

# **The Roles Konglish Plays in the Korean American Community**

Chan Hee Jeong

정찬희



A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics

Bryn Mawr College

December 2021

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to first acknowledge and give my warmest thanks to my thesis advisor, Professor Shizhe Huang. Thank you for your guidance and support. This thesis would have not been possible without her. Thank you for encouraging and motivating me so that I could complete this thesis. She has helped me through each and every step in this journey and words cannot express how grateful I am. Thank you to Professor Jane Chandlee for guiding me with the IRB process, I would have not been able to do any of my research without your help.

My deepest thanks to my family, 엄마 아빠, 소명, 하임. 하와이에 계시는 동안 저를 위해 응원해주시고 기도해 주셔서 감사합니다. 비록 멀리 떨어져 있지만, 격려를 여기까지 느낄 수 있었습니다. 저를 믿어주셔서 감사합니다. 사랑합니다. 외할머니 항상 저를 위해 기도해 주셔서 감사합니다. 영상통화 할 때마다 "거의 다 왔어, 거의 다 끝났어"라고 한 말이 포기하지 않고 나아갈 수 있던 원동력이었요.

To all my friends, especially Nijah Morris and 현주 언니, this would have been such a difficult journey without you and your support. Thank you for always checking up on me, you all have a special place in my heart. My Grace Covenant Church family, I am forever grateful for the prayers and times we have shared together. And to Hillary Kim at Swarthmore College, thank you for helping me with the glosses in this thesis.

Most importantly, I would like to thank God for giving me strength throughout this journey of writing my thesis. 논문을 잘 마칠 수 있게 도와주신 하나님 아버지한테 감사와 영광을 돌립니다.

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis explores the roles Konglish plays in Korean Americans' lives. The roles investigated are the emotional, social, hierarchical, and daily-life roles. The emotional role of how Korean Americans use Konglish in situations when they experience a strong emotion. The social role of how Konglish brings together Korean Americans into one community. The hierarchical role of how Korean hierarchical terms are used within English sentences to show respect towards one. And lastly, Korean Americans use Konglish in their everyday lives which is why it is called the daily-life role. This thesis also looks into the definition of Konglish and introduces a bit of the history of Korean Americans, the importance of English loanwords in Korean, and the hierarchy in Korean. Data was collected from Korean Americans through three different methods: a survey, group observations, and individual interviews. By focusing on the connection between Konglish and Korean Americans in this thesis, it shows how just Korean or just English alone is not enough for Korean Americans to express themselves and their stories.

**KEYWORDS:** Konglish, Korean Americans, code-switching, English loanwords.

## Table of contents

<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. Literature Review.....</b>	<b>3</b>
2.1 Definition of Konglish.....	3
2.2 History of Korean Americans.....	6
2.3 English Loanwords in the Korean Language.....	7
2.4 Hierarchy in the Korean Language.....	10
2.5 The Hierarchical Role of Konglish.....	11
2.6 The Emotional Role of Konglish.....	14
2.7 The Social Role of Konglish.....	15
<b>3. Purpose of My Study.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>4. Research Methodology.....</b>	<b>22</b>
4.1 Survey Collection.....	22
4.2 Group Observation.....	23
4.3 Interview.....	25
<b>5. Results.....</b>	<b>26</b>
5.1 Survey Collection Results.....	26
5.2 Group Observation Results.....	31
5.3 Interview Results.....	53
<b>6. Discussion.....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>7. Conclusion.....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Appendices.....</b>	<b>69</b>

## List of figures

Figure 1: Top ten US destinations for Korean immigrants

Figure 2: English Loanword categories and Examples

Figure 3: Speech Levels of Korean (<https://jreidy17.wordpress.com/2014/10/17/honorifics-and-speech-level/>)

## 1. Introduction

*“Konglish is an immigrant language. Konglish such as Spanglish or multilingual languages, it’s a manifestation of our struggles, of our parents, ancestors, who have come before us. It’s a language made to share our pain, tears but also joys and what we want to accomplish.”*

*- Research study participant*

South Koreans are continuing to immigrate to the United States and the Korean American community has been steadily growing. The one common thread that brings Korean Americans together is Konglish (Korean and English). Through speaking Konglish, Korean Americans are able to build their own community and socialize within themselves. Konglish is one of the ways I myself found a community when immigrating to the United States at three years old with my parents and it continues to play a big role in my life. As a Korean American myself, I have noticed how the use of Konglish helped Korean Americans make connections with others in the same community. Many Korean Americans sit in this very awkward gray area where Americans say we are “too Korean” but back in South Korea, they tell us we are “too American”. An outcome of this is struggling with issues connected to identity crisis which is why it is even more important for Korean Americans to be able to create a community.

The paper will start with a literature review that dives into the background information that will help contribute to your understanding of Konglish, starting from the definition of Konglish, the history of Korean Americans, and details on the hierarchy and English loanwords within the Korean language. Then it will look into the roles Konglish plays in Korean Americans’ lives. Later in the paper, I will get more into the details of the roles, but the roles I will study are the hierarchical role of Konglish, the emotional role of Konglish, the social role of Konglish, and the daily-life role

of Konglish. These roles range from Korean Americans using Konglish to show respect towards one who is older or in a higher position than them, using Konglish to express themselves fully, using Konglish to find a community to be a part of, and using Konglish so often that it is a part of their daily language use. Next will be my research section which includes a survey, group observations, and interviews that were done with Korean Americans to support my hypothesis of how Konglish plays a role in Korean American lives. Lastly, I will conclude this paper with the results and discussion of the research that was conducted.

## **2. Literature review**

This chapter's literature review first introduces Konglish and its definition. Then it discusses the history of Korean Americans and the three big waves of immigration that brought in many South Korean immigrants to the United States. It then summarizes how English loanwords play a big role in the Korean language and how because of this, Konglish is a daily occurrence for Koreans/Korean Americans. Next, it dives into the hierarchy within the Korean language and how Konglish plays a hierarchical role for Korean Americans when they code-switch. Then the social role of Konglish and how the common characteristic, Konglish, brings together Korean Americans into one community is discussed. Lastly, it will review the emotional role of Konglish. The Korean Romanization throughout this paper has been done through using the Revised Romanization of Korean system which is the official Romanization system of the South Korean Government.

### **2.1 Definition of Konglish**

Konglish can be defined differently depending on one's background. To Koreans in South Korea, Konglish would mainly be English loanwords in the Korean language. Experts studying Konglish have offered various definitions. Hadikin (2014: 9) explains the definition of Konglish and says it is associated with a varying range of meanings, that there is "no generally agreed definition of Konglish." They define Konglish as where English loanwords went through considerable semantic shifts but can also refer to "respective Koreanized English variety, mistakes made by Koreans when using English, or the Korean learners' variety of English". Kim (2002) describes Konglish as "Korean English speaking with Korean syntax" and that Konglish "may express complex Korean words, meanings or interactions in but a single English word, the meaning of which may not be readily apparent to a native English speaking person."



The Konglish throughout this paper is best defined by what Lee (2018) explained what Konglish is in a Yale News article: The native language of diaspora children. To Korean Americans, Konglish can also be English loanwords and the other definitions provided by the authors above, but the main focus of Konglish to Korean Americans is code-switching. On page 45, Kim (2006) defines code-switching as something that can either happen between sentences or within a sentence and that it is “the alternation of two languages within a single discourse, sentence, or constituent.” Young says that Konglish does not just represent the combination of the two languages, Korean and English, and Korean Americans growing up in two very different cultures, but that it also “symbolizes the unique and similar illusory experience of Korean Americans” (Young 2012: 74). Horne (2017) says that Korean Americans can never escape entirely their Korean or American identity and will not be able to pick a single identity to display. And as a result, the two end up forming a totally new identity through their interactions with others. These unique combinations and special identity are what makes Korean Americans unique, and one of the special factors in this identity is ‘Konglish’.

One important thing that needs to be remembered of code-switching, as Hagens said, is that there is a “need to recognize that code-mixing and switching are natural phenomena and fully acceptable. While the first impression for a native speaker may be that code-mixing and code-switching represent a poor and incomplete grasp of English, they, in fact, represent a sophisticated and complex ability to integrate two languages” (Hagens 2020: 34). Some Koreans will look at Korean Americans speaking Konglish and believe that they mix these two languages together just because they are insufficient in both languages when in reality, many Korean Americans code-switch because they do not feel like they are able to express themselves and their thoughts fully with just one language. But Lee talks about how Konglish could be more used as a tool for Korean

Americans. A participant in the research shared that though Konglish was positively characterized as a shared learning practice within her family, Konglish was also considered a tool for this participant and her goal of becoming more proficient in Korean (Lee 2019: 67).

Here are some examples of what Konglish can look like

(1) 누나<sup>1</sup> can you pass me the 빵 and 우유 over there?

*Nuna can you pass me the ppang and uyu over there?*

‘Nuna can you pass me the bread and milk over there?’

(2) I am 썸타<sup>2</sup>ing.

*I am sseomta-ing.*

‘I am sseomta-ing.’

(3) 샐러드 맛있다.

*Salleodeu masitda.*

Salleodeu    mas            it            da

Salad            taste            has            IND

‘The salad is delicious.’

---

<sup>1</sup> The word ‘누나’ [*nuna*] is a term that means ‘older sister’ but this term can be only used by a boy who is using it towards a girl who is older than him. This word can also be used between biological siblings where the younger brother would call his older sister ‘누나’ [*nuna*] but can also be used between friends where the younger boy would call his girlfriend who is older than him ‘누나’ [*nuna*].

<sup>2</sup> The word 썸타 [*sseomta*] is the phase between the talking and dating phase where it is not exclusive but there is still lots of flirting going on.

## 2.2 History of Korean Americans

*Developing in Two Languages: Korean Children in America* by Shin Sarah goes into the history of Koreans in the United States. The reason why it starts with Koreans in the United States is that in order to learn about Korean American children, it is crucial to learn about the parents and past generation(s) who immigrated to the United States and their settlement. Korean Americans are 1.5 generation and above children of South Korean immigrants who immigrated to the United States. 1.5 generation refers to people who immigrated to the US at a young age with their parents' who identify as first-generation. According to Shin (2004), Korean Americans are one of the more recent immigrant groups who have entered American society, and “over two-thirds of the present Korean population in the United States having arrived after 1970” (Shin 2004: 41). The National Association of Korean Americans (NAKS) website shows that according to the U.S. census taken in 2000, there are 1,076,872 Koreans living in the United States. In the table below that was taken from Shin’s paper, it shows that the top ten states with Koreans are California, New York, New Jersey, Illinois, Washington, Texas, Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Georgia.

**Table 2.1** Top ten US destinations for Korean immigrants

<i>State</i>	<i>Number of Koreans in the USA</i>	<i>As a percentage of total no. Koreans in the USA %</i>	<i>Percentage increase from 1990 Census</i>
California	345,882	32	33
New York	119,846	11	25
New Jersey	65,349	6	70
Illinois	51,453	5	24
Washington	46,880	4	58
Texas	45,571	4	43
Virginia	45,279	4	50
Maryland	39,155	4	29
Pennsylvania	31,612	3	18
Georgia	28,745	3	88

*Source:* US Bureau of the Census, 2000 Census of the Population, Supplementary Reports (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office).

Figure 1: Top ten US destinations for Korean immigrants

There are three main events that occurred that lead to the immigration of South Koreans to the United States. The first wave of immigrants to Hawai'i was around 1902 and South Koreans left their home country for Hawai'i to work on sugar plantations as laborers. "More than 7,000 Koreans, most of them men, came to Hawai'i looking for relief from economic hardship in Korea" (Shin 2004: 42). On the sugar farms, they worked long hours under harsh conditions and the hot Hawaiian sun. This first wave of immigrants wanted to go back home once being financially able to do so because of the connection they had with their homeland. The second wave of immigrants was after the Korean War. Since the Korean War, the United States has had a very significant economic, military, and political presence in South Korea. Shin (2004) says that there are three main groups that compose of immigrants who immigrated to the United States post-Korean War: 1) Korean women who were married to American servicemen stationed in Korea 2) orphans from the Korean war who were later on adopted by American citizens and 3) professional workers. The first two groups formed the majority of the immigrant group (77%) and the professional workers made up the rest of the group. The third wave of South Korean immigrants came to the United States because of the favorable changes in immigration law (e.g., US Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965). The first two waves were mostly South Koreans who immigrated to the U.S. individually, but in the third wave, they came not just as individuals but many with families, at least having their spouse and their child(ren).

### **2.3 English Loanwords in the Korean Language**

English loanwords are seen in everyday speech in the Korean language and are especially an important part of Konglish. Ahn (2003) says it is common for Koreans to use the term Konglish

"to indicate the word they have spoken in what they believe to be a Korean invention using English word(s) to describe something, and that word is not in common English usage" (Ahn 2003: 15).

Rüdiger (2018: 188) describes how English loanwords are modified to reflect the Korean syllable structure rules and pronunciation when it is borrowed into Korean. "Thus, an epenthetic vowel is added to the original lexical item 'bus' to form the Korean English loanword '*beo-seu*' [버스] or the voiced labiodental fricative /v/ which does not form part of the Korean phoneme inventory is replaced by a stop, resulting in '*ba-i-ol-lin*' [바이올린; from English 'violin']" (Rüdiger 2018: 188). These two examples, 'bus' and 'violin', are straightforward English loanwords in the Korean language but Rüdiger explores more types of English loanwords. The author created this table below based on Kim's (2012) article and it shows the ways English loanwords are present in the Korean language. The different categories of English loanwords are direct, semantic shift, creative compounding, mixed-code combination, and clipping.

**Table 1.** English Loanword Categories and Examples (Based on Kim 2012)

Category	Examples
1 direct	<i>o-ren-ji</i> (오렌지; from English 'orange' [fruit]) <i>i-me-il</i> (이메일; from English 'email') <i>wa-in</i> (와인; from English 'wine')
2 semantic shift (Konglish)	<i>tael-leon-teu</i> (탤런트; from English 'talent' = 'celebrity') <i>bil-la</i> (빌라; from English 'villa' = 'apartment units') <i>seu-taen-deu</i> (스탠드; from English 'stand' = 'lamp')
3 creative compounding	<i>a-i syo-ping</i> (아이 쇼핑; from English 'eye shopping' = 'window shopping') <i>baek-mi-reo</i> (백미러; from English 'back mirror' = 'rearview mirror')
4 mixed-code combinations	<i>an-jeon bel-teu</i> (안전 벨트; Korean word for 'safety' + English 'belt' = 'safety belt') <i>gam-ja chip</i> (감자 칩: Korean word for 'potato' + English 'chip' = 'potato chip')
5 clipping	<i>sel-ka</i> (셀카; clipping of English 'self-camera' to 'sel-ka' = 'selfie') <i>mae-seu keom</i> (메스 컴; clipping of English 'mass communication' to 'mass com' = 'media')

Figure 2: English Loanword categories and Examples

To explain each category, I will take one example from each category that is provided in the table below and go deeper into them.

An example that is under the ‘direct’ category is the word ‘오렌지’ [*o-ren-ji*] that directly translates into the fruit ‘orange’ in English, which is why this is just a direct English loanword.

The word ‘텔런트’ [*tael-leon-teu*] is an English loanword with a semantic shift that is pronounced like the English word ‘talent’. When thinking of the word ‘talent’, people would usually think of it in terms of what someone is talented in, has a skill in, or is specialized in. Oxford English Dictionary defines ‘talent’ as “a special natural ability or aptitude, usually for something expressed or implied; a natural capacity for success in some department of mental or physical activity; an accomplishment.” But in this case, the word means celebrity in Korean. There definitely is still a connection between the definitions of one being talented in something and celebrity.

The next category is creative compounding. The example of creative compounding provided is the word ‘아이 쇼핑’ [*a-i syo-ping*] which is said as ‘eye shopping.’ The word ‘eye shopping’ brings together the two words ‘eye’ and ‘shopping’ which means window shopping. Because just like you look into windows when window shopping without buying anything, eye shopping is also just looking into stores with no purpose of buying something.

The next category is mixed-code combination and an example from the table is the word ‘안전 벨트’ [*an-jeon-bel-teu*] which means seat belt. The word ‘안전’ [*an-jeon*] is a Korean word that means safety and the word ‘벨트’ [*bel-teu*] directly comes from the English word ‘belt’. So combined together, it would be ‘safety belt’ that translates into ‘seat belt’ in English.

The last category is clipping. Clipping is clipping parts of English words and putting them together. The example they have is the word ‘셀카’ [*sel-ka*] which translates into selfie in English.

‘셀카’ [*sel-ka*] comes from the two English words ‘self-camera’ and takes the first syllable of the two words to create the word.

## 2.4 Hierarchy in the Korean Language

Based on power, age, and solidarity, Korean grammar is encoded with hierarchical connections. Hierarchy is so important in the Korean language that it has honorifics and seven different speech levels. To explain honorifics in a simple way, it is done by inserting -(으)시 [*-(eu)si*], an honorific suffix, after the root of a verb but before the final conjugation. The seven speech levels in the Korean language are shown in the table below.

Speech Level	Present Indicative of "hada"		Level of Formality	When Used
	Non-Honorific	Honorific		
Hasoseoche (하소서체)	hanaida (하나다)	hashinaida (하시나이다)	Extremely formal and polite	Traditionally used when addressing a king, queen, or high official; now used only in historical dramas and the Bible
Hapshoche (합쇼체)	hamnida (합니다)	hashimnida (하십니까)	Formal and polite	Used commonly between strangers, among male co-workers, by TV announcers, and to customers
Haoche (하오체)	hao (하오)	hasho (하쇼), hashio (하시오)	Formal, of neutral politeness	Only used nowadays among some older people
Hageche (하게체)	hane (하네)	hashine (하시네)	Formal, of neutral politeness	Generally only used by some older people when addressing younger people, friends, or relatives
Haerache (해라체)	handa (한다)	hashinda (하신다)	Formal, of neutral politeness or impolite	Used to close friends, relatives of similar age, or younger people; also used almost universally in books, newspapers, and magazines; also used in reported speech ("She said that...")
Haeyoche (해요체)	haeyo (해요)	haseyo (하세요) (common), hasheoyo (하시어요) (rare)	Informal and polite	Used mainly between strangers, especially those older or of equal age. Traditionally used more by women than men, though in Seoul many men prefer this form to the Hapshoche (see above).
Haeche (해체)	hae (해) (in speech), hayeo (하여) (in writing)	hasheo (하셔)	Informal, of neutral politeness or impolite	Used most often between close friends and relatives, and when addressing younger people. It is <i>never</i> used between strangers unless the speaker wants to pick a fight.

Figure 3: Speech Levels of Korean <https://jreidy17.wordpress.com/2014/10/17/honorifics-and-speech-level/>

Some important hierarchical titles to remember are these four words: 언니 [*eonni*], 형 [*hyeong*], 누나 [*nuna*], 오빠 [*oppa*]. The word ‘언니’ [*eonni*] means ‘older sister’ and it is an expression that can be used between two girls. It can be used by one’s biological younger sister where she would call the older sister ‘언니’ [*eonni*] but can also be used between two girls who are close friends and the younger friend would call the older friend ‘언니’ [*eonni*]. The word ‘형’ [*hyeong*] is also used in the same context as 언니 [*eonni*] except it means ‘older brother’ and is an expression that can be used between two boys. The word ‘누나’ [*nuna*] is also another term that means ‘older sister’ but this term can be only used by a boy who is using it towards a girl who is older than him. This word can also be used between biological siblings where the younger brother would call his older sister ‘누나’ [*nuna*] but can also be used between friends where the younger boy would call his girlfriend who is older than him ‘누나’ [*nuna*]. Lastly, the word ‘오빠’ [*oppa*] means ‘older brother’ and is used in the same context as ‘누나’ [*nuna*] except the positions between the girl and boy are switched. So this is used in a situation where the younger girl would call the older boy ‘오빠’ [*oppa*] and can be used between biological siblings or in a close friend relationship.

## 2.5 The Hierarchical Role of Konglish

Shin (2010) comments that code-switching from English to Korean can indicate traditional Korean hierarchical connections since the Korean language encodes hierarchical relationships considerably more clearly grammatically and lexically than English does. Two examples are given by Shin’s participants. Before presenting the data, I would like to explain that (4) has an annotation and (5) does not because (5) is a single word translation. From now on and forward with the other



examples within this thesis, there will be inconsistencies with some examples having annotations while some examples do not due to only having single words.

(4) Video-game 하고 있어요. 장로님은요?

*Video-game hago isseoyo. Jangnonimeunyo?*

Video-game	ha	go	iss	eo	yo
Video-game	doing	PRES	am	INF	ALLOC (haeyo form)

Jangnonim	eun	yo
Elder	TOP	ALLOC (haeyo form)

‘I am playing a video-game. What about you, elder?’

(5) 장로님 and 집사님 are having the meeting in the next room.

*Jangnonim and jipsanim are having the meeting in the next room.*

‘Elder and decoy are having the meeting in the next room.’

The terms 장로님 [*jangnonim*] and 집사님 [*jipsanim*] in both examples (4) and (5) were used to show respect towards the older members of the church but specifically in example (4), the participant switched over to using Korean because they were specifically talking to the elder. The ‘요’ [-yo] in example (4) made his sentence polite and respectful towards the elder. Nam says that “the Korean culture reflected in Konglish includes intimacy and hierarchy within the social network...” (Nam 2010: 281).

The motivations that are often found for code-switching are the following two factors: 1) participant roles and relationships and 2) speaker’s situational or cultural environment (Kim 2006:

4749). Horne (2017) explains how his Korean American friends are more likely to use Konglish with other ethnic Koreans because it “relates to the speaker’s age, gender, social status, etc.” In order to respect the Korean culture and show respect for an individual, Korean Americans are more likely to use Korean or insert Korean words when having a conversation with someone who is older or is in a higher social position than them (Horne 2017: 7). These are two examples from Horne’s (2017) paper:

(6) 언니 더 주세요. Thank you!

*Eonni deo juseyo. Thank you!*

Eonni	deo	ju	seyo	Thank you
<i>Eonni</i>	more	give	ALLOC (haeyo form)	Thank you

‘*Eonni* please give me more. Thank you!’

(7) Make me food 선배.

*Make me food seonbae.*

‘Make me food upperclassman.’

The word ‘언니’ [*eonni*] in example (6) means ‘older sister’ and it is an expression that can be used between two girls. It can be used by one’s biological younger sister where she would call the older sister ‘언니’ [*eonni*] but can also be used between two girls who are close friends and the younger friend would call the older friend ‘언니’ [*eonni*]. Example (7) has the word ‘선배’ [*seonbae*] which translates into upperclassman or senior colleague. Both examples (6) and (7) represent students who are talking to other university students but use these hierarchical terms in order to still show respect towards them because they are older. It does not just show respect

towards the older one/one that is in a higher social position, but it serves as a tool to get them out of any trouble. As I have mentioned in section 2.4 Hierarchy in the Korean language, hierarchy is not just embedded into the Korean language but the Korean culture too. So, age and hierarchy are always present in an environment with anyone who has Korean blood, and most of the time, people end up walking on eggshells to make sure they are extra careful and do not offend anyone.

## 2.6 The Emotional Role of Konglish

Horne (2017), titled *Konglish: A Korean American Phenomenon*, brings in many examples of Konglish being used by Korean American university students. Horne observed and collected data by following around and shadowing students while they were prepping for a performance at an event, and many students, later on, were interviewed and asked their perspectives on when they use Korean or use English. Horne said that if a Korean American was born in Korea and relocated to the United States in early childhood or if they grew up speaking Korean at home, they will often utilize Korean in situations when they are surprised or frustrated (Horne 2017: 5). Here are some of the examples Horne observed that tie into how Konglish plays an emotional role:

(8) Ah this is so hard! 어떡해!? 미치겠다!

*Ah this is so hard! Eotteokae!? Michi-get-da!*

Eotteo	kae	Michi	get	da
What	do	Crazy	FUT	DECL

‘Ah this is so hard! What do I do!? I am going to go crazy!’

(9) 아 갑자기! 왜!

*A gapjagi! Wae!*

‘Ah suddenly! Why!’

Example (8) is an example of how one participant was faced with a situation that put them into stress and expressed their frustration by code-switching from using English to Korean. Example (9) was a situation when someone sneaked up behind a member who was prepping for the event and scared her. The one who got scared switched to Korean, which appears to be an emotional reaction because the two usually speak to each other in English. Another example given by Horne is how another participant would code-switch into using Korean when trying to portray herself or sound cuter. She said that “what makes a Korean word or phrase cuter is hard to say” but by using Korean, she is able to convey her cuteness better which is why she uses it to express herself more accurately (Horne 2017: 8).

## **2.7 The Social Role of Konglish**

Shin explains that “...the use of code-switching often reflects the social or cultural identities of the speakers” and how code-switching is frequently reflected in the co-membership in a minority group (Shin 2010: 91). Bringing back Horne’s (2017) paper, he comments on how people who immigrate to the United States around the same age like to hang out together since their English and Korean language skills are probably similar or about the same, “This would also suggest they use similar amounts of each language or mixing of each language”. On page 8, he says that people who can communicate and speak well in both Korean and English share a special and common bond with other speakers of those languages. And it is because, within a

culture, language is tied so strongly to it. And bilinguals who speak the same two languages have a common background and understanding of the two cultures (Korean and American) and the two languages associated with it. He gives examples of how Konglish plays a social role for Korean Americans.

(10) 가위 바위 보.

*Gawi bawi bo.*

‘Scissors rock paper (rock paper scissors).’

(11) \*Korean finger heart followed by the phrase\*<sup>3</sup> 쟁반 받쳐줄게요

*Jaengban batchyeojulgeyo.*

Jaengban	batchyeojul	ge	yo
----------	-------------	----	----

Tray	give	FAM	ALLOC (haeyo form)
------	------	-----	--------------------

‘I will fix a plate (of hearts) for you.’

Example (10) was used in the situation when the Korean American students were choosing who would get to use the bathroom first and to figure out who was going to be the first one, they used the method of rock paper scissors. But instead of saying it in English, ‘rock paper scissors’, they used the Korean way ‘가위 바위 보’ [*gawi bawi bo*]. This is one example of how in an environment where English is mostly spoken, code-switching into using Korean was done because of the familiarity with the Korean version of the game ‘rock paper scissors.’ Example (11)’s phrase

---

<sup>3</sup> The asterisk shows a motion that one has done.

is expressing positive affection and within the interaction, not only did they code-switch into using Korean, but the Korean finger heart was followed by the phrase. The Korean finger heart is formed by one's thumb and index fingers crossing and that is made into a heart shape. Because she said the phrase "I will fix a plate for you" and expressed the heart through the Korean finger heart, it was able to be translated into "I will fix a plate of hearts for you" through the combination of the words and the gesture.

In Young's (2012) paper, a Korean American man in his 30s talked about his experience with Konglish. He said that Konglish is something that Korean Americans can do when coming together but throw in some Korean words within the English phrases. Specifically, he mentioned, "you know, you can't be with your Caucasian American friend, throwing out Konglish, you know what I mean? That is a set of familiarity, I guess. I was drifted to Korean American church more" (Young 2012: 74). This man gave an example of how Konglish has played a social role in his life and not only gave him and his friends the ability to use Konglish among themselves but also because of Korean Americans churches using Konglish and being drifted to the familiarity, he saw himself attending especially churches that were focused around Korean Americans.

Han (2014) studied four Korean American children at a Korean language school to see how these children used either Korean and/or English at the Korean language school to engage in their language and literacy practices. On page 58, she describes a case where their participant James talked about how he would code-switch from using English to Korean when he and his Korean friends would want to talk without their American friends knowing what they are having a conversation on. Through speaking Konglish and code-switching, James and his friends were able to create their own social group and be able to have and create their own "special language" to just communicate within themselves. On page 149, Han gives an example of how James and his friends

code-switched and used Konglish. Before presenting the data, I will provide the Korean words in brackets right after the Korean words and followed by the English translation.

- (12) ‘xxx (his Korean female friend) has a boy friend (American), OK? So, maybe he is depressed or something and then she is like, “야, 애 왜 이렇게 그래?” [*Ya, yae wae ireoke geurae?*; James what is wrong with him?] I am like, “몰라” [*Molla*; I don’t know]. And then, he just looks angry and depressed. We are like, backing off from him. And then, she is like saying, “애 건들지 마” [*Yae geondeulji ma*; Don’t bother him]’

Ya	yae	wae	ireo	ke	geurae
Hey	him	why	this	way	is PRES

Molla

Do not know PRES

Yae	geondeul	ji	ma
Him	touch	PROP	do not

These Korean American students were able to communicate in Konglish without those around them understanding, but they were also able to pass around a warning issue so they would not get themselves in a bad situation.

Woo (2017) talks about how Korean American teenagers bonded in Cyberspace and because Cyberspace is all texting between friends, language makes a big part of this site. So, because of this, Konglish was a big factor for Korean Americans to connect in Cyberspace through the use of Konglish. On page 177, Woo talks about how the common thread between the Korean

Americans on Cyberspace was using Korean phrases when communicating online, Korean phrases like this one which was Romanized before being sent as a text, “뭐 해?” [*mwohae?*] which translates into “What are you doing?”. Woo continues and talks about how though the hybrid language did lead to the Korean American teens alienating their parents, the majority of whom could not communicate in English and their non-Korean classmates who could not comprehend Korean, Konglish did signal inclusion and belonging within the Korean American teenagers. Konglish played a key part in developing a sense of belonging and a strong ethnic identity in geographic and virtual worlds, whether Konglish was spoken or written as an e-text.

But the social role of Konglish does not just happen between friends and acquaintances but also within families too. An interviewee in Tan’s (2001) book talked about how for them, “Konglish was not a convenience, but a necessity” (Tan 2001: 2147). Continuing, they explained how because communicating with their parents solely in Korean was frequently too difficult, they began to speak a new mixed language, Konglish, around the house. Han’s (2014) participant in her research study shared his experience with Konglish and it was very similar to the interviewee in Tan’s research. Her participant, Kevin, code switches from using English to purposely using Korean when arguing with his parents. Kevin said, “My parents misinterpret my English. And they get more angry at me” (Han 2014: 63). He was worried that his parents would misinterpret his main points during arguments, so he used Korean to communicate with his parents, especially when he needed to get across any important information to them.



### **3. Purpose of My Study**

Horne (2017) says that Korean Americans will utilize Korean in situations where they are frustrated or surprised. It felt like it was lacking in terms of how Konglish is used in an emotional role because emotions do not just include frustration or surprise, but also can be used when they are happy, worried, strongly agreeing with someone, etc. I am questioning if Korean Americans use Konglish as an emotional role within frustrated, shocked, happy, worried, and other situations.

Konglish playing a social role has been talked about by multiple writers. The two main reasons Konglish plays a social role are because Young (2012) said that Konglish is something that Korean Americans can specifically do when coming together and that there is a special and common bond between the speakers who have knowledge in both languages. Han (2014) described Konglish as the “special language” for Korean Americans to communicate within themselves. There were not that many examples in both of their papers that supported these reasons so I am verifying these main reasons but also looking into other reasons why Konglish could play a social role for Korean Americans.

Shin (2010) and Horne (2017) have given examples as shown in section 2.5 of how Konglish plays a hierarchical role within students and in church environments, but I felt like it was missing examples to support this hypothesis of how hierarchy is within the use of Konglish. In my data collection, I will find data on how Konglish plays a hierarchical role in more conversations between students and immediate/extended family members.

Lastly, the daily-life role of Konglish was only introduced in section 2.3 by showing how English loanwords and Konglish are an important part of the Korean language. The only examples given were the ones in figure 2, so overall there was not any research done by any of

the authors mentioned in the literature review to show how often Korean Americans use Konglish words in their daily lives. Therefore, I will be collecting data to see how often the Korean American participants use Konglish as a daily-life role.

## **4. Research Methodology**

This chapter focuses on the various research methods used for my current study to collect data. The data collection was done to look into the main research question, “The roles Konglish plays in the Korean American community.” More specifically, this case study is designed to find how Konglish plays an emotional, social, hierarchical, and daily-life role in Korean Americans' lives. The chapter starts by introducing a survey that was filled out by 48 Korean Americans. This survey collected data for my hypothesis of how Konglish plays a daily-life role in Korean Americans' lives. Second, I will provide an overview of the two in-person observations done where I listened to a group of Korean American university students hold a conversation and wrote down any Konglish they used. Third, I discuss the in-depth interview I held with eight of the Korean American students from the groups I observed. Lastly, I dig into the analysis from the data collection. All participants from these three methods of data collection agreed to participate in this study by reading and signing a consent form that was reviewed by IRB.

### **4.1 Survey Collection**

The first part of the data collection was through an online Google form. 48 participants were recruited and selected through social media.

These were the criteria for participant selection:

- a. The participants are 18 years or older.
- b. The participants are university students or graduated college in the past three years.
- c. They identify as Korean American.
- d. They were either born in the U.S. or were born in Korea and grew up in the U.S.
- e. They have knowledge in and use both English and Korean.

All participants were asked for a pseudonym to go by for the survey. Each participant answered five questions in a full Korean sentence, and it took each participant about 10 minutes to fill out the survey. As I have mentioned in section 2, English loanwords are a big part of the Korean language which is one of the reasons why Konglish is natural for and used daily by Korean Americans. Though every question was asked in Korean on the survey and an English translation of the question was provided, I asked participants questions where I predicted that they would have to code-switch when answering the question. I knew that the answer I predicted they would give me would have to be an English loanword/Konglish word.

1. 식당 갔을 때 어떤 걸 보고 주문하세요? [*When you go to a restaurant, what do you look at when ordering?*]
2. 아침에 일어나셔서 어떤 거 제일 먼저 하세요? [*What is the first thing you do when you wake up?*]
3. 중국집에 가서 사장님이 공짜로 만두를 준다면, 그 행동을 뭐라고 부릅니까? [*When you go to a Chinese restaurant and the owner gives you free dumplings, what do you call that act?*]
4. 음악을 들을 때 어떤 기계 쓰세요? [*What device do you use when you listen to music?*]
5. 어디 가서 운동을 하세요? [*Where do you go to work out?*]

## 4.2 Group Observation

The second part of my data collection was observing two different groups of Korean Americans. I explained the purpose of this research and its procedure, their voluntary participation, how data will be kept confidential. I also informed them that they were allowed to stop and leave

the observation at any time without any consequences. The criteria for participant selection were the same as the survey collection.

The first group was a group of four Korean American university students who attend Bryn Mawr College. The second group was a group of five Korean American university students who attend Haverford College. Each group observation took around an hour. I was able to recruit participants from both groups through social media and mutual friends. Data collection for both groups was done through notetaking on my computer. Just having the group holding a conversation in Konglish supported my hypothesis of the social role bringing Korean Americans together. Both groups' main language throughout the group observation was English. To collect data for my hypothesis of Konglish having an emotional and hierarchical role, I encouraged the groups to talk about the following topics but gave them the opportunity to bond and talk about any other topics too.

1. Describe your happiest day out of the week. How did you feel?
2. Imagine yourself getting chased by a group of zombies. How would you react or respond?  
What words would be coming out of your mouth?
3. What is your favorite Korean food? Can you describe what it tastes like?
4. How do you feel about using Korean honorifics towards an upperclassman when holding a conversation in Korean?
5. Imagine your parent(s) showing up here right now with a packed lunch that is full of homemade food. What words do you think your parent(s) would say to you when seeing you? How do you think you will react or respond to this situation?

### 4.3 Interview

The third part of my data collection was holding a more in-depth interview with participants from each group I observed. A total of 8 interviews were conducted through a phone call. The interviews were conducted in English and each interview was around 20 minutes. Notes were taken on my computer throughout the interview. The questions I asked throughout these interviews focused more on the role of Konglish having a social role in these Korean American students' lives.

1. What makes you identify yourself as a Korean American? Does using Konglish identify one as a Korean American?
2. How often do you use Konglish?
3. Who do you use Konglish with? Family, friends, teacher, etc.?
4. Do you feel more comfortable talking in Konglish with Korean Americans or with Koreans from South Korea who also know English? An example could be a Korean international student. Why do you feel more comfortable with one than the other?
5. What does Konglish mean to you?
6. If it applies, how has Konglish helped you find a sense of belonging in a community?
7. Do you have any other stories or experiences with Konglish you would like to share?

## 5. Results

In this chapter, I present and analyze the results from the survey that looked into the daily-life role of Konglish and the group observations and interviews where I took notes on the emotional, social, and hierarchical role of Konglish.

### 5.1 Survey Collection Results

The first question on the survey was “식당 갔을 때 어떤 걸 보고 주문하세요?” [When you go to a restaurant, what do you look at when ordering?]. I hypothesized that most participants would answer with the word 메뉴 [*menyu*; menu] which is a direct English loanword or the word 메뉴판 [*menyupan*; menu board = menu] which is a mixed code combination of combining the words 메뉴 [*menyu*; menu] and 판 [*pan*; board] which becomes the word ‘menu board’ that means ‘menu’ in English. The reason why I hypothesized participants would use either one of these words is that they are both Konglish words used daily and there is no other direct translation of the word ‘menu’ in the Korean language. Out of the 48 participants, 42 answers included a Konglish word and these 42 Konglish answers included the word 메뉴 [*menyu*; menu] or 메뉴판 [*menyupan*; menu board = menu]. 3 answers included just Korean words and 3 answers were disqualified for answering the question just in English. This comes out to the result that 87.5% of the participants used Konglish, 6.25% used Korean, and 6.25% used English in the first question.

The second question on the survey was “아침에 일어나셔서 어떤 거 제일 먼저 하세요?” [What is the first thing you do when you wake up?]. I hypothesized that many of the participants would use Konglish words in this question because a lot of the activities done when one wakes up is some sort of Konglish/English loanword such as the word 샤워 [*syawo*; shower] or checking

their 핸드폰 [*haendeupon*; handphone = phone]. Out of the 48 participants, 18 answers included Konglish words. These were the Konglish words that appeared in this question (the number of answers that included the specific Konglish word will not match up to the number of 18 answers because some answers had more than one Konglish word within the sentence):

- a) 핸드폰 [*haendeupon*; handphone = phone] which is a creative compounding English loanword of combining the two English words ‘핸드’ [*handeu*; hand] or 휴대폰 [*hyudaepoon*; carry phone = phone] which is a mixed code combination English loanword of combining the Korean word 휴대 [*hyudae*; carry] and the English word 폰 [*pon*; phone]. 11 out of the 18 Konglish answers included the word 핸드폰 [*haendeupon*; handphone = phone] or 휴대폰 [*hyudaepoon*; carry phone = phone].
- b) 컵 [*keop*; cup] which is a direct English loanword. 2 out of the 18 Konglish answers included the word 컵 [*keop*; cup].
- c) 알람 [*allam*; alarm] which is a direct English loanword. 2 out of the 18 Konglish answers included the word 알람 [*allam*; alarm].
- d) 이메일 [*imeil*; email] which is a direct English loanword. 1 out of the 18 Konglish answers included the word 이메일 [*imeil*; email].
- e) 샤워 [*syawo*; shower] which is a direct English loanword. 1 out of the 18 Konglish answers included the word 샤워 [*syawo*; shower].
- f) 인스타그램 [*inseutageuraem*; Instagram] which is a direct English loanword. 1 out of the 18 Konglish answers included the word 인스타그램 [*inseutageuraem*; Instagram].



g) 디엠 [*diem*; DM] which is a direct English loanword. DM stands for Direct Message. 1 out of the 18 Konglish answers included the word 디엠 [*diem*; DM].

h) 클렌징 [*keullenjing*; cleansing] which is a direct English loanword. There is a Korean word for washing one's face which is 세수 [*sesu*] which is just a pure Korean word but this participant specifically wanted to say that they used their cleanser to wash their face. 1 out of 18 Konglish answers included the word 클렌징 [*keullenjing*; cleansing].

26 answers included just Korean words and 4 answers were disqualified for answering the question just in English. This comes out to the result that 37.5% of the participants used Konglish, 54.17% used Korean, and 8.33% used English in the second question. The reason why the number of participants just used Korean is because many used the word 세수 [*sesu*; washing face] and 화장실 [*hwajangsil*; bathroom].

The third question on the survey was “중국집에 가서 사장님이 공짜로 만두를 준다면, 그 행동을 뭐라고 부릅니까?” [When you go to a Chinese restaurant and the owner gives you free dumplings, what do you call that act?]. For this question, I hypothesized that the participants would answer this question with a semantic shift English loanword, 서비스 [*seobiseu*; service = on the house]. The word ‘service’ in English can mean helping someone out with something or doing something for someone. But the Korean word ‘service’ has definitely had influence from the definition of the English word ‘service’, but it means on the house. 38 out of the 48 answers sent in by the participants included a Konglish word, and all 38 Konglish answers included the word 서비스 [*seobiseu*; service = on the house]. 6 answers included just Korean words and 4 answers were disqualified for answering the question in just English. So, the result for question 3

is that from the 48 Korean American participants, 79.16% used Konglish, 12.5% used Korean, and 8.33% used English.

The fourth question on the survey was “음악을 들을 때 어떤 기계를 쓰세요?” [What device do you use when you listen to music?]. My hypothesis for this question was that most Korean Americans would use Konglish because of the words 핸드폰 [*haendeupon*; handphone = phone] which is a creative compounding English loanword of combining the two English words ‘핸드’ [*handeu*; hand] and ‘폰’ [*pon*; phone] which is a direct English loanword and 휴대폰 [*hyudaepon*; carry phone = phone]. 37 out of the 48 answers submitted included a Konglish word. These are the Konglish words that appeared throughout the 37 Konglish answers:

- i) 핸드폰/휴대폰/스마트폰/폰. 핸드폰 [*haendeupon*; handphone = phone] which is a creative compounding English loanword of combining the two English words ‘핸드’ [*handeu*; hand]. 휴대폰 [*hyudaepon*; carry phone = phone] which is a mixed code combination English loanword of combining the Korean word 휴대 [*hyudae*; carry] and the English word 폰 [*pon*; phone]. 스마트폰 [*seumateupon*; smartphone] which is another creative compounding English loanword of combining the two English words ‘스마트’ [*seumateu*; smart] and 폰 [*pon*; phone]. 폰 [*pon*; phone] which is a direct English loanword. 24 out of the 37 Konglish answers included 핸드폰/휴대폰/스마트폰/폰.
- j) 어플/앱. 어플 [*eopeul*; application] which is a clipping English loanword where they take out the ‘a’ and ‘pl’ from the word ‘application’. 앱 [*aep*; app] which is a direct English loanword. 2 out of the 37 Konglish answers had the word 어플/앱.

k) 아이폰 [*aipon*; iPhone], 에어팟 [*eeopat*; AirPods], 애플 뮤직 [*aepeul myujik*; Apple Music], and 아이패드 [*aipaedeu*; iPad]. All of these were direct English loanwords of the product name. 13 out of 37 Konglish answers included these products.

l) 이어폰 [*ieopon*; earphone] which is a direct English loanword. 4 out of the 37 Konglish answers included this word

m) 헤드셋 [*hedeuset*; headset] which is a direct English loanword. 1 out of the 37 Konglish answers included this word.

n) 컴퓨터 [*keompyuteo*; computer], 랩탑 [*raeptap*; laptop], 노트북 [*noteubuk*; notebook]. All three of these words are direct English loanwords and 4 out of the 37 Konglish answers included these words.

6 answers just included Korean words and 5 answers were disqualified due to answering the question in English. As a result, 77.08% used Konglish, 12.5% used Korean, and 10.42% used English.

The last question on the survey was “어디 가서 운동을 하세요?” [Where do you go to work out?]. My hypothesis for this question was that many of the Korean American participants would code-switch and use Konglish because of the word 헬스 [*helseu*; health = gym] and 헬스장 [*helseujang*; health place = gym]. 28 out of the 48 answers included Konglish words. These are the Konglish words that were in the answers:

o) 헬스 [*helseu*; health = gym], 헬스장 [*helseujang*; health place = gym], and 헬스클럽 [*helseukeulleop*; health club]. The word 헬스 [*helseu*; health = gym] is a semantic shift English loanword because the word ‘health’ in English usually refers to someone’s condition but in Korean, it refers to the gym. The word 헬스장 [*helseujang*; health place

= gym] is a mixed code combination English loanword where the English word ‘health’ and the Korean word 장 [*jang*; place] is put together to create the word 헬스장 which also means gym. Lastly, the word 헬스클럽 [*helseukeulleop*; health club] is a direct English loanword. 22 out of the 28 Konglish answers included one of these words.

p) 짐 [*jim*; gym] is a Konglish word that is not an English loanword because there are other words to say gym (as shown in ‘o’) but these Korean American participants still used the Korean characters to spell out ‘gym’. 4 out of the 28 Konglish answers had this word.

q) 아파트 [*apateu*; apart = apartment] is a clipping English loanword where they clipped the word apartment and made it into apart, though it means the same thing. 1 out of the 28 Konglish answers had this word.

r) 하이킹 [*haiking*; hiking] is a direct English loanword and 1 out of the 28 Konglish answers had this word.

s) 필라테스 센터 [*pillateseu senteo*; pilates center] is a direct English loanword and 1 out of the 28 Konglish answers had this word.

15 out of the 48 participants submitted answers that just included Korean words and 5 answers were disqualified due to answering the question in just English. So, 58.33% of the Korean Americans used Konglish, 31.25% answered just using Korean, and 10.42% used just English.

## 5.2 Group Observation Results

### Bryn Mawr College group observation

Approximately 101 Konglish sentences were noted down during the first group observation which happened at Bryn Mawr College. In the first question, “Describe your happiest day out of the week. How did you feel?” participants were able to present the way social and hierarchical

roles of Konglish play in their lives through talking. Not every participant ended up talking about their happiest day because there was no happy day for them in the past week. But one participant first talked about a special dinner she had and started with a Korean filler word then continued to use English after. The sentence ended with a hierarchical term to show her respect towards the upperclassman who is older.

(13) ㅇㅏ on Saturday... had a dinner/party for 선배.

*A on Saturday... had a dinner/party for seonbae.*

‘Ah on Saturday... had a dinner/party for *seonbae*.’

Another participant talked about how her thesis proposal was submitted in the past week and one of the participants reacted in a Korean way to express how proud they were that the participant successfully submitted her proposal.

(14) 오~

*O~*

‘Oh~’

Continuing the conversation, a participant talked about how her week was really not the best because her boyfriend broke up with her. She talked about the situation saying, “My boyfriend broke up with me, f\*cking b\*tch.” Another participant surprised, emotionally reacted in a Korean way to show how upset and mad they were for the participant by saying:

(15) 쓰레기!

*Sseuregi!*

‘Trash!’

The second question for the group was, “Imagine yourself getting chased by a group of zombies. How would you react or respond? What words would be coming out of your mouth?” As expected, the participants used Konglish as an emotional role to express how distressed they would be if they were in this situation. One participant specifically mentioned in example (18) that when she finds herself in situations where she is shocked, rather than English curse words coming out of her mouth, she finds herself swearing in Korean.

(16) I would say “오 주여.”

*I would say “O juyeo.”*

‘I would say “Oh lord.”’

(17) The “시발.”

*The “Sibal.”*

‘The “F\*ck/sh\*t.”’

(18)<sup>4</sup> ‘In situations when I’m shocked, Korean swear words come out first rather than English curse words. Like 시발 [*sibal*; f\*ck/sh\*t].’

---

<sup>4</sup> For this example, I will provide the Korean words in brackets right after the Korean words and followed by the English translation.

(19) I would say “끝까지 인생이 좇 같았어!”

*I would say “Kkeutkkaji insaengi jotgatasseo!”*

Kkeut	kkaji	insaeng	i	jot	gata	ss	eo
End	until	life	TOP	Slang for penis	similar	SP	DECL

‘I would say “My life was sh\*t till the end!”’

For the third question, “What is your favorite Korean food? Can you describe what it tastes like?” I found a common thread within the participants using Konglish as an emotional role to agree with other participants and express how happy they were hearing about the food. One participant said, “I like the 칼국수 [knife cut noodles] my grandma makes. She makes it when we go to her 시골 [countryside] house.” Another participant showing how much she loves the dish said:

(20) Yes, 아~ 칼국수!

*Yes, a~ kalguksu!*

‘Yes, ah~ knife-cut noodles!’

The next participant mentioned how her favorite food is 갈비찜 [Korean braised short ribs] and talked about the ingredients she prefers having in the dish, “I’d rather have potatoes than the 무 [radish], so she’ll (mom) just puts little potatoes instead of 무 [radish]. I don’t like taking off the bones, so I eat them boneless.” Another participant agreeing said:

(21) 나도 나도!

*Nado nado!*

Na do

Me too

‘Me too me too!’

The fourth question in this group observation was, “How do you feel about using Korean honorifics towards an upperclassman when holding a conversation in Korean?” The participants in the group observation were able to show how Konglish plays a hierarchical and emotional role for them while also expressing their thoughts on using hierarchical terms with others. Example (22) shows how this participant still shows respect to her 선배 s [upperclassmen] by using the term within the sentence when talking about them, even if these upperclassmen are not Korean.

(22)<sup>5</sup> ‘예를 들면 [*Yereul deulmyeon*; For example] all the 선배 s [*seonbaes*;

upperclassmen] I’m close to aren’t Korean. But when I talk about them, to my

parents, I would say, “그 선배, 졸업한 선배...” [*geu seonbae, joreopan seonbae...*;

that upperclassman, the upperclassman that graduated]’

Ye reul deul myeon

Example ACC take if

geu seonbae joreop an seonbae

that seonbae graduate did PAST seonbae

---

<sup>5</sup> For this example, I will provide the Korean words in brackets right after the Korean words and followed by the English translation.



Examples (23) and (24) were conversations on the topic of the word 언니 [eonni]. A participant started by asking the question mentioned in example (23) to another participant in the group. She replied, as shown in example (24), but was also able to give an example of how her younger sister will still use hierarchical terms to show respect towards her even when she is mad, using Konglish as an emotional tool.

(23) Does your sister not call you 언니<sup>6</sup>?

*Does your sister not call you eonni?*

‘Does your sister not call you eonni?’

(24) She does. When she’s angry she’ll say “언니 why!!!”

*She does. When she’s angry she’ll say “Eonni why!!!”*

‘She does. When she’s angry she’ll say “Eonni why!!!”’

Example (25) is another example of Konglish playing an emotional role. This participant expressed their feelings on using honorifics with upperclassmen and explained how it really depends on the age gap. When she was talking about using honorifics with someone who is only a couple of years apart from her, she immediately switched over to using Korean saying, “What’s the big deal (with honorifics/hierarchy)?!” which shows that she found it frustrating having to use honorifics and stress about hierarchy when the age gap was small between her and the other Korean person. Continuing to speak in Korean, she said how the story would change if the age gap was bigger.

---

<sup>6</sup> The word ‘언니’ [eonni] means ‘older sister’ and it is an expression that can be used between two girls. It can be used by one’s biological younger sister where she would call the older sister ‘언니’ [eonni] but can also be used between two girls who are close friends and the younger friend would call the older friend ‘언니’ [eonni].

(25) If we're only a couple years apart, I'm like “이 게 뭐라고?!” 나이 차이가

있었으면...

*If we're only a couple years apart, I'm like “Ige mworago?!” Nai chaiga*

*Isseosseumyeon...*

Ige      mwo      rago              Nai      chai              ga              isseoss              eumyeon

This      what      is PRES      Age      difference      TOP      existed REM      if

‘If we're only a couple years apart, I'm like “What's the big deal (with honorifics)?!”

But if there is a (big) age gap then (that changes the story) ...’

The two participants in examples (26) and (27) talked about who they use hierarchical terms with and who uses hierarchical terms with them. After the participant talked about hierarchical terms in example (27), the participant continued and mentioned how they would not want to talk to someone informally because she did not want to seem rude.

(26) I call my sister and brother and cousins 언니, 오빠<sup>7</sup>.

*I call my sister and brother and cousins eonni, oppa.*

‘I call my sister and brother and cousins *eonni, oppa*.’

---

<sup>7</sup> The word ‘오빠’ [*oppa*] means ‘older brother’ and this term can only be used by a girl who is using it towards a boy who is older than her. The word can also be used between biological siblings where the younger sister would call her older brother ‘오빠’ [*oppa*] but can also be used between friends where the younger girl would call her guy friend who is older than her, ‘오빠’ [*oppa*].

(27)<sup>8</sup> ‘My younger sister, she has to call me 언니 [*eonni*; eonni]. Other Korean

Americans who are older than me, I have to call them 언니 [*eonni*; eonni], 오빠

[*oppa*; oppa]. My godmother who is 8 years older, I have to call her 언니 [*eonni*;

eonni]. So with the 선배 s [*seonbaes*; upperclassmen] here, I would call them 언니

[*eonni*; eonni]. Right when Chan Hee gave me her number, I saved her number as

찬희 언니 [*Chan Hee eonni*; Chan Hee eonni].’

The last question for the group was, “Imagine your parent(s) showing up here right now with a packed lunch that is full of homemade food. What words do you think your parent(s) would say to you when seeing you? How do you think you will react or respond to this situation?” One participant showed how she would use Konglish in a cute way with her mother if this happened.

(28) If I haven’t seen her (mom) in a couple of months, 애교하고 and be like 오~!

*If I haven’t seen her (mom) in a couple of months, aegyohago and be like o~!*

aegyo    ha                      go

aegyo    do PRES              and

‘If I haven’t seen her (mom) in a couple of months, do *aegyo*<sup>9</sup> and be like oh~!’

There was a little bit of time left after going through the five questions so the group of Bryn Mawr students decided to just talk about anything ranging from Konglish jokes that only Konglish

---

<sup>8</sup> For this example, I will provide the Korean words in brackets right after the Korean words and followed by the English translation.

<sup>9</sup> A cute way of displaying affection.

users would be able to understand to talking about Korean swear words to talking about certain Korean words that do not have a direct English translation. When the topic of swear words came up, one participant talked about how her mom and her would swear in Korean while watching the news which shows that they use Konglish as an emotional role.

(29)<sup>10</sup> ‘When watching the news, sometimes there’s 또라이 s [*ttorais*; crazy people] on tv and my mom would say “오 미쳤어” [*O michyeosseo*; Oh (they’re) crazy] and when politics come up we’ll both say “지랄~” [*Jiral~*; Bullsh\*t~]’

#### Haverford College group observation

In the Haverford group observation, about 109 Konglish sentences were noted down. This group talked much faster and there were a lot more instances when more than one participant would be talking at once, so I believe their use of Konglish was much higher than the 109 Konglish sentences that were noted down. In the first question, “Describe your happiest day out of the week. How did you feel?” one participant talked about how he went to Kentucky to support his teammates for a sports event. But despite being cramped in a middle seat and being in the car for 12 hours, he said it was a good time. Another participant in the group switched from English to Korean, using it as an emotional role, to express his thoughts on the long car ride and the participant having to sit in the middle seat.

---

<sup>10</sup> For this example, I will provide the Korean words in brackets right after the Korean words and followed by the English translation.

(30) 힘들었겠다.

*Himdeureotgetda.*

Himdeur	eotget	da
Difficult	INFR PAST	DECL

It must have been tiring.

For the second question, “Imagine yourself getting chased by a group of zombies. How would you react or respond? What words would be coming out of your mouth?”, there were three different emotional responses to the question. One participant looked at another participant and said the phrase written in example (31). Instead of actually saying the word 시발 [*sibal*; f\*ck/sh\*t], the participant said the word 식빵 [*sikppang*; bread] because the two words sound somewhat similar. After another participant said the phrase in example (32), he added on saying “Honestly Korean comes out first when I get scared” which shows that this participant uses the emotional role of Konglish to express his emotions. Once everyone went around answering this question, a participant noticed how the light outside the classroom we were in turned off and was spooked by the incident. With a nervous tone, he said the sentence in example (33).

(31) You... 너 식빵 (시발) 나오겠지?

*You... neo sikppang (sibal) naogetji?*

neo	sikppang	nao	get	ji
you	bread	come out	FUT	PROP

‘You... bread (f\*ck/sh\*t) will probably come out (of your mouth)?’

(32) I would say “뭐야 이거?!”

*I would say “Mwoya igeo?!”*

Mwo	ya	igeo
What	is PRES	this

‘I would say “What is this?!”’

(33) 어, 불 꺼졌어...

*Eo, bul kkeojyeosseo...*

Eo	bul	kkeo	jyeoss	eo
Oh	light	off	PAST	DECL

‘Oh, the light turned off...’

The participants showed a variety of Konglish uses in an emotional context for the third question, “What is your favorite Korean food? Can you describe what it tastes like?” Right after I finished saying the third question to the group, one participant showed their frustration through Korean in example (34).

(34) 와~ 이거 정말 어려운데. 딱 한개?

*Wa~ igeo jeongmal eoryeounde. Ttak hangae?*

Wa	igeo	jeongmal	eoryeoun	de	Ttak	hangae
Wow	this	really	hard	is PRES	Only	one

‘Wow~ this is really hard. Only one?’

The first participant to talk about his favorite food said, “Probably 찜닭 [Korean braised chicken].” Another participant sitting across from him was surprised by his unexpected answer, because the dish is not modern, but rather a traditional Korean dish.

(35) 진짜? It’s your favorite for real?

*Jinjja? It’s your favorite for real?*

‘Really? It’s your favorite for real?’

The next participant talked about how his favorite food is his mother’s 갈비 [Korean BBQ short ribs]. He explains how much he loves this dish in example (36) and his admiration for his mother’s dish was so big that he used Konglish within that sentence. He continued saying, “Whenever I go to Korean restaurants it feels like a waste of money because my mom can cook it better.” Another participant agreeing, used Korean to express her thoughts saying what is written in example (37).

(36) My mother’s 갈비. 가게 한 개 세워야 한다고, 너무 맛있어...

*My mother’s galbi. Gage han ge sewoya handago, neomu masisseo...*

Gage	hange	sewo	ya	handa	go	neomu	mas	isseo
Store	one	stand	INT	must	FNL	too	taste	has
				PRES				PRES

‘My mother’s Korean BBQ short ribs. (I tell her) that she needs to open up a restaurant, it’s so good.’

(37) 맞아 맞아.

*Maja maja.*

Maja

Right

‘You’re right, you’re right.’

The next participant said, “I think I would go with 김밥 [Korean rice rolls] because I like eating it with 국 [stew], 된장찌개 [Korean soybean paste stew].” The participant across from her exclaimed as shown in example (38) to express how he also thought that combination is truly the best.

(38) 라면과 김밥... 최고지!

*Ramyeongwa gimbap... choegoji!*

Ramyeon	gwa	gimbap	choego	ji
Ramen	and	Korean rice rolls	best	is PRES

‘Ramen and Korean rice rolls... it’s the best!’

The next food mentioned in this question was 삼겹살 [pork belly]. A participant started by asking, “Is 삼겹살 [pork belly] Korean?” Another participant shocked and in disbelief with her question exclaimed the word in example (39). Continuing the conversation on meat, someone else mentioned that they could not eat meat by itself but needed something else with it. One participant shocked by this statement blurred out the Korean phrase in example (40). As they talked about the



different side dishes they could eat with meat, one participant said “I like eating it with 깻잎 [perilla leaves].” The participant across from her expressed their satisfaction with the answer being perilla leaves in example (41). But one of the participants said with disgust, “I don’t like it.” And another who liked perilla leaves fought back jokingly saying, “What’s wrong with you?” To calm down the ‘tension’, a participant used the Korean phrase in example (42) with a worried tone.

(39) 당연하지!

*Dangyeonhaji~*

Dangyeon	ha	ji
Obvious	to be	is PRES

‘Of course~’

(40) 아 진짜?!

*A jinjja?!*

A	jinja
Ah	really

‘Ah really?!’

(41) 카~

*Kya~*

‘Kya~<sup>11</sup>’

---

<sup>11</sup> A sound effect expressing freshness/satisfaction.

(42) 야... 야...

*Ya... ya...*

‘Hey... hey...’

Going back to the topic of 찜 [stew], a participant said, “I’m not a big 찜 [stew] person.”

Another participant shocked by this statement said:

(43) 어? Are you Korean?

*Eo? Are you Korean?*

‘Huh? Are you Korean?’

The last dish mentioned in this question was the combination of 곱창 [small beef intestine] and 삼겹살 [pork belly]. A participant expressing their love for this combination said the Korean sentence in example (44). The group talked about a K-Pop singer, Hwasa, who is a part of the K-Pop group ‘Mamamoo’ and how she started this crazy wave of selling out 곱창 [small beef intestine] after popularizing it on a Korean variety show. One participant, not knowing who Hwasa is, asked, “Who’s Hwasa?” Other participants shocked by his question said the sentences in example (45).

(44) 정말 장난 아니지!

*Jeongmal jangnan aniji!*

Jeongmal	jangnan	ani	ji
Really	joke	not NEG	is PRES

‘It’s seriously no joke!’

(45) 어?! You don't know Hwasa?!

*Eo?! You don't know Hwasa?!*

‘Huh?! You don't know Hwasa?!’

The fourth question in this group observation was, “How do you feel about using honorifics towards an upperclassman when holding a conversation in Korean?” A participant explained how honorifics and hierarchical terms are ingrained into his family, so he always uses them. The question ended up flowing towards talking about the use of hierarchical terms with anyone, but the participants specifically focused more on these terms being used within their families. In example (46), a participant talked about how he uses the word 형 [hyeong] with his older cousin. In example (47) a participant talked about how her younger sister calls her 언니 [eonni], but her younger brother also calls her 언니 [eonni], which is interesting because the term is used correctly when it is between two girls. The brother is the youngest out of the three and heard the middle child always calling the oldest sister (who is the participant) 언니 [eonni] and thought that was her name for a very long time which is why he used the word towards his oldest sister.

(46) I'm starting to use it with my cousin and I call him 형<sup>12</sup> and stuff.

*I'm starting to use it with my cousin and I call him hyeong and stuff.*

‘I'm starting to use it with my cousin and I call him hyeong and stuff.’

---

<sup>12</sup> The word ‘형’ [hyeong] means ‘older brother’ and it is an expression that can be used between two boys. It can be used by one’s biological younger brother where he would call the older brother ‘형’ [hyeong] but can also be used between two guys who are close friends and the younger friend would call the older friend ‘형’ [hyeong].

(47) My sister calls me 언니<sup>13</sup> and my brother also calls me 언니.

*My sister calls me eonni and my brother also calls me eonni.*

‘My sister calls me *eonni* and my brother also calls me *eonni*.’

The last question for the group was, “Imagine your parent(s) showing up here right now with a packed lunch that is full of homemade food. What words do you think your parent(s) would say to you when seeing you? How do you think you will react or respond to this situation?” Example (48) shows a participant reacting to this situation and using Konglish as an emotional role. Specifically, at the end of the example, the participant said, “으으으 [*eueueu*]” which is a very Korean way of expressing one crying.

---

<sup>13</sup> The word ‘언니’ [*eonni*] means ‘older sister’ and it is an expression that can be used between two girls. It can be used by one’s biological younger sister where she would call the older sister ‘언니’ [*eonni*] but can also be used between two girls who are close friends and the younger friend would call the older friend ‘언니’ [*eonni*].

(48)<sup>14</sup> ‘와~ [Wa~; Wow~] my parents... I’m close with my mother so she’ll know this week has been really rough. I recently 카톡 ed [katok<sup>15</sup>ed; katoked] her and was like “기도해 주세요 [Gidohae juseyo; Please pray for me]” She would say “힘들 텐데 수고했어 [Himdeul tende sugohaesseo; You must be tired, you did well].” I would probably cry like 으으으 [eueueu<sup>16</sup>; eueueu].’

Gido	hae	ju	se	yo
Pray	do	give	SUBJ	ALLOC (haeyo form)

Himdeul	ten	de	sugo	haess	eo
Difficult	would	RET	effort	did PAST	DECL

There were about 20 minutes left until the end of the hour group observation session, so I gave the participants the freedom to talk about anything. It was interesting to see how this group also started off by talking about Konglish jokes just like the group at Bryn Mawr College. In example (49), it shows one Konglish joke that a participant brought up to the rest of the group. A participant who was sitting right next to the one who brought up the joke immediately talked in Korean as shown in example (50) because of how corny and cheesy he found the joke. Example (50) was said by the cringing participant, but because these two participants are close friends, he meant it in a joking way.

---

<sup>14</sup> For this example, I will provide the Korean words in brackets right after the Korean words and followed by the English translation.

<sup>15</sup> Kakaotalk (Katok for short) is a messaging app that is used by many Koreans.

<sup>16</sup> A Korean crying sound effect.

(49) How long does it take to grow an onion? 오년.

*How long does it take to grow an onion? Onyeon.*

‘How long does it take to grow an onion? Five years.’

(50) 너 맞는다, 주먹 쥐었다.

*Neo manneunda, jumeok jwieotda.*

Neo	man	neun	da	jumeok	jwieot	da
You	get hit	IND	DECL	fist	clenched PAST	DECL

‘You’re gonna get punched, I clenched my first.’

The next topic was 애교<sup>17</sup> [*aegyo*] and who they use aegyo with. One participant said that she has a lot of 애교 [*aegyo*] when talking to her parents. The participant across from her, shocked, said:

(51) Huh? 너?! 니가?

*Huh? Neo?! Niga?*

Neo	Ni	ga
You	You	OBJ

‘Huh? You?! You (do)?’

Moving onto the next topic, the group went back to the topic of food, but more cultural aspects were included this time. The question asked to the group from one participant was, “For

---

<sup>17</sup> A cute way of displaying affection.

your birthdays do you guys eat 미역국 [seaweed soup]?” In South Korea, it is a tradition to eat 미역국 [seaweed soup] for your birthday every year. But one participant answered the question by saying, “I don’t like 미역국 [seaweed soup].” The participant who asked the question was surprised by the response he got and replied with:

(52) 헐~ you don’t? 미역국 싫어하는 한국 사람 처음 만났어.

*Heol~ you don’t? Miyeokguk sileohaneun hanguk saram cheoeum mannasseo.*

Miyeokguk	sileo	haneun	hanguk	saram	cheoeum	mannass	eo
Seaweed	dislike	do	Korean	person	first	meet	DECL
soup		PRES				PAST	

‘Oh my gosh~ you don’t? This is my first time meeting a Korean who doesn’t like seaweed soup.’

The fourth topic that this group talked about was the difference between getting scolded in Korean and English and the emotional sides of it. One participant said, “Whenever someone scolds me in Korean, it feels personal.” They gave an instance in example (53), describing how when someone is mad at you, that someone would say the sentence mentioned at the end of that example. Example (54) shows one of the participants using Konglish as an emotional role to express how they would react to a situation like example (53), clearly giving off a sign that they would be terrified.

(53) You know when someone's mad at you and says it in Korean, "(full name) 일로와."

*You know when someone's mad at you and says it in Korean, "(full name) illowa."*

illo        wa

here       come

'You know when someone's mad at you and says it in Korean, "(full name) come here.'"

(54) That's when you're like "오늘 죽었다..."

*That's when you're like "Oneul jugeotda..."*

Oneul        jugeot        da

Today       die PAST    DECL

'That's when you're like "I'm dead today..."'

The four underclassmen were very talkative in the group, so the one upperclassman was curious and asked if they were all friends. As they explained how they all know each other, they started looking back at the times when they first met. Examples (55) and (56) show an interaction that happened at the beginning of the school year between two of the participants in the group observation. These two examples are able to show how Konglish was able to bring together the two Korean American students.



(55) I met him for the first time at the gift shop and he said “한국분이세요?”

*I met him for the first time at the gift shop and he said “Hangukbuniseyo?”*

Hanguk	bun	i	se	yo
Korean	person	to be	PROP	ALLOC (haeyo)

‘I met him for the first time at the gift shop and he said “Are you Korean?”’

(56) Well, I kept hearing, “엄마 엄마 no 그거 안이빠, 너무 안이빠...”

*Well, I kept hearing, “Eomma eomma no geugeo anippeo, neomu anippeo...”*

Eomma	geugeo	an	ippeo	neomu	an	ippeo
Mom	that	NEG	pretty	too	NEG	pretty

‘Well, I kept hearing, “Mom mom no that’s not pretty, really not pretty...”’

The upperclassman being curious about the other Korean/Korean American students on campus, the group started talking about the Korean/Korean American students. When one of the participants named a Korean student’s name, another participant, surprised about the fact that the student was Korean, reacted by using Konglish in an emotional way as shown in example (57).

(57) He’s Korean? 몰랐어!!!

*He’s Korean? Mollasseo!!!*

Mollass	eo
did not know PAST	DECL

‘He’s Korean? I didn’t know!!!’

### 5.3 Interview Results

In the first question of the individual interviews, “What makes you identify yourself as a Korean American? Does using Konglish identify one as a Korean American?” many interviewees explained how they identify themselves as Korean American because their parents are Korean, and they were either born in South Korea then grew up in the United States at a young age or were born in the United States. It was not just the language that made them identify themselves as Korean American, but also the cultural values, food, and traditions. Interviewees talked about how both cultures influenced them because though the household environment they grew up in was more centered in Korean culture, they also grew up in American culture outside of the household. “Even the way I dream, who I want to be and want to do in my life is very close to the American dream,” explains an interviewee talking about how American culture has influenced his life as a Korean American. One interviewee said, “Growing up in American culture, it influences my views such as family views and gender equality, but when I go to Korea, I feel how American I am.”

Focusing on the second part of the first question, “Does using Konglish identify one as a Korean American?”, many of my interviewees were very thoughtful with this question and considered the fact that many Korean Americans might have not had as many opportunities to use Konglish. An interviewee said, “Konglish doesn’t have to be a marker of their Korean Americanness, because some weren’t taught Korean or were bullied for using it.” Some interviewees said that Konglish is not the only thing about being Korean American because it can also be values, traditions, and more, but that “...using Konglish helps me identify myself as a Korean American.” One interviewee expressed strongly how Konglish is a big part of being Korean American, “Konglish was a reminder that I am a Korean American. When I talk with Korean immigrants, 1.5, 2nd, 3rd generation, I use Korean and English at the same time which is

what Konglish is. I can say that Konglish is one of the reasons why I'm Korean American.” Another interviewee talked about how they rely on Konglish when speaking in Korean for long periods of time and that they cannot speak Korean without Konglish. This interviewee grew up speaking Konglish more than English or Korean so naturally, they feel more comfortable with Konglish. “Konglish is the neutral ground for us to communicate with each other (Korean Americans).”

Through the second question, “How often do you use Konglish?” I got to hear interviewees answer this question, but it naturally tied in with the third question prepared for this interview, “Who do you use Konglish with? Family, friends, teacher, etc.?” As they talked about how often and when they use Konglish, they naturally brought up the different people and groups they use Konglish with. Most interviewees talked about how most of their usage of Konglish was at home when they were with their immediate and extended family members. It was interesting to note how many of these interviewees were only able to speak Korean at home because their parents made them and did not allow them to speak English. But it was also fascinating to hear one interviewee talking about how in their family, it was a gradual transition. This interviewee’s parents made a rule at home when they first moved to the US that English was not allowed at home and this rule was enforced until 8th grade. Once he entered high school, the whole family slowly figured out that the US was their new home and started accepting American culture as their home, adapting American culture into their home. So, the gradual transition went from only using Korean to using little bits of English words, such as filling in the words he and his younger brother did not know how to say in Korean or when the context was needed. “Sometimes it (Konglish) just makes sense, a perfect way of describing something. Therefore, we started using Konglish more and my parents spoke to us in Konglish. Probably because it’s better for us to understand but also because it accurately reflects what they want to express.”

One other intriguing thing I noticed was that two different interviewees, who were at one point only allowed to use Korean in the household, used Konglish with their siblings secretly. One of the interviewees said that she is not supposed to talk to her sister in English but will combine both languages. The other interviewee said that he has a younger brother and there was not much of a big age gap between them so they would talk here and there a lot. “When we could only use Korean, we would whisper in English. We created our own language, Konglish. A language my brother and I used together.”

Other groups of people the Korean American students used Konglish with included their Korean American church, close family friends, and friends in college. Some interviewees talked about how they use Konglish with their Korean American friends in college, and one talked about how coming to college and meeting Korean Americans has opened a door for them to speak Konglish outside of their household, “I’ve never really used it (Konglish) outside of my family until I met underclassmen at Haverford.” One of the interviewees mentioned that he used Konglish at 한글학교 [Korean (language) School] as a teacher who taught Korean there and I was very surprised. Surprised because some Koreans view Konglish in a negative way because it is a mixture of English and Korean and not ‘pure Korean’. Explaining his reasoning behind why he used Konglish at the school, he said “In order to help students learn Korean, I would use Konglish to help them. Parts where they would be confused or overwhelmed if I spoke everything in Korean, I would use Konglish, so they could understand at least 50%.”

Many also mentioned how they use Konglish at times when there are no other words to describe something in Korean or English. Here are two quotes from the interviewees, “...but when you’re talking about something, sometimes that thing is better when it’s said in Korean and that’s when I would use Konglish” and “Sometimes there are just specific Korean words that work better

in Korean.” Another interviewee mentioned how the use of Konglish is important for humorous reasons because “there will be jokes in Konglish where you have to understand both English and Korean to be able to understand the joke.”

One interviewee talked about how it has gotten to a point where they feel like it is awkward speaking without Konglish because the use of Konglish helped pave the way to more stable conversations. “I will use words such as *파이팅* [*paiting*; fighting = you got this] and *스킨십* [*seukinsip*; skinship = physical touch] and forget that it’s Konglish that I’ll just use it with my non-Korean speaking friends (in college). And then they’ll just accept it too.” They continued talking about how the use of Konglish is so natural for them that they would sometimes be talking in English with their professors during one-on-one conversations and switch to using Korean, “I had a meeting with my advisor for my thesis and I would have long periods of silence where I would mumble in Korean trying to remember the English word.”

The common theme found within the fourth question, “Do you feel more comfortable talking in Konglish with Korean Americans or with Koreans from South Korea who also know English? An example could be a Korean international student. Why do you feel more comfortable with one than the other?” was that the Korean American interviewees felt more comfortable talking in Konglish with other Korean Americans because they would understand each other's struggles more. Here are some quotes said by three different interviewees on why they felt more comfortable with one than the other: “Korean Americans would understand better about struggling and being fluent in both languages,” “I feel safer using my Korean (with Korean Americans). When I’m with Koreans, I’m scared I’m gonna mess up because it’s their native language. With Korean Americans, I don’t have to worry about pronunciation or messing up and it comes out more naturally. I tend to think more about my words when talking in Korean with Koreans,” and “I feel more comfortable

with Korean Americans because our experiences are more similar, such as struggling with the Korean language. Not to assume that Korean international students would judge me for having awful Korean but Korean Americans would understand better.”

One interviewee explained more deeply why they felt more comfortable speaking Konglish with Korean Americans. She talked about the vibe between Korean Americans and Koreans and how she does not feel comfortable around “우리 또래 Koreans' [Koreans our age].“ Talking about how Korean Americans grew up in the United States, she said, “...they (Koreans) don't have experience being marginalized people in society. In my experience with Koreans, it's difficult to get close because we don't have much in common. Even if we do, 뭔가 자연스럽게 [somehow naturally] they are in the majority and shows entitlement through actions that they themselves might not recognize.” She realized how she was not able to get close to the Korean international students on her campus because of the feeling of discomfort and how through this, her identity of being Korean American became more solidified after coming to college. “We know what it's like to grow up as the ‘other.’”

In the fifth question, “What does Konglish mean to you?” the meaning of Konglish to the interviewees ranged from some saying that Konglish is a big part of their identity and some saying it is a small part of their identity but wished it was bigger. An interviewee stated, “Konglish is a tangible reminder of what my identity is. It's the way I can express who I am without showing or proving it. It's not artificial, it's organic.” One interviewee said that through Konglish, they are able to bond with other Korean Americans who go through the same thing as them and that it is a big part of their life. Multiple interviewees specifically used the word ‘bridge’ to explain how Konglish is a bridge between the two cultures and languages they grew up with.

There was a visible theme throughout the answers in the fifth question too and it was that 1) they wished at times when talking to a non-Korean speaker that they would understand Konglish/Korean and 2) Konglish was used because they were able to fully express themselves through it. One of my interviewees defined Konglish as the mix of Korean and English and it is either combining the terms to create one thing that only Korean Americans understand or that it could also be going between the two languages because you do not know a specific term. She said, “There are times when I’m talking to someone in English and wish they knew Korean because it would make more sense in Korean.” Another interviewee mentioned how she feels like an imposter when not being able to use Konglish and would often think, “If only I could use Konglish, only if the other person was able to know Konglish.”

Looking at the second theme, an interviewee talked about how he and his brother used Konglish when they shared hardships and joys and they were not able to capture it fully in Korean and English came to support it. He added, “Konglish was created because of our experiences. When we try to express things unique to Korean Americans, just the two languages alone by itself cannot comprehend it.” Furthermore, an interviewee explained how through the use of Konglish, there is more range to express her emotions.

The sixth question focused more on Konglish playing a social role, “If it applies, how has Konglish helped you find a sense of belonging in the community?” There were various communities they were able to find a sense of belonging in through Konglish, varying from their catholic church that had a big Korean American community to Konglish helping to foster a sense of community between the Korean Americans in their class year or with other Korean American students in different class years. One interviewee talked about how meeting Korean Americans on campus and talking to them in Konglish has solidified their identity more and that it felt very

‘homey’, “I definitely felt that (sense of belonging in a community) a lot after meeting Korean Americans here (at college). The Korean American underclassmen I meet, they’re friendly and easy to talk to.” Another stated how once she came to college, she could not rely on Konglish as a form of communication due to the small community of Korean Americans on her campus and reflected on the fact that she took Konglish for granted.

In another interview with a different interviewee, he specifically said that Konglish has helped him be placed in and have a sense of belonging in two different communities: 1) a community of Korean Americans and 2) an immigrant community. He explained that the Korean American community is a growing community and through the use of Konglish, Korean Americans are able to communicate with one another without explaining, “This is what I meant, this is what this means, etc.”. This is a sense of belonging that cannot be addressed in a full Korean or full American community. He speaks on not just the recent events tied to #StopAsianHate but overall that Korean Americans have gone through a lot and continue to do so. So, when there is nowhere else they can share their experiences, Korean Americans get to use the language they are most comfortable with, for most of the community is Konglish, then go to a Korean American community to share. The second community is an immigrant community. He says, “Konglish is an immigrant language. Konglish such as Spanglish or multilingual languages, it’s a manifestation of our struggles, of our parents, ancestors, who have come before us. It’s a language made to share our pain, tears but also joys and what we want to accomplish” which ties back to Lee’s (2018) definition of Konglish: the native language of diaspora children.

The last question for the interviewees was a much more open-ended question asking them if there is anything about Konglish they were not able to share in the past questions, “Do you have any other stories or experiences with Konglish you would like to share?” One participant shared a



story that connects to the other interviewees talking about how they are scared of getting judged for using Konglish with Koreans. This interviewee went through this situation when she was around 5 or 6 years old, after church, when she and her friends were playing but ended up getting in trouble because they did something they were not supposed to do. There was a Korean adult that did not understand much English, who got mad at the interviewee and her friends. The interviewee was trying to explain to the adult, but her Korean was not perfect since she was still very young, so she talked to him in a mix of Korean and English. He got frustrated with her and told her, “그냥 영어로 말해” [just speak in English] and she felt so hurt by his words. The interviewee ended her story by saying, “It felt like him saying I’d rather take your English than your crappy Korean.”

A different interviewee shared that he uses Konglish a lot when he is overwhelmed with emotions or usually when there is something very personal going on, which connects to my hypothesis that Konglish plays an emotional role for Korean Americans. He also shared that knowing Konglish is not a requirement or a checkpoint to identity as a Korean American, but rather a perk or a gift that comes from being Korean American. The interviewee noted that Konglish will identify who you are, it will help with daily life, and “You always have the option and ability to receive the gift or hold it for a bit or dismiss it.” Lastly, he mentioned how Konglish was disguised as a curse for him through his grades in his English courses from K-12 but is now a blessing to know Konglish because of the Korean Americans he met in college.

## 6. Discussion

By asking questions on the survey that had to do with things that are a part of their daily life such as going to restaurants, activities they do when they first wake up, listening to music, and exercising, I was able to explore and analyze through the data collection how much Konglish Korean Americans use within their daily lives. As I have mentioned in section 4.1, I predicted that participants would answer the questions in the survey with an English loanword/Konglish word because English loanwords play a big part in the Korean language, which is why Konglish happens very naturally. Within the Konglish answers given throughout the five questions on the survey, I was able to find participants using the five categories of English loanwords shown in figure 2: direct English loanwords, English loanwords with semantic shifts, creative compounding English loanwords, mixed code combination English loanwords, and clipping English loanwords. 87.5% of participants used Konglish in the first question, 37.5% in the second question, 79.16% in the third question, 77.08% in the fourth question, and 58.33% in the last question. The second question was more open-ended and there were a lot of different options for what the answer could have been, which is why I believe that the percentage was lower. As I have mentioned in section 3, none of the papers in the literature review provided any research on how often Korean Americans use Konglish in their daily life. It was only explained that English loanwords play an important part in the Korean language. So, through the survey and analyzing my data collection, I was able to see how often Konglish is used in Korean Americans' daily lives.

Through the two group observations, I was able to find other reasons for why Konglish is used as a social role outside of the ones mentioned in Young (2012) and Han (2014). I mentioned in section 4.2 that just having the groups holding a conversation with each other and using Konglish would support my hypothesis of Konglish playing a social role. When the Korean

American students came together in the two different observation groups, I was able to see how they used Konglish to interact with each other and build a sense of belonging in the groups. Though some participants in both groups knew the other participants, it was still awkward in the beginning because some of the Korean American students were meeting each other for the first time. But as the conversation went on and they started interacting with each other more, I could see that they were code-switching more comfortably. After both of the group observations, many participants expressed how happy and comfortable they felt with the group of Korean Americans they got to meet up with because it had a ‘homey’ feeling and since there are not that many Korean Americans on either campus, it was rare getting to meet up with many at once.

Additionally, I was able to focus on the emotional role of Konglish and found examples to answer my question of Korean Americans using Konglish as an emotional role within various types of situations. There were various emotional ways I saw the Korean American students using Konglish during the group observations such as in example (15) where she used Konglish to express that she was mad about another participant’s break up situation, example (16) ~ (19) and (31) ~ (33) where participants each yelled phrases of Korean swear words if they imagined themselves being in the zombie situation, example (25) where a participant was frustrated with honorifics being such a big deal, example (21) and (37) where participants used Konglish to show that they really agreed with a statement, example (28) where a participant shows how she uses Konglish to express her cuteness when talking, and example (48) of using Konglish to express themselves crying. Seeing the variety of styles Konglish was used when participants were expressing their emotions supports my hypothesis of how Konglish plays an emotional role for Korean Americans. Horne (2017) said that Konglish was utilized in situations when one was

surprised or frustrated, but through my data, we could see that it was not just limited to these two emotions, but many more.

Analyzing my data, I found ways of hierarchy playing a role in Konglish between students and family members. The words 선배 [*sunbae*; upperclassmen], 언니 [*unnie*], 오빠 [*oppa*], and 형 [*hyeong*] were mentioned throughout the group observations and these hierarchical terms were used to respect the person they were talking about. Though for some of the participants, their use of these terms might be because they used them while growing up and it is natural for them to say. Yet they still chose to use these terms rather than calling one by their first name, which gives signs of respect. Since we were only able to see how hierarchical terms were used in two settings in the literature review section, 1) a student setting and 2) a church setting, the research data I analyzed added onto how hierarchical terms are used within school settings but expanded into home settings too.

The last data collection, the individual interviews, went towards my hypothesis that Konglish plays a social role, but the research dived a lot deeper than I expected. I was able to agree with Young (2012) that Konglish is something Korean Americans can specifically do when they are together because an interviewee mentioned that a sense of belonging through Konglish is something that cannot be addressed in a full Korean or full American community. Han (2014) described Konglish as “the special language” for Korean Americans to communicate within themselves. Though the interviewee did not use the same exact words, he said, “We (he and his brother) created our own language, Konglish,” which shows that Konglish was their own special language.

When thinking of “social role”, I thought that many of the interviewees would talk about how Konglish has helped them find friends and connect with other Korean Americans. Many

talked about how they use it with family, friends, church community members, etc. who are Korean American, but they ended up going under the surface level and explaining the reasoning behind why the connections happen. Being Korean American was not just about Konglish, but also the food, culture, and values. Though many interviewees mentioned how Konglish helps them identify themselves as Korean American, it is important to look at how one of the interviewees mentioned that Konglish does not have to be a marker for one's Korean Americanness because some Korean Americans might have been made fun of for speaking Korean, were not taught Korean, or were forced to not use it in certain settings. So, it is crucial to know that some Korean Americans just did not grow up in an environment where they could either learn or use their Korean or Konglish. But an interviewee said, "You always have the option and ability to receive the gift or hold it for a bit or dismiss it."

Konglish is a social role because an interviewee defined it as a neutral ground for Korean Americans to communicate with each other. But it is also used in a social setting because they are able to express themselves the best through the use of Konglish and it leads to stable conversations. One of the main reasons why it leads to stable conversations is because of feeling comfortable. As an interviewee mentioned, Koreans living in South Korea do not have experience being marginalized people in society but Korean Americans who were either born in the US or grew up in the US from a very young age do have the experience of being marginalized people in society. Korean Americans are able to understand each other's struggles and pains that they have gone through which is why they are able to relate with and feel comfortable talking with each other in Konglish. I was able to address and verify the social roles Konglish plays that were mentioned in the literature review, but also find more reasons behind how Konglish plays this social role for Korean Americans.

## **7. Conclusion**

This thesis aimed to research how Konglish plays a hierarchical, emotional, social, and daily-life role in Korean Americans' lives. Based on the data I have collected through the survey, group observations, and individual interviews, it can be seen that Konglish does play these four different roles in the Korean American community.

It was seen through the data collection that Konglish plays a hierarchical role by having Korean Americans use honorific titles and using formal/polite speech with those who are older or in higher positions than them. As I have mentioned in section 2.4, hierarchy is a big thing in the Korean language, and it is very natural for Korean speakers to use honorific titles and formal speech levels. It might either be to show respect towards the person who is older/in a higher position or to not come off as rude. The emotional role was clearly shown, especially through the group observations, how these Korean American students use Konglish when feeling a strong sense of emotion. It was shown in situations when they would express being shocked, mad, sad, excited, and more. The use of Konglish as an emotional role helped the conversation flow better and it caused the environment to feel more close-knit. My hope to find data for the social role was mainly through the individual interviews, but I ended up being able to hear directly from the participants after the group observations. They all mentioned how this was such a nice and fun time being able to come together with Korean Americans and talk about Korean American things and other stuff that contributes to their identity of being Korean American. Through the interviews, it was clearly shown that their use of Konglish has helped them find a sense of belonging in various communities: a church community, high school friend group, college, and more. Lastly, the survey filled out by 48 Korean Americans illustrated how Konglish plays a daily-life role for Korean Americans. Focusing on daily activities they might do such as going to a restaurant and working

out, the data collection shows how much Konglish is used daily. Just like how an interviewee from one of my individual interviews said that “Konglish will help with daily life.”

Going back to the definition of Konglish Lee (2018) has provided, the native language of diaspora children, I believe that all the stories and conversations shared throughout the data collection support this definition even more. Interviewees talked about their experiences as a child of an immigrant in the United States and how they have been through ups and downs and felt pain and joy. But one thing that can bring together the Korean American community to share, comfort, and celebrate these events and trials is Konglish. Through Konglish, they are able to fully express themselves and go back and forth, using both Korean and English, to communicate. Just like one of my interviewees mentioned, “Konglish was created because of our experiences and will continue to be used by Korean Americans to spread these experiences.” Just Korean or English alone, will not be able to grasp the full meaning of Korean Americans and their stories.

## References

- Ahn, S. H. (2003). A case study of a Korean learner. *Asian EFL Journal*. Retrieved March 13, 2003 from World Wide Web: [http://asian-efl-journal.com/dec\\_03\\_K1.pdf](http://asian-efl-journal.com/dec_03_K1.pdf)
- Hagens, Sheilagh. 2020. *Attitudes toward Konglish of South Korean teachers of English in the Province of Jeollanamdo*.
- Han, M. 2014. *Korean American Students' Language and Literacy Practices at a Korean Language School* (Order No. 3641126). Available from Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts (LLBA). (1622141235).  
<https://proxy.brynmawr.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/korean-american-students-language-literacy/docview/1622141235/se-2?accountid=9772>
- Horne, Zack. "Konglish: A Korean- American Phenomenon." *Anthropology.nd.edu*, University of Notre Dame, [anthropology.nd.edu/assets/319996/hornezachary.pdf](http://anthropology.nd.edu/assets/319996/hornezachary.pdf).
- Kim, Eun-Young J. 2012. Creative Adoption: Trends in Anglicisms in Korea. *English Today* 28 (2). 15-17.
- Kim, E. (2006). Reasons and Motivation for Code-Mixing and Code-Switching. *EFL Vol. 4 No. 1*. 43-61.
- Kim, James. (2002). Korea: A cross cultural communication analyzed. *Asian EFL Journal*. Retrieved April 7, 2003, from <https://www.asian-efl-journal.com/main-editions-new/korea-a-cross-cultural-communication-analyzed/index.htm>
- Lee, Kyung Mi. "Konglish: An Anecdotal Definition." *Yale Daily News*, 26 Oct. 2018, <https://yaledailynews.com/blog/2018/10/25/konglish-an-anecdotal-definition/>
- Lee, S. 2019. *Speaking Korean in America: An Ethnographic Study of a Community-Based*



- Korean Heritage Language School* (Order No. 27662692). Available from Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts (LLBA). (2352142406).
- <https://proxy.brynmawr.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/speaking-korean-america-ethnographic-study/docview/2352142406/se-2?accountid=9772>
- Nam, Hyunjeong. 2010. *Konglish, Korean L2 learners' unique interlanguage: Its definition, categories and lexical entries*. Korean Journal of Applied Linguistics, 26(4), 275-308.
- Rüdiger, Sofia. 2018. *Mixed Feelings: Attitudes towards English loanwords and their use in South Korea*. Open Linguistics. 4. 184-198. 10.1515/opli-2018-0010.
- Shin, Sarah J. *Developing in Two Languages : Korean Children in America*, Channel View Publications, 2004. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.library.upenn.edu/lib/upenn-ebooks/detail.action?docID=235030>.
- Shin, Sun-Young. 2010. *The functions of Codeswitching in a Korean Sunday School*. "Talent, N. (6) and N." *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford UP, 2015, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/197208?rskey=xo8Tdx&result=1#eid>.
- Tan, A. 2001. *Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics (GURT) 1999: Language in Our Time: Bilingual Education and Official English, Ebonics and Standard English, Immigration and the Unz Initiative*. United States: Georgetown University Press.
- Woo, Susie. 2004. *Online and Unplugged: Locating Korean American Teens in Cyberspace*, *Amerasia Journal*, 30:1, 171-187, DOI: 10.17953/amer.30.1.k17534373g7v68nl
- Young, J. Y. 2012. *Korean, Asian, Or American? The Identity, Ethnicity, and Autobiography of Second-Generation Korean American Christians*. United States: University Press of America.

# Appendices

## Appendix A: IRB Exemption from Bryn Mawr College IRB

### Attachments:

- IRB: Exemption Confirmation.pdf

Gary McDonogh, Chair  
Institutional Review Board  
Bryn Mawr College  
101 North Merion Avenue  
Bryn Mawr, PA 19010-2899

B R Y N M A W R

11/11/2021  
Chan Hee Jeong  
Jane Chandlee

22-015 Investigating the roles of Konglish in Korean Americans

Dear Chan Hee Jeong,

The IRB Chair confirmed the exempt status of the above named research protocol on 11/11/2021. The exemption category is: 45CFR 46.101(b)(3) Benign Behavioral Interventions - Adults.

If you want to make any changes to the protocol, you must submit an Amendment to the IRB to obtain approval for the changes BEFORE they are implemented. Data collection cannot continue under a changed protocol until all changes have been approved by the IRB.

If any participant experiences complications or adverse effects or lodges a complaint with regard to participation in the study, you must notify the IRB immediately by submitting an Adverse Event report. All such events need to be reported to the IRB as soon as they occur. Best of luck with this research.

Sincerely,

Gary McDonogh  
Chair, Bryn Mawr College IRB

T: Exemption Notification

## Appendix B: List of Glossing Abbreviations

GLOSS	EXPLANATION
ALLOC	Allocutive (addressee honorific)
DECL	Declarative
FAM	Familiar
FNL	Phrase-final Suffix
FUT	Future Tense
IND	Indicative Aspect
INF	Infinitive
INFR	Inferential Mood
INT	Interrogative
NEG	Negative Particle
OBJ	Objective
PAST	Past Tense
PRES	Present Tense
PROP	Propositive
RET	Retrospective Aspect
SUBJ	Subjective
TOP	Topic Marker

### **Appendix C: Survey Questions**

1. 식당 갔을 때 어떤 걸 보고 주문하세요? [When you go to a restaurant, what do you look at when ordering?]
2. 아침에 일어나셔서 어떤 거 제일 먼저 하세요? [What is the first thing you do when you wake up?]
3. 중국집에 가서 사장님이 공짜로 만두를 준다면, 그 행동을 뭐라고 부릅니까? [When you go to a Chinese restaurant and the owner gives you free dumplings, what do you call that act?]
4. 음악을 들을 때 어떤 기계 쓰세요? [What device do you use when you listen to music?]
5. 어디 가서 운동을 하세요? [Where do you go to work out?]

### **Appendix D: Group Observation Questions**

1. Describe your happiest day out of the week. How did you feel?
2. Imagine yourself getting chased by a group of zombies. How would you react or respond?  
What words would be coming out of your mouth?
3. What is your favorite Korean food? Can you describe what it tastes like?
4. How do you feel about using honorifics towards an upperclassman when holding a conversation in Korean?
5. Imagine your parent(s) showing up here right now with a packed lunch that is full of homemade food. What words do you think your parent(s) would say to you when seeing you? How do you think you will react or respond to this situation?

## **Appendix E: Individual Interview Questions**

1. What makes you identify yourself as a Korean American? Does using Konglish identify one as a Korean American?
2. How often do you use Konglish?
3. Who do you use Konglish with? Family, friends, teacher, etc.?
4. Do you feel more comfortable talking in Konglish with Korean Americans or with Koreans from South Korea who also know English? An example could be a Korean international student. Why do you feel more comfortable with one than the other?
5. What does Konglish mean to you?
6. If it applies, how has Konglish helped you find a sense of belonging in the community?
7. Do you have any other stories or experiences with Konglish you would like to share?