

# Analyzing the effectiveness of Korean training with translation: Focusing on positive psychological change

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## ABSTRACT

This study sought to examine the potential positive effects of Korean translation assignments on the psychological well-being, including anxiety and stress, of mid-to-late adolescent immigrant youth. In this study, students were provided with Korean classes using reading materials with positive content, followed by assignments to translate these materials into their native languages. The results indicated that the task had a positive effect on the students' emotions. Participants indicated that the novel experience of translating Korean texts into their native languages was both engaging and resulted in positive emotional transformations, as well as heightened motivation to learn Korean. This research underscores the important correlation between utilizing positive reading materials and translation tasks in enhancing Korean language acquisition and fostering positive psychological outcomes.

**Keywords** Korean Language, Reading Education, Translation, Positive Psychology, Immigrant Youth

## Introduction

Korean language learners come to Korean language education for a variety of reasons and purposes. In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of people who have developed an interest in Korean culture, which has led to increased participation in Korean language learning.

However, this is not the case for mid-career immigrant youth. They move to Korea with their parents and are forced to learn Korean as a second language. Even though they have been learning and using Korean for a short period of time to prepare for university and employment, they are not satisfied with their Korean language skills and report many difficulties in school. Therefore, it is necessary to consider educational methods that can help them learn Korean with less anxiety and stress.

In the past, only people with significant mental problems would seek counseling or be interested in

psychological healing, but in recent years, stress management and mental health have become increasingly important to the general population. As a result, research is being conducted on the relationship between foreign language learning and psychological and emotional health.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the emotional relationship between Korean language education and emotional well-being among mid-career immigrant [youth]. The study aims to determine whether the translation tasks given to learners have an impact on psychological domains such as anxiety reduction or stress relief.

## Research

### Research with undocumented youth

Several studies have been conducted on the psychological domain of mid-immigrant youth since 2010. Kye-min, Yang and Hye-young, Cho (2010) conducted a study on the current status of psychological and social adjustment of mid-immigrant adolescents, and Kyung-sook, Jeon (2020) conducted a qualitative study on mid-immigrant adolescents' adjustment to Korean society. Ryoo et al. (2017) studied the relationship between mental health problems based on the pre- and post-migration experiences of adolescents

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who migrated to Korea. The results showed that depression and suicide were associated with adjustment to Korea after migration.

Additionally, thoughts and other negative emotions were explored. Lee et al. (2021) confirmed the relationship between art therapy and depression, anxiety, and stress among mid-career immigrant youth. Other studies have been conducted on anxiety and identity among mid-career immigrant youth. In Korean language education, Mi-Kang Kim and Young-Joo Kim (2021) found that self-esteem and self-efficacy (self-confidence) of mid-career immigrant adolescents had a significant relationship with Korean language mastery. However, most of the studies on mid-career immigrant youth have focused on their motivation to learn, teaching materials, and career paths. As such, there is little research on the relationship between Korean language education and psychological healing, which confirms the need for further research.

### **Researching the psychological connection to language learning**

Katalin Piniel and Agnes Albert (2018) found that language learners experience both positive and negative achievement-related emotions, cognitive emotions, thematic emotions, and social emotions, and that the two most frequent emotions are pleasure and anxiety. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) conducted a large-scale survey of 1,746 participants and found that learners experience pleasure more often than foreign language anxiety during language learning and argued that these two emotions should be treated as different dimensions of a continuum rather than as endpoints of a single continuum. In other words, enjoyment is not simply the absence of anxiety, and it is possible to be both enjoying and anxious.

In Korean language education, studies have also been conducted on the emotional relationship between Korean language learning and emotions. Geon-su Im and Hyun-Yong Cho (2023) investigated the psychological changes of Japanese Korean language learners after learning Korean. The results of the study showed that learning Korean increased their self-confidence and made them more active and passionate. They also improved their relationships with their families and reported feeling joy in their daily lives. Bong-woon Song (2023) investigated the relationship

between Korean language learning and psychological healing among Korean language learners in Myanmar and found positive results. Hyun-yong Cho (2023) surveyed learners in Africa and the Middle East and found that learning Korean was effective for healing. This confirms that learning Korean has a positive psychological impact and can even have healing effects. Psychology has already shown that reading and writing.

The relationship between language and psychological effects based on literary activities such as writing has been studied extensively. Therefore, this study aims to verify the emotional relationship between learning Korean and learning by reading and studying positive texts and translating them into the learners' native language.

### **Research methods**

#### **What to study**

This study focuses on Chinese immigrant adolescents from China who are Korean language learners. As previous studies have confirmed, unlike international students or general-purpose Korean learners, adolescents who migrate to Korea and learn Korean are psychologically unstable due to the influence of their families and surroundings. Therefore, they are the most suitable subjects to observe and study Korean learning and psychological changes.

The subjects of this study were learners who were able to read Korean reading materials and translate them into their native Chinese. The participants were four learners who had been in Korea for more than five years. The participants were all women in their twenties, enrolled in a university in Seoul or preparing to enter the workforce after graduation, and all had passed the TOPIK (Test of Proficiency in Korean) level 6. Before conducting the study, we explained the purpose and methodology of the study to the participants and obtained their consent to utilize their personal information, survey results, and interview contents for the study and informed them that they would not be used for any other purpose. The interviews were conducted in Korean.

**Table. 1.** Participant information

Participant	Participant information
B Learner	Lived in Korea for 6 years, obtained GED after arrival, Taking a leave of absence for the second year of D University
C Learner	Lived in Korea for 6 years, obtained GED after arrival, Taking a leave of absence for 4th year at J University, currently being treated for depression (medication)
K Learner	Lived in Korea for 10 years, obtained GED after arrival, Preparing to work after graduating from D University
L Learner	Lived in Korea for 12 years, attending graduate school after graduating from J University

## Research methods

At the beginning of the study, we conducted a survey to determine the learners' current stress levels, life satisfaction, positive and negative emotions, and their psychological state. The measurement tool used to check satisfaction with current life is the 'Life Satisfaction Scale' developed by Diener et al. (1985), but we used the 'Life Satisfaction Scale' by Jung- Ho, Kim (2007), which was adapted from it. To check positive and negative emotional states, we used the Positive/Negative Emotion Scale by Eun-mi Ko, Jung-ho Kim, and MiRihye Kim (2015), and the Stress Response Scale by Seung-mi Choi, Tae-Young Kang, and Jong-min Woo (2006).<sup>1</sup> To ensure accurate responses from the learners, all the questionnaires were translated into Chinese and presented in Korean.

After the survey, we conducted a full-scale translation Korean class. First, the learners were given one orientation session to inform them about the contents of the study, the teaching method, and the translation task, and to confirm their willingness to participate. After that, we conducted five online (ZOOM) classes once a week for about two hours for Korean reading, submission of translation tasks, and feedback.<sup>2</sup> We selected "Reading the World in Korean" by Hyun-Yong Choi (2016)<sup>3</sup>, which is designed to be used as a translation of Korean reading materials for classroom use as a reading textbook for intermediate-level learners and above. The selected textbook contains 65 short texts of about 3 paragraphs, which were selected based on the age and interest of the learners and the relevance of the research topic.

The content was considered and selected by the researcher. The purpose of this study is to determine whether there are psychological changes in learners

through learning a second language that they read and translate. Therefore, the contents were selected as appropriate.

Three days before each weekly Korean class, I shared the reading material for that class with the learners so that they could read it in advance and participate in the class. In class, we reviewed the main vocabulary and grammar of the reading material and read the text together from beginning to end to learn the content in detail. After the text was finished, I took questions from the learners and corrected any misunderstandings they had. Afterwards, the learners were encouraged to share their thoughts about the text by sharing their impressions and listening to the other learners' thoughts. Time was allowed for the stories to be finalized, and the class ended with an announcement about the assignment due date and the next class. After the class, learners had three days to submit their translation assignments in hwp or word files. The Chinese researcher checked the translation tasks submitted by the learners and provided feedback individually. They also responded to learners' questions about the feedback. The translation tasks were not intended to be accurate, but rather to check learners' understanding of the text. An example of the reading material and feedback is shown in Table 3 below.

After the translation Korean class, we conducted 1:1 interviews with all learners. The interviews were conducted online (ZOOM), recorded with the learners' consent, and transcribed.

**Table. 2.** Translated Korean lesson progression

Share pre-class readings
↓
Korean reading lessons

<sup>1</sup> All three surveys are presented on a 7-point Likert scale.

<sup>2</sup> The online class ran for 5 weeks in January-February 2024, and absentees received 1:1 private lessons with the same content.

<sup>3</sup> Cho Hyun-yong (2016)'s "Reading the World in Korean" is designed for Japanese learners. However, both the text and key vocabulary are in Korean, so it can be utilized regardless of the learner's nationality.

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graph TD
    A[ ] --> B[Submit translation assignments]
    B --> C[Individualized feedback on translation assignments]
    C --> D[Questions and answers about feedback]
    style A fill:none,stroke:none
    style D fill:none,stroke:none
  
```

[illegible]

## Research findings

**Table. 4.** Part of the questionnaire for 'Life satisfaction'

**Table. 5.** Part of the questionnaire for ‘Positive/Negative Sentiment’

'Positive sentiment' questions	B Learner	C Learner	K Learner	L Learner
Joy	4	1	5	5
Satisfaction	2	1	5	5
Pride	2	1	4	5

'Negative sentiment' questions	B Learner	C Learner	K Learner	L Learner
Anxiety	1	7	2	3
Depressed	1	7	1	4
Guilt	1	7	2	4

**Table 6.** Part of the questionnaire for 'Stress response'

Question	B Learner	C Learner	K Learner	L Learner
6. I fatigue easily.	2	7	2	5
7. I feel weak all over.	1	7	1	2
10. I'm demotivated.	1	7	4	2
11. My nerves are on edge.	1	7	4	2
12. What is the outlook for what I do? None.	1	7	2	3
13. I remain dazed.	1	7	1	5
14. My voice gets louder	1	7	5	2
15. If you're in a hurry or working, I feel like I'm being chased.	1	7	2	2
17. I have headache or pain.	1	7	2	5
18. My heart is pounding.	1	7	2	2
19. I feel bored.	2	7	1	2

Here are some of the learner interviews. The interviews helped us learn more about how learners feel about themselves and how they changed before and after the course.

All of the learners said that none of their previous general Korean classes <sup>4</sup> were particularly fun or memorable. However, they felt that the translated

Korean class was new and exciting because it was their first experience.

L Learner: I read some articles that I hadn't encountered before, and I think it changed my thinking a bit.

B Learner: It would be great if I could read something like this when I'm studying Korean. It's something I've thought about before, but after reading your post, I think it's true.

C Learner: This class was special because I'm a Chinese teacher, so it was very helpful and I'm satisfied.

K Learner: I think there were some things that I could relate to and some things that I could see that could happen.

Regarding the emotional difference between how they felt before and after the translation class and after performing the translation task, all learners responded positively. They said that translating good texts was stress-relieving and fun.

L Learner: (When I read by myself) I understood something roughly but not exactly, but when the teacher explained it to me, it was all solved. And I felt a little positive and stress-relieving while translating. And after seeing such a text (the text used in the class), I wanted to find some similar books and read them.

B Learner: I'm not sure if it's entirely positive or if it's just psychological since I've thought about it on my own before. But I do think it's good, and it would be nice for my friends to see it in Chinese.

C Learner: It's kind of hard to explain that thing where you read something and you change your mind, and it's kind of fun to translate it because it's kind of like, you know, you can combine other people's words with your own thoughts. It was fun to write something like that.

<sup>4</sup> Regular courses, liberal arts classes for international students, TOPIK classes, etc.

K Learner: When I'm stressed, I think it helps me a little bit to read something like this, and I know it's different for everyone, but....

Above, we can see that C Learner's response, "It's a little hard to explain how you change your mind," has a positive impact, but it means that it is difficult to explain in words.

Next, when asked about the translation activity, most of them reported some difficulties. The difficulties were related to thinking about and choosing appropriate vocabulary or expressions for the context. This is a difficulty that can be encountered when translating for the first time, but it was not found to be psychologically burdensome or uncomfortable.

L Learner: I think I'm a little bit more lacking in the language side, because when I translate, it's a little bit difficult to know how to do the exact words or the intonation or something like that because you have to convey that feeling in Chinese.

B Learner: I think I did a lot of double-checking when I was translating and making sure that it was sentences, that it was smooth, that it was correct. I think I was thinking, "How can I make this resonate with someone reading this in Chinese?"

C Learner: It was helpful to have a class with the teacher before translating, because she explained the words that I didn't understand and I realized that I was confused. When I finished translating, I thought, "Good job." There were a lot of things that I forgot because of the feedback from the Chinese teacher.

K Learner: It was a little hard to find the right words to convey the same good feelings I had when I translated it. I think this would be good for my friends who are wandering around, who can't get their feelings together, and I think it would be good for them to read something like this.

Learners said it was good to talk to other learners in class about their impressions. They also said that they would like to share and discuss their translations with other learners.

C Learner: After you write, if you can get together with your friends to discuss what you wrote, that would be great. Because it's really important to know

if it comes out the way you translated it or how you translated it. I'm also curious to know what other friends think because they might translate it a little differently than I do.

K Learner: I think it's kind of helpful to talk to my friends because then I can share what I've been feeling, and then I can see how other people might be feeling, and so it's like, you know, you can't really get to know something as richly by yourself, but you can get to know it more richly by talking to other people.

Two months after the translation Korean lessons and interviews were completed, we asked the learners if there was anything they still remembered after all this time. Two learners said they remembered the words 'tears', and one said 'smile'. It was clear that they remembered something that resonated with them and that they had translated themselves, even after three months.

In addition, all of the learners said they would like to participate in the Translated Korean class again and would recommend it to others. The reasons for this were that they were interested in the new activity of translating into their native language, which was different from their regular Korean classes, and that it helped to improve their motivation and willingness to learn. In particular they would like to participate in more than five sessions and would like to participate for a longer period of time, such as six months or more, even if it is once or twice a month. This is because the learners themselves clearly feel that the program is helpful and that it will not only help them improve their Korean language skills but also have a positive psychological impact on them. These learners' responses confirm that the translation task activity is having a positive impact on both their emotions and their Korean language learning.

## **Conclusion**

This study examines whether performing a Korean translation task has an impact on psychological domains such as anxiety reduction or stress reduction in mid-adult immigrant youth.

The participants of the study were adolescent Korean learners from China. They migrated to Korea in their adolescence and experienced intense stress and anxiety to adapt to the new society. Although the learners in this study have been living in Korea for more than five years,

they still experience anxiety and stress in their lives, which was confirmed through questionnaires and interviews. Therefore, we selected five reading materials with positive emotional themes and gave them a reading lesson once a week, translated them into Chinese, their native language, and submitted them as assignments. After all the lessons were completed, we conducted 1:1 individual interviews with the learners to talk about the changes they felt. All of the learners were satisfied with the content of the reading material and were happy that the translation assignment was given after the reading class. Although they had difficulty finding the most appropriate vocabulary and expressions for the translation task, they felt satisfied after completing the task, were interested in new activities, and found it helpful in relieving stress. They would like to participate in the Translation Korean class again if it is offered again and requested a longer course.

These findings suggest that Korean learners performing translation tasks are more likely to use the language effectively, which can lead to a positive impact on the learners' emotions. However, it was not easy to recruit participants with an advanced level of Korean language proficiency to translate from Korean to their native language for this study. In addition, the purpose of this study is to conduct basic research to confirm the psychological effect of Korean translation assignments for Immigrant Youth, who have not been examined before. To this end, the participants were limited to one nationality to ensure not only homogeneity but also smooth communication and accurate feedback between the researcher and the participants during the interviews, which lead small participants for this study. Therefore, that is a limitation of this study. However, since this study confirmed that translation assignments had a positive effect on Korean learners' psychology, it would be meaningful to conduct a long-term study with participants of various nationalities in the future. The comparison between the groups that performed the translation assignments and those that did not will be the subject of the next research.

### **Acknowledgements**

None

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare no conflicting financial interests.

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