of immigrant families, most often in the everyday spaces where immigrant families encounter English. Home and school consistently appear as primary sites of brokering, alongside community settings such as stores, healthcare facilities, and public service offices (McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Orellana & Phoenix, 2017; Rainey et al., 2014; Roche et al., 2015). These patterns suggest that language brokering is not confined to occasional assistance but is woven into the daily functioning of family life, particularly in contexts that require navigating institutional systems and accessing essential resources.

Across these settings, youth frequently support their families by translating written materials, facilitating communication, and interpreting institutional expectations. In school contexts, this often includes explaining school documents, report cards, and expectations embedded in academic systems (Orellana, 2009; Valdés, 2003). In community and institutional environments, such as healthcare or government offices, brokering may involve more complex and high-stakes communication, including navigating technical language, interpreting authority dynamics, and conveying sensitive information (Antonini, 2010; García-Sánchez et al., 2011). These experiences highlight that language brokering extends beyond literal translation to include meaning-making, mediating, and decision-making on behalf of family members.

Importantly, the literature suggests that the intensity and meaning of language brokering shift depending on context. While some brokering occurs in routine, everyday interactions, youth are also frequently positioned in situations that carry greater emotional and social consequences. As young people move between informal family settings and more formal institutional encounters, language brokering becomes both a practical responsibility and a relational practice

that shapes family dynamics. Studies consistently point to this dual nature, showing that brokering is associated with both emotional strain, such as stress or anxiety, and positive outcomes, including a sense of contribution, competence, and strengthened parent–child relationships (Morales & Wang, 2018; Roche et al., 2015).

Taken together, these findings suggest that language brokering is best understood as a multifaceted and context-dependent experience, rooted in the everyday realities of immigrant family life while simultaneously shaped by the demands of institutional navigation. Rather than a singular or uniform activity, brokering reflects a dynamic process through which youth engage with language, culture, and responsibility across multiple domains of their lives.

Developmental Stage: Emerging Adulthood

Participants in this study are in the developmental stage of *emerging adulthood*, typically defined as ages 18 to 25, a period characterized by exploration, instability, and ongoing identity formation (Arnett, 2000). During this stage, individuals have moved beyond adolescence but have not yet taken on fully established adult roles, creating a distinct developmental space characterized by greater autonomy, expanded perspective-taking, and deeper self-reflection. Emerging adulthood is particularly significant for this study as individuals begin to consolidate their sense of self while revisiting earlier life experiences. Arnett (2000) highlights that identity exploration during this period occurs across domains such as relationships, work, and personal beliefs, allowing young adults to examine how past experiences have shaped who they are becoming.

For individuals from immigrant families, this developmental stage is especially important for interpreting language brokering experiences. In childhood and adolescence, language brokering is often carried out as an immediate and context-driven responsibility; however,

emerging adulthood creates space for the cognitive and emotional distance needed to revisit and reconsider these experiences in more meaningful ways. Young adults are able to reflect on how brokering shaped their roles within the family, their sense of responsibility, and their navigation of linguistic and cultural boundaries. Importantly, this stage of identity development also enables participants to examine how their language brokering experiences intersected with their overall educational experiences. In this way, emerging adulthood provides an essential developmental lens for understanding how participants in this study make meaning of their past language brokering experiences and their broader educational trajectories.

When Brokering Begins: Age Patterns and Early into the Role

Children's entry into language brokering is consistently described as early, most often beginning in late childhood, though many accounts describe even earlier starts. Reviews note that children commonly begin brokering between ages 8 and 12, spanning late elementary through early middle school (Kim et al., 2018; Mier-Chairez et al., 2019). In a longitudinal study of Mexican origin adolescents, Kim et al. (2018) focused on middle school students because children of immigrants typically start brokering during this age range. Retrospective qualitative research with adult brokers from diverse backgrounds similarly reports first brokering as early as age 7, with an average onset around age 11 (Narchal & Hembrow, 2024). Survey research with fifth grade Latino students further shows that many children are already serving as regular brokers by ages 10 to 11 (Weisskirch & Alva, 2002).

At the same time, ethnographic and case study work illustrate how brokering can begin even younger. Rajagopal and Anderson (2025), in a year-long study of a Vietnamese background child, describe a seven-year-old who regularly translated both written and spoken communication for his mother at home and in community settings. Ethnographic and narrative

studies with Mexican origin youth also portray children brokering during late elementary school, including for younger siblings and in consequential settings such as school meetings and medical visits (Alvarez, 2017; Orellana & Phoenix, 2017). Together, these studies suggest that there is no single starting age. Rather, brokering emerges when children develop enough functional proficiency in English and encounter institutional demands that exceed their caregivers' language access (Delgado, 2023; López, 2020).

Once brokering begins, it often becomes an ongoing role within the family. Longitudinal narrative work with a Mexican origin broker shows that she assumed this responsibility early and continued through high school and into college (Orellana & Phoenix, 2017). Retrospective interviews with adult brokers across ethnic groups similarly describe brokering as a lasting and taken for granted part of family life, rather than a brief stage of childhood (Arumí & Rubio-Carbonero, 2022; Bauer, 2015; Narchal & Hembrow, 2024).

Factors for Early Language Brokering Entry

Schooling often serves as a key moment when language brokering becomes necessary. Parent teacher conferences, enrollment and placement forms, special education meetings, disciplinary conversations, and routine school letters create situations in which children are asked to interpret because caregivers cannot easily navigate English dominant communication (Alvarez, 2017; Delgado, 2023; López, 2020). Narrative and longitudinal studies show that school-based interactions frequently mark the point when brokering shifts from occasional help to an ongoing responsibility. In these settings, children are no longer translating casual conversation. They are mediating decisions that carry academic and social consequences (Phoenix & Orellana, 2021).

Sibling dynamics further shape who begins brokering and how early. Across studies, older siblings often broker first, yet responsibility is not distributed evenly. Families tend to rely on the child who is seen as most capable, available, or confident, regardless of birth order (Alvarez, 2017; Love & Buriel, 2007; Narchal & Hembrow, 2024). At the same time, research in Latino immigrant families suggests that older and first-born children—particularly girls—often carry a disproportionate share of family responsibilities, including language brokering, reflecting broader expectations of caregiving and family obligation (Valenzuela, 1999; Morales et al., 2012). Gender, temperament, and perceived language ability also influence this process. Even when multiple children are bilingual, brokering often settles on the child who can most consistently manage institutional language and social pressure (Guan et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2018; López, 2020). Together, early school demands and these family level decisions help explain why many children begin brokering in late childhood, while others assume the role much earlier.

Language Brokering in Schools: Policy, Law, and Technology

School settings play a central role in structuring when, how and why language brokering occurs. In the United States, federal policy formally establishes that schools are responsible for ensuring meaningful communication with families who have limited English proficiency. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, schools receiving federal fundings must provide language access so that families can participate fully in their child's education. Federal guidance issued by the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights explicitly discouraged the use of students as interpreters except in emergency situations. These policies position schools as the primary agents responsible for translation and interpretation.

Despite these legal requirements, implementation remains uneven across school contexts. Research indicates that interpreter access, translated materials, bilingual staffing are often inconsistent, particularly in routine or low-stakes interactions such as informal conversations, quick clarification, for follow-up communication after meetings. In these every day moments, schools may implicitly rely on students to bridge communication, even when educators recognize the ethical concerns associated with doing so (Cline et al., 2014). As a result, school structures simultaneously aim to reduce reliance on child language brokers in formal settings while inadvertently sustaining their role in informal and relational communication. Even where schools provide translated documents or interpretation services, families often continue to depend on their children for explanation, reassurance, and contextual understandings. This finding suggests that institutional supports do not eliminate, but reshape language brokering (García-Sánchez et al., 2011; Morales & Hanson, 2005; Orellana et al., 2003).

More recently, the rapid expansion of digital translation tools and artificial intelligence (AI) has introduced new possibilities for school-family communication. Teachers and families increasingly use translation apps, real-time captioning, and AI-based messaging tools to communicate across languages. On the surface, these technologies appear to reduce the need for student involvement by providing immediate, accessible translation. However, research on language brokering suggests that the practice has never been limited to word-for-word translation. Children do not simply translate language. They interpret tone, clarify intent, explain institutional expectations, and navigate power dynamics embedded in school interactions. For instance, students may soften messages, reframe disciplinary language, or provide additional

context to help parents understand school norms-forms of mediation that extend beyond the capacity of automated translation (Bauer, 2015; Crater & Iqbal, 2022; Morales & Hanson, 2005).

Moreover, language brokering is deeply embedded in relational and developmental processes that technology cannot replicate. Through repeated brokering experiences, youth learn to navigate linguistic and cultural boundaries, develop a sense of responsibility toward their families, and construct identities as bilingual and bicultural individuals. These experiences are often understood as acts of care and obligation rather than merely functional tasks (Hua & Costigan, 2012; Weisskirch et al., 2011). Retrospective studies further show that brokering becomes part of how individuals make sense of their family roles and social positioning over time (Orellana & Phoenix, 2017). While AI tools may reduce the frequency of simple translation tasks, they do not replace the relational, cultural, and moral dimensions of brokering.

Emotional and Psychological Dimensions of Language Brokering

Research on language brokering describes it as emotionally layered and psychologically complex. It is not portrayed as entirely harmful or entirely beneficial. Instead, studies show that brokering unfolds within a mix of stress, pride, responsibility, family relationships, and broader social conditions.

Emotional Risks: Burden, Stress, and Psychological Vulnerability

Early studies described language brokering as a common but emotionally complex part of immigrant family life. Children often translate in everyday situations as well as in high-stakes settings such as schools, banks, and medical appointments. In these moments, children are not only translating words, but also helping their families navigate unfamiliar systems, expectations

and authority structures (McQuillan and Tse, 1995; Ng, 1998). Weisskirch and Alva (2002) found that youth often experienced mixed feelings. Many reported a sense of pride and competence, while also feeling embarrassment, pressure, or fear of making mistakes. These studies did not frame brokering as inherently harmful. Instead, they suggested that taking on adult-like responsibilities can shape children's development in subtle ways.

The emotional impact of brokering depends less on how often it occurs and more on how it is experienced. Umaña-Taylor (2003) raised concerns that taking on adult-like roles too early may complicate identity development, particularly when children act as intermediaries within families. Similarly, Rainey et al. (2014) found that frequent brokering alone was not associated with distress. Instead, youth who experienced brokering as stressful or burdensome were more likely to report anxiety and depressive symptoms in young adulthood. This finding suggests that brokering becomes a source of emotional strain when youth feel responsible for avoiding mistakes or protecting their families from harm.

Family relationships also play an important role in shaping these experiences. Frequent language brokering was linked to lower well-being primarily among youth with insecure attachment. In contrast, when family relationships were supportive and trusting, brokering responsibilities were felt less overwhelmed. When families were secure, responsibilities felt shared. When relationships were strained, the same responsibilities felt heavier (Weisskirch et al., 2020)

More recent studies place language brokering within racialized social contexts, showing how children's experiences are shaped by discrimination and unequal treatment. For instance, brokering predicted depressive and social anxiety symptoms mainly among youth who also reported racial discrimination or high cultural mistrust (Felkey and Graham, 2022). Brokering

alone did not consistently predict distress. Rather, distress emerged when youth mediated within settings marked by unfair treatment and systemic inequality. Across these studies, emotional risk appears conditional rather than inevitable. Brokering becomes more vulnerable when combined with insecure attachment, discrimination, coercive expectations, or high-pressure institutional demands.

Research with Asian American youth suggests that language brokering is often experienced as both relationally meaningful and emotionally demanding at the same time. On one hand, brokering can strengthen family relationships by helping adolescents recognize their parents' sacrifices, which may foster respect and, in some cases, support more positive behavioral outcomes, particularly when open communication is limited (Shen et al., 2014). On the other hand, brokering can also introduce emotional strain when youth feel pressure from taking on adult-like responsibilities or from navigating cultural differences. These findings highlight that supportive and stressful processes can coexist within the same experience of brokering.

Emotional Benefits: Competence, Identity, and Relational Growth

Alongside the risks described in the literature, many studies also show that language brokering can support adolescents' development, especially when young people experience it as meaningful rather than stressful. A key idea across studies is perceived efficacy. Kim et al. (2017) explain that adolescents who feel confident in their translating skills tend to report higher self-esteem and fewer depressive symptoms. In contrast, youth who feel that brokering is a heavy burden are more likely to report higher levels of depressive symptoms. These findings suggest that the emotional meaning attached to brokering, whether it feels empowering or overwhelming, shapes its impact on well-being.

Language brokering has also been connected to ethnic identity development and bicultural competence. For example, Weisskirch (2005) found that among Latinx college students brokering was positively associated with ethnic identity exploration and affirmation. Through regular translating experiences, youth learn to move between cultural settings, interpret institutional language, and communicate with authority figures. Over time, these experiences can build skills that support leadership, confidence, and advocacy. Research within Chinese American families further highlights the cultural meanings tied to brokering. Wu and Kim (2009) found that stronger orientation toward Chinese culture was linked to a greater sense of familial obligation. This sense of obligation was associated with feeling valued by parents, which, in turn, was connected to perceiving brokering as efficacious rather than burdensome. In other words, when youth felt culturally connected and important within their families, they were more likely to experience brokering as meaningful and manageable.

Language brokering has also been linked to prosocial development. In a study of Latino mother-adolescent pairs, Kam et al. (2017) found that adolescents who engaged more frequently in brokering reported higher levels of perspective taking and empathic concern, and similar patterns were observed among mothers. Perspective taking refers to the ability to understand another person's point of view, and empathic concern refers to feeling care and compassion for others. Both are foundational elements of prosocial behavior (Van der Graaff et al, 2018).

Studies with South Asian Canadian young adults echo these findings. Cila and Lalonde (2014) found that more frequent brokering was associated with greater perceived competence and empowerment when navigating bureaucratic systems. Participants described increased confidence when speaking with professionals and advocating for family members. Qualitative retrospective research further shows that the meaning of brokering can shift across the life

course. Orellana and Phoenix (2017) found that adults often looked back on childhood brokering experiences as shaping who they became. Many recalled feeling needed and trusted by their families. Experiences that once felt heavy were later integrated into narratives of resilience and agency.

Other qualitative work emphasizes language brokering as relational and caring labor. Bauer (2015) argues that brokering involves complex emotional negotiation within institutional spaces, as children manage language, expectations, and feelings. Rajagopal and Anderson (2025) describe it as a caring and layered communication practice that can feel both overwhelming and empowering, as children learn to regulate emotion and responsibility in public settings. López (2020) integrates these perspectives, describing language brokering as a multidimensional experience shaped by immigration systems, family roles, racialization, and institutional power. Emotional outcomes vary depending on context, relational climate, and structural conditions.

Research on language brokering has increasingly reframed the practice as a meaningful site of bilingual development rather than a purely compensatory task. Youth engaged in brokering do more than translate words; they interpret meaning, adjust register, and navigate audience and cultural expectations across contexts, which fosters heightened metalinguistic awareness and strategic language use. Through these repeated, real-world communicative demands, language brokers develop the ability to monitor accuracy, negotiate meaning, and make context-sensitive linguistic decisions, all of which align with the concept of emergent bilingualism as a dynamic and adaptive process. In this way, language brokering not only reflects existing bilingual abilities but actively contributes to the development of sophisticated bilingual awareness grounded in lived, relational practice. This perspective challenges deficit-oriented

views of bilingual youth and instead positions their everyday experiences as rich sites of language learning and cognitive growth (Mills & Murray, 2017).

Language Practices and Cultural Values of Korean Immigrants

Many Korean immigrants arrived with strong educational backgrounds and a deep commitment to upward mobility, often centering those aspirations on their children's academic success (Yoon, 1997; Zhou & Kim, 2006). Education has remained a guiding force in many Korean immigrant families, shaping where families choose to live, how daily routines are structured, and how long-term goals are imagined. Across communities, including those in Oregon and the greater Portland area, ethnic institutions have played an important role in sustaining these aspirations. Korean churches, heritage language schools, community organizations, and supplementary academies, or *hagwons*, often support both academic achievement and cultural continuity (Choi et al., 2013; Yoon et al., 2021). These institutions serve as meeting points between the two worlds. They help families navigate English-dominant public life while also maintaining Korean language practices and cultural traditions within the home.

Language use within Korean immigrant families often reflects generational differences. For many first-generation parents, Korean remains the primary language at home, church, and in extended family life. It carries not only practical meaning but also connections of identity, obligation, and belonging (Jee et al, 2024; Sok & Schwartz, 2021). Within the household, parents may intentionally sustain Korean through daily conversations and family language practices, even as their children spend much of their time in English-dominant schools and peer environments.

For children, English often becomes the language they use most comfortably in daily life. It is the language shared with classmates, friends, and often siblings, and it gradually shapes how they think, speak, and interact outside the home. This shift, however, is usually gradual rather than sudden. Research on Korean American families describes patterned exchanges in which children address parents in English, parents respond in Korean, and both languages coexist within the same conversation (Lee et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2024; Song, 2016). These exchanges do not necessarily reflect a break from Korean. Instead, they show how language abilities become distributed differently across generations, with children growing more confident in English while parents remain more comfortable in Korean.

Over time, English becomes more dominant among the second generation, while Korean remains more rooted among immigrant parents. As children spend more years in English-speaking schools in public institutions, they often develop greater comfort navigating classrooms, healthcare settings, and other formal systems than their parents (Choi et al., 2013; Song & Wu, 2024). This difference does not necessarily mean that the Korean language disappears from family life. Rather, language abilities become unevenly distributed within the household. Parents may continue to hold authority in matters of culture, tradition, and family decision-making, while children acquire increasing confidence in English-dominant settings. Communication within the family is reshaped, not replaced.

Research further suggests that these generational language patterns are closely tied to broader processes of acculturation and shifting family roles. For example, Kim and Wolpin (2008) found that Korean American adolescents often adapt more quickly to U.S. linguistic and cultural norms than their parents, creating differences not only in language proficiency but also in expectations around communication, autonomy, and authority. As a result, children may take

on more active roles in navigating English-dominant environments, while parents maintain stronger ties to heritage language practices. These differences do not simply reflect language preference but signal a broader redistribution of communicative responsibility within the family.

Cultural Values Shaping Korean Immigrant Families

Korean immigrant family life is often shaped by cultural values rooted in Confucian and collectivistic traditions, including filial piety (*hyo* in Korean), respect for elders, emotional restraint, and a strong sense of interdependence (Choi et al., 2013; Park, 2012; Yoon et al., 2021). Within this framework, children's education carries both practical and moral significance. Academic success is frequently understood not only as an individual achievement but as a reflection of family effort and responsibility. For many immigrant parents, education represents a primary pathway to stability and upward mobility, and it becomes central to family planning and daily life (Seo et al., 2020; Yoon et al., 2021). However, these sociocultural values may shift across generations and contexts. Hyun (2001) found that traditional Confucian values tend to be weaker among younger individuals, women, and those with greater exposure to Western ideas among Korean immigrants in the United States. Higher levels of education were also associated with lower endorsement of traditional values, suggesting that migration contexts may accelerate sociocultural change. These findings indicate that Confucian values can evolve in response to changing social conditions and that cultural values within Korean immigrant communities are dynamic and internally diverse.

These values often take shape through structured educational practices. Importantly, these patterns should not be interpreted through deficit-oriented frameworks. Choi et al. (2013) demonstrate that what is often characterized as "controlling" or "harsh" parenting in Western contexts is more accurately understood as culturally embedded parental involvement rooted in

responsibility, guidance, and relational obligation. Within this framework, communication may emphasize respect, indirect expression, and role-based expectations rather than open questioning or direct negotiation. This highlights the importance of interpreting communication practices within their cultural context, rather than through externally imposed norms. Church-based programs, *hagwons*, and weekend Korean language schools provide spaces where families reinforce high academic expectations while sustaining cultural continuity (Byun et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2025). In these settings, aspirations for academic success and commitments to cultural continuity remain closely connected, influencing how parents guide their children and how children come to understand their responsibilities within the family.

Family roles are often clearly structured and relationally defined. Parents, particularly mothers, frequently assume primary responsibility for moral guidance and educational oversight (Jin, 2015; Park, 2012). Parent-child relationships are described as especially close, reflecting both collectivistic values and the interdependence that can accompany immigrant adaptation. Emotional life within these families is influenced by cultural concepts such as *jeong*, which conveys deep relational attachment; *haan*, referring to restrained sorrow or enduring hardship; and *noon-chi*, the attentive reading of social cues (Choi et al., 2013; Park, 2012). These concepts encourage sensitivity to relational harmony and careful management of others' emotions.

These relational norms are also reflected in communication practices shaped by hierarchical expectations and respect for authority. Research on Korean educational contexts shows that speaking is often associated with seniority, expertise, and permission, while listening is positioned as the expected and appropriate form of participation. For instance, Lee and Kim (2019) describe classrooms where student engagement is frequently expressed through attentiveness, silence, and compliance rather than verbal questioning. Similarly, DeWaelsche

(2015) finds that students may avoid asking questions publicly, not due to lack of ability, but because questioning authority can be perceived as disruptive or face-threatening. These patterns suggest that language use is shaped not only by proficiency, but by culturally informed expectations about when and how it is appropriate to speak.

At the same time, second-generation youth often develop within school and peer contexts that emphasize autonomy, direct communication, and individual expression. Lee (2011) demonstrates that ethnic identity formation among Korean American adolescents unfolds within this intergenerational space. In Lee's study, adolescents' developing ethnic identities shaped how they communicated with their immigrant fathers. First-generation fathers often maintained traditional Korean norms, while adolescents adopted more individualistic values and direct communication styles associated with mainstream American culture. Linguistic differences, including fathers' limited English and children's limited Korean, further complicated dialogue. Lee (2011) found that these acculturation gaps frequently resulted in superficial exchanges, misunderstandings, and emotional distance, limiting opportunities for deep and reflective communication. Importantly, Lee argues that ethnic identity is not solely an internal developmental process but a relational one, negotiated through ongoing interaction with parents. These cultural and relational dynamics also shape how language brokering unfolds within Korean immigrant families.

Language Brokering in Korean American Families

This relational view of identity has important implications for understanding language brokering. When communication between parents and children is already shaped by cultural hierarchy, linguistic asymmetry, and differing expectations around authority and autonomy, language brokering may intensify these dynamics. Youth who translate for their

parents are not only converting language; they are navigating authority structures, protecting parental dignity, and managing relational harmony within contexts that may expose cultural differences.

Parenting practices often reflect this balancing process. Yoon et al. (2021) describe Korean immigrant parenting as blending elements associated with mainstream authoritative approaches, such as open communication and support for autonomy, with culture-specific emphases on interdependence and strong academic oversight. Their findings suggest a bilinear pattern of adaptation, in which acculturation and enculturation unfold simultaneously rather than replacing one another. Within this dynamic, youth may experience moments of tension as their developing autonomy, shaped by Western schooling and peer norms, intersects with parental expectations grounded in collectivistic and achievement-oriented values (Choi et al., 2013; Jin, 2015). The broader influence of "model minority" narratives, which emphasize relentless effort and educational attainment as markers of success, can further intensify academic pressure and shape emotional experiences within close-knit family systems (Shih et al., 2019; Yoon et al., 2021).

These cultural and relational patterns help explain how language brokering becomes woven into family life. A strong emphasis on education and institutional engagement requires parents to interact regularly with schools, healthcare providers, and other public systems where language barriers may arise. In such contexts, children's bilingual abilities often position them as practical mediators between family and institution (Lee, 2023). Within hierarchical family structures that value filial responsibility, brokering may be understood as part of being a dutiful child, particularly when it involves protecting parental dignity or ensuring clear communication

in English-dominant settings (Lee, 2023; Park, 2012). At the same time, these responsibilities can feel demanding as youth navigate differing norms around authority, autonomy, and self-expression across home and school environments.

Language choice itself carries relational significance. Korean remains central to identity and family cohesion, while English structures access to education and public life. Children's decisions about when and how to use each language therefore extend beyond practicality; they are shaped by considerations of respect, belonging, and obligation (Cunningham & King, 2018; Jung, 2023; Park, 2023). Within this intersecting web of cultural expectations and institutional demands, language brokering emerges not only as a communicative task but as a relational practice embedded in family life.

Language Brokering in a Growing Immigrant Context

Understanding language brokering in growing immigrant contexts such as Oregon is important for seeing how broader structural conditions shape the everyday lives of immigrant families. In places with smaller co-ethnic communities and limited language supports, brokering becomes a regular and often heavier responsibility for youth, revealing both the expectations placed on them and the gaps in institutional support.

Studies conducted in Oregon consistently point to a similar pattern. Martinez et al. (2009) show that in Oregon, in particularly Eugene-Springfield region, higher levels of brokering demand are associated with greater family stress, reduced parental involvement, and poorer academic and emotional outcomes for youth. For adolescents, high brokering contexts were linked to lower academic performance, particularly in language arts, more internalizing symptoms, weaker ethnic belonging, and a higher likelihood of substance use. In contrast, youth in lower brokering contexts demonstrated more positive academic and socioemotional outcomes,

suggesting that these responsibilities are closely tied to structural constraints that shift critical tasks onto children. Building on this, Kim (2019) found that more frequent and prolonged brokering among Korean participants, including some in Oregon, was associated with lower levels of hope, with no clear relationship to acculturation or resilience. This finding suggests that brokering may not necessarily support adaptation, but instead reflects an ongoing responsibility shaped by family obligation. Dorantes (2021) further illustrates how these dynamics are lived out in daily life, showing that Latinx youth in Oregon often broker in high-stakes situations such as healthcare, employment, and financial matters, where their translations carry real consequences for their families' well-being.

Taken together, these studies highlight an important implication for co-ethnic immigrant communities in emerging contexts like Oregon. When co-ethnic networks are smaller and bilingual resources are limited, language brokering becomes more intensive, prolonged, and individualized. As a result, youth take on roles that are not only necessary but also deeply consequential. In this context, brokering functions less as a bridge to assimilation and more as a response to systemic gaps, where children step in to compensate for limited access to linguistically and culturally responsive services. For smaller immigrant groups, such as Korean communities in Oregon, this dynamic further increase reliance on youth, shaping family relationships, identity, and well-being over time.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Research Design and Rational

This study uses a descriptive qualitative design to explore the lived experiences of Korean young adults who engaged in language brokering during childhood and adolescence. While prior research on language brokering has largely focused on Latino and Chinese populations, relatively little is known about how Korean immigrant youth make sense of these experiences over time and into adulthood. In addition, existing studies tend to emphasize the functional aspects of brokering, such as what children do for their families, rather than how these experiences are remembered, interpreted, and reflected upon in later life. This study addresses these gaps by focusing on the interpretation and reflection of language brokering among Korean immigrant young adults, a group that remains underrepresented in the literature, particularly in smaller and less-studied immigrant contexts such as Oregon. By centering participants' retrospective meaning-making, the study reframes language brokering as an evolving experience that continues to shape identity, relationships, and perspectives into adulthood. In doing so, it also offers implications for educators by deepening understanding of how to better support students who serve as language brokers, recognizing the complex responsibilities they carry and the ways these experiences intersect with their academic and social lives.

The purpose of this study is not only to understand what participants did as language brokers, but also how they now interpret those experiences in young adulthood. Language brokering takes place within family relationships and interactions with English-speaking institutions. It often involves complex emotions, responsibilities, and cultural expectations.

Because of this complexity, qualitative research is appropriate. As Creswell (2013) explains, qualitative research helps researchers understand how individuals interpret their experiences within specific social and cultural contexts.

At the same time, this study has clear boundaries. Leung (2015) explains that small-scale qualitative studies are not designed to produce generalizable findings or establish cause-and-effect relationships. This study does not attempt to prove that language brokering leads to specific developmental outcomes. Instead, consistent with Leung's argument, the goal is to understand context, variation, and lived experience. Participants in this study were young adults between the ages of 18 and 25. They were asked to reflect on language brokering experiences that may have occurred recently or up to ten years earlier. The reflective nature of this study is important because young adulthood is a developmental period focused on identity exploration. Erikson (1959) describes this stage as a time when individuals revisit earlier experiences to form a clearer sense of self. During this period, young adults often reinterpret childhood memories in light of who they are becoming. Language brokering, which often begins in childhood, may take on new meaning when viewed from this later stage of life.

Habermas and Bluck (2000) further explain that young adulthood is the stage when individuals become more capable of organizing life events into a coherent personal narrative. This developmental capacity allows participants to reflect more deeply on how language brokering shaped their relationships, responsibilities, and sense of identity. McAdams (2001) argues that individuals construct identity by developing an internal "life story." Through this life story, people organize past experiences, understand their present circumstances, and imagine their future. Identity is not fixed; it is shaped through the way individuals tell and retell their experiences over time. McAdams et al. (2006) explain that life stories create coherence by

connecting past, present, and future. Similarly, Singer (2004) suggests that autobiographical storytelling allows individuals to give emotional meaning to important life events.

In this study, when participants describe their language brokering experiences, they are not simply recalling events. They are actively interpreting those experiences and connecting them to their family roles, their navigation between cultures, and their identity development. Personal narratives are also shaped by culture. Singer (2004) notes that individuals draw from culturally available narratives when making sense of their lives. A reflective qualitative design will allow these cultural influences to emerge naturally through participants' storytelling. Additionally, qualitative inquiry provides space for voices that are often underrepresented (Creswell, 2013). Korean language brokering experiences remain relatively underexplored in existing research, particularly within specific regional communities. This design allows participants' voices to guide the analysis rather than imposing predetermined categories.

Setting

The study was conducted among participants who have spent at least two years of secondary school experience in Oregon. In this region, Korean immigrant populations expanded significantly following changes to U.S. immigration policy in the 1960s. Settlement increased in metropolitan areas such as Portland and Seattle throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Korean American Historical Society records, 1985; Migration Policy Institute, 2022). These demographic patterns have produced intergenerational households in which first-generation parents may have limited English proficiency, while second-generation children grow up fluent in English and educated in U.S. schooling systems. Researchers have observed that such linguistic gaps frequently position children as cultural and language brokers within immigrant families (Choi, 2003; Min, 2006).

Demographic and Linguistic Context of Korean Immigrants in Oregon

Korean-speaking immigrants in Oregon represent a small but visible linguistic community, particularly within the Portland metropolitan region. Washington County, Oregon's second-most populated county, had an estimated population of 611,272 residents in 2024, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2024). Within this growing and diverse county, Korean is the fourth most spoken language other than English, following Spanish, Vietnamese, and Chinese. Approximately 2,523 residents report Korean as the primary language spoken at home (Oregon Secretary of State, 2024). Statewide, Korean ranks among the more prevalent non-English languages, with an estimated 4,751 speakers across Oregon (Oregon Secretary of State, 2024). In addition to language data, demographic estimates suggest that more than 20,000 Korean Americans currently reside in Oregon, with the largest concentrations located in the Portland metropolitan region (Multnomah County, 2022). These data indicate that Korean immigrants constitute a growing and established immigrant community within the state. Although these numbers represent a relatively small proportion of the overall population, they reflect a sustained and measurable Korean-speaking presence in both Washington County and the state more broadly.

Census and state economic data describe the region as a major center for technology and advanced manufacturing, with a concentration of technology firms that have shaped local labor markets and population growth (State of Oregon Employment Department, 2025; U.S. Census Bureau, 2024). Within this regional landscape, Korean-speaking immigrants live in communities shaped by both professional employment sectors, including technology and engineering, and locally rooted small businesses. These economic patterns form part of the institutional environment in which families build their lives. Parents navigate workplaces and public systems

that operate largely in English, while children move daily through English-dominant schools within diverse districts.

Sampling Strategy and Recruitment

Participants included Korean immigrant young adults who engaged in language brokering for their families during childhood or adolescence. Eligibility criteria are as follows: (a) self-identifying as Korean or Korean American; (b) having been either born in the United States or born in Korea and immigrated to the United States during childhood, or having been raised in a Korean immigrant household and attended at least 2 years of middle school and/or high school in Oregon; (c) having served as a language broker between Korean and English for parents or immediate family members; and (d) being between 18 and 25 years of age at the time of participation.

Participants may identify across immigrant generational categories, including first generation (individuals born in Korea who immigrated to the United States during adolescence), 1.5 generation (individuals born in Korea who immigrated during childhood and were socialized in both Korean and U.S. contexts), and second generation (individuals born in the United States to Korean immigrant parents). Generational status was not used as a criterion for recruitment but was collected as demographic information and considered during data analysis to examine how participants' experiences of language brokering may vary across generational positions. Oregon provides an important setting for this research because it represents a smaller and less-studied context for Korean immigrant communities. Requiring participants to have attended middle school and/or high school in Oregon ensures that they can reflect on language brokering within U.S. K-12 educational settings, where interactions with schools, teachers, and institutional systems are especially salient.

To identify participants who hold direct and meaningful experience associated with the study, I used a combination of purposive, snowball, and convenience sampling. First, purposive sampling guided the initial phase of recruitment. Purposive sampling involves intentionally selecting individuals who possess specific lived experiences relevant to the research questions (Miles et al., 2014; Patton, 2015). Because this study centers on childhood language brokering within Korean immigrant families, the first three participants were identified through personal and professional networks where eligibility can be thoughtfully assessed. Recruitment emails were sent to potential participants and individuals who could help identify eligible participants, outlining the purpose of the study, participation expectations, and confidentiality procedures. (see Appendix A). This initial purposive approach ensures that early participants closely reflect the phenomenon being examined.

Second, snowball sampling was used to extend recruitment beyond my immediate networks. Snowball sampling is a purposeful strategy in which initial participants share study information with others who meet the inclusion criteria. This approach is particularly appropriate when working within culturally connected communities where trust and relational ties shape access (Patton, 2015). Through this process, initial participants were invited to refer additional eligible individuals who might be interested in participating. Snowball sampling supports the study's aim by reaching participants who are embedded within Korean immigrant networks and who might not be accessible through formal recruitment channels.

Finally, convenience sampling was used to broaden outreach within established community spaces. Convenience sampling refers to recruiting participants who are accessible to the researcher within naturally occurring settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Community-based outreach occurred in locations where Korean-American community members regularly

gather. Flyers were posted at a Korean church with congregation of more than 300 Korean American members, as well as at two Korean grocery stores located in the Beaverton and Portland areas. These sites were intentionally selected because they function as cultural and social hubs within the local Korean community. Recruitment materials were provided in both Korean and English to ensure accessibility for individuals with varying language preferences. The flyer, titled "Research Participants Needed," included a brief description of the study, eligibility criteria, and contact information (see Appendix B). All three sampling strategies were implemented concurrently throughout the recruitment process.

Participants

A total of 10 people participated in the study. Of these, three identified as male and seven as female. The sample included one first-generation participant, five who identified as 1.5 generation, and four who identified as second generation. In terms of language brokering experience, four participants reported engaging in language brokering for 4-6 years, three reported more than 10 years of experience and three reported 1-3 years. Regarding frequency, five participants reported engaging in language brokering several times a week, two reported a few times a month, one reported daily involvement, and two reported engaging rarely. At the time of the study, the average age of participants were 21.9 years and they had between 2 and 15 years of language brokering experience. All participants had completed at least two years of schooling in the United States, allowing them to reflect on both family and school-based brokering experiences. Pseudonyms are used throughout this manuscript to protect participants' identities.

Data Sources and Instruments

The primary source of data for this study were semi-structured focus groups with Korean American young adults who served as language brokers during childhood or adolescence. I selected this data collection approach to encourage collective reflection, allowing participants to build on one another's experiences and engage in shared meaning-making. I conducted three focus groups, each consisting of 3 or 4 participants. Group sizes were intentionally kept small to foster meaningful dialogue and support reflective engagement among participants. One week prior to their scheduled focus group session, participants received a Zoom link along with a brief reminder of the study purpose and participation details. To protect confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned to all individuals in transcripts and written reports.

I used a semi-structured focus group protocol consisting of open-ended questions designed to prompt reflection on participants' experiences [See Appendix C]. These questions aligned with the research questions and encouraged participants to describe and interpret their language brokering experiences in their own words. Follow-up and probing questions were used to clarify responses and explore ideas more deeply, while still allowing participants to guide the direction of the discussion. With participants' consent, all focus group discussions were video recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. Zoom was used to generate transcripts, which served as the primary data source for coding and analysis. Following each session, I reviewed the transcripts to correct minor errors such as filler words and spelling inaccuracies by rewatching the video recordings. In addition, brief observation notes were taken to document contextual details and group interactions that may not have been fully captured in the transcripts. Each focus group lasted approximately 60-90 minutes, and video was recorded using Zoom's secure recording function with participant consent.

The first focus group was conducted in Korean, while the second and third focus groups were conducted in English. Across all focus groups, participants naturally drew on both Korean and English, particularly when referencing specific words or expressions related to their language brokering experiences. The Korean-speaking focus group's transcript was translated into English using ChatGPT with the prompt: *"Translate the following text from Korean to English. Preserve the original meaning, tone, and nuance rather than translating word-for-word."* Then, I carefully reviewed the translated transcript to ensure accuracy. Any ambiguous or culturally specific phrases were revised to better reflect the intended meaning and context.

At the beginning of each focus group, I briefly shared my own experience as a language broker. Prior research (Kwon, 2013) demonstrates that researcher self-disclosure within shared cultural contexts can reduce hierarchical distance and foster openness. As someone who also served as a language broker for my Korean-speaking mother, I recognize that my positionality shapes this study. I introduced myself, explained my connection to the topic, and invited participants to share their first memory of language brokering. This opening structure was intended to create trust and mutual recognition.

Additionally, I incorporated brief written reflection as part of the discussion protocol. Prior to sharing verbally, participants were given approximately 30 seconds to independently brainstorm and jot down their initial thoughts in response to the prompt. This structured pause is intended to provide participants with time to reflect, organize their ideas, and consider their experiences before engaging in group dialogue. Following this brief written reflection, participants were invited to share their responses aloud. This approach supports more thoughtful participation and may help mitigate the influence of immediate group consensus by allowing

individuals to first formulate their own perspectives before hearing others' contributions. Incorporating silent idea generation prior to discussion is supported by focus group methodology, which suggests that brief individual reflection can reduce conformity effects, ensure all participants have an opportunity to contribute, and improve the diversity of responses (Krueger & Casey, 2015). After the focus group concluded, one participant was invited to participate in a follow-up interview to provide additional depth and context to his experiences. This invitation stemmed from his response to a question about his parents' educational background, during which he offered a detailed explanation of how he perceived his parents' educational experiences and how those perceptions influenced his language brokering responsibilities. The follow-up interview allowed for a richer exploration of these experiences and supported a more nuanced and accurate representation of the participant's lived experiences.

In addition to video-recorded transcripts, observation notes served as a supplementary data source. After each focus group, I rewatched the video recordings and documented participants' nonverbal communication, including facial expressions, gestures, pauses, tone, and emotional shifts alongside their verbal responses. For example, I noted instances when participants paused before responding to questions about family responsibilities, laughed while describing stressful brokering experiences, or became more animated when discussing moments of helping their parents. These observations were recorded as analytic memos and helped provide contextual understanding of participants' experiences, supporting a more nuanced interpretation of the data during analysis. These observation notes function as a complementary data collection instrument, capturing contextual and relational nuances that may not be fully evident in the transcript alone (Patton, 2015). During analysis, the notes was reviewed alongside transcripts to support thematic interpretation.

Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis

I analyzed the focus group data using thematic analysis following the six-phase framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is a flexible qualitative analytic method used to identify, analyze, and report patterns of meaning within a dataset. This approach allows researchers to move systematically from initial engagement with the data toward the development of themes that capture significant aspects of participants' experiences. Dedoose qualitative analysis software was used to support the organization, coding, and interpretation of the data (SocioCultural Research Consultants, LLC, 2025). While Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework provides procedural guidance, this study is further informed by Braun and Clarke's (2023) emphasis on *"knowing practice,"* which calls for a deliberate, reflexive, and theoretically grounded approach to thematic analysis. Rather than treating analysis as a purely technical or standardized process, this study conceptualizes thematic analysis as an interpretive practice in which meaning is actively constructed through engagement with the data. In alignment with this perspective, themes were developed as patterns of shared meaning that offer interpretive insight into participants' experiences, rather than as surface-level topic summaries. This approach also acknowledges the researcher's positionality as an analytic resource, engaging reflexivity throughout the analytic process rather than attempting to eliminate subjectivity.

In addition, this study drew on Naeem et al.'s (2023) systematic approach to thematic analysis to support both analytic rigor and conceptual development. I examined participants' language, focusing on recurring words, phrases, and expressions that illuminate key aspects of their experiences. This attention to language supports the development of codes and themes that remain grounded in the data. Consistent with Naeem et al. (2023), I interpreted

themes not only as patterns within the data but also as analytically constructed meanings that connect participants' experiences to the broader research questions. In this sense, analytically constructed meanings refer to interpretations developed through analysis that link patterns in participants' accounts to broader concepts. Throughout the analytic process, I examined relationships among codes and themes to support deeper interpretation and contribute to a conceptual understanding of language brokering experiences.

Throughout the data analysis, member reflections were incorporated as a collaborative and interpretive process to refine understandings and deepen the analysis. Rather than treating participant feedback as verification of a single objective account, this process aligns with Braun and Clarke's (2023) critique of traditional member checking and instead invites participants to extend, clarify, or complicate interpretations. Participants were invited to review thematic summaries for resonance, clarity, and completeness, and may be consulted during analysis when complex or nuanced interpretations emerge. Following the development of themes, member checking was conducted by emailing participants a copy of the draft of Results section. Participants were invited to review the findings and provide feedback on whether the themes and interpretations accurately represented their experiences. Three participants responded and indicated that they agreed with the findings and felt the results accurately reflected their experiences. This process helped enhance the credibility of the study by incorporating participant perspectives into the interpretation of the findings. This process is intended to support a more nuanced and participant-centered interpretation of the data, ensuring that findings meaningfully represent participants' lived experiences while remaining consistent with an interpretive qualitative approach (Birt et al., 2016; Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2023).

Step 1: Data Familiarization

The first phase of analysis is becoming familiar with the dataset. This requires researchers to engage deeply with the data before formal coding begins (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I reviewed the video recordings from the focus group and Zoom-generated transcripts multiple times to ensure accuracy and completeness. During this stage, I reread the transcripts multiple times while recording preliminary observations, analytic notes, and possible patterns that emerge from participants' reflections. This process allows the researcher to begin identifying potential meanings and patterns within the dataset while remaining open to unexpected insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

To assist in organizing the data, I compiled all the transcripts into a single document and uploaded it into Dedoose for systematic management. As an additional organizational support tool, I used ChatGPT to assist in clustering similar responses and identifying recurring language patterns within the transcripts (Nguyen-Trung, 2024). However, all analytic interpretations and thematic decisions remained under my control to maintain methodological rigor and accuracy (Turobov et al., 2024).

Step 2: Initial Coding

The second phase of data analysis involves generating initial codes from the dataset. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), coding is the process of systematically identifying and labeling meaningful segments of data that are relevant to the research question. In this study, coding followed an inductive approach, allowing codes to emerge directly from participants' narratives rather than applying predetermined categories.

Each transcript was examined line by line, and segments of text representing meaningful ideas, experiences, or reflections were labeled with descriptive codes. Coding focused on

capturing participants' reflections on their experiences of language brokering, including the contexts in which brokering occurred, emotional responses, and perceived impacts on their identities and family relationships. Codes were applied systematically within Dedoose, which allowed me to track codes across transcripts and organize them within the broader dataset. At this stage, coding remained flexible and inclusive to ensure that a wide range of potential meanings and insights are captured (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During initial coding, 21 codes were generated for Research Question 1 and 16 codes for Research Question 2. These codes were then reviewed, refined, and grouped into broader clusters, resulting in five initial clusters. [appendix]

Step 3: Searching for Themes

Once the initial coding process was complete, the analysis moved to the phase of searching for themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe this stage as the process of examining how different codes may combine to form broader patterns of meaning across the dataset. During this phase, related codes were grouped together and organized into emerging themes that represent meaningful patterns within participants' experiences.

During the theme development phase, codes describing translation across different contexts were grouped into broader categories. Codes related to emotions were similarly organized into themes capturing relational and emotional dimensions of participants' experiences. As themes were developed, participants' discussions of their language brokering experiences largely and naturally addressed Research Question 1, as they frequently reflected on the meanings, challenges, and opportunities associated with those experiences. However, responses related to Research Question 2 were often embedded within broader discussions of their experiences rather than stated explicitly. Therefore, I revisited the initial codes and the broader clusters from Step 2 to identify patterns that reflected participants' perspectives on

school supports. In particular, I examined codes related to institutional navigation, real-time brokering in school, teacher-initiated language support, language access gaps, translation difficulties, limitations of automated translation systems, and the reliability of school communication systems. These codes were reviewed alongside the broader clusters *Need for System-Level Support* and *Limits of Individual Brokering in School* to identify patterns related to how schools supported, or had room to improve, for the students and their families. These patterns ultimately informed the development of Theme 3, which addressed Research Question 2 by examining what participants' experiences suggest for educators and schools.

I used Dedoose during the initial coding phase to generate and organize codes. For the clustering process, I used Google Docs to document and group initial codes into broader conceptual clusters, which supported the identification of patterns and emerging themes. As themes were developed, I conducted member checks with participants to confirm interpretations and ensure alignment with their perspectives.

Step 4: Reviewing Themes

After emerging themes were identified, I reviewed and refined the themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that this step requires evaluating themes at two levels: first, at the level of coded data extracts and, second, at the level of the entire dataset. At the first level, I examined the coded excerpts associated with each theme to determine whether they form a coherent and meaningful pattern. When certain excerpts did not fit within the theme, they were reassigned. At the second level, the entire dataset was revisited to ensure that the themes accurately reflected participants' narratives and captured the broader patterns present in the data. Repeatedly revisiting the data, supports the development of themes that authentically capture participants' meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Step 5: Defining and Naming Themes

Once the thematic structure has been refined, the next phase involves clearly defining and naming each theme. Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that this step requires identifying the central organizing idea that captures the meaning of each theme and clarifying how it contributes to answering the research question. At this stage, connections among the initial codes are further examined to develop broader thematic categories.

Building on the earlier coding process, similar codes were grouped together to form more comprehensive categories that represent shared patterns across participants' experiences. This process reflects the second cycle of coding described by Saldaña (2013), which focuses on examining relationships among codes and organizing them into broader conceptual groupings. Using Dedoose's hierarchical coding system, these groupings were structured into parent themes and, when appropriate, more specific subthemes. Through this process, Themes 1 and 2 emerged as the primary themes addressing Research Question 1, which examined participants' language brokering experiences. As the thematic structure was refined, patterns related to participants' reflections on how these experiences inform educators were defined as Theme 3, which addressed Research Question 2.

Throughout this process, the original transcripts were revisited to ensure that themes remain grounded in participants' narratives. Refining and clearly naming themes clarified their scope and meaning within the dataset and allowed the analysis to more fully capture how participants describe and interpret their language brokering experiences across different contexts.

Step 6: Thematic Validation and Interpretation

The final phase of thematic analysis involves producing the research report. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe this stage as the process of integrating the analytic narrative and data extracts to tell a coherent story about the dataset. In this study, selected excerpts from the focus group discussions were presented to illustrate each theme and foreground participants' voices. Findings were organized to address both research questions. First, the themes captured how participants reflected on their experiences as language brokers during childhood and adolescence and how they made sense of those experiences in young adulthood. Second, the findings examined how participants' reflections on language brokering informed their perspectives on educators, schools, and educational practices, offering insights into how teachers and school systems can better support multilingual students and language brokers. Themes were presented to highlight both shared patterns across participants and variation in individual trajectories, emphasizing the complexity of language brokering experiences.

This process developed gradually through ongoing reflection, as I worked to better understand how the themes were connected rather than separate. Although the themes themselves were refined through iterative analysis, the development of the conceptual model was guided by Naeem et al. (2023), who emphasize the importance of visually representing relationships across themes rather than presenting them as isolated categories. Drawing on this guidance, I mapped visual connections among the themes to highlight key processes as they unfolded over time and across contexts.

To develop the conceptual model, I first created a basic flowchart on Google Slide to map the relationships among the themes and identify how different conditions, experiences, and outcomes were connected. As I continued to analyze these relationships, it became apparent that

a linear representation did not adequately capture the complexity of participants' language brokering experiences. Rather than occurring in a simple sequence, the themes appeared to influence one another in overlapping and reciprocal ways across time and contexts.

To support the visualization process, I used ChatGPT as a design-support tool to generate several possible layouts based on the thematic relationships I had identified. I provided ChatGPT with my initial Google Slides flowchart and prompted it to create a conceptual map that reflected the relational nature of language brokering. The first visualization did not fully capture the complexity and interconnectedness of the findings. Therefore, I provided additional feedback and descriptions emphasizing the ongoing, overlapping, and evolving nature of language brokering and requested revised versions of the conceptual map. This iterative process was repeated five times, resulting in four alternative visual models. I then reviewed and compared these models and selected the version that most accurately represented the relationships reflected in the data. This process informed the development of the conceptual map presented in the Results chapter.

Confidentiality and Data Disposal Plan

To protect participant confidentiality and align with ethical guidance in qualitative research, I implemented a multi-layered data security and disposal plan. Confidentiality is central to building and maintaining participant trust, particularly when sharing detailed, context-rich narratives (Kaiser, 2009). Also, ethical research must uphold the principles of autonomy, beneficence, and justice (Orb et al., 2001). In alignment with these standards, all identifying information such as participant names, sites, and specific programs were replaced with pseudonyms during transcription. Any details that could reveal a participant's identity was masked or described in general terms across field notes, transcripts, and all reporting to ensure

strong protection of confidentiality. Dedoose is a HIPAA-safe, cloud-based platform designed for qualitative data analysis (SocioCultural Research Consultants, LLC, 2025). Using Dedoose allowed me to organize, code, and analyze the data within a system that supports secure storage and controlled access. This process aligns with recommendations for maintaining rigorous and ethical data management throughout qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Miles et al., 2014).

I video-recorded and transcribed the focus group's Zoom interviews using Zoom's built-in automated transcription feature. After each interview, the video file and transcript were downloaded to an encrypted, password-protected OneDrive folder and deleted from Zoom's cloud storage. No audio files or transcripts were emailed, stored on personal devices, or shared with others, ensuring confidential handling throughout transcription, storage, and analysis.

Researcher Positionality

Qualitative inquiry requires careful attention to the subtle ways bias may influence a study, as transparency and reflexivity are essential to ethical and trustworthy research. Research bias refers broadly to systematic influences that may shape the overall design, data collection, and analytic direction of a study (Maxwell, 2013). Because this study explores Korean immigrant young adults' experiences of language brokering, and because I bring cultural proximity and personal familiarity with this phenomenon, I recognize that my positionality may influence what I notice, how I frame questions, and how I interact with participants. Rather than attempting to eliminate this standpoint, I engaged in sustained reflexivity, acknowledging it as both a resource and a potential constraint (Berger, 2015). Throughout the research process, I maintained reflexive memos documenting assumptions, methodological decisions, and analytic shifts to create an audit trail of how findings evolve over time (Patton, 2015). Peer debriefing

further support credibility by inviting a trusted doctoral candidate colleague to question analytic decisions and surface assumptions that may otherwise go unexamined. Together, these strategies aim to reduce broader research bias while honoring the co-constructed nature of qualitative knowledge.

Additionally, it is important that I pay attention to the potential for interpretation bias during analysis, which occurs when a researcher's prior beliefs or theoretical commitments shape the meanings they draw from participants' narratives (Maxwell, 2013). Interpretation bias may lead a researcher to privilege information that aligns with existing assumptions while overlooking alternative perspectives. At the same time, my positionality as an educator working closely with multilingual students is not only a potential source of bias but also a source of insight. Insider research literature suggests that the researcher's proximity to the context can enhance the depth and quality of interpretation by providing access to shared meanings, cultural understanding, and relational trust with participants (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Rather than viewing insider status as a limitation, Dwyer and Buckle (2009) argue that researchers often occupy a space between insider and outsider, where familiarity with the context supports more nuanced interpretation while ongoing reflexivity helps guard against unexamined assumptions.

To mitigate the risks of interpretation bias while leveraging the strengths of insider perspective, I used analytic memos during coding and theme development to document how interpretations are generated and refined (Saldaña, 2013). I actively sought disconfirming evidence and alternative explanations to ensure that themes are grounded in participants' accounts rather than my expectations. I also conducted member checking, inviting participants to review thematic summaries for resonance and accuracy (Birt et al., 2016). After completing the final analysis, I shared a summary of the findings with each participant via email to ensure that

the interpretations reflect their experiences. In addition, during the coding and thematic analysis process, I communicated with participants when significant codes or themes emerge, particularly if clarification was needed, to confirm that my interpretations accurately captured their perspectives.

Response bias may arise when participants modify their responses due to concerns about judgment, relational proximity, or confidentiality (Fisher, 1993; Krumpal, 2013). Because some participants were connected to me through mutual community relationships, including being children of acquaintances within the Korean immigrant community, they might feel hesitant to speak candidly or worry that their narratives could be shared beyond the research context. To mitigate this concern, I clearly communicated that participation was entirely voluntary, that there were no consequences for declining or withdrawing, and that their responses would remain confidential. I emphasized that pseudonyms were used in all transcripts and reporting, that identifying details were masked, and that no information would be shared with family members or mutual contacts.

Additionally, given that participants reflected on deeply personal family experiences, I intentionally created a respectful, non-evaluative focus-group environment that affirmed multiple perspectives and emphasized that there were no “right” or “wrong” answers. Prior to data collection, I explained key research concepts in clear, accessible language to ensure that participants fully understood the protections in place before consenting to participate. A brief written reflection further supported this process by giving participants time to organize their thoughts before speaking. Jotting down initial ideas prior to sharing might help participants be better positioned to articulate their perspectives more clearly and contribute more meaningfully to the discussion (Krueger & Casey, 2015; Morgan, 1997). By addressing relational proximity

transparently and reinforcing confidentiality safeguards, I aimed to reduce response bias and support authentic, reflective sharing. Additionally, as the discussion facilitator, I invited each participant to respond to prompts while offering the option to pass. Providing structured turn-taking and adequate wait time can support more thoughtful, equitable participation and encourage more authentic responses (Krueger & Casey, 2015; Vaughn et al., 1996).

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

I conducted three focus groups as part of the data collection process, each offering distinct perspectives shaped by participants' immigration histories, family roles, and levels of involvement in language brokering. All participant names are pseudonyms. Excerpts from focus group transcripts are cited using a participant identification system that indicates focus group and participant number (e.g., P1-1 = Focus Group 1, Participant 1), followed by the participant's pseudonym. Specifically, participants are identified as follows: P1-1(Soo Min), P1-2 (Yoo Jin), P1-3 (Ara); P2-1 (David), P2-2 (Boram), P2-3 (Eun Ji); and P3-1 (Jiwoo), P3-2 (Youngjae), P3-3 (John), P3-4 (Tae-hyun). In this system, the first number refers to the focus group session, and the second number refers to the participant within that group (see Table 1).

The first focus group, which consisted of three female participants, Soo Min, Yoo Jin, and Ara, was particularly insightful. All three had immigrated to the United States after the age of ten and maintained strong Korean proficiency. They opted to speak in Korean during the focus group. Ara was a recent immigrant who arrived two years prior to this study and identified herself as a first-generation Korean immigrant, while Soo Min and Yoo Jin both identified as 1.5 generation. Yoo Jin offered a nuanced perspective on generational identity, noting, "I think I'm about 1.75 generation. I immigrated when I was 11, after finishing 4th grade in Korea," highlighting the flexibility of generational identity. At the time of the focus group, Soo Min and Ara were emerging young adults who continued to live with their parents and remain actively involved in language brokering. Soo Min, whose parents ran a restaurant, explained that helping at the family business increased her exposure to language brokering.

Table 1
Participant Demographic Information

Participant Code	Pseudonym	Gender	Generational Status	Age	Birth Order	Age at time of immigration
1-1	Soo Min	F	1.5	23	Youngest of three	12 years old
1-2	Yoo Jin	F	1.5	20	Oldest of two	11 years old
1-3	Ara	F	1	19	Oldest of two	17 years old
2-1	David	M	2	24	Youngest of three	Born in the U.S.
2-2	Boram	F	1.5	20	Only child	15 years old
2-3	Eun Ji	F	1.5	23	Youngest of two	11 years old
3-1	Jiwoo	F	2	24	Oldest of two	Born in the U.S.
3-2	Youngjae	F	2	20	Youngest of two	2 years old
3-3	John	M	2	21	Oldest of two	3 months
3-4	Tae-hyun	M	1.5	25	Middle of three	15 years old

The second focus group included three participants with more varied experiences: David, Boram, and Eun Ji. Boram immigrated at the age of 15 and Eun Ji at 11, while David was born in the United States. David, identifying as a second generation Korean-American, described having more limited involvement in language brokering due to being the youngest of three siblings; he often relied on his older brothers to take on those responsibilities. While his participation was less direct, his reflections offered a different perspective—one shaped by distance from brokering responsibilities and later bilingual awareness. Boram, an only child, identified herself as 1.5 Korea-American generation. As an only child, she took on most of the brokering responsibilities while also adjusting to a new lifestyle in the United States. Eun Ji identified

herself as 1.5 Korean-American and explained that she shared brokering responsibilities with her older brother.

The third focus group consisted of four participants with diverse backgrounds and family dynamics: Jiwoo, Youngjae, John, and Tae-hyun. Jiwoo, an elder daughter of two, was born in Chicago and moved to Oregon in high school and remained deeply involved in language brokering from a young age. Her consistent role in supporting her parents contributed to her strong Korean proficiency and her ability to recall detailed experiences across a range of situations. Youngjae and John both immigrated at an early age, around two years old, and described experiences shaped by long-term exposure to both languages. Youngjae has an older sibling and described helping her parents with brokering in more routine, everyday situations rather than high-stakes contexts. Tae-hyun immigrated at the age of 15 and was the middle child of three. He described language brokering as an ongoing responsibility that extended into adulthood, particularly through his involvement in his parents' restaurant business. Across these groups, participants' experiences varied based on factors such as birth order, immigration age, and family roles.

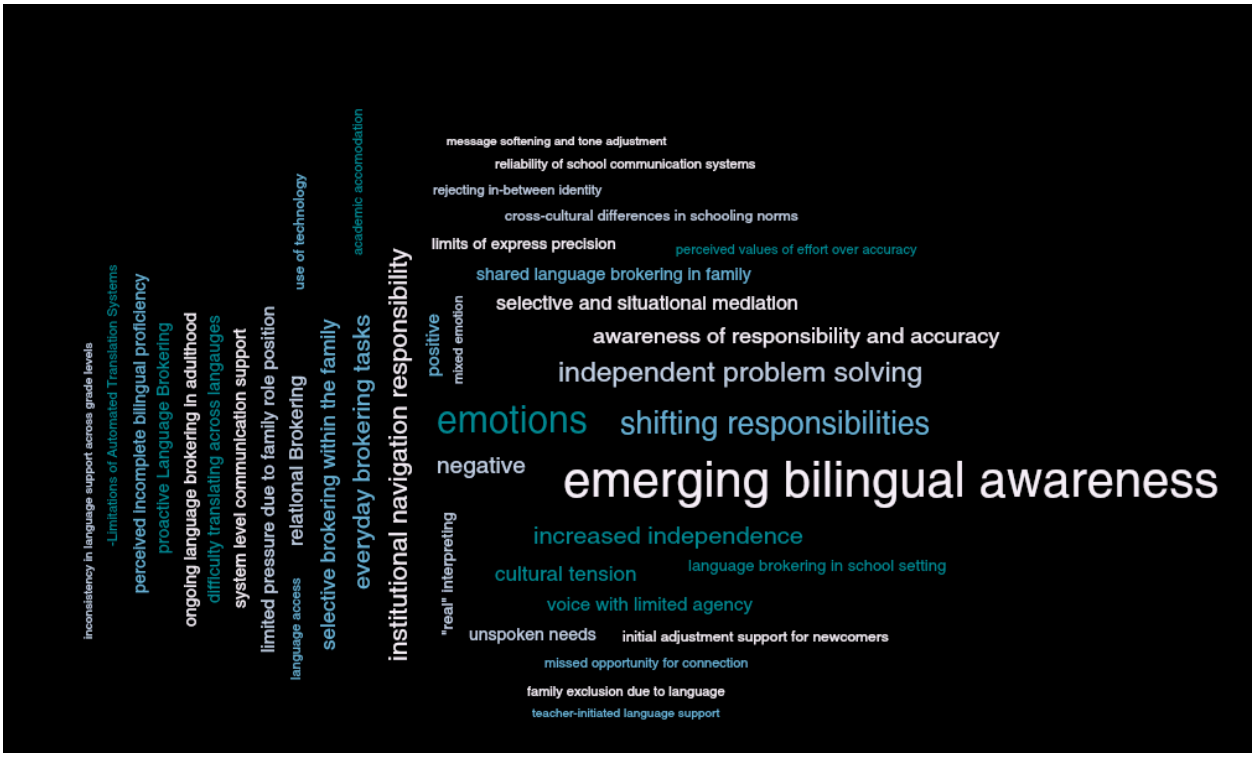
The 41 initial codes were organized into five broader conceptual clusters before being synthesized into three final themes. Cluster 1, *Brokering as Early Responsibility Within Family Systems*, captured participants' early language brokering responsibilities within family relationships and contributed to Themes 1 and 2. Cluster 2, *Relational Negotiation* and *Emotional Complexity of Brokering*, included codes related to emotions, voice, and family dynamics and informed Theme 1 (Relational Complexity). Cluster 3, *Brokering as a Site of Growth, Awareness, and Identity Formation*, reflected participants' development of independence, awareness, and identity through brokering and informed Theme 2 (Adaptive

Growth). Finally, Clusters 4 (*Need for System-Level Support*) and 5 (*Limits of Individual Brokering in School*) highlighted challenges and supports within educational settings and informed Theme 3, which focused on implications for educators and schools.

In Figure 1, larger font size indicates codes that appeared more frequently across participant excerpts. However, the figure is not intended to substitute for thematic interpretation, since frequency alone does not capture the depth, context, or meaning of participants' experiences. Rather, it serves as a supplementary visual representation of the analytic process, showing which coded ideas were most prevalent and patterns that informed the development of themes.

Figure 1

Word Cloud of Codes Generated During Thematic Analysis



Codes such as *emerging bilingual awareness*, *emotions*, *shifting responsibilities*, and *independent problem solving* appeared prominently, suggesting that participants' accounts

frequently centered on bilingual identity, emotional complexity, changing family roles, and adaptive forms of growth. This visual summary is intended to be referenced alongside the thematic findings, which provide the interpretive context necessary to understand how these codes functioned within participants' broader narratives.

Research Question 1: How do Korean American young adults reflect on their language brokering experiences?

To address Research Question 1, participants reflected on their experiences as language brokers during childhood and adolescence and how they made sense of those experiences as young adults. Analysis of these reflections generated two themes that captured both the challenges and opportunities associated with language brokering.

Challenges: Constrained Voice and Relational Complexity (Theme 1)

In all focus groups, participants described being positioned to speak on behalf of others without full control over what or how messages were communicated, requiring them to navigate expectations, manage tone, and respond to unspoken dynamics. While these conditions limited their ability to express themselves freely, they also contributed to the development of responsibility, competence, and decision-making under uncertainty. Participants' experiences further reflected uneven access to opportunities to develop competence through brokering experiences and extended beyond language to broader forms of cultural mediation.

Constraints on Expression: Voice, Language, and Control. Participants' experiences of language brokering were shaped not only by responsibility, but also by a sense of being caught between what they were asked to say and what they personally felt or intended. Soo Min, the youngest of three siblings, described how this dynamic played out in her family's restaurant business. She explained, "When there were communication issues with employees, I would step

in and help convey messages. In those moments… I often tried to soften what was being said or adjust the wording so that the other person could understand better. I would change the tone or nuance when needed." Her account highlights how brokering required more than direct translation, as she actively managed how messages were delivered in order to maintain understanding and relationships, in her case, between her co-workers and her parents.

Similarly, Youngjae recalled an incident at the airport where her mother struggled to understand an issue with a ticket, reflecting, "It's hard to capture the exact intention and true meaning behind the material I'm trying to translate… without knowing the whole situation, because only my mom knew the whole situation." In these moments, participants were not only translating language but also mediating incomplete information across parties that required them to manage meaning, tone, and relationships, even when they did not feel fully in control of the situation.

This complexity was further shaped by relational dynamics embedded in these interactions. John, reflecting on an experience at a grocery store when he was around seven or eight years old, described feeling a strong sense of responsibility to advocate for his mother when a cashier spoke too quickly and rushed the interaction. He recalled, "I almost felt… a little defensive toward my mom… I felt like I should protect my mom… so I was translating everything for her."

Participants also described moments where speaking did not fully feel like their own. Yoo Jin reflected, "When I had to interpret something that didn't match my own opinion, I think I didn't like it… I have to say something that isn't my opinion as if it were mine." Similarly, Youngjae recalled translating feedback during a parent-teacher conference, noting, "I had to… say things that were… that I was doing good and bad… it felt a little bit embarrassing." These

accounts illustrate how participants were often speaking, but not entirely for themselves—conveying messages that did not fully reflect their own perspectives.

This tension was further shaped by participants' awareness of their own linguistic limitations. David reflected on feeling "anxious… because, personally, I'm not the best at Korean… sometimes we had a language barrier, like at the DMV," while Ara described moments where "I would understand something in English but then struggle to explain it clearly in Korean." Across these experiences, participants navigated communication with expectations of clarity and authority, even when their confidence, voice, and control were not fully aligned.

Emotional Layering: Obligation, Guilt, and Burden. The constraints participants experienced in speaking for others were closely tied to how they felt in those moments. Rather than describing a single emotion, participants reflected on a mix of feelings such as obligation, frustration, guilt, and burden. Jiwoo described her experience as "burdensome," explaining, "I had to work on my own… and also help my parents with translating things like the DMV, insurance, and housing… it felt like an additional burden that I had to carry." Her reflection highlights how brokering responsibilities were layered onto other challenges, particularly during periods of adjustment, such as when families were newly navigating unfamiliar systems.

For participants who immigrated at an older age, after 10, these emotions were often shaped by an increasing awareness of their parents' sacrifices. Ara shared, "I can also sense that my parents feel a bit sorry when they ask me for help… they're careful because they don't want to interrupt me… so I think it would have been better if I had been more proactive." In these moments, responsibility became intertwined with care, obligation, and a sense of reciprocity within the family. These accounts suggest that emotional responses to brokering were not isolated reactions, but part of how participants made sense of their roles. Feelings of burden,

guilt, and responsibility were closely tied to their growing awareness of family dynamics and expectations.

Yoo Jin, who immigrated 10 years prior to the focus group, had mixed emotions in understanding her parents. She reflected, “I think I feel both pride and a sense of guilt at the same time. After all, I believe my parents immigrated largely for us, their children… so I feel sorry about that.” At the same time, she described these emotions as less present during the act of brokering itself, noting that “when I actually interpreted for my parents, I don’t think I had strong thoughts or emotions in the moment… I just did it naturally because it was something I could do.” Her account suggests that while emotions such as pride and guilt are part of how participants make sense of their experiences, they are not always actively felt in real time. Instead, brokering often becomes normalized, with participants focusing on completing the task rather than engaging with their emotional responses in the moment.

While participants often described emotional layering in routine brokering interactions, these dynamics became more pronounced in moments when the stakes of communication intensified. In these situations, the consequences of getting something wrong were more immediate, and the pressure to be accurate and composed became more intense. Ara reflected on one such moment during her mom’s optometrist appointment, which she described as a “real interpreting moment.” She explained that “proper interpretation was necessary because the tests couldn’t proceed unless I understood everything accurately and explained it correctly,” noting that this experience “really stayed” with her. Unlike the everyday interactions she was used to, this situation required sustained focus and carried a heightened sense of urgency, as it involved her mother’s health.

Boram shared a similar experience when she had to interpret after her mother was involved in a car accident during high school. She rushed to the scene from her clarinet lesson and recalled, “When I got there, my mom was trying to communicate with the police, and the whole situation was really stressful… I remember my mom couldn’t even form her words in Korean because she was so shocked… it was a chaotic situation, and I felt kind of helpless.” In that moment, Boram found herself navigating communication with the police for the first time, taking on a role she had not been prepared for. What might have been a familiar expectation in other contexts became immediate and high-stakes. These experiences illustrate how language brokering could quickly shift from routine to high-stakes, requiring participants to manage not only communication but also the urgency and emotional intensity of the situation.

Ongoing Brokering and Evolving Relational Understanding. Although language brokering is often associated with childhood, participants described it as an ongoing part of their lives that continued into young adulthood. Many participants share that they continue to translate emails, make phone calls, and step in to assist their parents in real time. Soo Min noted that her most recent brokering experience had happened just “yesterday,” particularly while helping with her parents’ business, highlighting how these responsibilities remained embedded in her daily routine. This continuity extended beyond tasks into how participants understood their relationships over time. She further reflected that "immigrant life is an experience where children come to see their parents at their most vulnerable… parents… end up having to ask their children even about small things,” suggesting that the continuity of brokering not only sustained her responsibilities but also deepened her awareness of her parents’ vulnerability.

Extending this sense of evolving awareness, participants also reflected on how their understanding of these experiences shifted over time. David described how language brokering

prompted distance in his relationship with his parents, explaining, “I would say I felt more distant. I wanted to distance myself because I didn’t want to be translating all the time. Even though I didn’t do it that often, if a situation came up, I would try to avoid it, especially in high school. I wouldn’t say I was the best son back then, partly because of that stage of life. I was pretty avoidant.” As the youngest of three siblings, David’s experience suggests that access to other potential brokers within the family may have shaped his ability to withdraw from these responsibilities. Unlike participants who described consistent expectations to step in, David appeared to have greater flexibility to avoid brokering, which may have contributed to both his distance behaviors and the relational strain he described. He further reflected on how this distance was intertwined with broader social and cultural pressures, noting that he often felt embarrassed speaking Korean in front of his predominantly white peer group and struggled with feeling “caught in between.” In response, he described withdrawing from home and limiting interactions with his parents, suggesting that brokering could contribute not only to responsibility, but also to avoidance and relational strain.

It is important to note, however, that David's perspective shifted over time. Reflecting on these experiences, he noted, “I do regret that now… my mom was trying her best… but I didn’t do my best… I think I could have been a better son,” indicating an ongoing reinterpretation of past experiences through a new lens of awareness. His reflection suggests that the meaning of brokering is not fixed but evolves as participants reassess earlier choices and relational dynamics. Together, these accounts illustrate how ongoing language brokering extends beyond continued task involvement, shaping how participants understand responsibility, distance, and care within their family relationships over time.

As participants reinterpreted their relationships over time, they also described an ongoing need to negotiate the balance between familial responsibility and personal boundaries. At the time of the focus group, Tae-hyun was 24 years old and lived with his parents. He explained, "It gets a little stressful because they try to call or text me when I'm at school… but if I look at it more broadly, I feel like I get closer with them through translating." His reflection captures how brokering could simultaneously create strain and foster connection. However, this relational outcome was not consistent across participants. Boram noted, "I don't think the language brokering experience brought me closer to my parents… I had a lot to manage… and it definitely created some stress," underscoring that brokering did not uniformly lead to increased closeness. Ongoing language brokering is not simply a continuation of earlier responsibilities, but it is a process through which participants continually reinterpret their roles and relationships. What begins as necessity can evolve into a more complex negotiation of care, obligation, and independence.

Opportunity: Brokering as Adaptive Growth Under Constraint (Theme 2)

Although constraints were unavoidable, participants consistently described language brokering as a source of adaptive growth. However, this development did not occur through structured support or guided learning. Rather, it naturally emerged over time as participants took on responsibility, navigated uncertainty, and responded to ongoing demands placed on them. Youngjae said "like returning things, making reservations at restaurants, legal documents, or emails… it was mostly just everyday things… my parents can do it, but it's just more convenient if I do it for them." In this way, growth developed through repeated experiences of stepping into roles that pushed them beyond what they were ready for. This relationship between constraint and growth was not linear or uniformly experienced. David, who was the youngest of

three, said “If I’m being honest, I don’t think I developed many strengths or skills from this… I relied a lot on my brothers, and once they were gone, I felt a little lost… I realized I should have studied Korean more.” Participants described different levels of involvement in brokering, which shaped how they developed not only practical skills, but also ways of thinking, responding, and positioning themselves within their families and broader environments.

Reframing Constraint as Agency. Over time, participants described a shift in how they made sense of their roles as language brokers. What initially felt like limitation began to take on a different meaning. As they reflected on these experiences, many came to see them not only as constraints, but also as moments that shaped their independence. Yoo Jin’s account illustrates this shift. Reflecting on her experiences, she shared,

> When I was younger, especially in elementary or middle school, I think I disliked it [language brokering] more. But when I got to high school, my perspective started to change. Since I had more control over my own life and decisions, I sometimes felt that my parents not being fluent in English wasn’t entirely a bad thing.”

She went on to explain how this shift translated into greater autonomy. She said,

> I felt like I had a wider range of choices because I could make decisions myself. My parents also had to rely on and respect my choices more, which I actually liked… I decided most things myself, like taking AP classes or choosing extracurricular activities.”

Her reflection shows how responsibilities that once felt imposed gradually became a space where she could make decisions for herself, moving from simply responding to expectations toward actively shaping her own path.

Jiwoo reflected on how early these responsibilities began, noting, “I started interpreting for my parents at the age of 8.” From a young age, brokering became part of her everyday life, gradually shifting from occasional help to an expected role. Even after leaving for college, she described returning home to find “a pile of stuff to do” waiting for her, suggesting that these responsibilities did not diminish over time. By the time she was applying for college, Jiwoo had taken on a much more active role in managing important decisions. She shared, “I did the majority of it on my own, and I would just tell them, like, ‘Oh, I’m gonna plan on applying to XYZ schools,’… and then, ‘Here’s my essay.’” Her reflection illustrates how brokering moved beyond translation into active management of decisions and tasks. While shaped by constraint, these experiences became a place where she developed agency and confidence in navigating systems independently. This sense of independence did not emerge by choice, but through repeatedly stepping in when support was limited, tying her growing agency closely to necessity.

Participants described how the impact of language brokering extended beyond childhood, shaping how they interacted with others and navigated the world over time. Tae-hyun described how frequently communicating on behalf of his parents—through phone calls, paperwork, and everyday interactions—gradually made him more comfortable speaking with others. Reflecting on this, he shared, “I had to be on the phone with customer service… interpreting paperwork or anything like that… I think that helped me a lot… now I can easily take these phone calls with no issue.” His account shows how skills that developed through repeated responsibility became something he could draw on in other areas of his life, including work and daily interactions.

Developing Responsibility, Competence, and Bilingual Awareness. Many participants voiced that language brokering required them to assume responsibility while managing uncertainty in everyday situations. Rather than emerging from confidence or full understanding,

responsibility often preceded competence, requiring participants to act before they felt fully prepared. Yoo Jin recalled a camping trip shortly after arriving in the United States, as her English proficiency was still emerging, when she confidently interpreted a warning about wildfire restrictions incorrectly, later reflecting, "I completely mistranslated it… I also wanted to show… 'Mom, see? I'm good at English.'" Her account illustrates how competence was not simply developed over time, but performed in the moment, shaped by the pressure to appear capable despite limited understanding. Acting decisively did not necessarily reflect certainty; instead, it often required projecting confidence in situations that felt unclear or ambiguous.

As her English proficiency increased, however, her role expanded, and her responsibilities moved beyond translation to include coordination and decision-making. She explained, "When announcements came from school… I would first read through everything and figure out what needed to be done… when we were applying for things like FAFSA, I would organize all the documents we needed first and then tell my parents, 'Fill this out here and send it back to me.'" In these moments, Yoo Jin was no longer simply translating information, but managing processes and guiding her parents through unfamiliar systems, reflecting a shift from participation to leadership. She recognized that these experiences contributed to her emerging awareness of her bilingual abilities. Reflecting on her language development, Yoo Jin noted, "I think the fact that I'm still good at Korean is the biggest advantage for me… because my parents are not fluent in English, I continued using Korean… that's why I was able to maintain it." She further described how maintaining Korean allowed her to communicate across generations and contexts, including with extended family and within community settings. Her account suggests that bilingual awareness did not develop in isolation but was closely tied to the responsibilities she assumed within her family. Continued engagement in brokering not only supported skill

development but also shaped how she understood the value and function of her bilingualism over time.

Similar patterns appeared across participants in contexts such as banking, insurance, and school systems, where they had to respond quickly, even when they did not fully understand what was happening. Jiwoo said, “I had to translate things about housing, insurance, and other paperwork… even when I didn’t fully understand everything, I still had to explain it to my parents.” These experiences positioned them in roles typically held by adults, shaping how they approached problem-solving through repeated engagement with real-world demands. Jiwoo also reflected that these experiences strengthened her ability to navigate both languages in real time, noting, “I think my skills of just being more comfortable with… the language… and being able to know the words in both English and Korean, and being able to kind of put that on the spot… for my parents.” She further explained that these skills continued to shape her confidence, adding that her experience in a leasing office “definitely brought more confidence… like, I can easily take these phone calls with no issue.”

Ara and Boram both described developing the ability to translate in real time through repeated engagement in language brokering. Ara reflected, “After coming here… and actually doing it [simultaneous interpretation], I realized it was much harder than I had expected… I developed problem-solving skills, or the ability to respond quickly in different situations.” Similarly, Boram noted, “In Korea, simultaneous interpretation is considered a difficult profession, but I naturally took on that role… I would listen in Korean and immediately translate into English,” particularly during phone calls with her parents. Their accounts suggest that what is typically understood as a specialized skill was developed informally through everyday

practice, requiring them to respond quickly and manage communication across languages under pressure.

These experiences highlight how participants' bilingual abilities were not only practiced but understood over time. As they engaged in real-time translation, they began to see themselves as capable of navigating both languages with increasing fluency and confidence. In this way, emerging bilingual identity was not formed through formal instruction, but through sustained responsibility and repeated interaction across contexts, where competence, awareness, and self-perception developed alongside one another.

Uneven Access to Developmental Opportunities. Participants who had older siblings described that growth through language brokering occurred differently based on their level of involvement within the family. David, the youngest of three brothers, said that his language brokering involvement was limited. He reflected, "Since I grew up with two older siblings, I relied on them a lot and asked for support. I think that was the problem—I didn't pick up the responsibilities myself. In the end, I had to learn the hard way after years, realizing how hard my mom tried and how hard my dad worked. If I had put in a little more effort, I think I could have made things easier for them during high school." This highlights how reduced participation constrained opportunities to develop the skills and confidence associated with brokering. Later, David added, "I relied a lot on my brothers, and once they were gone, I felt a little lost," highlighting how responsibility was not evenly distributed within the family. Although language brokering may appear routine or natural in some family contexts, his experience shows that not all children take on the same level of responsibility. When that responsibility eventually shifted to him, the transition felt abrupt and disorienting rather than gradual.

A similar pattern emerged in Tae-hyun's account, where limited early involvement shaped how he later understood missed opportunities for development. He shared, "When I was younger, my older sister did most of the interpreting, so I tended to avoid it and didn't really want it to fall on me. I kind of kept my distance from it." Reflecting back, however, he noted that this distance came with trade-offs: "If I could say something to my younger self, I think I would tell myself to do it more… it would have helped me improve my English… and develop those skills, because they'll be really helpful in the future." Like David, Tae-hyun explained that not participating as much early on limited his skill development, which he only realized afterward.

Uneven responsibility across siblings was a recurring pattern. Eun Ji, who had a brother two years older than her, reflected, "Looking back, I think my brother, two years older than me, did more of the language brokering. He knew more technical terms, like how to fix a car or medical-related terms. He had a stronger grasp of technical English vocabulary, so he was more helpful in those situations." Her account suggests that older siblings were often positioned as the primary point of contact in more complex or high-stakes contexts, while younger siblings engaged in more limited roles. At the same time, Eun Ji's reflection complicates the idea that limited involvement necessarily led to a negative experience. Although her brother often took on more technical brokering responsibilities, she described her own experience in positive terms. She shared, "I enjoyed translating for my parents. Although we immigrated to the United States at the same time, their English improved a lot, and I think they are close to fluent now. I honestly think they're amazing. My parents also have more wisdom than I do, so it never felt like a burden for me." Her account suggests that the emotional meaning of brokering was shaped not only by the amount of responsibility participants carried, but also by how they perceived their

parents' growth, competence, and adaptation. As Eun Ji recognized her parents' increasing English proficiency and acculturation, she came to understand them not as dependent, but as capable and resilient. This perception seemed to lessen the emotional weight of brokering, allowing her to view translation as a relational act of support rather than a burden.

Soo Min, who was also the youngest of three, described how language brokering became more collaborative over time rather than remaining concentrated on her older sister. She explained, "Since I have an older sister, I've always seen how much responsibility she took on… now that we're able to share that role more, I feel it's even better… I can help ease the burden that used to fall more heavily on my sister." Although responsibility was initially uneven, her experience reflects a more gradual transition into shared involvement. These findings show that growth through language brokering was not automatic but depended on how much responsibility participants took on. Family roles and changing dynamics influenced when and how this development occurred.

Cultural Mediation Beyond Language Brokering. Participants described language brokering as something that often required them to navigate cultural differences as well. In these moments, they were not just translating words but trying to make sense of meaning across different cultural perspectives. Participants reflected on situations where differences in social norms, expectations, or everyday interactions created tension or misunderstanding. David, for example, described feeling "in between" when navigating his parents' concerns about aspects of American culture that felt unfamiliar to them. He explained, "My parents would see things on the news or social media and get worried… so they would be more strict about what I could do," noting how these concerns often shaped restrictions on his social life. As he described, "I would have to explain to them, like, this is normal… this is what other people are

doing," highlighting how he stepped into a mediating role, using examples from social media and everyday experiences to help his parents better understand why certain behaviors were common among his peers.

Similarly, Yoo Jin described tensions that arose around school-related experiences, particularly events such as prom or homecoming. She noted that feelings of being "in between" were not primarily tied to language, explaining, "Honestly, I don't think I felt 'in between' because of language very often. If anything, that feeling came more from cultural differences than from language itself." Instead, she noticed this tension in differences in cultural adaptation, reflecting, "I was kind of in between… not because of the language, but because I adjusted faster than my parents did." Because her parents were unfamiliar with the U.S. school system, events such as dances—where students dressed up, took photos, and socialized—felt unfamiliar and, at times, concerning, leading them to set boundaries around clothing and participation. As she explained, "I had to keep telling them, like, it's normal… this is just what people do," illustrating how she worked to mediate these differences. Over time, she gradually persuaded her parents, reflecting that these moments were less about language and more about differences in how quickly they adapted to cultural norms. In this way, she helped her parents become more comfortable through ongoing explanation and negotiation.

Boram's account further illustrates how this mediation often required navigating relationships in both directions. She described a situation in which she was dating someone who was not Korean and found herself explaining her parents' behavior to her partner, while also helping her parents understand aspects of American dating culture. As she explained, "I had to explain to him, like, my parents don't mean it that way… it just comes off like that because of the language," highlighting how she worked to clarify her parents' intentions. At the same time,

she noted that she would tell her parents, “this is just how it is here,” as she tried to help them make sense of cultural expectations. In this way, she was not only translating language, but also actively shaping how each side understood the other.

These experiences added another layer to participants’ roles. Rather than simply passing along information, they were actively shaping how that information was understood. They had to anticipate what might be confusing, adjust how things were explained, and respond to emotions that emerged in the process. Problem-solving was not just figuring out what something meant, but how to make it meaningful for someone else. In this way, participants were not only navigating between languages, but also between cultural worlds, taking on the role of intermediaries in both.

Research Question 2: What do participants' experiences suggest for educators and schools?

To address Research Question 2, participants reflected on how their experiences as language brokers shaped their perspectives on schools, educators, and language support systems.

School Support as Relational and Contextual Process (Theme 3)

Although participants’ individual experiences varied based on factors such as family circumstances, language proficiency, school context, and access to support, a common pattern emerged across accounts: language brokering often persisted within school settings, though its intensity, frequency, and form differed. Collectively, their reflections highlighted that language brokering in schools was not solely an individual responsibility but was shaped by the availability of institutional supports, relationships with educators, and broader school communication systems.

Tensions Within Language Support. Participants emphasized that access to institutional language support—such as translated materials and interpretation services—reduced

the frequency with which they needed to act as intermediaries. Boram, for example, described how the school district's Korean translation services "definitely reduced responsibility," particularly for routine communication like school announcements and transcripts. These supports limited the situations in which she needed to step in, making everyday interactions more manageable. In more complex or high-stakes situations, participants continued to manage communication and decision-making. Reflecting on the college application process, Boram explained that she translated sections requiring detailed parental information, adding that she "mostly… did it on [her] own." In this way, institutional support narrowed the scope of brokering without fully removing it, leaving students responsible for navigating more complex and consequential tasks. Boram further highlighted how these responsibilities extended beyond language into broader academic and familial expectations. She shared, "When I looked at my friends, some of them had parents who spoke good English and could help them… but for me, I had to handle everything on my own. Instead of receiving help from my parents, I was the one helping them. It felt like my responsibilities doubled, which led to stress and some tension." Her reflection illustrates how language brokering intersected with unequal access to parental academic support, positioning her as both a student and a support system within her family.

Although she noted receiving assistance from external resources such as *hagwon,* private fee-based after-school academies that students attend in addition to regular school hours for support in subjects like math and English, AP coursework, and college entrance exam preparation, these supports did not fully offset the added responsibilities she carried at home. Like Boram, John also articulated that he received help from *hagwon,* an external academic support, for his college application. Similarly, John's account highlights how parents' limited English proficiency shaped students' reliance on external resources. He explained that for

college applications, “I went to a hagwon… so the process was not led by me, but… directed by the manager there.” His reflection suggests that when support was not available at home due to language barriers, students often turned to external institutions to fill that gap.

At the same time, participants described how school support could introduce new tensions related to autonomy, privacy, and control. Although services like interpreters were intended to increase access, they sometimes altered the dynamics of communication. Yoo Jin, for example, described feeling uncomfortable with third-party interpreters during conferences, noting that “At my first parent-teacher conference, an interpreter was provided. But I felt uncomfortable having someone who wasn’t part of my family hear about me. So I said, “I’ll interpret myself—let’s not have an interpreter next time.” After trying it once, I felt that my English was good enough to explain things, so after that, I always went to conferences and interpreted for myself.” Yoo Jin’s experience highlights a disconnect between the intended purpose of institutional support and how it is experienced by students. Although interpreters are designed to reduce barriers, they can also introduce new forms of discomfort, particularly when sensitive information is shared. This suggests that support systems, while well-intentioned, may not fully account for students’ perspectives on privacy and personal boundaries.

Yoo Jin also talked about how access to language support does not necessarily ensure its effectiveness. Although translation tools are intended to improve accessibility, she said “In fact, the translated Korean often felt more confusing and sometimes even gave incorrect information. There were times when I had to go back to the English version to understand what it was actually trying to say. So eventually, I turned off the Korean translation and switched everything back to English. At first, I thought language support would be helpful, but if it’s going to be translated awkwardly like that, I felt it might be better not to have it at all.” This suggests that the

usefulness of support depends not only on availability, but also on the quality and accuracy of the translation. She also voiced concerns, noting, “for parents who truly cannot understand English, receiving inaccurate translations could actually make situations more complicated.” Rather than reducing barriers, imperfect translations may introduce new forms of confusion, limiting the practical value of available support.

Extending on these limitations of language support, Jiwoo’s reflection highlights how challenges persisted beyond translation, particularly in navigating differences in educational systems. She explained that her parents were “so used to such a strict school schedule” from their experiences in Korea, and that when they encountered the U.S. system, they felt it was “way different than [they] thought it was,” highlighting how differences in educational systems created gaps in understanding that she had to navigate. She further reflected, “What I wish teachers and schools better understood about children interpreting for their parents is some grace… they don’t understand because they don’t have that perspective,” pointing to the ways educators may not fully recognize the responsibilities students carry. Her perspective suggests that beyond access, students also sought recognition of the role they played in mediating both language and cultural differences. School-based support, therefore, cannot be understood solely in terms of access. While institutional systems reduced certain forms of responsibility, they also redistributed and, at times, complicated students’ roles. Language support both enabled participation and introduced new constraints, requiring students to continually navigate issues of control, voice, and relational boundaries within school settings.

Teacher-Level Effort as Relational Compensation. Participants identified teacher-level effort as a critical factor in shaping meaningful support. These efforts often appeared in how

teachers adjusted their communication—slowing down, simplifying language, or taking extra time to ensure understanding.

David's account illustrates how relational forms of teacher support could shape students' experiences, even in the absence of formal language services. He described attending a small private Christian school where translation or interpretation services were not available due to limited resources, explaining, "Since it was a smaller Christian school, it wasn't very well funded, so they didn't have the translation services that public schools might have." Despite this, he emphasized that his teachers were "very understanding… they would speak slowly and take their time," particularly during parent conferences, which allowed his mother to follow along. He noted that his teachers were "very loving and caring" and made an effort to communicate clearly, which helped reduce the pressure on him to fully manage communication. At the same time, he acknowledged that "having a formal language support system would have been very helpful," pointing to the limits of relying solely on individual effort.

Soo Min's experience highlights a different form of effort—one that required additional time and initiative beyond standard practice. She recalled, "What stands out the most is my homeroom teacher… she would translate every school notice into Korean and send both the English and Korean versions home with me. I remember always having two copies in my bag." Reflecting back, she shared that she had not fully recognized it at the time but now sees "how much effort she put in to support me… even if the translation wasn't perfect, the fact that she made that effort meant a lot." For Soo Min, this effort was not only about making information accessible, but also about feeling seen and supported within the classroom.

In contrast, Youngjae's account illustrates how the absence of such effort could create additional burdens for students. He recalled, "I wish these teachers would… not assume

that everyone's parents speak English," describing an assignment that required him to interview his parents. While the task itself was not high-stakes, he explained that it "took… more time" because he had to first explain the questions and expectations to his parents. This suggests that when teachers do not account for students' linguistic and familial contexts, responsibility is shifted back onto students, increasing the effort required to complete even routine tasks.

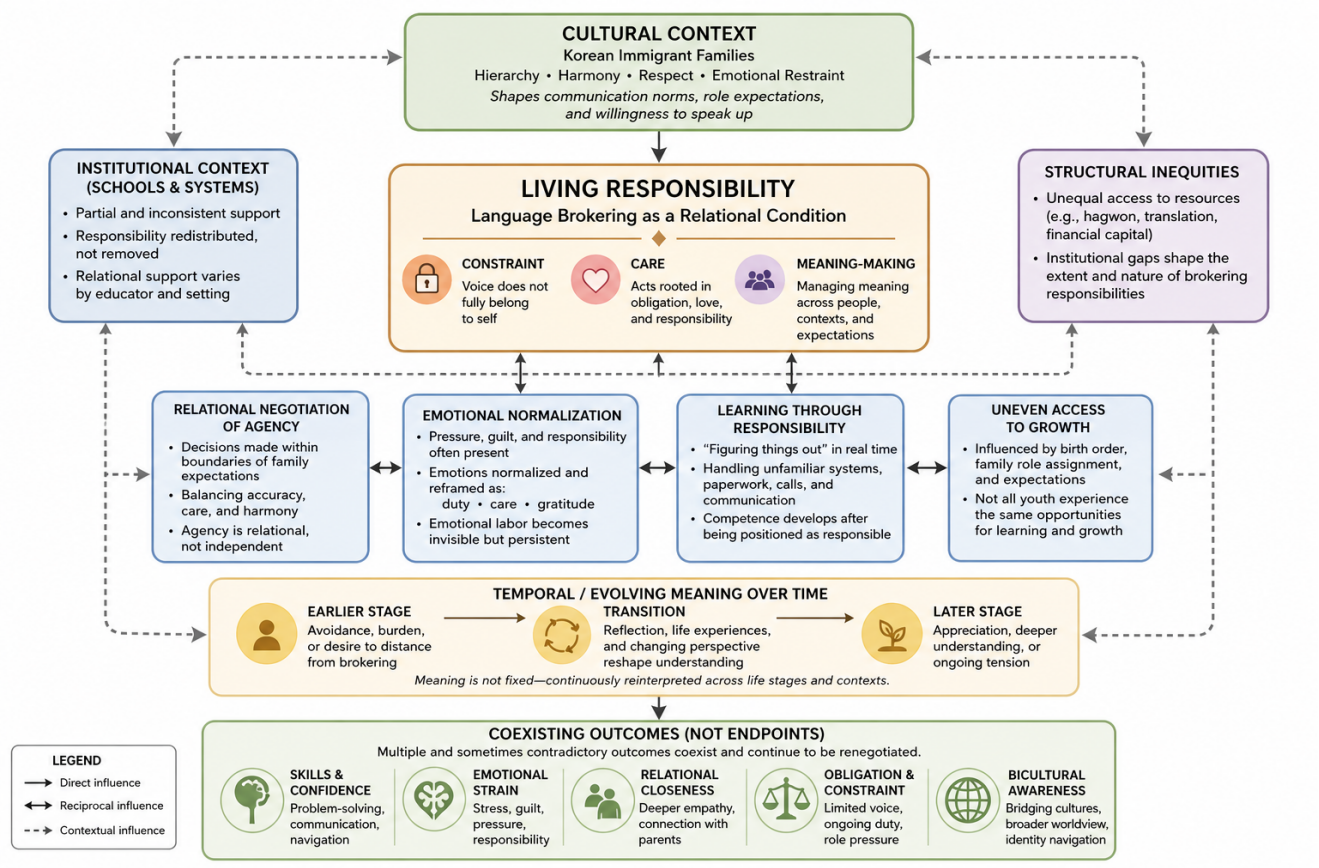
Conceptual Model

The development of a conceptual model is a critical step in qualitative research, particularly in moving from thematic findings to theoretical contribution. Naeem et al. (2023) emphasize that conceptual model development serves as a bridge between qualitative analysis and theory building, requiring researchers to synthesize patterns across data into a coherent explanatory framework. In narrative approaches, this process centers on participants' lived experiences, emotions, and evolving life histories, rather than abstract variable relationships (Eldh et al., 2020).

The conceptual model in this study (see Figure 2) was developed from participants' narratives of language brokering, with themes serving as interpretive anchors. Rather than generating hypotheses or causal predictions, the model aims to capture the complexity, fluidity, and relational nature of participants' experiences, while preserving the meaning they assigned to those experiences. As Naeem et al. (2023) suggest, conceptual models in qualitative research should reflect the processes and relationships embedded within participants' accounts, rather than reduce them to discrete variables.

Figure 2

Conceptual Map: Language Brokering as a Relational and Evolving System Among Korean Immigrant Young Adults



This conceptual model illustrates language brokering as a relational and evolving process, rather than a linear sequence of actions or fixed outcomes. At the center of the model is the idea of living responsibility, capturing how language brokering is experienced through overlapping dimensions of constraint, care, and meaning-making. Rather than functioning as a discrete task, brokering is embedded within everyday family life, shaping how participants communicate, make decisions, and understand their roles within relationships. Surrounding this core are four interconnected processes—relational negotiation of agency, emotional normalization, learning through responsibility, and uneven access to growth—that unfold simultaneously and remain in

constant interaction. Participants do not simply act with or without agency; instead, they describe negotiating their voice within relational boundaries shaped by family expectations.

Similarly, emotional experiences such as stress and pressure are often present but become normalized over time, reframed as responsibility, care, or even gratitude. Learning emerges not through prior preparation, but through being positioned in situations that require immediate response, where competence develops through repeated engagement. At the same time, these opportunities for growth are not equally distributed, as access to brokering experiences varies based on family roles, expectations, and positioning within the household. These processes are situated within broader contextual conditions that shape how brokering is experienced. Cultural norms within Korean immigrant families—particularly those emphasizing hierarchy, respect, and relational harmony—influence how participants communicate and navigate responsibility. Institutional contexts, such as schools, provide forms of support that are often partial and inconsistently experienced, redistributing rather than eliminating the responsibility placed on students. Structural inequities further shape these experiences by influencing access to external resources, such as private educational supports, which can either alleviate or intensify brokering demands.

The model also highlights a temporal dimension, emphasizing that the meaning of language brokering shifts over time. What may initially be experienced as a burden or something to avoid is often later reinterpreted through reflection and changing perspectives, sometimes leading to appreciation, deeper understanding, or continued tension. In this way, brokering is not a static experience but one that is continuously redefined across life stages and contexts. Finally, outcomes are represented not as endpoints but as coexisting and evolving states. Participants describe developing skills and confidence alongside ongoing emotional strain, experiencing

relational closeness alongside obligation and constraint, and building bicultural awareness while navigating complex identity demands. These outcomes exist in dynamic tension, reflecting the ongoing and relational nature of language brokering. The arrows within the model indicate these reciprocal and context-dependent relationships, underscoring that brokering unfolds through continuous interaction between individual experiences, family dynamics, and broader structural conditions.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine how young adults from Korean immigrant families make meaning of their childhood experiences as language brokers and to explore what they believe schools could have done to better support them. Findings reveal that language brokering was not an isolated task, but an ongoing, relationally embedded experience characterized by constrained expression, emotional complexity, and shifting understandings over time. Participants described how their roles as brokers often required them to communicate messages that were not fully their own, limiting their ability to express themselves authentically while simultaneously managing expectations from both parents and external actors. These constraints were layered with emotional tensions, including obligation, guilt, and, at times, pride, reflecting the complex interpersonal responsibilities placed on them at a young age. Over time, participants' interpretations evolved as they developed a deeper awareness of their parents' vulnerabilities and sacrifices, yet this increased understanding did not necessarily translate into relational closeness. Instead, language brokering often introduced distance, stress, or tension, highlighting the enduring relational complexity embedded in these experiences.

At the same time, findings also reveal that participants reframed these constrained experiences as sites of adaptive growth. Participants described developing responsibility, problem-solving skills, and an emerging awareness of their bilingual abilities through everyday brokering tasks. However, this growth was neither uniform nor freely chosen. Opportunities for skill development were shaped by family dynamics, birth order, and access to support, resulting in uneven experiences across participants. Although some described increased agency and

confidence over time, others reflected on missed opportunities or reliance on siblings, suggesting that development occurred within structural and relational constraints. Additionally, participants' roles extended beyond linguistic translation to include cultural mediation, as they navigated differences between home and school contexts. This finding further underscores that language brokering involves negotiating not only language, but also cultural expectations and identities.

In relation to the second research question, findings indicate that school-based support was experienced as conditional, fragmented, and largely mediated through individual relationships rather than systemic structures. Participants experienced a tension between access and autonomy when school systems either removed them from brokering roles or expected them to facilitate communication without clear direction or guidance. Institutional tools, such as translated documents or interpretation supports, were inconsistently effective, at times producing confusion or reinforcing students' responsibilities. In this context, teacher-level efforts emerged as a critical form of relational support, with participants valuing educators who demonstrated flexibility, understanding, and responsiveness to the specific needs of language brokers.

Interpretations and Contribution to Literature

Although small in number of participants, this study adds to the literature on language brokering from multiple facets. The focus on Korean immigrant young adults adds an important nuance related to culture and familial expectations, and the emphasis on language brokering within the context of K-12 education ties this study's findings to educational leadership in important ways.

Living Responsibility: Constraint, Care, and Relational Meaning

For Korean immigrant young adults, language brokering was not simply about translating; it required speaking under conditions where their voice did not fully belong to them. Participants described stepping into communication roles where they adjusted tone, softened meaning, and delivered messages in ways that maintained relationships. While this sometimes meant speaking in ways that did not fully reflect their own perspectives, these practices were not experienced as unusual disruptions, but as part of how they learned to communicate and care within their families. In moments such as parent–teacher conferences or assisting with workplace communication in family-run businesses, participants were not only translating language but managing meaning across individuals with differing expectations and levels of understanding.

This context positions brokering as a form of relational communication, where what matters is not only accuracy, but how messages are received and what they accomplish within relationships. This interpretation aligns with research emphasizing the relational and intergenerational dimensions of children's interpreting within immigrant households (Valdés, 2003), where brokering extends beyond linguistic transfer to include the negotiation of social relationships. Similarly, prior studies have shown that these experiences are often understood by youth as acts of care and obligation, rather than merely functional tasks (Hua & Costigan, 2012; Weisskirch et al., 2011).

Rather than experiencing full autonomy, participants described making decisions within relational boundaries shaped by family expectations and responsibility. At times, this meant communicating messages that did not fully reflect their own opinions or feeling accountable for outcomes beyond their control. However, these experiences were not simply restrictive. Instead, they reflected how participants learned to navigate responsibility, balancing accuracy, care, and

relational expectations. In this sense, agency was not absent, but relational—negotiated within the needs of others rather than expressed independently. In Korean immigrant families, this dynamic is intensified by expectations of respect, hierarchy, and relational harmony (Choi et al., 2013; Park, 2012). At the same time, participants were navigating school environments in the United States that emphasized independence, creating a constant tension between autonomy and obligation (Jin, 2015; Yoon et al., 2021). Rather than having or lacking agency, participants were negotiating it—making decisions within boundaries shaped by family expectations and relational responsibilities (Bauer, 2015; Cila & Lalonde, 2014; Kam et al., 2017; Rajagopal & Anderson, 2025).

Participants' experiences also suggest that the emotional dimensions of brokering were often normalized. While moments of pressure, guilt, and responsibility were present, these feelings were rarely foregrounded. Instead, brokering was described as something they "just did," reflecting how emotional labor became embedded within everyday family roles. Over time, what might be interpreted externally as burden was often reinterpreted internally as responsibility, care, and connection. Many participants described developing a deeper understanding of their parents' struggles, expressing appreciation for their sacrifices, and, in some cases, feeling a sense of gratitude that they were able to help. This finding extends prior research on emotional strain in language brokering (Martinez et al., 2009; Morales & Wang, 2018) by showing how that strain can become normalized and reframed, even as it continues to shape how youth understand care, obligation, and their place within the family (Dorantes, 2021; Valdés, 2003).

Participants' experiences showed that the meaning of language brokering is not fixed, but changes over time. What began as something they avoided or experienced as a burden was later

reinterpreted through reflection. For example, some participants described distancing themselves from brokering during adolescence, only to later feel regret or develop a deeper understanding of their parents' experiences. Others continued to experience tension, feeling both closer to their parents and more stressed because of the same responsibilities. These patterns suggest that brokering is not a single, stable experience, but an evolving process through which individuals continually renegotiate their roles and relationships. Rather than leading to one clear outcome, brokering creates conditions where care, distance, obligation, and independence coexist. This finding challenges prior research that has largely framed language brokering in terms of more stable and measurable outcomes. Studies such as Martinez et al. (2009) and Love and Buriel (2007) have linked brokering to behavioral adjustment, emotional well-being, autonomy, and parent-child relationships, often treating these effects as relatively consistent or directional. In contrast, the current study highlights the role of reflection and changing perspective, showing that brokering is not simply associated with fixed outcomes, but is continuously reinterpreted as individuals make sense of their experiences across different stages of their lives.

Growth Through Experience.

Within this context of responsibility, language brokering also became an important source of learning and development. Participants described "figuring things out" in real time—handling paperwork, interpreting phone calls, and explaining unfamiliar systems—often without formal guidance. While these experiences involved uncertainty, they were not described solely as struggle. Instead, participants came to understand these moments as opportunities where they developed practical skills, confidence, and awareness through repeated engagement. Over time, what began as uncertainty became familiarity, as participants learned how to navigate systems, anticipate needs, and respond effectively across contexts.

While prior research on Korean immigrant family life has emphasized the role of Confucian-influenced values, such as respect for authority, hierarchical relationships, and expectations of obedience (Kim & Wolpin, 2008; Lee & Kim, 2019), the current study extends that literature by showing how these cultural orientations operate within the specific context of language brokering. In Confucian-influenced settings, speaking is often tied to authority, experience, and seniority, while questioning or challenging others may be perceived as inappropriate. Within this framework, participants' accounts of "figuring things out" reflect not only linguistic demands, but also relational and cultural constraints that shape how and when they can seek clarification. Asking questions in brokering contexts was not always a neutral act of learning; it could carry relational risk by exposing uncertainty, disrupting perceived authority, or positioning parents as vulnerable. As a result, participants were often required to enact competence in real time, managing both the practical demands of translation and the cultural expectation to remain composed, respectful, and effective. In extending existing literature, this study highlights how language brokering becomes a phenomenon where development is shaped through responsibility, where learning emerges through engagement in real-world interactions.

This process also varied in how it developed across participants. Those who were consistently positioned as brokers accumulated experience and became more confident over time, while others—particularly those with older siblings—described feeling unprepared when responsibility eventually shifted to them. This uneven access suggests that growth is not an automatic outcome of brokering but rather is dependent on how responsibility is distributed within families. Prior research has suggested that competence develops through repeated engagement (Cila & Lalonde, 2014; Kam et al., 2017), but the current findings extend that work by showing that not all youth are positioned to access those opportunities equally.

In Korean immigrant families, the distribution of responsibility is further shaped by cultural expectations, including those tied to birth order. Participants' accounts suggest that brokering is not only assigned based on ability, but also influenced by norms of care and obligation, where first-born children often carry greater responsibility than their younger siblings. The concept of K-Jangnyu helps explain why first-born daughters were more consistently positioned in these roles, as expectations of responsibility and sacrifice aligned with brokering demands (Lee, 2023). This nuance reframes brokering as a culturally structured responsibility, where repeated expectation—not just opportunity—drives skill development.

As participants took on more responsibility, their role extended beyond translation into coordination and decision-making. This finding challenges narrower definitions of language brokering by showing that youth are not simply intermediaries, but active managers of institutional navigation. While prior research conceptualizes language brokering as linguistic and cultural mediation (McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Orellana, 2009), the current study extends this work by demonstrating that youth are not only intermediaries, but active coordinators and decision-makers in institutional interactions.

Participants also described how their language brokering experiences shaped their bilingual awareness in specific and practical ways. Rather than developing language skills in isolation, they learned to respond quickly, adjust meaning, and translate across contexts in real time. This finding supports research that positions language brokering as a site of emergent bilingual development (Mills & Murray, 2017), while also emphasizing that these skills develop within relational and situational demands.

At the same time, participants' accounts suggest that growth and responsibility remained closely connected. Their confidence and capabilities were developed through ongoing

engagement in brokering, often alongside continued expectations to support their families. As a result, what appears as independence or competence cannot be fully separated from the responsibilities that shaped it. Rather than replacing burden, growth and responsibility coexisted, reflecting the complex ways in which participants understood their roles within their families.

School Support as Conditional, Relational, and Incomplete.

Participants' experiences show that school-based language support reduced—but did not eliminate—language brokering, leaving students responsible for remaining gaps. However, responsibility re-emerged in more complex situations—such as college applications, financial forms, or decision-making processes—where participants were expected to interpret, organize, and guide their parents. In these moments, brokering extended beyond translation into coordination and accountability, positioning students not just as intermediaries, but as primary navigators of institutional systems. This finding suggests that school support does not remove responsibility, but redistributes it, leaving students to manage the most consequential aspects of communication (Dorner et al., 2008; Martinez et al., 2009).

At the same time, participants' experiences suggest that responsibility in language brokering is not static but shifts over time alongside processes of acculturation. Several participants described feeling more confident in high school, as both they and their parents became more familiar with schooling in the United States. As their English proficiency improved and their understanding of institutional systems deepened, participants felt more capable in their brokering roles. Concurrently, parents began to rely differently on their children, often granting greater independence and expressing increased trust in their decisions.

While Kim and Wolpin (2008) frame differences in language proficiency as creating gaps in communication and authority, the present study suggests that these differences can also

become sites of coordination and relational interdependence. Rather than simply producing tension, the acculturation gap often positioned youth as active contributors within the family, reshaping communication in ways that were both functional and relational. Importantly, participants' accounts indicate that parents were not static in this process. As families spent more time in the United States, parents' familiarity with institutional systems increased, and their reliance on children shifted rather than simply persisted. In this sense, acculturation did not lead to a straightforward movement toward autonomy, but instead reshaped how responsibility, trust, and decision-making were negotiated within the family over time. In this way, language brokering evolves not only in response to institutional demands, but also through changing family dynamics and mutual adaptation across generations.

Participants also described how institutional support could introduce new tensions around autonomy, privacy, and control. For example, Yoo Jin chose to interpret for herself during conferences rather than rely on an interpreter, not because support was unavailable, but because it disrupted her sense of privacy and ownership over personal information. Similarly, when translation systems produced confusing or inaccurate Korean, she opted out of using them altogether, suggesting that access alone does not guarantee usefulness. These experiences highlight a mismatch between how support is designed and how it is experienced. Rather than simply increasing access, institutional supports can reshape communication in ways that feel less controlled, less accurate, or less aligned with students' relational needs. Therefore, effective language support should extend beyond access alone and include practices that help multilingual students and their families feel seen, valued, and connected within the school community.

Brokering within school contexts also depended on students' language proficiency. Participants with stronger bilingual skills were able to detect subtle differences in tone, intent,

and meaning, allowing them to intervene when translations were unclear or misleading. In contrast, those with more limited proficiency described greater uncertainty, particularly when translating complex or unfamiliar information. This affected not only how students experienced brokering, but also how accurately information was conveyed to their families. This finding extends prior research on relational dynamics in brokering (Weisskirch et al., 2020) by identifying language proficiency as a key mechanism shaping both communication quality and relational alignment. In this sense, linguistic competence is not separate from relational experience—it directly shapes how effectively students can represent their families' interests and intentions.

At the same time, participants consistently emphasized that the most meaningful forms of support were relational rather than structural. Teachers who slowed down, clarified meaning, or took extra time reduced the burden of brokering in ways that formal systems did not. For Korean-immigrant young adults, what mattered was not only access to information, but whether they felt understood. This finding reframes support as something enacted through relationships, not just delivered through systems.

However, this form of support was uneven. Because it depended on individual teachers, it was not consistently available. Some students experienced strong relational support, while others described situations where teachers assumed parental English proficiency or assigned tasks that increased their responsibility without recognizing it. These assumptions were also reflected in how educators interpreted families' language needs. Even when parents had high levels of education and some English proficiency, participants continued to take on brokering responsibilities, suggesting that higher parental education does not necessarily diminish the need for language brokering. John shared that despite his father holding a Ph.D., language barriers

persisted in everyday and institutional contexts. This finding highlights how educational attainment does not always translate into functional or context-specific language proficiency. This finding is particularly salient for Korean immigrant families, many of whom come from relatively highly educated backgrounds while also maintaining strong cultural values that prioritize academic achievement (Lee & Zhou, 2015; Pew Research Center, 2013). Together, these findings suggest that language brokering is not simply a function of parental educational level but is shaped by the specific linguistic and relational demands families encounter across different contexts.

These gaps extended beyond school. Participants described turning to external resources, such as *hagwon*, to navigate high-stakes processes like college applications when support was not available at home or school. These resources helped fill critical gaps, but access depended on family resources, making support uneven across students. This finding highlights how language brokering is shaped not only by school systems, but by broader inequalities in access to support. Taken together, these findings show that language support remains incomplete. While schools address certain aspects of communication, they do not fully account for the relational, interpretive, and decision-making work involved in brokering. As a result, students continue to fill these gaps—not simply because they are capable, but because systems rely on them to manage what formal supports cannot fully capture. At the same time, this responsibility evolves as students and families adapt, reflecting broader processes of acculturation, shifting roles, and increasing confidence over time. This finding reframes language brokering not as an individual skill, but as a relational and structural response to partial and evolving systems of support.

Implications for Practice

This study has multiple implications for practice, both in school systems and beyond.

School Support for Language Brokers and Teachers

What stood out in this study is that Korean-immigrant language brokers recognized when teachers showed grace, patience, and a genuine understanding of their experiences. They spoke about appreciating teachers who took the time to communicate clearly, who made efforts to include families through translated messages—even when those translations were imperfect—and who approached them with care rather than assumption. At the same time, support was not always experienced as meaningful. Even when interpreters or translation services were available, students did not necessarily feel supported, especially when there was no prior relationship or trust. This finding suggests that for language brokers, support is not only about access—it is about being seen. Students wanted to be recognized as individuals navigating complex responsibilities, not just as translators within the system. However, the study also shows that these experiences were inconsistent. Some students encountered relationally responsive teachers, while others were left to manage communication on their own. Therefore, the findings suggest a need for more consistent teacher professional development focused on relational support practices for language brokers, including strategies for building trust, communicating clearly, and recognizing the complex responsibilities multilingual students navigate.

While these findings highlight the importance of teacher-level support, they also point to a less explored dimension of support—peer interactions among students who share language brokering experiences. An important implication of this study is the need to consider language brokering not only as an individual or family-based experience, but also as a potentially shared, peer-mediated phenomenon within school contexts. Although participants in this study did not explicitly describe interactions with other language brokers, the absence of such accounts raises important questions about whether these experiences remain largely privatized or whether they

are collectively recognized among peers. If language brokering is normalized within Korean immigrant communities, students may not perceive it as noteworthy or worthy of discussion, which may limit opportunities for collective meaning-making.

At the same time, research on adolescent identity development suggests that peer interactions play a critical role in shaping how experiences are interpreted and internalized (Mills & Murray, 2017). This suggests that schools are positioned to make these often-invisible experiences more visible by creating intentional spaces—such as classroom discussions, affinity groups, or reflective activities—where students can share, validate, and critically reflect on their roles. Supporting opportunities for peer connection may help transform language brokering from an isolated responsibility into a shared site of recognition, potentially fostering a stronger sense of identity, agency, and belonging among students who navigate these roles.

In addition, there is a need for more consistent, school-wide approaches to understanding and supporting language brokers. Although many districts already offer professional development for multilingual learners, this study suggests that such efforts must go further. Many multilingual students serve as language brokers at home, whether they choose to or not. The goal is not to encourage students to take on this role, but to recognize that it is a common and often valued part of family life. This requires a shift in how educators think about language brokering. Rather than framing it as a problem or assuming students are being taken advantage of, schools must move toward an asset-based perspective. Language brokering should be understood as a normal response to structural language barriers—one that reflects students' bilingual abilities, adaptability, and care for their families. At the same time, recognizing it as normal does not mean ignoring the responsibility language brokering carries.

A key implication is that relational practice matters just as much as structural support. Although schools may rely on interpreters and translated materials, students consistently emphasized that what made the biggest difference was everyday interaction—teachers slowing down, checking for understanding, and making them feel valued. These small, relational moves reduced pressure in ways that formal systems often could not. Supporting language brokers, then, is not only about improving translation systems, but about how teachers engage with students on a daily basis and recognize them as capable, emerging bilingual individuals.

The findings point to the need for professional development that supports educators in examining their assumptions about language brokering and multilingual students. Research on effective professional development emphasizes that meaningful change occurs not through passive information delivery, but through active learning experiences that require teachers to interrogate their thinking and connect it to practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Within this framework, approaches such as "Myth vs. Reality" reflection provide a concrete entry point. In these activities, teachers examine common beliefs—such as "students shouldn't have to translate," "interpreters solve the problem," or "parents should just learn English"—and consider them alongside research and student experiences. By surfacing and questioning these assumptions, teachers engage in the kind of reflective, meaning-making processes that have been shown to support shifts in beliefs and instructional practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

This reflective work can be deepened through the inclusion of student narratives, either through panels or recorded testimonies. Hearing directly from students about their experiences with responsibility, decision-making, and emotional pressure allows teachers to move beyond surface-level empathy toward a more nuanced understanding of language brokering as a lived, relational experience. When paired with guided reflection, these narratives create opportunities

for teachers to listen carefully, suspend immediate judgment, and reconsider previously held assumptions—again aligning with research highlighting the importance of active, reflective engagement in professional learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

In addition, schools can engage in communication audits, ideally in collaboration with ELD specialists, as a way to connect reflection to practice. Teachers might review their own materials—emails, syllabi, and family communication—and ask: Is this accessible? Who is currently doing the work of translation? Framing this process as supportive and reflective, rather than evaluative, is essential. Research suggests that professional development is most effective when it builds on existing practice and supports incremental change (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Questions such as "What is already working?" or "Have you tried…?" can guide this process without creating pressure to overhaul everything at once. The goal is to move toward clearer, more inclusive communication practices that reduce the extent to which students are positioned as default translators, while still recognizing the complex realities they navigate.

Translanguaging

An additional implication from this study is the potential value of viewing language brokering through a translanguaging lens. Although participants did not explicitly use the term *translanguaging*, their descriptions often reflected the process of weaving together linguistic, cultural, and relational resources as they navigated communication between family members, schools, and institutions. Rather than drawing from separate language systems, participants described moving fluidly across languages, cultural knowledge, and social contexts to make meaning and support others. This aligns with García and Wei's (2015) conceptualization of translanguaging as the strategic and dynamic use of an individual's full linguistic repertoire rather than the movement between discrete languages. Translanguaging scholars argue that

multilinguals do not simply switch between languages but draw upon an integrated communicative repertoire to construct meaning, negotiate relationships, and exercise agency.

Rather than viewing students' home languages as temporary bridges to English, teachers can intentionally design classroom opportunities that allow multilingual students to draw on their full linguistic repertoires as part of learning. Translanguaging pedagogy challenges monolingual assumptions by recognizing that multilingual students do not simply move between separate languages, but actively use an integrated repertoire of linguistic, cultural, and semiotic resources to make meaning (García & Wei, 2022). In classroom practice, this may include allowing students to discuss ideas in multiple languages before sharing with the whole class, use multilingual resources during research and note-taking, compare concepts across languages, annotate texts using their full linguistic repertoires, or create projects that incorporate multiple languages and modes of communication.

These instructional moves are important because translanguaging pedagogy positions multilingualism as a resource for thinking, identity, and participation rather than as an obstacle to overcome. Creese and Blackledge's (2010) classroom research showed that flexible bilingual practices can support both learning and identity negotiation, while García et al. (2017) describe translanguaging pedagogy as involving a teacher stance, intentional instructional design, and responsive shifts that leverage students' bilingualism for learning. For language brokers, this is especially meaningful because many already engage in complex translanguaging outside of school as they interpret, negotiate, and reconstruct meaning for their families. By recognizing and legitimizing these practices in the classroom, general education teachers can affirm multilinguals' agency, strengthen belonging, and build instruction from the communicative strengths students already bring to school (García & Kleifgen, 2019; Wei & García, 2022).

Korean Language School and Heritage Schools

Heritage language schools are critical spaces in Korean immigrant communities, supporting not only language development but also cultural identity and intergenerational connection. Heritage language learning reinforces ties to family and cultural values (Lee, 2002), while also providing opportunities for Korean American youth to negotiate their ethnic identities and make meaning of their bicultural experiences (You, 2005). Findings from this study extend this literature by highlighting the relational role of heritage language. Participants who felt more confident in both Korean and English described stronger connections with their parents and a deeper understanding of their parents' sacrifices. In this way, heritage language functioned not simply as a skill, but as a bridge across generations. Therefore, these findings draw attention to the role of curriculum within Korean heritage language schools.

Although Korean heritage schools vary in their curricular approaches, the Korean Standard Curriculum serves as a common framework for Korean language education and reflects broader educational priorities promoted by the Korean government. It adopts a multilingual and communication-centered approach, emphasizing the development of communicative competence across diverse contexts. However, it does not explicitly address the lived experiences of bilingual students who engage in language brokering (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2020). As a result, the relational, emotional, and responsibility-based dimensions of brokering remain largely absent from the curriculum, despite its broader recognition of learners' linguistic diversity. Incorporating students' lived experiences into curriculum—through stories, discussions, and examples that reflect both the challenges and growth associated with language brokering—can support students in seeing their lives meaningfully represented in what they are learning.

This approach is grounded in scholarship emphasizing the importance of representation as a mechanism for identity affirmation and engagement. Bishop (1990) argues that curriculum should function as a "mirror," allowing students to recognize themselves and their experiences within academic content. Similarly, culturally relevant and culturally sustaining pedagogies emphasize that learning becomes more meaningful when it reflects and affirms students' cultural and linguistic practices (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012). From an asset-based perspective, frameworks such as community cultural wealth further highlight that students' everyday experiences—including language brokering—constitute valuable forms of knowledge that should be recognized within classroom learning (Yosso, 2005). In this way, integrating language brokering into curriculum not only acknowledges the challenges students navigate, but also affirms their growth, capability, and contributions, fostering a stronger sense of belonging and relevance in the learning process.

Korean heritage schools are uniquely positioned to support not only students, but families as well. Findings from this study suggest that 1.5 and second-generation Korean American participants developed a deeper awareness of their parents' sacrifices and a stronger sense of empathy through language brokering. In this way, language functioned as more than a tool for communication—it became a bridge across intergenerational gaps, shaping how participants understood their parents' experiences and intentions.

These insights point to an expanded role for Korean heritage language schools in the United States, which are often supported to maintain linguistic and cultural continuity. Although these programs have traditionally focused on language proficiency, the findings suggest they can also play a critical role in strengthening intergenerational communication and relational understanding. At the same time, participants' experiences show that the challenges of language

brokering are deeply relational and not limited to individual students. Heritage schools can therefore serve as spaces that support families more broadly—through opportunities for parents to better understand these dynamics, build their own capacity to navigate systems, and reduce reliance on their children as intermediaries.

Educational and community-based supports should therefore be attentive to these cultural dimensions, recognizing that students' roles may be shaped by expectations that extend beyond language proficiency alone. Programs such as heritage language schools may also play an important role, not only in maintaining language skills, but in supporting intergenerational communication and helping students navigate the relational complexities associated with brokering.

Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. First, this study focused specifically on Korean American young adults who grew up in Oregon. Although this focus allowed for a deeper understanding of culturally specific dynamics, it also limits the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the sample included three males and seven females, resulting in a female-skewed representation. Language brokering experiences may vary across gender and across immigrant communities with differing linguistic, cultural, and migration histories. The sample recruited for this study made analysis of these potential differences untenable.

Second, in this study, participants were asked to reflect on past language brokering experiences, often from adolescence or earlier. As a result, their accounts are shaped by retrospective interpretation. Although this reflective lens provides valuable insight into how meaning evolves over time, it also introduces the possibility of recall bias and selective memory.

Participants may reinterpret earlier experiences through the lens of their current perspectives, which can both deepen understanding and complicate interpretation.

This limitation is further connected to participants' current living arrangements during emerging adulthood. Half of the participants (n = 5) reported that they were still living with their parents at the time of the study. As noted by Kang et al. (2010), emerging adults who continue to live with their parents may engage in different meaning-making processes, as they are more likely to remain embedded in ongoing family dynamics and potential sources of conflict compared to those with greater physical distance. For participants who remained at home, continued proximity to family may have influenced how they interpreted their past language brokering experiences. Their reflections were likely shaped not only by memory, but also by ongoing involvement in everyday brokering tasks, current relational dynamics, and present-day responsibilities within the household. In contrast, participants living independently may have engaged in reflection with greater temporal and emotional distance, potentially leading to different interpretations of similar experiences.

Next, eight out of the ten participants reported that both their parents had a college-level or higher education. This relatively high level of parental education may have shaped how participants interpreted and later reflected on their brokering experiences, particularly in how they understood their parents' challenges and available resources.

This study is also limited in its ability to capture the role of peer interactions in shaping language brokering experiences. Although focus groups were designed to elicit shared reflection, cultural and social dynamics may have influenced how participants responded. Korean cultural norms emphasizing collectivism and social harmony may encourage agreement and discourage divergence from group consensus (Kim & Markus, 1999; Triandis, 1995). In this study, four

accounts of participant comments included phrases such as “I agree with what the other participant is saying,” or “similar to what the other participant said,” suggesting a tendency toward alignment rather than critique. In small group settings, this may have created subtle pressure to build on others’ ideas rather than introduce contrasting perspectives. Consistent with focus group research, such dynamics can produce conformity effects, particularly among culturally similar participants (Krueger & Casey, 2015; Morgan, 1997). As a result, the data may underrepresent variation in individual experiences and may help explain the limited discussion of peer-to-peer interactions among language brokers.

Future Research

Future research could build on the patterns that emerged in this study by looking more closely at how language brokering is experienced within Korean immigrant families, particularly in relation to birth order, language proficiency, and relational dynamics. In this study, three participants stood out as carrying a more sustained and intensive brokering role. Their experiences were shaped not only by their language abilities, but also by their position within the family—often as first-born children—or by the closeness of their day-to-day relationships with their parents. Although the focus group setting made it possible to see shared patterns across participants, it also suggested the value of slowing down and listening more closely to individuals who carry a disproportionate share of responsibility. In-depth, one-on-one interviews could create space for such participants to reflect more fully on moments of decision-making, uncertainty, and emotional complexity, offering a deeper understanding of how brokering is lived in real time.

At the same time, the composition of the sample represents an important limitation. The participants in this study largely came from middle-class Korean immigrant families in Oregon.

Fully 80% (n = 8) reported that both parents had a college-level or higher education, and 70% (n = 7) indicated that at least one parent held a master's or doctoral degree. Many also reported some level of English support within the household. These conditions likely shaped how brokering was distributed and experienced, including the kinds of resources available to families and the extent to which students were expected to step in. Participants may have had greater access to institutional support, parental guidance, and external resources, which could reduce the intensity or frequency of brokering responsibilities. As a result, the findings—particularly those related to normalization, reinterpretation, and relational closeness—may reflect experiences more common in relatively well-resourced families.

As Kwon (2013) reminds us, "social class has rarely been the central analytic frame of research on immigrant families… neglecting to address how life experiences of immigrants and their children are classed as well as racialized in the United States" (p. 68). Taking this limitation seriously highlights how this study may underrepresent experiences in families with more limited access to education, English proficiency, or institutional support, where brokering may involve greater responsibility or sustained burden. It also suggests that language brokering cannot be fully understood through cultural explanations alone but must be examined in relation to structural conditions that shape family roles and expectations. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted within this socioeconomic context and may not fully capture the range of experiences across diverse Korean immigrant families. Attending to these differences in future research may reveal not only who brokers, but how responsibility is felt, negotiated, and sustained under varying conditions.

Finally, because this study focused on participants in emerging adulthood, it offers only a partial view of how meaning changes over time. Some participants were still living at home and

actively engaged in brokering, while others had more distance from those responsibilities. Future research could follow these trajectories more closely, exploring how interpretation and meaning shift as individuals move in and out of these roles. Participants also frequently described navigating school-based communication and institutional systems, suggesting that these are important contexts where brokering takes shape. Examining how teacher practices, language access policies, and everyday school interactions either reduce or reproduce students' responsibilities as brokers would further extend this work by grounding it more directly in the contexts where these experiences continue to unfold.

Conclusion

As a qualitative study, this research was valuable in capturing the depth and nuance of participants' lived experiences with language brokering. Through focus groups, participants were able to share detailed narratives that revealed not only what they did, but how they felt, interpreted, and made meaning of those experiences over time.

As a 1.5 generation Korean American who immigrated from Korea, I began this study with the belief that my own experience of language brokering for my mother would allow me to deeply understand and empathize with immigrant youth in similar positions. However, as I listened to participants' stories, I came to recognize the complexity and diversity of these experiences. Each participant's story was shaped not only by language brokering itself, but by a range of intersecting factors, including family dynamics, levels of Korean and English proficiency, age at immigration, and the nature of their relationships with their parents. These layered conditions revealed that language brokering is not a singular or uniform experience, but one that unfolds differently across individuals and contexts.

This study also contributes to the literature by centering Korean immigrant families, a group that has often been underrepresented in language brokering research. Existing research has largely focused on Latinx or Spanish-speaking populations, which is critical, but fewer studies have examined the specific cultural, linguistic, and relational dynamics shaping Korean families. This absence is not a reflection of a lack of experience, but rather a gap in research attention. By focusing on Korean immigrant young adults, this study helps broaden the scope of the field and highlights the importance of including diverse immigrant communities in order to more fully understand how language brokering is lived and interpreted across contexts.

At the same time, this study is situated within a broader demographic context. There are over 1.9 million Korean Americans living in the United States, and Oregon is home to a growing Korean population of approximately 20,000 residents, representing a small but steadily increasing immigrant community. Attending the experiences of Korean immigrant youth within this context not only adds to a limited but important body of research but also underscores the need to more fully recognize and represent the voices of Asian immigrant populations within language brokering scholarship.

Appendix A: Purposive Sampling

Subject: Invitation to Share Your Story - Dissertation Study

Dear [Name],

Hello, my name is Jennifer Lee and I'm a doctoral candidate at the University of Oregon. I was introduced to you by [mutual connection], whom I work/volunteer with at [community/organization name]. They mentioned that you may share a similar experience that relates to my doctoral research, and I wanted to personally reach out.

I am currently completing my doctoral dissertation titled *A Qualitative Study of Korean Immigrant Young Adults' Lived Experiences with Language Brokering*. My study explores how Korean American young adults describe their experiences of serving as language brokers for their parents while growing up. Because I understand that you may have had this shared experience, I would be honored to invite you to consider participating and sharing your story. This research seeks to create space for thoughtful reflection on how early responsibilities of translating and interpreting shape identity, family relationships, and life perspectives over time.

If you choose to participate, you will join a small focus group conversation via Zoom lasting approximately 60-90 minutes. The discussion will be guided by open-ended, reflective questions. Participation is completely voluntary, and you may decline to answer any question or withdraw at any time.

I recognize that these experiences are personal and meaningful. If you feel comfortable sharing your story, your voice would contribute to a deeper understanding of Korean immigrant family dynamics and intergenerational experiences.

Please feel free to reply to this email if you would like more information or are interested in participating. I would truly appreciate your consideration.

With appreciation,

Jennifer Lee
Doctoral Candidate
University of Oregon
jlee20@uoregon.edu

Appendix B: Poster

University of Oregon

Research Participants Needed

This study explores the experiences of Korean immigrant young adults who, while growing up, helped their parents by translating or explaining English language, culture, or everyday systems. The goal of this study is to better understand how they reflect on these experiences today, and what those roles meant to them while growing up and in adulthood. Participation involves a focus group where participants will be invited to share their experiences and perspectives.

Who can participate?

- Ages 18–25
- Bilingual in Korean and English
- Experience helping parent(s) with translation or navigating systems

What does participation involve?

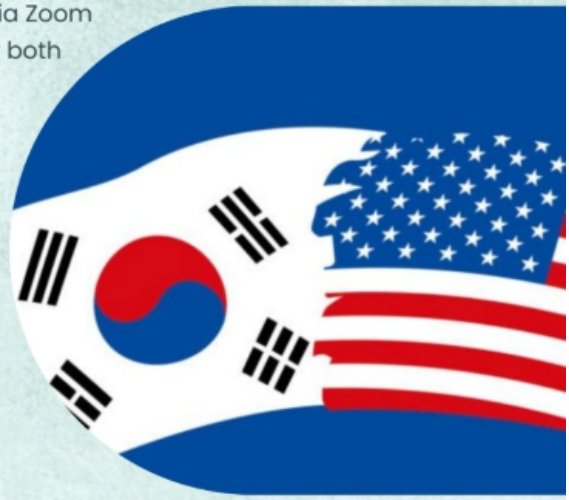
- One focus group (3–5 participants)
- Approximately 60–90 minutes via Zoom
- Conducted in English, Korean, or both

Compensation

$10 Starbucks gift card

For more information, please contact:

Jennifer Lee
jlee20@uoregon.edu
541-525-8082



UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

University of Oregon

한국 이민자 청년들 연구 참여자 모집

이 연구의 목적은 성장 과정에서 부모를 도와 통역, 문화 설명, 또는 일상적인 제도이용을 돕는 역할을 했던 한국계 이민 가정의 청년들의 경험을 파악 하고 자 하는 것입니다. 이러한 경험을 오늘날 청년들이 어떻게 되돌아보고 있는지, 또한 성인이 된 이후 그 역할이 어떤 의미를 가졌는지를 포커스 그룹을 통해 더 깊이 이해하는 데 있습니다.

참여 기준

- 나이 18 -25세
- 한국어와 영어를 모두 사용할 수 있는 분
- 부모를 위해 통역을 하거나 제도, 시스템 이용을 도운 경험이 있는 분

참여 내용

- 포커스 그룹 1회 참여 (3-5명)
- Zoom을 통한 온라인 진행
- 약 60-90분 소요
- 영어, 한국어 또는 두 언어 혼용 가능

참여 혜택

- 스타벅스 기프트카드 $10 제공

문의사항

이제니퍼
jlee20@uoregon.edu
541-525-8082



Appendix C: Focus Group Questions

A. Warm-up / Rapport Questions (3-4 minutes)

1.To start, can you share your first name and one word or short phrase that comes to mind when you think about translating or interpreting for your parents while growing up?

- What made you choose that word?

B. Main Interview Questions

2. Can you tell me about a time you remember interpreting for your parents?
    - How old were you?
    - Where were you?
    - What kinds of things were you translating?
3. What kinds of situations did you most interpret growing up?
4. How did you feel in those moments while you were interpreting?
5. Describe a time when you felt "in between" your parents and the outside world?
6. How do you think serving as an interpreter affected your relationship with your parent(s)?
7. How, if at all, did these experiences shape your identity as a Korean American or bilingual/bicultural person?
8. Think back to your childhood. Describe a time that you thought, "I can't believe that my parents asked me to translate this!"
9. Tell me about a time when you misinterpreted.
10. What skills or strengths do you think you developed because of serving as a language broker?
11. Thinking about having served as a language broker for your parents, how does it still impact you today?
12. If you could talk to your younger self during those interpreting moments, what would you want them to know?
13. What do you wish teachers, schools, doctors, or institutions better understood about children interpreting for their parents?
14. Is there anything we didn't ask that feels important to share about your experience?

Prompts:

Tell me more about…
Can you give me an example of..
You didn't say anything about..
How would you describe…
What did you do when…

References

Alvarez, S. (2017). Brokering literacies: Child language brokering in Mexican immigrant families. *Community Literacy Journal, 11*(2), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1353/clj.2017.0000

Angelelli, C. V. (2004). *Medical interpreting and cross-cultural communication.* Cambridge University Press.

Anguiano, R.M. Language brokering among Latino immigrant families: Moderating variables and youth outcomes. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 47, 222–242 (2018). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-017-0744-y

Antonini, R. (2010). The study of child language brokering: Past, current, and emerging research. *mediAzioni, 10*.

Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist, 55*(5), 469–480. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.5.469

Arumí, M., & Rubio-Carbonero, G. (2022). Reflecting on past language brokering experiences: How they affected children's and teenagers' emotions and relationships. *Multilingua, 42*(1), 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1515/multi-2021-0152

Bauer, E. (2015). Practising kinship care: Children as language brokers in migrant families. *Childhood*, *23*(1), 22-36. https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568215574917

Berger, R. (2015). Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research, 15*(2), 219–234. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794112468475

Birt, L., Scott, S., Cavers, D., Campbell, C., & Walter, F. (2016). Member checking: A tool to enhance trustworthiness or merely a nod to validation? *Qualitative Health Research, 26*(13), 1802–1811. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316654870

Bishop, R. S. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom, 6*(3), ix–xi.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2023). Toward good practice in thematic analysis: Avoiding common problems and be(com)ing a knowing researcher. *International Journal of Transgender Health, 24*(1), 1–6. https://doi.org/10.1080/26895269.2022.2129597

Byun, S., Schofer, E., & Kim, K. (2012). Revisiting the role of cultural capital in East Asian educational systems: The case of South Korea. *Sociology of Education, 85*(3), 219–239. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038040712447180

Choi, Y., Kim, Y. S., Kim, S. Y., & Park, I. J. K. (2013). Is Asian American parenting controlling and harsh? Empirical testing of relationships between Korean American and Western parenting measures. *Asian American Journal of Psychology, 4*(1), 19–29. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0031220

Choi, Y., Kim, Y. S., Pekelnicky, D. D., & Kim, H. J. (2013). Preservation and modification of culture in family socialization: Development of parenting measures for Korean immigrant families. *Asian American Journal of Psychology, 4*(2), 143–154. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0028772

Cila, J., & Lalonde, R. N. (2014). Language brokering, acculturation, and empowerment: Evidence from South Asian Canadian young adults. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 36*(5), 489–507. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2014.953540

Cline, T., Crafter, S., & Prokopiou, E. (2014). *Child language brokering in schools: A discussion of selected findings from a survey of teachers and ex-students.* Educational and Child Psychology, 31(2), 34–47.

Corona, R., Stevens, L. F., Halfond, R. W., Shaffer, C. M., Redi-Quinones, K., & Gonzalez, T. (2012). A qualitative analysis of what Latino parents and adolescents think about feel about language brokering. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 21, 788–798.

Crafter, S., & Iqbal, H. (2022). Child language brokering as a family care practice: Reframing the 'parentified child' debate. *Children & Society, 36*(3), 400–414. https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12485

Creese, A., & Blackledge, A. (2010). Translanguaging in the Bilingual Classroom: A Pedagogy for Learning and Teaching? *The Modern Language Journal*, *94*(1), 103–115. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25612290

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Cunningham, U., & King, J. (2018). Language, ethnicity, and belonging for the children of migrants in New Zealand. *SAGE Open, 8*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244018782571

Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., & Gardner, M. (2017). *Effective teacher professional development*. Learning Policy Institute. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Effective_Teacher_Professional_Development_REPORT.pdf

Data USA. (2025). Portland–Vancouver–Hillsboro, OR-WA Metro Area. *https://datausa.io/profile/geo/portland-vancouver-hillsboro-or-wa*

De Ment, T. L., Buriel, R., & Villanueva, C. M. (2005). Children as language brokers: A narrative of the recollections of college students. In R. Hoosain & F. Salili (Eds.), *Language in multicultural education* (pp. 255–272). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.

Delgado, V. (2023). Uncovering youth's invisible labor: Children's roles, care work, and obligations in immigrant families. *Social Sciences, 12*(1), 36. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12010036

DeWaelsche, S. A. (2015). Critical thinking, questioning and student engagement in Korean university English courses. *Linguistics and Education, 32*, 131–147. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2015.10.003

Dorantes Ortiz, A. A. (2021). *I speak for my parents: Complicated feelings, thoughts, and experiences of Latina/o youth who language broker for their parents* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Oregon). University of Oregon Scholars' Bank. https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu

Dorner, L. M., Orellana, M. F., & Jiménez, R. (2008). "It's one of those things that you do to help the family": Language brokering and the development of immigrant adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 23*(5), 515–543. https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558408317563

DuBord, E. M. (2025). "Let me be a bridge": Language brokering among emerging adult Latina professionals in the Midwest. *Journal of World Languages, 2*(1), 1–28. https://doi.org/10.1515/jwl-2025-0007

Dwyer, S. C., & Buckle, J. L. (2009). The space between: On being an insider–outsider in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 8*(1), 54–63. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690900800105

Eldh, A. C., Årestedt, L., & Berterö, C. (2020). Quotations in qualitative studies: Reflections on constituents, customization, and purpose. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 19*. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920969268

Erikson, E. H. (1959). *Identity and the life cycle: Selected papers*. *Psychological Issues, 1*, 1–171.

Felkey, J., & Graham, S. (2022). Racial/ethnic discrimination, cultural mistrust, and psychological maladjustment among Asian American and Latino adolescent language brokers. *Cultural diversity & ethnic minority psychology*, *28*(1), 125–131. https://doi.org/10.1037/cdp0000502

Fereday, J., & Muir-Cochrane, E. (2006). Demonstrating rigor using thematic analysis: A hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding and theme development. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 5*(1), 80–92. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690600500107

Fisher, R. J. (1993). Social desirability bias and the validity of indirect questioning. *Journal of Consumer Research, 20*(2), 303–315. https://doi.org/10.1086/209351

García-Sánchez, I. M. (2018). Children as interactional brokers of care. *Annual Review of Anthropology, 47*, 167–184. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-102317-050050

García-Sánchez, I. M., Orellana, M. F., & Hopkins, M. (2011). Facilitating intercultural communication in parent–teacher conferences: Lessons from child translators. *Multicultural Perspectives, 13*(3), 148–154. https://doi.org/10.1080/15210960.2011.594387

García-Sánchez, I. M., Orellana, M. F., & Hopkins, M. (2021). *Children's language brokering in educational contexts: Policy, practice, and power.* Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 41, 1–17.

García, O., Johnson, S. I., & Seltzer, K. (2017). *The translanguaging classroom: Leveraging student bilingualism for learning*. Caslon.

García, O., & Kleifgen, J. A. (2019). Translanguaging and literacies. *Reading Research Quarterly, 55*(4), 553–571.

García, O., & Wei, L. (2015). Translanguaging, bilingualism, and bilingual education. In W. E. Wright, S. Boun, & O. García (Eds.), *The handbook of bilingual and multilingual education* (pp. 223–240). Wiley-Blackwell. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118533406.ch13

Gordon, M. M. (1964). *Assimilation in American life: The role of race, religion, and national origins*. Oxford University Press.

Guan, S.-S. A., Greenfield, P. M., & Orellana, M. F. (2014). Translating into understanding: Language brokering and prosocial development in emerging adults from immigrant families. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 29*(3), 331–355. https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558413520223

Guan, S. S. A., Nash, A., & Orellana, M. F. (2016). Cultural and social processes of language brokering among Arab, Asian, and Latin immigrants. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 37*(2), 150–166. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2015.1044997

Habermas, T., & Bluck, S. (2000). Getting a life: The emergence of the life story in adolescence. *Psychological Bulletin, 126*(5), 748–769. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.126.5.748

Harris, B., & Sherwood, B. (1978). Translating as an innate skill. In D. Gerver & H. W. Sinaiko (Eds.), *Language interpretation and communication* (pp. 155–170). Plenum Press.

He, Y., et al. (2025). Engaging multilingual families through equitable partnerships: A literature review. *Review of Educational Research.*

Higuera, K. (2024). The immigrant linguistic maturation of Asian American and Latinx language brokers. *Sociology Compass*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.13221

Hurh, W. M. (1998). *The Korean Americans*. Greenwood Press.

Hua, J. M., & Costigan, C. L. (2012). The familial context of adolescent language brokering within immigrant Chinese families in Canada. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 41*(7), 894–906. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-011-9682-2

Hyun, K. J. (2001). Sociocultural change and traditional values: Confucian values among Koreans and Korean Americans. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 25*(2), 203–229. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0147-1767(01)00009-8

Jee, M. J., Park, M. Y., & Cheon, S. Y. (2024). Language maintenance and ethnic identity among Korean heritage speakers in the Pacific region (Australia, New Zealand, and Hawaii). *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, *45*(10), 4364–4383. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2023.2170386

Jin, B. (2015). *Family cohesion and child functioning among South Korean immigrants in the US: The mediating role of Korean parent–child closeness and the moderating role of acculturation* (Publication No. 3702303) [Doctoral dissertation, Syracuse University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Jung, S. J. (2023). Language shift and maintenance of the Korean community in Australia: An update with the 2021 census. *Korean Linguistics, 19*(2), 121–139. https://doi.org/10.1075/kl.00003.jun

Kaiser, K. (2009). Protecting respondent confidentiality in qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research, 19*(11), 1632–1641. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732309350879

Kam, J. A., & Lazarevic, V. (2014). The stressful (and not so stressful) nature of language brokering: Identifying when brokering functions as a cultural stressor for Latino immigrant children in early adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 43*(12), 1994–2011. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-013-0061-z

Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2015). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.

Krumpal, I. (2013). Determinants of social desirability bias in sensitive surveys: A literature review. *Quality & Quantity, 47*(4), 2025–2047. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-011-9640-9

Kam, J. A., Guntzviller, L. M., & Stohl, C. (2017). New approaches to studying language brokering from a communication perspective. In R. Antonini, L. Cirillo, L. Rossato, & I. Torresi (Eds.), *Language brokering in immigrant families*. Routledge.

Kang, H., Okazaki, S., Abelmann, N., Kim-Prieto, C., & Lan, S. (2010). Redeeming immigrant parents: How Korean American emerging adults reinterpret their childhood. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 25*(3), 441–464. https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558410361371

Kim, E., & Wolpin, S. (2008). The Korean American family: Adolescents versus parents acculturation to American culture. *Journal of Cultural Diversity, 15*(3), 108–116.

Kim, H. S., & Markus, H. R. (1999). Deviance or uniqueness, harmony or conformity? A cultural analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 77*(4), 785–800. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.77.4.785

Kim, J. J. (2019). *The effects of language brokering among the Korean population* (Doctoral dissertation, George Fox University). George Fox University Digital Commons. https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/psyd/314

Kim, S. J. (2012). *"We shouldn't be forgotten": Korean military brides and Koreans in Kansas* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Kansas). University of Kansas. https://hdl.handle.net/1808/10252

Kim, S. Y., Du, Y., Alvarado, C., Sim, L., Wen, W., Zhang, T., & Shen, J. (2025). Language brokering conditions the indirect association between Mexican-origin adolescents' academic discrimination and educational expectations. *Journal of Community Psychology*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.70033

Kim, S. Y., Hou, Y., & Gonzalez, Y. (2017). Language brokering and depressive symptoms in Mexican-American adolescents: Parent–child alienation and resilience as moderators. *Child Development, 88*(3), 867–881. https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12620

Kim, S. Y., Hou, Y., Song, J., Schwartz, S. J., Chen, S., Zhang, M., Perreira, K. M., & Parra-Medina, D. (2018). Profiles of language brokering experiences and contextual stressors: Implications for adolescent outcomes in Mexican immigrant families. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 47*(8), 1629–1648. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-018-0851-4

Kim, Y., Curry, K., Fiegener, A., Olsen, J., & Egure, D. (2025). A heritage school for young Korean American students. *Journal of Research in Education and Pedagogy, 2*(1), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.70232/jrep.v2i1.20

Korean American Historical Society. (1985). *History of Koreans in the Pacific Northwest*.

Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2015). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Kwon, H. (2014). The hidden injury of class in Korean-American language brokers' lives. Childhood, *21*(1), 56–71. https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568213483597

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal, 32*(3), 465–491. https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312032003465

Lee, D. H. (2011). Ethnic Identity Formation of Second-Generation Korean-American Adolescents and Its Influence on Communication with Their Fathers. *Multicultural Education Review*, *3*(1), 45–74. https://doi.org/10.1080/2005615X.2011.11102879

Lee, E. (2023). *Exploring the association of language brokering and parent–child relationship in Korean immigrant families* (Doctoral dissertation, University of North Texas).

Lee, H., Pang, M. E., & Park, J. H. (2024). Translanguaging and family language policy: An investigation of Korean short-term stayers' language practice at home. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education, 23*(2), 181–196. https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2021.1979400

Lee, J. A., & Kim, C. J. (2019). Teaching and learning science in authoritative classrooms: Teachers' power and students' approval in Korean elementary classrooms. *Research in Science Education, 49*(5), 1367–1393. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11165-017-9659-6

Lee, J. S. (2002). The Korean Language in America: The Role of Cultural Identity in Heritage Language Learning. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, *15*(2), 117–133. https://doi.org/10.1080/07908310208666638

Lee, J. S., Choi, J. Y., & Marqués-Pascual, L. (2016). An analysis of communicative language functions in the speech patterns of bilingual Korean and Mexican immigrant children. *Journal of New Approaches in Educational Research, 5*(1), 66–73. https://doi.org/10.7821/naer.2016.7.193

Leung, L. (2015). Validity, reliability, and generalizability in qualitative research. *Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care, 4*(3), 324–327. https://doi.org/10.4103/2249-4863.161306

López, B. G. (2020). Incorporating language brokering experiences into bilingualism research: An examination of informal translation practices. *Language and Linguistics Compass, 14*(1), Article e12361. https://doi.org/10.1111/lnc3.12361

Love, J. A., & Buriel, R. (2007). Language brokering, autonomy, parent–child bonding, biculturalism, and depression: A study of Mexican American adolescents from immigrant families. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, 29*(4), 472–491. https://doi.org/10.1177/0739986307307229

Martinez, C. R., Jr., McClure, H. H., & Eddy, J. M. (2009). Language brokering contexts and behavioral and emotional adjustment among Latino parents and adolescents. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 29*(1), 71–98. https://doi.org/10.1177/0272431608324477

Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

McAdams, D. P. (2001). The psychology of life stories. *Review of General Psychology, 5*(2), 100–122. https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.5.2.100

McAdams, D. P., Bauer, J. J., Sakaeda, A. R., Anyidoho, N. A., Machado, M. A., Magrino-Failla, K., White, K. W., & Pals, J. L. (2006). Continuity and change in the life story: A longitudinal study of autobiographical memories in emerging adulthood. *Journal of Personality, 74*(5), 1371–1400. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2006.00412.x

Martinez, C. R., Jr., McClure, H. H., & Eddy, J. M. (2009). Language brokering contexts and behavioral and emotional adjustment among Latino parents and adolescents. *The Journal of Early Adolescence, 29*(1), 71–98. https://doi.org/10.1177/0272431608324477

McQuillan, J., & Tse, L. (1995). Child language brokering in linguistic minority communities: Effects on cultural interaction, cognition, and literacy. *Language and Education, 9*(3), 195–215. https://doi.org/10.1080/09500789509541413

Mier-Chairez, J., Arellano, B., Tucker, S. E., Marquez, E., & Hooper, L. M. (2019). Theoretical, empirical, and practice literature on language brokering: Family, academic, and psychological outcomes. *Faculty Publications*, 597. https://scholarworks.uni.edu/facpub/597

Migration Policy Institute. (2017). Korean immigrants in the United States (2015 profile). *(Web source—see URL list at end.)*

Migration Policy Institute. (2022). *Korean immigrants in the United States*. Retrieved from https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/korean-immigrants-united-states

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Mills, S. D., & Murray, K. E. (2017). A cross-cultural evaluation of ethnic identity exploration and commitment. *Journal of College Student Development, 58*(3), 315–332. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2017.0025

Min, P. G. (2006). Asian American immigration: History and contemporary trends. In P. G. Min (Ed.), *Asian Americans: Contemporary trends and issues* (pp. 7–31). Sage Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452233802.n2

Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism. (2020). *Standard curriculum for Korean language* (Notice No. 2020-54) [English version]. Republic of Korea.

Morales, A., & Hanson, W. E. (2005). Language brokering: An integrative review of the literature. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, 27*(4), 471–503. https://doi.org/10.1177/0739986305281333

Morales, A., & Wang, K. T. (2018). The relationship among language brokering, parent–child bonding, and mental health correlates among Latinx college students. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling, 40*(4), 316–327. https://doi.org/10.17744/mehc.40.4.04

Morales, A., Yakushko, O. F., & Castro, A. J. (2012). Language brokering among Mexican-immigrant families in the midwest: A multiple case study. *The Counseling Psychologist, 40*(4), 520–553. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000011417312

Morgan, D. L. (1997). *Focus groups as qualitative research* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Multnomah County. (2022, January 13). *Board proclaims Jan. 13 Korean American Day in Multnomah County*. https://multco.us/news/board-proclaims-jan-13-korean-american-day-multnomah-county

Narchal, R., & Hembrow, R. (2024). Hidden care: A qualitative exploration of the roles and responsibilities of language brokers. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being, 19*(1). https://doi.org/10.1080/17482631.2024.2371536

Naeem, M., Ozuem, W., Howell, K., & Ranfagni, S. (2023). A step-by-step process of thematic analysis to develop a conceptual model in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 22*, 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231205789

National Council on Interpreting in Health Care. (2004). *National code of ethics for interpreters in health care.*

Ng, J. (1998). From kitchen to classroom: Reflections of a language broker. *Voices from the Middle, 6*(1), 38–40. https://doi.org/10.58680/vm19982242

Nguyen-Trung, K., Saeri, A. K., & Kaufman, S. (2024). Applying ChatGPT and AI-powered tools to accelerate evidence reviews. *Health Science Reports*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1155/2024/8815424

Olsen, S. (2019). *Language Brokering Experiences Among Racially and Culturally Diverse Youth.:* Oregon State University.

OpenAI. (2025). *ChatGPT* (June 8 version) [Large language model]. https://chatgpt.com

Orb, A., Eisenhauer, L., & Wynaden, D. (2001). Ethics in qualitative research. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship, 33*(1), 93–96. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1547-5069.2001.00093.x

Orellana, M. F. (2009). *Translating childhoods: Immigrant youth, language, and culture.* Rutgers University Press.

Orellana, M. F., & Phoenix, A. (2017). Re-interpreting: Narratives of childhood language brokering over time. *Childhood, 24*(2), 183–196. https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568216671178

Orellana, M. F., Reynolds, J., Dorner, L., & Meza, M. (2003). In other words: Translating or "para-phrasing" as a family literacy practice in immigrant households. *Reading Research Quarterly, 38*(1), 12–34. https://doi.org/10.1598/RRQ.38.1.2

Oregon Secretary of State. (2024). Most common languages in each county (Washington County language data). *(Web source—see URL list at end.)*

Oregon Secretary of State. (2025). *Oregon Blue Book: Washington County. (Web source—see URL list at end.)*

Oregon Employment Department. (2025). Regional labor market information: Washington County. *(Web source—see URL list at end.)*

Paris, D. (2012). Culturally sustaining pedagogy: A needed change in stance, terminology, and practice. *Educational Researcher, 41*(3), 93–97. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X12441244

Park, M. (2012). Filial piety and parental responsibility: An interpretive phenomenological study of family caregiving for a person with mental illness among Korean immigrants. *BMC Nursing, 11*, 28. https://doi.org/10.1186/1472-6955-11-28

Park, R. E., & Burgess, E. W. (1921). *Introduction to the science of sociology*. University of Chicago Press.

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Pew Research Center. (n.d.). *Asian Americans: Koreans in the U.S.* Retrieved February 16, 2026, from https://www.pewresearch.org/race-and-ethnicity/fact-sheet/asian-americans-koreans-in-the-u-s/

Phoenix, A., & Orellana, M. F. (2021). Adult narratives of childhood language brokering: Learning what it means to be bilingual. *Children & Society*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12462

Portes, A., & Rumbaut, R. G. (2001). *Legacies: The story of the immigrant second generation*. University of California Press.

Portes, A., & Zhou, M. (1993). The new second generation: Segmented assimilation and its variants. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 530*(1), 74–96.

Parada, M. (2013). Sibling Variation and Family Language Policy: The Role of Birth Order in the Spanish Proficiency and First Names of Second-Generation Latinos. Journal of Language, Identity and Education, 12(5), 299–320. https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2013.835572

Rainey, V. R., Flores, V., Morrison, R. G., David, E. J. R., & Silton, R. L. (2014). Mental health risk factors associated with childhood language brokering. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 35*(5), 463–478. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2013.870180

Rajagopal, H., & Anderson, J. (2025). "There's nothing to read here…the newspaper is *cho cá*, for the fish!": A young refugee-background child brokering languages, literacies, and cultures as a caring multiliterate practice. *Reading Research Quarterly*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.70018

Roche, K.M., Lambert, S.F., Ghazarian, S.R. *et al.* Adolescent Language Brokering in Diverse Contexts: Associations with Parenting and Parent–Youth Relationships in a New Immigrant Destination Area. *J Youth Adolescence* 44, 77–89 (2015). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-014-0154-3

Rumbaut, R. G. (2004). *Ages, life stages, and generational cohorts: Decomposing the immigrant first and second generations in the United States*. International Migration Review, 38(3), 1160–1205.

Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Shen, J. J., & Dennis, J. M. (2017). The family context of language brokering among Latino young adults. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 36*(1), 131–152. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407517721379

Shen, Y., Kim, S. Y., Wang, Y., & Chao, R. K. (2014). Language brokering and adjustment among Chinese and Korean American adolescents: A moderated mediation model of perceived maternal sacrifice, respect for the mother, and mother–child open communication. *Asian American Journal of Psychology, 5*(2), 86–95. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035203

Shen, Y., Seo, E., Jiles, A. I., Zheng, Y., & Wang, Y. (2022). Language brokering and immigrant-origin youth's well-being: A meta-analytic review. *American Psychologist, 77*(8), 921–939. https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0001035

Shen, Y., Seo, E., Walt, D. C., & Kim, S. Y. (2020). Stress of language brokering and Mexican American adolescents' adjustment: The role of cumulative risk. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 40*(3), 400–425. https://doi.org/10.1177/0272431619847526

Shih, K. Y., Chang, T.-F., & Chen, S. Y. (2019). Impacts of the model minority myth on Asian American individuals and families: Social justice and critical race feminist perspectives. *Journal of Family Theory & Review, 11*(3), 412–428. https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12342

Singer, J. A. (2004). Narrative identity and meaning making across the adult lifespan: An introduction. *Journal of Personality, 72*(3), 437–459. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-3506.2004.00268.x

SocioCultural Research Consultants, LLC. (2025). *Dedoose: Qualitative and mixed methods research software*. https://www.dedoose.com

Sok, S., & Schwartz, A. (2021). "We are Korean people and we must speak Korean well": Parental involvement in five Korean American families with successful heritage language maintenance. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 45*, 1648–1661. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2021.2008947

Song, J., & Wu, A. E. (2024). Intergenerational autoethnography of heritage language maintenance: Focusing on emotion, identity, and power. *Modern Language Journal*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12898

Song, K. (2016). "Okay, I will say in Korean and then in American": Translanguaging practices in bilingual homes. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy, 16*(1), 84–106. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468798414566705

Triandis, H. C. (1995). *Individualism and collectivism*. Westview Press.

Tse, L. (1996). Language brokering in linguistic minority communities: The case of Chinese- and Vietnamese-American students. *Bilingual Research Journal, 20*(3–4), 485–498. https://doi.org/10.1080/15235882.1996.10668640

Tse, L., & McQuillan, J. (1996). *Culture, language, and literacy: The effects of language brokering on bilingual students*. ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication.

Turobov, A., Coyle, D., & Harding, V. (2024). *The utilisation of AI-driven tools, notably ChatGPT, within academic research: A methodological exploration of GPT-assisted thematic analysis*. arXiv. https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2405.08828

Umaña-Taylor, A. J. (2003). Language brokering as a context for adolescent identity development. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 23*(3), 268–293.

United States Congress. (1964). *Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VI*. Pub. L. No. 88-352, 78 Stat. 241. https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-78/pdf/STATUTE-78-Pg241.pdf

U.S. Census Bureau. (2024). *Washington County, Oregon population estimates*. Retrieved from https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/washingtoncountyoregon/POP010220

U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. (2015). *Dear colleague letter: English learner students and limited English proficient parents*.

Valdés, G. (2003). *Expanding definitions of giftedness: The case of young interpreters from immigrant communities.* Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Van der Graaff, J., Branje, S., De Wied, M., Hawk, S. T., Van Lier, P. A. C., & Meeus, W. (2018). Prosocial behavior in adolescence: Gender differences in development and links with empathy. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 47*(5), 1086–1099. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-017-0786-1

Vaughn, S., Schumm, J. S., & Sinagub, J. M. (1996). *Focus group interviews in education and psychology*. SAGE Publications.

Valenzuela, A. (1999). Subtractive schooling and the politics of caring in Mexican American education. *State University of New York Press.*

Wei, L., & García, O. (2022). Not a First Language but One Repertoire: Translanguaging as a Decolonizing Project. *RELC Journal*, *53*(2), 313-324. Weisskirch, R. S. (2005). The relationship of language brokering to ethnic identity for Latino early adolescents. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, 27*(3), 286–299. https://doi.org/10.1177/0739986305277931

Weisskirch, R. S. (2010). Child language brokers in immigrant families: An overview of family dynamics. *mediAzioni, 10*. http://mediazioni.sitlec.unibo.it

Weisskirch, R. S., & Alva, S. A. (2002). Language brokering and the acculturation of Latino children. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, 24*(3), 369–378. https://doi.org/10.1177/0739986302024003007

Weisskirch, R. S., Guan, S.-S. A., & Lazarevic, V. (2020). The role of attachment in language brokering and psychological well-being among college students. *Journal of Family Issues, 42*(1), 156–175. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X20910763

Wu, N. H., & Kim, S. Y. (2009). Chinese American adolescents' perceptions of the language brokering experience as a sense of burden and sense of efficacy. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 38*(5), 703–718. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-008-9379-3

Yoon, E., Choi, Y., Suh, J.-E., & Galvin, S. (2021). Examination of Korean immigrant mothers' parenting practices: By using the framework of bilinear acculturation. *Asian American Journal of Psychology, 12*(1), 52–64.

Yoon, I.-J. (1997). A cohort analysis of Korean immigrants' class backgrounds and socioeconomic status in the United States. *Korea Journal of Population and Development, 26*(1), 61–81. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43783494

Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 8*(1), 69–91. https://doi.org/10.1080/1361332052000341006

You, B. keun. (2005). Children Negotiating Korean American Ethnic Identity Through Their Heritage Language. *Bilingual Research Journal*, *29*(3), 711–721. https://doi.org/10.1080/15235882.2005.10162860

Zhou, M., & Kim, S. (2006). Community forces, social capital, and educational achievement: The case of supplementary education in the Chinese and Korean immigrant communities. *Harvard Educational Review, 76*(1), 1–29. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.76.1.u08t548554882477

Zhou, M. (1997). Growing up American: The challenge confronting immigrant children and children of immigrants. *Annual Review of Sociology, 23*, 63–95.