

BECOMING AN AMERICAN: THE KOREANS

**THE SECOND IN A SERIES OF EXAMINATIONS
OF ASSIMILATION AND LANGUAGE
LEARNING PATTERNS AMONG IMMIGRANTS**

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History

Korea is located on a peninsula in eastern Asia. Bordered on three sides by water, it touches Russia on its northern tip, China along its northwestern edge, with Japan across the Sea of Japan to the east. The population of Korea, including both North and South Korea, totals 73 million people.

The nation's narrow connection with the rest of the continent has resulted in a society where immigration is minimal. Though small communities of ethnic Chinese and Japanese live in North Korea and South Korea is home to about a million foreigners, Korea is mostly populated by native-born Koreans. Korean is the official and majority language in both North Korea and South Korea.

From 1392 to 1910 Korea was ruled by the Joseon Dynasty, the longest ruling dynasty in East Asia. Confucianism was adopted as Korea's official religion, causing a decline in the popularity of Buddhism. The philosophy of Neo-Confucianism developed by the Chinese scholar Zhu Xi soon became prevalent throughout the Korean peninsula. Roman Catholicism and other forms of Christianity were also eventually introduced during the Joseon Dynasty. This period saw many technological and cultural advances. For most of it, Korea was within China's sphere of influence.

Chinese influence declined in the 19th century, as Japan began serious efforts to assert its power. The Treaty of Ganghwa in 1876 forced Korea to open itself up to trade from Japan. In 1895, Korean Empress Myeonseong was assassinated by the order of Japanese Lieutenant General Miura Goro for her attempts to keep Korea independent of outside influences. Japan's imperialism conflicted with Russia's ambitions for Korea and Manchuria, but that ended after the Russo-Japanese War in 1908. By 1910 Korea was occupied by Japanese military troops, and Korea was forcibly annexed.

Japanese rule was harsh, seeking to diminish Korean identity by suppressing the Korean language and looting many cultural artifacts. The worst offense came in 1939, when Koreans were conscripted for labor and recruited into the Japanese military against their will. Though a dedicated Korean liberation movement was underway soon after annexation, it never gained enough power to reassert Korea's independence.

Japanese control of Korea ended with the conclusion of World War II in 1945. Under the direction of the United Nations, jurisdiction of the Korean peninsula was divided along the 38th parallel. The Soviet Union was put in control of administrating the north side, with the United States administrating the south side. As with Vietnam, the intent was to create a provisional government that would then take over as the Korean Government.

However, much as the situation would later play out in Vietnam, elections were scheduled but never occurred. The Soviet Union and the United States differed on which political leaders should ascend to the head of the Korean government, and the resulting stalemate led to the division of two separate countries in 1948: North Korea and South Korea.

In 1950, Korea became a front of the Cold War when North Korea invaded South Korea armed with



Russian weapons and tanks. This war lasted until 1953, causing heavy losses on all sides, significant casualties among Korean civilians, and the destruction of many of Korea's cities.

Under the terms of the ceasefire a demilitarized zone was established along the 38th parallel; this zone continues to exist to this day. North Korea named itself the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and adopted a communist form of government, whereas South Korea called itself the Republic of Korea and adopted democracy.

In the aftermath of the Korean War both North and South Korea prospered, but the two countries have ended up in very different positions today. By 1960 North Korea was one of the wealthiest countries in the world, and the most industrialized country in Asia. However this economic boom ended in the 1970s, and in the 1990s the North Korean economy severely declined for several reasons. It lost the Soviet Union as a major trading partner at the end of the Cold War, and its relations with China became more difficult after China normalized relations with South Korea in 1992. The nation experienced a series of unprecedented floods followed by, ironically, years of drought. A lack of arable land and a weak economy incapable of sustaining its industry through imports led to famine and further economic troubles. Since 1995, a "Military First" policy has been in place by the order of dictator Kim Jong-il in an attempt to sustain the stability of the current regime. Though it maintains good relations with Vietnam and China, North Korea does not have formal diplomatic relations with the United States. Recent controversy over missile tests and North Korea's nuclear capability have led to strained relations with its neighbors.

In contrast, South Korea has become one of the world's fastest growing economies. Today it endures as a major economic power, and has one of the largest economies in the world. It is the world's largest shipbuilder, third largest steel producer, and is among the top five automobile manufacturers. It is also recognized as a leader in science, engineering, and information technology. South Korea adopted representative democracy under American influence and continues to maintain good relations with the United States.

History of Immigration

The first wave of Korean immigration to the United States occurred in the earliest days of the 20th century. By 1903, Korean natives who came to the U.S. and its territories totaled about 7,226, most of whom settled in Hawaii and worked as unskilled laborers on the sugar plantations [1].

Arranged marriages between Korean men in the U.S. and Korean women still living in their home country were fairly common. Beginning in 1912 and lasting until 1924 about 1,000 Korean women immigrated to the U.S. for that purpose. Outside of these arranged marriages, it is unclear how many Koreans came to the United States between 1905 and 1945, although the number was no doubt limited. It was not until 1945, after Japan's unconditional surrender in World War II, that the U.S. recognized Korea as a sovereign power [2]. In the 1940s, Korean immigration was first recorded as such and totaled 83 legal permanent residents.

Though the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1952 set a 100 person quota on Korean immigration, it was during the 1950's that the second wave of immigrants from Korea occurred. In that time, the number of Koreans seeking legal permanent residency increased nearly 60 times, but still totaled less than 5,000. Within this group there were wives of U.S. servicemen, professionals, as well as orphans from the Korean War [3].

The Immigration Act of 1965 made sweeping changes to the nation's immigration laws and re-ignited the

melting pot tradition of the United States. The law abolished the quota system set in 1924 and permitted unlimited family reunification visas for the Korean wives of American servicemen, Korean students studying in the United States and Korean professionals working in the U.S. to welcome their spouses, children and parents into the nation. Once these individuals became citizens, they could bring their own nuclear family members, forming a “chain immigration” pattern.

The United States quickly became home to more Koreans than any nation outside of eastern Asia, and Koreans became one of the fastest growing immigrant groups in the United States. From 1960 to 2000, the number of Korean immigrants living in America increased from 11,000 to 864,000, tripling in the 1960s, multiplying by seven times in the 1970s and nearly doubling in the 1980s. By 2000, Korea was the seventh most common country of origin for the foreign born in the United States, ranking behind only Mexico, the Philippines, India, China, Vietnam and Cuba. Korea’s most recent standing is a far cry from 1960, when the nation ranked 43rd in immigration to the United States, behind Belgium, Syria, and Argentina [4].

**Most Common Nations of Origin for the Foreign Born Living in the United States,
and respective figures for Korea, 1960-2000
(figures in thousands)**

| <u>1960</u> | | <u>1980</u> | | <u>2000</u> | |
|------------------------|-----------|-------------------|------------|-----------------|------------|
| 1. Italy | 1256 | 1. Mexico | 2199 | 1. Mexico | 9177 |
| 2. Germany | 989 | 2. Germany | 849 | 2. Philippines | 1369 |
| 3. Canada | 952 | 3. Canada | 842 | 3. India | 1022 |
| 4. United Kingdom | 833 | 4. Italy | 831 | 4. China | 988 |
| 5. Poland | 747 | 5. United Kingdom | 669 | 5. Vietnam | 988 |
| | | 6. Cuba | 607 | 6. Cuba | 872 |
| 40. India | 12 | 7. Philippines | 501 | 7. Korea | 864 |
| 41. Colombia | 12 | 8. Poland | 418 | 8. Canada | 820 |
| 42. Dominican Republic | 11 | 9. Soviet Union | 408 | 9. El Salvador | 817 |
| 43. Korea | 11 | 10. Korea | 289 | 10. Germany | 706 |
| 44. Albania | 9 | 11. China | 286 | | |
| | | 12. Vietnam | 231 | | |
| | | | | | |
| <u>1970</u> | | <u>1990</u> | | | |
| 1. Italy | 1008 | 1. Mexico | 4298 | | |
| 2. Germany | 832 | 2. Philippines | 912 | | |
| 3. Canada | 812 | 3. Canada | 744 | | |
| 4. Mexico | 759 | 4. Cuba | 736 | | |
| 5. United Kingdom | 686 | 5. Germany | 711 | | |
| | | 6. United Kingdom | 640 | | |
| 35. Belgium | 41 | 7. Italy | 580 | | |
| 36. Latvia | 41 | 8. Korea | 568 | | |
| 37. Korea | 38 | 9. Vietnam | 543 | | |
| 38. Ecuador | 36 | 10. China | 529 | | |
| 39. Israel | 35 | 11. El Salvador | 465 | | |

From 2001-2007, nearly 150,000 Koreans were admitted to the United States as legal permanent residents (LPR). This figure indicates that Korean immigration rates have remained about the same as they were in the prior decade, when 164,000 Koreans received LPR status from 1991-2000. However, both of these rates represent a decline from the height of Korean immigration in the 1970s (268,000) and 1980s (334,000)[5].

Data from the U.S. Office of Immigration Statistics indicate that Koreans are naturalizing at a rate consistent with their population. Between 1991 and 2007, Korea was the eighth most common country of birth for newly naturalized citizens, ranking behind Mexico, the Philippines, Vietnam, India, China, Cuba and the Dominican Republic. During this 17 year span, more than 277,000 Koreans became U.S. citizens, including almost 150,000 since the beginning of 2000.

Settlement Patterns

The earliest Korean immigrants to the United States settled in Hawaii. By 1907, approximately 2,000 Koreans had moved to the mainland and were concentrated in the San Francisco area. By 1910, the center of the Korean population on the mainland had shifted south to Los Angeles. For the next half century, until the liberalization of immigration law, what few Koreans lived in the United States resided chiefly in Hawaii and California, the latter mostly found in large metropolitan areas.

The radical change in immigration laws in 1965 led to a significant change in the number of Korean-born individuals living in the United States. However, it did not drastically change the places where Koreans settled in the nation. In 1970, the first year in which the U.S. Census split “Korean” from the “other Asian” category, nearly half the Korean-born population living in the United States could be found in just three states – California (24 percent), Hawaii (14 percent) and New York (9 percent) [6].

Though early Korean immigrants followed traditional immigration patterns of settling in large metropolitan areas that had been customary gateways for newcomers to the United States, new trends began emerging in the 1970s. A 1976 study found that while 41 percent of Korean-born individuals living in the United States lived in the western region, this was far below the 57 percent of Chinese immigrants who lived on the west coast and the 81 percent of Japanese. Almost one-fifth of the Korean born population was found to be living in the southern region of the U.S., more than twice the rate of Chinese immigrants and almost four times the rate of Japanese immigrants [6].

The Korean-born population in the U.S. experienced a significant increase in the 1970s, but the 1980 Census found that the settlement patterns remained virtually unchanged. California was home to almost 30 percent of America’s Korean-born, and the top four states – California, New York, Illinois and Maryland – accounted for almost half the Koreans living here. Korean-born individuals made up fewer than 0.1 percent of the population in 36 states and the District of Columbia, only in Hawaii did the population account for greater than 0.5 percent [7].

The 1980 Census also revealed that Korean born immigrants to the United States continued to settle in a manner contrary to prevailing immigration trends. In 1980, only two-thirds of Korean immigrants lived in urban areas, a statistic that was not only substantially below other immigrant groups, but far below the 74 percent rate for the entire American population.

By the end of the 1980s, the Korean population had doubled, but while the numbers changed, the places where Korean immigrants settled remained largely the same. More than one-in-three Koreans living in the United States called California home, and California, New York and Illinois accounted for more than half of the Korean-born population in the U.S. Perhaps the most notable change occurred in New Jersey. Home to the eighth largest Korean population in the U.S. in 1980, the state's rank jumped to fourth in 1990, partly because of the continued suburbanization trend that saw many Korean immigrants move from New York City to the suburbs of northern New Jersey [7].

The move from the city to the suburbs continued throughout the 1990s. A 2003 study found that 57 percent of Korean-Americans lived in the suburbs, one of the highest percentages among major ethnic groups. New Jersey continued to be a destination for many Korean-born individuals, as the state was home to the third largest Korean-American population in the United States in 2000. Along with California (31.1 percent) and New York (11.3 percent), these states comprised nearly half of the Korean immigrant population. At the same time, Korean populations in other states had become sizeable, accounting for more than 0.1% of the population in 36 states and Washington, D.C. [7].

States with the highest number of Korean-born immigrants are listed in the figure below. Notably, the only inland state on the list was Illinois, and nearly all of the Korean-born population here lived in and around Chicago.

| State of Residence of Korean-born Immigrants to the United States, with rank, 1980-2000 | | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|---|-------------|-------------|
| Population figures in thousands | | | | | | |
| State | <i>Korean-born population (Rank)</i> | | | <i>Percent of all Korean-born in U.S.</i> | | |
| | 1980 | 1990 | 2000 | 1980 | 1990 | 2000 |
| California | 83 (1) | 200 (1) | 268 (1) | 28.7 | 35.2 | 31.1 |
| New York | 27 (2) | 72 (2) | 98 (2) | 9.4 | 12.7 | 11.3 |
| New Jersey | 11 (8) | 28 (4) | 52 (3) | 3.7 | 4.8 | 6.0 |
| Illinois | 19 (3) | 30 (3) | 41 (4) | 6.7 | 5.3 | 4.7 |
| Washington | 11 (6) | 20 (8) | 38 (5) | 3.9 | 3.6 | 4.4 |
| Virginia | 11 (7) | 24 (6) | 37 (6) | 3.7 | 4.2 | 4.3 |
| Texas | 12 (5) | 24 (5) | 36 (7) | 4.0 | 4.2 | 4.2 |
| Maryland | 12 (4) | 21 (7) | 31 (8) | 4.3 | 3.7 | 3.6 |
| Pennsylvania | 10 (9) | 17 (9) | 27 (9) | 3.6 | 2.9 | 3.1 |
| Georgia | 5 (14) | 12 (11) | 23 (10) | 1.8 | 2.1 | 2.7 |

Note: Hawaii ranked 10th in 1980 and 1990 with 9,000 and 13,000 Korean born, respectively.

In all, the top 10 states accounted for 71 percent of all Koreans living in the United States in 1980, and more than 78 percent in both 1990 and 2000. While this “bunching” is not uncommon among immigrant groups, it is especially notable among Koreans, who are more likely to keep close ties with fellow Koreans and the Korean community. One 1988 study found that 81 percent of Koreans living in the United States had Korean friends, but only 38 percent reported having any American friends. These close bonds within the native community could have an effect on English language learning rates and use among Korean-born Americans.

Korean Language Use in the United States

Of the nearly 900,000 Americans who spoke Korean at home in 2000, one-third lived in California, and more than half lived in just three states – California, New York and New Jersey. Ten states – California, New York, New Jersey, Illinois, Virginia, Washington, Texas, Maryland, Pennsylvania and Georgia – account for nearly four-fifths of the Korean speaking population.

Between 1990 and 2000, the number of residents of the United States indicating that they spoke Korean at home increased by 42 percent, easily outpacing the growth in the overall U.S. population. The increase of nearly 270,000 speakers was nearly universal across the nation, with 45 states and the District of Columbia noting increases. The most notable surges between 1990 and 2000 came in states that already were home to a large number of Korean speakers, including California, New Jersey, New York and Washington. Only five states noted a decrease in Korean speakers – in all five of these cases the decline was less than 250, and among them, only Louisiana had a Korean speaking population that exceeded 600 [8].

Nationwide, Korean is the ninth most common language spoken at home in the nation, the same place it held in 1990. Between 1990 and 2000, the number of Korean speakers eclipsed the number of Polish speakers, but was surpassed by the number of Vietnamese speakers. Korean is the fourth most common language spoken in Virginia and the fifth most common in Maryland, and ranks among the top 10 languages in 28 of the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

**States with the most residents, age 5 and older, who speak Korean at home, 2000
(Number in parentheses indicates the rank of the language within the state)**

| | <u>Korean Speakers</u> | <u>Change from 1990</u> | <u>1990 Rank</u> |
|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| 1. California (6) | 298,076 | +82,231 | 1 |
| 2. New York (10) | 102,105 | +21,711 | 2 |
| 3. New Jersey (8) | 55,340 | +24,628 | 4 |
| 4. Illinois (8) | 43,712 | +9,739 | 3 |
| 5. Virginia (4) | 39,636 | +13,900 | 6 |
| 6. Washington (6) | 39,522 | +16,332 | 8 |
| 7. Texas (8) | 38,451 | +12,223 | 5 |
| 8. Maryland (5) | 32,937 | +9,374 | 7 |
| 9. Pennsylvania (10) | 25,978 | +7,862 | 9 |
| 10. Georgia (6) | 25,814 | +12,381 | 11 |

Though *concentrations* of Korean speakers are relatively diluted among the states, numbering more than 1 per 100 residents only in Hawaii, there are many counties and cities with high concentrations of Korean speakers. Almost 1-in-25 residents of Bergen County, N.J. speaks Korean at home, while Korean speakers account for 1-in-36 residents of Queens County, N.Y. and Fairfax County, Va. Los Angeles County, Calif. has more Korean speakers than can be found in 49 of the 50 states, and Korean speakers account for 1-in-53 residents here. Nationwide, Korean is the third most common language spoken at home in 22 counties and the fourth most common language spoken at home in 63 counties [8].

**U.S. Counties with the largest number of
people, age 5 and older, speaking Korean at home**

| <u>County</u> | | <u>Korean Speakers</u> | <u>Pct.*</u> |
|-----------------------|----|------------------------|--------------|
| 1. Los Angeles County | CA | 165,160 | 1.88% |
| 2. Queens County | NY | 57,445 | 2.75% |
| 3. Orange County | CA | 50,365 | 1.91% |
| 4. Bergen County | NJ | 32,805 | 3.96% |
| 5. Cook County | IL | 30,640 | 0.61% |
| 6. Fairfax County | VA | 24,710 | 2.74% |
| 7. Santa Clara County | CA | 18,215 | 1.16% |
| 8. Honolulu County | HI | 17,110 | 2.09% |
| 9. King County | WA | 16,285 | 1.00% |
| 10. Montgomery County | MD | 13,470 | 1.66% |

Other counties with notable Korean-speaking populations

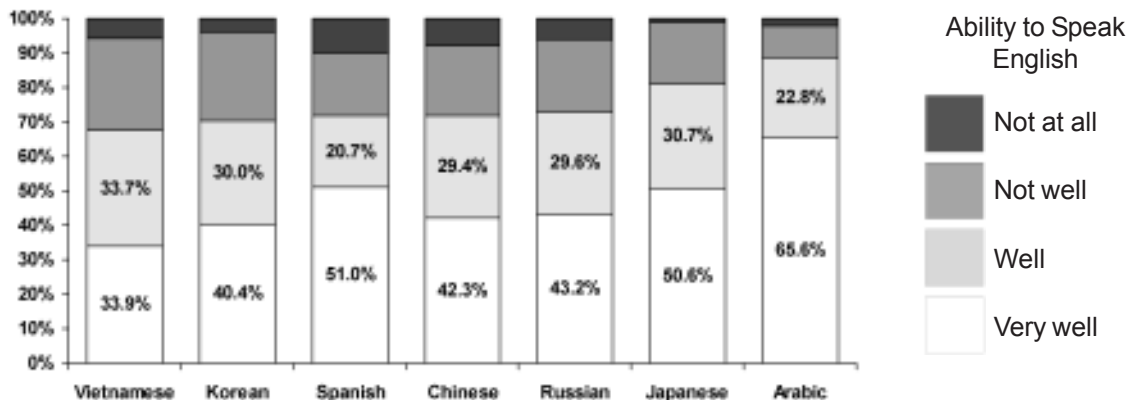
| | | | |
|------------------------|----|--------|-------|
| Pierce County | WA | 10,805 | 1.66% |
| Gwinnett County | GA | 8,170 | 1.51% |
| Howard County | MD | 5,130 | 2.24% |
| Anchorage Municipality | AK | 3,460 | 1.44% |
| Fairfax city | VA | 520 | 2.65% |

* - Percent of the total population, age 5+, who speak Korean at home

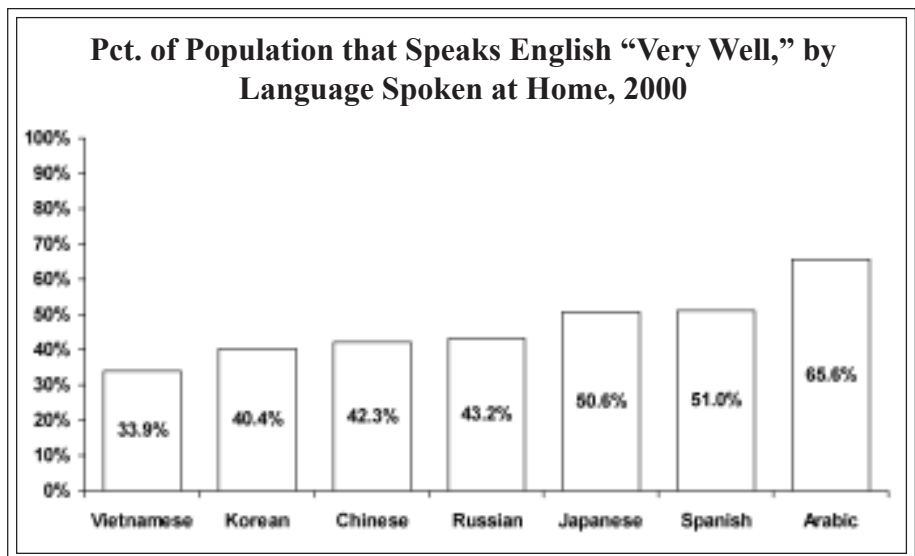
English Proficiency among Korean speakers

English proficiency rates for those who speak Korean at home are in line with those of Spanish speakers and above those of Vietnamese speakers, but trail the rates achieved by speakers of many other languages. According to Census 2000, 70.4 percent of those who speak Korean at home speak English “very well” or “well.” The seven-in-ten figure is in the ballpark of those who speak Spanish (71.7 percent), Chinese (72.7 percent) or Russian (72.8 percent) at home. While English proficiency rates among Koreans exceed those of the Vietnamese (67.6 percent), they fall far short of linguistic groups such as Japanese (81.3 percent) and Arabic (88.4 percent) [9].

**Ability to Speak English for the Population Age 5+, by
Language Spoken at Home, 2000**



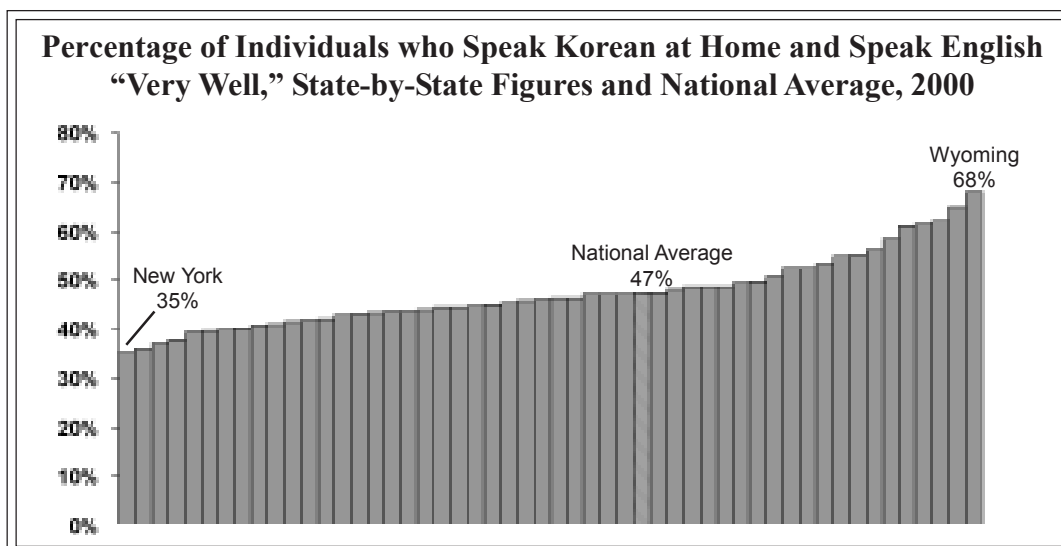
The shortfall is especially notable within foreign language speakers who speak English “very well,” the people most likely to be able to move fluidly within American society without any language barriers. Census 2000 found that 40.4 percent of American residents who spoke Korean at home spoke English “very well.” This rate trailed that of speakers of other languages as shown in the table.



Recent immigration to the United States accounts for some of the difference. The number of Korean immigrants in the United States nearly tripled between 1980 and 2000. Therefore, unlike groups such as Spanish speakers and Russian speakers with a long history in the United States, there are few elder, English-proficient Koreans to balance out the high number of recent immigrants. However, while recent immigration can explain part of the reason for lower-than-normal English proficiency rates nationwide, an examination of state-by-state rates illustrates another important point.

In our examination of linguistic proficiency rates among the Vietnamese, we found that there was little correlation between the concentration of Vietnamese speakers in a given state and English proficiency rates within that state. Yet, when we test that same theory with Korean speakers, we find that the common belief that heavy concentrations of foreign language speakers reduce English proficiency is in effect full force.

For this analysis, we looked at English proficiency rates for people who spoke Korean at home in each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Looking at the big picture, we found that the average rate for Korean speakers who spoke English “very well” was 47 percent and the average rate for Korean speakers who spoke English “well” was 31 percent. Among Korean speakers who spoke English “not well,” the average rate was 20 percent, and 2 percent for those who spoke English “not at all” [9].



When we break down the figures by the number of Korean speakers within the state, a clear trend comes to light. Using five categories of Korean speaking population – 15,000 and greater, 5,000-14,999, 2,000-4,999, 1,000-1,999 and less than 1,000 – we separated the states and averaged out English proficiency rates within those categories. If there was no correlation between population size and English proficiency, as we found with the Vietnamese population, we would expect these numbers to be all over the map. With Korean speakers, here is what we found:

| <u>Korean speaking population (states)</u> | <u>Very Well</u> | <u>Well</u> | <u>Not Well</u> | <u>Not at All</u> |
|---|-------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| 15,000 and greater (12) | 41 | 30 | 25 | 4 |
| 5,000 - 14,999 (10) | 46 | 31 | 20 | 2 |
| 2,000 – 4,999 (13) | 46 | 33 | 19 | 2 |
| 1,000 – 1,999 (7) | 49 | 31 | 18 | 2 |
| 999 and below (9) | 59 | 27 | 13 | 1 |

As the table shows, the average rate of English proficiency (spoke English “very well” or “well”) was only 71 percent in states with 15,000 or more Korean speakers. This figure rose to 77 percent among states with 5,000 – 14,999 Korean speakers and ultimately to 86 percent in the states with the fewest Korean speakers. As we move down the population categories, rates of English proficiency increased at every step, while rates of speaking English “not well” and “not at all” consistently declined.

States with the lowest English proficiency rates tended to have the largest populations of Korean speakers, while English proficiency rates were generally higher in states with the fewest Korean speakers, as shown in the table below. This stands in stark contrast to what was found within the Vietnamese speaking population.

| English Proficiency | | | | English Proficiency | | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|---|---------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| | <u>Rate*</u> | <u>Korean Pop.**</u> | <u>Pop Rank+</u> | | <u>Rate*</u> | <u>Korean Pop.**</u> | <u>Pop Rank+</u> |
| New York | 64.46 | 102,105 | 2 | Vermont | 95.38 | 325 | 49 |
| California | 66.81 | 298,075 | 1 | North Dakota | 93.13 | 220 | 51 |
| Alaska | 67.51 | 4,370 | 25 | Wyoming | 89.86 | 345 | 48 |
| Hawaii | 68.20 | 18,335 | 11 | Rhode Island | 89.55 | 1,435 | 38 |
| Maryland | 69.80 | 32,935 | 8 | West Virginia | 87.93 | 580 | 45 |
| Virginia | 70.55 | 39,635 | 5 | District of Columbia | 85.21 | 710 | 44 |
| Delaware | 70.62 | 1,600 | 36 | * - Percentage of state residents, age of 5 and older, who spoke Korean at home and spoke English “very well” or “well” | | | |
| New Jersey | 70.71 | 55,335 | 3 | | | | |
| Oregon | 70.93 | 9,185 | 18 | ** - Number of residents of the state, age 5 and older, who spoke Korean at home | | | |
| Illinois | 71.96 | 43,715 | 4 | | | | |
| Washington | 72.01 | 39,525 | 6 | + - Rank of the state’s Korean population within the 50 states and Washington, DC | | | |
| Georgia | 72.40 | 25,815 | 10 | | | | |
| Pennsylvania | 72.52 | 25,980 | 9 | | | | |

Conclusion

Though Korean immigration to the United States is a relatively new phenomenon, the Korean-American community has taken on the appearance of a group that has been here for many generations. From a nationwide population of just over 10,000 in 1960, the Korean population living in the United States has grown nearly 100 times during the last half-century. Korean communities thrive in places such as Queens, N.Y., Los Angeles, Calif., and Washington, D.C.

Korean immigrants in the United States are more likely than the average American to have a high school diploma and are nearly twice as likely to have a bachelor's degree. Koreans are more likely to work in managerial and technical fields than people of other nationalities with recent surges of immigration, such as Mexicans, Vietnamese, Chinese and El Salvadoreans. Consequently, the median household income of a Korean immigrant is nearly identical to that of the general population. In many ways, Korean assimilation into the United States appears to be a model for other immigrant groups.

However, one area where Koreans do not meet the assimilation ideal is in regard to English proficiency. When the major immigrant groups of the last half-century are compared, Koreans lag in terms of acquiring English. Only 70 percent of Koreans speak English "very well" or "well." Worse, English proficiency rates among Koreans decline as the population of Koreans in a state grows, meaning that the places where English proficiency is most important become the places where it is least likely to occur.

Since Koreans tend to live, shop and work in native communities, limited English proficiency among Korean immigrants can often be a permanent condition, making it more difficult for future generations to practice the English language skills learned in school. Limited English proficiency among Korean adults could also stunt the progress of younger, U.S.-born generations and make it more difficult for them to apply to higher education.

Improving English proficiency rates among Koreans will require a well-tailored effort that involves members of the Korean community. A report designed to improve the counting of Koreans for the Census said that, "it is essential that the respondents and the census worker and volunteers share the same ethnic and cultural backgrounds." Non-Koreans tend not to understand the status structure of the Korean community, and how dress and mannerisms may affect results [6]. If these simple acts can make Koreans disinclined to answer a few census questions, it is highly likely that these same mistakes will inhibit them from embarking on a long-term quest to learn English.

Instituting English language learning programs through Korean cultural centers, Korean churches and other community-based efforts will likely be more effective in English instruction than classes open to the general public. Engaging the support of community leaders and elders will also be vital in the success of these programs.

Appendix: Korean-Born Population of the United States, 1980, 1990 and 2000

| | <u>1980</u> | <u>1990</u> | <u>2000</u> | <u>Change since '80</u> |
|-------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------------|
| Alabama | 1,436 | 2,221 | 3,548 | 147% |
| Alaska | 1,289 | 3,061 | 4,048 | 214% |
| Arizona | 2,160 | 4,606 | 8,075 | 274% |
| Arkansas | 570 | 827 | 1,329 | 133% |
| California | 83,180 | 200,194 | 268,452 | 223% |
| Colorado | 4,604 | 7,750 | 12,356 | 168% |
| Connecticut | 1,646 | 2,577 | 5,508 | 235% |
| Delaware | 360 | 878 | 1,577 | 338% |
| Dist. of Columbia | 254 | 562 | 879 | 246% |
| Florida | 4,322 | 8,585 | 16,313 | 277% |
| Georgia | 5,117 | 11,678 | 23,188 | 353% |
| Hawaii | 9,060 | 13,265 | 17,202 | 90% |
| Idaho | 494 | 505 | 1,142 | 131% |
| Illinois | 19,383 | 30,058 | 40,681 | 110% |
| Indiana | 3,208 | 3,442 | 6,226 | 94% |
| Iowa | 1,801 | 2,260 | 4,302 | 139% |
| Kansas | 2,298 | 3,029 | 3,553 | 55% |
| Kentucky | 1,879 | 2,082 | 3,734 | 99% |
| Louisiana | 1,537 | 2,042 | 2,114 | 38% |
| Maine | 412 | 469 | 565 | 37% |
| Maryland | 12,444 | 21,111 | 31,249 | 151% |
| Massachusetts | 4,648 | 7,574 | 13,456 | 190% |
| Michigan | 7,363 | 8,384 | 18,107 | 146% |
| Minnesota | 5,996 | 4,025 | 11,853 | 98% |
| Mississippi | 550 | 836 | 1,236 | 125% |
| Missouri | 2,909 | 3,330 | 5,506 | 89% |
| Montana | 235 | 232 | 770 | 228% |
| Nebraska | 755 | 1,217 | 2,075 | 175% |
| Nevada | 2,030 | 3,207 | 6,071 | 199% |
| New Hampshire | 451 | 815 | 1,582 | 251% |
| New Jersey | 10,679 | 27,534 | 51,970 | 387% |
| New Mexico | 618 | 983 | 1,327 | 115% |
| New York | 27,104 | 71,975 | 97,933 | 261% |
| North Carolina | 3,022 | 5,046 | 9,836 | 225% |
| North Dakota | 260 | 332 | 271 | 4% |
| Ohio | 6,011 | 7,388 | 11,411 | 90% |
| Oklahoma | 2,256 | 3,099 | 4,146 | 84% |
| Oregon | 4,235 | 5,467 | 10,488 | 148% |
| Pennsylvania | 10,497 | 16,699 | 26,703 | 154% |
| Rhode Island | 549 | 673 | 1,404 | 156% |
| South Carolina | 1,560 | 1,866 | 3,030 | 94% |
| South Dakota | 280 | 310 | 667 | 138% |
| Tennessee | 1,978 | 2,965 | 6,106 | 209% |
| Texas | 11,562 | 23,919 | 35,986 | 211% |
| Utah | 1,148 | 1,659 | 3,013 | 162% |
| Vermont | 235 | 236 | 588 | 150% |
| Virginia | 10,816 | 23,612 | 37,036 | 242% |
| Washington | 11,389 | 20,267 | 38,172 | 235% |
| West Virginia | 416 | 461 | 846 | 103% |
| Wisconsin | 2,382 | 2,921 | 6,075 | 155% |
| Wyoming | 228 | 163 | 420 | 84% |

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