SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT IN PEER CULTURE BY
TWO KOREAN CHILDREN NEWLY ENROLLED IN U.S. PRESCHOOLS:
TOWARDS PRESCHOOLS WHERE EVERY VOICE MATTERS
by
JOOEUN OH
(Under the Direction of Kyunghwa Lee)

ABSTRACT

This study explores two Korean children’s social engagement in peer culture at two U. S. preschools with no or few peers from the same cultural linguistic background. Drawing on theoretical frameworks that include cultural psychology, the Bakhtinian notion of dialogism, and Michel de Certeau’s ideas of “tactics of the weak,” I perceive social engagement as a cultural process of participation in the meaning making process and the Korean children as capable of communicating with others and taking control of their lives. Using ethnographic methods, data were derived from observations of the children; field notes; video-cued interviews with the children; interviews with their teachers and caregivers; and video- and audio-recordings over a research period of one academic year.

This study describes how the Korean children developed various non-verbal strategies for communicating with their peers and creative tactics for gaining advantage by disrupting the social order that situated them as “the weak.” Findings highlight that the Korean children were not only being influenced by the culture in their classrooms but also contributed to the on-going construction of peer culture and class norms. The children in this study perceived clean-up time
and some of their peers as having special characteristics for satisfying their needs and supporting their social engagement. The findings suggest that we need more studies of cultural linguistic minority children’s unique ways of social engagement in order to find better ways to support the children in taking active part in their classroom communities.

INDEX WORDS: Social Engagement; Peer Culture; Cultural linguistic minority children; Korean children; Preschool; Non-verbal communication; Tactics of the weak; Clean-up time; Friendship; Ethnographic study
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

“Meaning making involves situating encounters with the world in their appropriate cultural contexts in order to know ‘what they are about.’ Although meanings are ‘in the mind,’ they have their origins and their significance in the culture in which they are created…. It is culture that provides the tools for organizing and understanding our world in communicable ways.”

–Bruner in The Culture of Education

When young children enter preschool for the first time, they encounter a new public world of school that moves them beyond the familiar world of home. Each individual child meets a group of people—peers and teachers—at school and begins to communicate with them in order to understand and engage in the world. Ann Swidler (1986), a cultural sociologist who has studied both how people construct culture and how it shapes human life, describes the role of culture as providing a repertoire or “toolkit” that helps people construct “strategies of action” and engage in the social world (p. 273).

This dissertation pays attention to the cultural linguistic minority children who do not have access to the same tools used by their peers from the dominant culture. Bruner (1996) noted that culture provides “the tools for organizing and understanding our world in communicable ways” (p. 3). However, the cultures of cultural linguistic minority children may equip these children with different “tools.” Their use of different languages and actions in certain contexts could lead to misunderstandings and make it hard for them to negotiate
meanings in order to engage in the social world. Therefore, cultural linguistic minority
children’s engagement in the social world is perhaps the process of their search for and creation
of the right tools that work for both themselves and other children. This dissertation was
designed to explore the tools used by cultural linguistic minority children in mainstream U.S.
preschools and to find better ways to understand and support these tools: their strategies of action
for negotiating meanings and engaging in peer activities, and their tactics for gaining control of
their lives.

In L. Frank Baum’s (2012) novel, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, a girl named Dorothy
meets three characters: the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman, and the Cowardly Lion. They join in
Dorothy’s journey to Oz in order to obtain what they seek (a brain, a heart, and courage) as a
means of living. Following their journey, readers understand that such “tools” for living are not
only given but are also created and developed. The three characters are very cautious, because
they think that they lack something other people take-for-granted. “You people with hearts, have
something to guide you, and need never do wrong; but I have no heart, and so I must be very
careful” (p. 113). The Tin Woodman says that people with a heart live with its guidance—
whether they are aware of it or not, but people like him have to make constant efforts to live
without the taken-for-granted tool’s help.

In my dissertation, I am concerned with children, like these three characters in Baum’s
story, who are aware of their different cultural linguistic tools for living in the mainstream world.
Just as L. Frank Baum helped his readers see the principle characters’ own ways of overcoming
their great challenges, I aim to guide the readers of my dissertation to see two young Korean
children’s agency and capability in their experiences at two mainstream U.S. preschools. I
intend to describe their careful attempts to communicate and interact with their peers and their creation of tools for social engagement.

While living in the U.S. for the last seven years, I have observed many young children in my Korean community who have gone through the challenging process of social engagement at U.S. preschools. My daughters also had a hard time adjusting to their school and engaging in peer activities when they were first enrolled in a U.S. preschool. As many parents and teachers assume, I thought that their limited English fluency might be the only issue in their school adjustment. However, while reviewing the related literature on children’s peer culture and peer relationships, I realized that engagement in the social world at school requires complex strategies, which are sensitive to the peer culture and the cultural tools used in that peer culture.

From the literature review and reflections on my children’s experiences, I recognized that studying children’s social engagement should be about their agency, their everyday attempts and efforts to gain control of their social lives. I also learned the importance of negotiating and sharing meanings in children’s lives. For this reason, the current study intentionally focuses on the Korean children’s agency and capability that appeared in their interactions with peers from the dominant culture.

This dissertation study appreciates and highlights the strengths that cultural linguistic minority students bring with them to negotiate new environments. There have been several terms used in academia to indicate children from non-dominant cultures, including ethnic minority, racial minority, immigrant, transmigrant, migrant, ELL (English Language Learners), socially disadvantaged, or culturally deprived. Each term has presented slightly different focuses for categorizing the children and often portrayed different images of the children. Because my study focuses on children whose home language, meanings, and cultural practices are different
from a majority of the children in their schools, I use the term “cultural linguistic minority children” and highlight their own ways of communicating and constructing shared meanings with their peers from the dominant culture. When these children are at the center of research in academia or in schools, the focus has mostly been on their maladjustment problems or their special needs. For example, many studies on cultural linguistic minority children’s school adjustment (de Feyter & Winsler, 2009; Zhou, 1997) have mainly focused on their limited language skills and cultural knowledge and, as a result, the social and emotional challenges each child experiences at school as a cultural-linguistic minority. Although these studies have highlighted the importance of teachers’ support in responding to cultural linguistic minority children’s needs, the studies have tended to focus on what those children cannot do rather than what they can do and overemphasize immediate adult interventions rather than the attempts children make to meet their own needs. This dissertation study suggests that teachers and researchers change the focus of their effort from working on what the children cannot do to working with what the children can do by highlighting how the two Korean children are capable of negotiating meanings and co-constructing peer culture.

The title of this study, *Social Engagement in Peer Culture by Two Korean Children Newly Enrolled in U.S. Preschools*, acknowledges children’s social engagement as a cultural process in which negotiation and construction of shared meanings occur among children (Bruner, 1986; Corsaro, 1997; Göncü, 1999; Rogoff, 2003). I use the term *social engagement* rather than the term *socialization* in order to highlight children’s agency. Gaskins (1999) argued that children’s social development should be understood through detailed case studies of children’s engagement in daily activities, in particular cultural systems, and not by simple descriptions of the children’s activities. I studied cultural linguistic minority children’s engagement in everyday
peer activities, which shaped and was shaped by peer culture in their preschool classrooms. I designate this phenomenon as children’s social engagement in peer culture.

Theoretically, this study is framed by several perspectives. First, from cultural psychology I became aware that social learning (like other human learning) is “situated in a cultural setting” and “dependent upon the utilization of cultural resources” (Bruner, 1996, p. 4). In this study I conceptualized the preschool classroom as a cultural setting and examined children’s strategies for social engagement in that cultural setting. Second, French sociologist Michel de Certeau’s (1984) ideas of “tactics of the weak”—plays of the weak to turn “the actual order” of the strong to “their own ends” (p. 37)—provided me with a frame to highlight cultural linguistic minority children’s agency. De Certeau also taught me how ethnographic observations of the children’s everyday practices and understanding the contexts and the meanings of these practices are important. Finally, Bakhtin’s (1981) dialogism gave me a metalinguistic definition of language, focusing more on dialogic exchanges of meanings and values. It guided me to explore cultural linguistic minority children’s various nonverbal communications for social engagement as their languages. It also helped me perceive the children’s social engagement as dialogic attunement, not as a one-way adjustment.

The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of cultural linguistic minority children’s engagement in peer culture in U.S. preschools, particularly through the experiences and voices of two newly enrolled Korean children. The research questions were as follows:

1. What are the Korean children’s strategies of action for negotiating and sharing meanings with their peers and engaging in the peer culture?

---

1 I discuss each of the frameworks in detail in Chapter 2.
- How are these children’s strategies of communication and social engagement in accordance with or in conflict with peer culture and classroom norms?
- How do these children’s strategies of action contribute to the construction of peer culture and norms in their classrooms?

2. What “tactics” (de Certeau, 1984) are used by the Korean children?
- How are these tactics used by the children to gain control of their lives in spite of their seeming weaknesses and disadvantages?
- How do these children’s tactics challenge the established order in the classroom norms and peer culture?

**Literature Review**

In recent decades, a number of researchers have argued that human development should be understood as a cultural process (Bruner, 1986; Corsaro, 1997; Rogoff, 2003). These scholars emphasized that children’s active participation in cultural practices is critical to their development and that children are not passive receivers of the traditions transmitted to them. Bruner (1986), in particular, suggested that studying young children’s negotiation and construction of shared meanings helps us understand their social engagement in larger society. As spaces of investigating this emphasis on “the importance of negotiating and sharing” (Bruner, 1986, p. 127) in understanding childhood social engagement, preschool settings have been important research sites. In preschool, researchers have studied how young children enter into a social system and establish shared understandings focusing on peer interactions (Chung, 2003; Corsaro, 1981, 1985; Corsaro & Rizzo, 1990; Elgas, 2003; Elgas, Klein, & Kantor, 1988; Evaldsson & Tellgren, 2009; Williams, 2001). These scholars valued preschool as a crucial setting where young children develop social conceptions and practice negotiation and sharing
through active play interactions. For example, Corsaro (1985, 1994, 2003), in his ethnographic studies of preschool children’s peer interactions, found that children collectively construct their own norms and values for social interactions based on their creative interpretations of culture and social order. These norms and values were referred to as peer culture, which I will further elaborate in the following section. This line of research on preschool children highlighted the critical importance of peer interaction in children’s social engagement.

While the studies of peer culture shed light on young children’s agency in constructing shared meanings and gaining control of their lives, it has been noted that children from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds have been overlooked in this line of research (Feng, Foo, Kretschmer, Prendeville & Elgas, 2004; Kim, 2009; Lee & Walsh, 2003). According to recent data, approximately one sixth of pre-kindergarteners in the United States are foreign born or U.S. born with immigrant parents (Clifford, Barbarin, Chang, Early, Bryant, & Howes, 2005). Despite the significant and growing numbers of children of recent immigrants, too little research has been conducted on the experience of immigrant children in preschool settings (Tobin & Kurban, 2010).

Considering the recent research interest in children’s socialization and acculturation in preschools, it is surprising that there has been so little attention paid to cultural linguistic minority preschoolers, who experience significant challenges in social and cultural learning as they move from home to school. Tobin and Kurban (2010) highlighted both the need for research on immigrant preschoolers and the importance of preschools as “the single most salient sites” where immigrant children’s home culture and the culture of the larger society meet. According to my search\(^2\), to date, there has been no research that explores cultural linguistic

\(^2\) I searched literature in the ERIC database and in the University library system using keywords such as young children, preschool, socialization, peer culture, peer interaction, play, play entry, immigrant children or ESL or ELL.
minority children’s own perspectives about their experiences at U.S. preschools and the way they form social relationships with peers.

**Children’s Peer Culture**

**The concept of peer culture.** Researchers who took ethnographic approaches for understanding young children’s social world at schools found that, just like their adult counterparts, children also construct their own peer culture (Corsaro, 1981, 1985; Corsaro & Eder, 1990; Corsaro & Miller, 1992; Corsaro & Nelson, 2003; Corsaro & Rizzo, 1990; Elgas, 2003; Elgas, Klein, & Kantor, 1988; Evaldsson & Tellgren, 2009; Williams, 2001). Corsaro (1979) defined children’s peer culture as “a stable set of activities or routines, artifacts, values, and concerns that children produce and share in interaction with peers” (p. 95).

Children’s peer culture is produced in accordance with their cultural knowledge and beliefs derived from the adult world. However, children interpret adult culture through their own perspectives and creatively reproduce it as a unique child culture in order to protect their peer interactions, gain control of their lives, and even challenge adult rules that regulate their actions and interactions. Corsaro (2003) termed the construction of children’s peer culture as “interpretive reproduction” (p. 126). Unlike the notions of social and cultural reproduction (e.g., Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), the idea of “interpretive reproduction” highlights children’s agency not to sustain or passively imitate adult norms and values but to initiate creative changes for themselves. Corsaro argued that this peer culture even contributes to the wider culture of other children and adults. In other words, the notion of children’s interpretive reproduction suggests that peer culture is a bridge between the child and the larger culture of society. Therefore, studying how a cultural linguistic minority child engages in a peer culture can help us understand the child’s social engagement both at micro- and macro-levels.
Themes of peer culture. There are two major themes of peer culture (Corsaro, 1997). First, *doing things together with each other* without interruption is a primary concern in young children’s peer culture. However, their peer interactions are perceived to be fragile, as there are many possible disruptions and intrusions from other children and adults. Therefore, children tend to protect an interactive space of ongoing play, and tension develops between a child seeking access and children wanting to exclude others. Many studies of peer culture have documented how children gain access to ongoing play and protect play activities by including or excluding some of their peers (Aydt & Corsaro, 2003; Elgas, 2003; Elgas et al., 1988; Evaldsson & Tellgren, 2009; Feng et al., 2004; Lee & Walsh, 2003). Corsaro (1979), through ethnographic observations of children in a university nursery school, identified fifteen play access rituals ranging from nonverbal (nonverbal entry, disruptive entry, encirclement, and producing a variant of the ongoing action) to verbal strategies (request for access, questioning participants, reference to adult authority, offering of objects, reference to affiliation, reference to individual characteristics, suggesting another activity, accepting invitations, and aid from non-participants, making a claim on an area or object). He found that children usually began with nonverbal strategies that involved a lower risk of rejection, although the attempts were often denied the first time. He acknowledged that the nonverbal strategy of producing a variant of the ongoing play action was the most successful strategy for gaining access, while the verbal request for access (e.g., “Can I join?”) was at a higher risk for rejection. He also found that, when confronting resistance to their access attempts, children develop complex access strategies (e.g., multiple nonverbal and verbal strategies) that allow them to enter and share play. Elgas and her colleagues conducted a series of studies in a university preschool serving three- to five-year-olds (Elgas, 2003; Elgas et al., 1988; Feng et al., 2004). The researchers utilized videotaping, daily
participant observation, interviews, and teacher notes to study peer culture. Their findings indicated that the preschool children structured and participated in several sub-peer groups and that play objects played an important part in gaining entry into a particular peer group.

It is notable that some strategies used to include and exclude friends or intruders were shown to overlap (Elgas et al., 1988; Feng et al., 2004). For example, the possession of objects that were used to indicate membership was also utilized as a strategy to exclude other children (Feng et al., 2004). Evaldsson and Tellgren (2009) conducted an ethnographic research study combined with video recordings of play interaction in a Swedish preschool. The study investigated multiple interactive and cultural resources used by both the girls excluding others from play and the girls seeking to resist social exclusion. The verbal request “can I join, which was indicated as being at higher risk for rejection by Corsaro (1979), was frequently used among the children as an access strategy as teachers also encouraged the children to use it. Seeking the teacher’s help and referencing the adult-based school rule, “everyone can join,” were also used as entry strategies. The girls in this study displayed complex communicative competencies (e.g., verbal rejections to requests for access, opposition, ignorance, justification, and directives) to collaboratively exclude other children. For example, to define a player as a non-ratified participant, the girls utilized play characters or play scripts (e.g., the role of a mother who just died) as resources for social exclusion. In addition, some studies indicated that children used gender, ethnicity, language, and individual characteristics to establish boundaries in their peer groups and display group identity (Aydt & Corsaro, 2003; Evaldsson & Tellgren, 2009; Lee & Walsh, 2003). For example, Aydt and Corsaro (2003) acknowledged that gender was used to determine a child’s inclusion or exclusion. Evaldsson and Tellgren (2009) observed that individual characteristics, such as age and size, were used by the focal girls to exclude others.
Lee and Walsh (2003) found that nationality and language affected the formation of peer groups more than race did in a culturally and linguistically diverse afterschool program.

A second theme of peer culture is children’s desire to challenge adult authority and norms for gaining control of their lives. When preschool children begin interacting with one another and developing their own peer culture, they find that there are adult rules that closely regulate their actions and interactions. Therefore, children attempt to resist adult rules in order to gain control of their lives (Corsaro, 1985). Corsaro (2001) discussed children’s collective resistance to adult rules, adopting Goffman’s (1961) notion of “secondary adjustment.” He documented children’s patterns of secondary adjustment that involved avoiding clean-up time (i.e., moving to another area, pretending not to hear the announcement, and claiming personal problems such as feigned illness) and concealing forbidden objects (e.g., small toys or candy). He suggested that the secondary adjustments are, for the children, important moments in which they see themselves in opposition to teachers and form the basic “conception of the teacher-student relationship” (p. 23). In another ethnographic study conducted in two Swedish preschools, Markstrom and Hallden (2009) also observed that the preschool children developed some strategies for managing school regulations and accounting for personal autonomy: the strategies of silence and avoidance (i.e., similar to the strategy “pretending not to hear”), negotiation, collaboration, and partial acceptance. The data showed that the children understood the teacher’s intentions behind rules and used the knowledge for negotiating other options. Furthermore, the children were shown to collaborate to support one another’s negotiations with the teacher. Markstrom and Hallden’s study captured the image of an active child who was seen as capable of capturing adults’ implicit intentions embedded in rules and of negotiating with adults. In addition to the advocacy of the active child, the study also suggests that, through joint
interactions, preschool children can contribute to change or even transformation of the rules and social order of the school.

Similarly, children in Chung’s study (2003) could understand implicit rules that varied in contexts, communicate the rules, and use the rules for interacting with peers or solving problems. She studied the children in a university childcare center in Illinois using the interpretive approach as her methodology. She recognized that understanding classroom rules required children to be sensitive to contexts, space, and interpersonal relationships in the classroom. While communicating explicit and implicit rules in various ways, the children were involved in the “complicated process of socialization” (p. 23). This study highlighted the importance of children’s relations with classroom rules in their socialization.

In short, research focused on children’s peer culture has shown that children’s conceptions of rules vary; rules guide children, help their interactions, and become resources for solving problems (Chung, 2003; Evaldsson & Tellgren, 2009; Williams, 2001), but mostly rules regulate children’s actions and intrude on their peer interactions (Corsaro, 2001; Evaldsson & Tellgren, 2009; Markstrom & Hallden, 2009). Importantly, children conceptualize rules as context-based (Chung, 2003; Markstrom & Hallden, 2009) and, thus, negotiable. The studies showed that children could jointly contribute to a change in the rules. Therefore, the findings of these studies shed light on young children’s ability to challenge adult authority and gain control of their lives.

**Research on Cultural linguistic minority Children**

Young children who are crossing borders by moving from their home country to another country have been overlooked in the line of research on peer culture. As noted earlier, Tobin and Kuban (2010) called for further research on these children’s experiences. However, only a few
studies have examined young cultural linguistic minority children’s peer interactions (e.g., Cromdal, 2001; Feng et al., 2004; Kim, 2009; Lee & Walsh, 2003; Meyer, Klein & Cenishi, 1994). For example, Feng et al. (2004) investigated how peer culture among a group of Mandarin-speaking preschoolers (two girls and one boy) was created and maintained in an English dominant context, a university childcare center in the United States. Focusing on children’s social interactions, data were collected by video recording and participant observation. They found that the children’s first language played a critical role in the formation of their own peer culture. Their first language was not only a tool of communication but was also a marker of group identity, a tool of exclusion, and a tool of forming their peer culture (i.e., shared play themes, routines, and play roles). This finding suggested that the Mandarin-speaking children preferred their own ethnic and linguistic peer group, because their shared language and culture made their peer culture more exciting, unique, and rich. Meyer, Klein, and Genishi (1994) also found that, in a similar setting, four Korean girls sat together, interacted in Korean, and imitated one another’s actions throughout the school year. The findings indicate that shared language and cultural knowledge is crucial in peer grouping.

Lee and Walsh (2003) examined how culture and language influence children’s peer relations in a multicultural and multilingual afterschool program. They also found that nationality and language more than race strongly influenced the formation of peer groups and the characteristics of peer interactions in each peer group. For example, cross-gender and cross-age play within national and linguistic boundaries were more likely in limited English-speaking groups than in fluent English groups. Cromdal (2001) studied bilingual children’s procedures for entering play activities in a bilingual preschool. He found bilingualism to be a resource in children’s play entry. The children in his study used their bilingual abilities for various
purposes, such as forming alliances, building oppositions, and excluding other children. These studies indicated that the use of a language other than the dominant language can be a resource in peer culture and peer interaction for cultural linguistic minority children.

However, it is notable that the children in the aforementioned studies were in settings where the use of their first language was relatively unconstrained (e.g., a bilingual setting, an afterschool program, a heritage language school) and that contacts with a group of peers from the same cultural and linguistic communities were available. I could not find any study on peer interactions of a sole cultural linguistic minority child placed in an English speaking preschool classroom. This lack of research has also been noticed by other scholars (Feng et al., 2004; Tobin & Kurbon, 2010). Feng et al. (2004) indicated that their findings on the role of first language might be different for single cultural linguistic minority children in English dominant classrooms. They stated that it is common for young cultural linguistic minority children “to be thrown into English-speaking environments with no peers who share their language and their culture” (p. 33). They called for researchers’ attentions to this group of cultural linguistic minority children. In this dissertation study, I intended to close this gap in the existing research literature. I studied Korean children who have recently enrolled in U.S. preschool classrooms with no or few Korean peers.

Methodology

Ethnography

The main purpose of research on children’s peer culture is to understand the world of children from their perspectives. Ethnography is considered a useful methodology for this purpose. As many interpretive researchers, who worked with children in recent decades, have shown (Corsaro 1985; Dyson, 1997; Graue & Walsh, 1998), a carefully designed ethnographic
study allows adult researchers studying children to get into their world, develop close relations with them, and observe their everyday lives in detail. In particular, Corsaro (2006) suggested that “[e]thnography is an excellent method for studying young children because many features of their interactions and peer cultures are produced and shared in the present and cannot easily be obtained by way of interviews, surveys, or experiments” (p. 97).

Ethnography was developed by early anthropologists as “a way to understand ‘natives’ in their own culture” (Prasad, 2005, p. 75). Ethnography systematically describes the lived experiences in a cultural place (Greenfield, 1997) through intensive fieldwork and high levels of researcher involvement with participants (Prasad, 2005). In order to present local meanings and insiders’ views of a culture, a researcher’s “deep engagement over time with a culture” is expected in ethnographic fieldwork (Preissle & Grant, 2004, p. 165). Another central feature of ethnography is the search for patterns within everyday life (Graue & Walsh, 1998). Ethnography is deeply committed to understanding the cultural context in which daily practices take place (Prasad, 2005). Therefore, ethnography has often been used by cultural psychologists, as they emphasize the relation between practices and beliefs and identify the cultural meanings in that relation.

My study aims to understand the patterns of two Korean children’s engagement in peer culture in contexts. Geertz (1973) argued that ethnographic interpretation of meanings is available only with “thick description” (p. 4) of culture, which is “a context” of an insider’s actions (p. 14). In fact, he claimed that “ethnography is thick description” (p. 9), which requires researchers’ “microscopic” (p. 21) observations and descriptions of “small matters” (p. 21) that compose a context of one’s actions in order to interpret meanings of the actions within the culture itself. Through thick description of the Korean children’s everyday classroom lives, I
intend to understand the peer culture in each classroom, the strategies for social engagement and tactics used by the Korean children, and the procedures of negotiating and sharing meanings among the children.

**Research Methods and Procedures**

**Participant observation.** In this study, I used ethnographic participant observation aiming to take a close look at children’s everyday lives (Preissle & Grant, 2004). Corsaro (1985) used a “reactive strategy” (i.e., entering children’s spaces and reacting to them only when approached or questioned by the children) for his observations (p. 28). The reactive strategy brought many informal interactions and conversations between Corsaro and the children, and those interactions and informal conversations became a part of the rich data used in his studies. I adopted Corsaro’s reactive strategy in order to be attentive to children but not to intervene in their interactions and relationships.

I began observing one Korean boy, Hyunsoo*3, in the first week of October 2011 and one Korean girl, Yeji, in the second week of November 2011. I spent one day a week in each of their classrooms and continued my observations until the end of the school year in May 2012. Each child was observed a total of 15 times. In order to gain basic understandings of the participating children’s school lives, I observed the children for the whole school day during the first month of data collection. After the first month, my observations focused more on in-class playtime, snack time, and transition times. Although the social interactions of the participating children were my main focus, play interactions among other children in the classrooms were also recorded in order to understand how the focal children’s peer interactions were situated in the flow of classroom lives. During the observations, I paid attention to children’s verbal and nonverbal interactions as well as the particular situations and contexts of the interactions. These field notes were typed

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*3 All names of the people and schools in this dissertation are pseudonyms.
and organized with a brief memo after each observation. The children’s social interactions were video-recorded. Segments of video-clips were used to interview the focal children as detailed below.

**Interviews.** Interviewing by a researcher, who shares the participating children’s native language, was crucial for these linguistic minority children, because it gave them chances to verbally express their feelings and thoughts about peer interaction episodes in their own terms. I intended to give the children opportunities to review their experiences and share their views by adopting the “video-cued ethnography” Tobin and his colleagues used in their study of preschools in three countries (Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009, p. 15). Video-cued ethnography is a methodology in which participants are shown a set of video recordings that contain their actions, and the participants are asked to provide contexts, reflections, and explanations. Tobin et al. (2009) suggested that the videotapes capture actions, but video-cued ethnography makes it possible for researchers to capture *practice*, which is “action plus intention” (p. 19). Therefore, by adopting this methodology, I intended to capture the Korean children’s intentions embedded in their “tactics” (de Certeau, 1984) and attempts used for social engagement.

In their study, Tobin and his colleagues (2009) used the video-cued ethnography mainly to interview adults: the teachers and school administrators. This approach is also appropriate for young children, because I found that children are fascinated by watching themselves in video-recordings and eager to talk about the events. Clarke (2005) also suggested that “a living record of young children’s lives” (p. 494), such as photographs, could provide a platform for communication between adults and preschool children.

I interviewed each participating child a total of four times from November 2011 to May 2012. The children’s interviews were conducted at several places (at each child’s home, at a
playroom in a church, at a neighborhood playground) where the children felt comfortable. I prepared some snacks and play materials to help them feel comfortable and enjoy the interviews. At the interview, each participating child watched video recordings of his or her peer interactions and had a non-structured conversation with me. I used questions, such as: “Who is there [in the scene]?”; “What is happening?”; “Why are you/the children [in the scene] acting like that?”; and “What do you think/feel about this happening?” Their comments were audio-recorded and transcribed after each interview.

In addition, the participating children’s parents and teachers were interviewed to attain additional information about the children. Each child’s teacher was interviewed at the beginning and at the end of the school year (for a total of two times) about the child’s general adjustment and friendships in school. Each interview took approximately thirty to sixty minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. I had informal conversations with each child’s parents several times to hear how they felt about their child’s school lives. The conversations were not audio-recorded, but I took notes on some of the information I gathered from each conversation.

Participants and Settings

The focal participants of this study were two Korean children who were enrolled in U.S. preschools in a university town of a southeastern state. I chose the Korean children, because I, a Korean researcher, and the children shared a primary language and communicated freely. Below, I briefly describe each participating child and the school setting.

**Yeji and New Hope Learning Center.** Yeji is a Korean girl living with her father, a computer technician working at a state university; her mother, a former ESL teacher at an elementary school in Korea; and her sister, a first-grader enrolled at a public elementary school.
Yeji’s family moved to the United States in 2001. Yeji was born in the United States in February 2008, but the first time Yeji was exposed to an English-speaking environment was in the fall of 2010. At that time, she attended a mother’s morning out class (a three-hour childcare program) at New Hope Learning Center twice a week for three months. Then, she left the school during the spring of 2011 in order to visit her grandparents in Korea. After she came back in November 2011, Yeji reenrolled in a three-year-old class at the preschool. The New Hope Learning Center was a small church-run preschool, which had six classes of eight to twelve children per class. All of the teachers, including the coordinator at the center, were European-American females. In Yeji’s three-year-old class, there were two teachers, Ms. Betty, a lead teacher, and Ms. Carry, an assistant teacher. They both had worked in the childcare center more than ten years. This class had seven boys and four girls. All of the children were European American except for Yeji. Yeji spoke only a few English words, such as yes and no, when she enrolled, but she seemed to understand most of her teachers’ directions.

**Hyunsoo and Bluefield Preschool.** Hyunsoo’s family moved to a university town in a southeastern state in July 2011, when he was three years and nine months old. Hyunsoo was living with his father, a Korean graduate student in a master’s program; his mother, a housewife; and his baby brother. Hyunsoo had been enrolled in Bluefield Preschool, a small church affiliated preschool, since August 2011. The school had mostly middle-class European American children and some Asian children. Each class had ten to thirteen children, including one or two Asian children from Korea or China. Hyunsoo’s classroom teachers were Ms. Sunny, a lead teacher, and Ms. Corny, an assistant teacher, and they both had their own children who attended preschools and elementary schools. Hyunsoo’s classroom had five boys and six girls. The class was a mixed-age group of three and four year olds. The majority of the children in his
classroom were White, except for one girl, Mia, a third-generation Asian-American, and another Korean boy, Jinu. Mia’s grandparents moved to the United States from a country in Southeast Asia, and her family used English at home. Jinu came to the United States from Korea in July 2009. He had been in this preschool for the past two years and was relatively fluent in English. Jinu seemed to already be in the established peer culture, having many friends in the classroom. Jinu mostly interacted with two other boys but not with Hyunsoo at the time when Hyunsoo was enrolled. Hyunsoo was able to understand and speak only some simple English words, such as yes, no, and toilet.

The two children’s families spoke Korean at home. Except at school, the children rarely had chances to communicate with others in English. The families were involved in the Korean community in the university town as members of Korean churches or the Korean graduate student association. Therefore, I occasionally had chances to meet with these children and their parents and had informal conversations with them at the Korean churches and on the university campus.

**The Researcher’s Role**

As described earlier, both the families of the participating children and I were involved in the same Korean community in a university town. Also, I had raised my two daughters in the same town as a Korean mother for seven years. Therefore, the families and I shared many similar life experiences and developed close relationships. My daughters began their early schooling in that town, and I witnessed the process of their school adjustment, moments of struggles and joy. These similarities and familiarities were both my strengths and limitations for studying the two focal children.
Prasad (2005) stated that ethnographers are required to develop close relationships with the people being studied and a strong familiarity with their culture. The similarities and the close relationships I developed with the families were helpful for building trust, communicating with them, and understanding their lives. However, these familiarities sometimes prevented me from questioning some cultural meanings embedded in particular practices that I might take for granted. Therefore, I tried to apply “the dual operation of making the familiar strange and the strange familiar” (Stigler, Shweder, & Herdt, 1990, p. 49) employed by ethnographers (e.g., Lubeck, 1996; Miller & Sperry, 1987). I employed the same approach in order to make the children’s world—which was strange to me, an adult researcher—familiar and their experiences as newly enrolled Korean children and their cultural reasoning—which seemed to be similar to my daughters’ cases—strange to me.

Another challenge was minimizing the researcher’s effects on the data. Each participating child and his or her teachers expected me to play a role for his/ her benefit. For example, the teachers sometimes wanted me to play a role as a translator between the teacher and the child or to help them discipline the child. The participating children wanted to speak Korean with me to express their thoughts and feelings and sometimes expected me to help solve their problems. I informed and reminded the teachers of my researcher role and my reactive strategy (i.e., reacting to a child only when requested). I tried to be attentive to the participating children’s interactions with me, and I recorded what they said or even requested from me. It became another good source of data for understanding their lives in the classrooms. While being attentive to the children’s requests, I still wanted to observe the children’s interactions for solving their own problems. To that end, I tried to be slow when I reacted to the children’s requests, except in the case of an emergency, which was rare. By employing this slow reaction, I
intended the children to feel that “she may not know how to solve this, because she is neither a teacher nor a child” and think of their own solutions. This slow reaction strategy worked in the way that I intended in many cases. After each visit, I reflected on the effects of interactions between the participating child and myself and accounted for them carefully in my memos.

**Data Analysis**

Graue and Walsh (1998) described data analysis as an on-going process. Interpretation starts from the beginning of data collection. In the field, I used a field note booklet, which had a comment section, and wrote down my emerging interpretations, thoughts, and questions. I used the comments on the generated data to identify themes for coding the data. I wrote a brief memo whenever I organized and typed my field notes. Also, I regularly reread the field notes and wrote my reflections as memos. When I selected some peer interaction episodes for the children’s interviews, I wrote a memo about why I selected particular episodes. These memos were used for the constant analysis of data.

For data analysis, I used the “constant comparative analysis” method (Butler-Kisber, 2010). This method is defined as a thematic form of qualitative data analysis that uses close-reading of the data and the “constant comparing and contrasting of units and categories” of the data (p. 33). I took analytic steps to reflect on my data generation and previous analysis and determined what I needed to do differently or focus on more for the next steps of data collection and analysis.4 I gradually changed some sub-research questions, data collection methods, and interview questions based on the results of the constant comparative analysis. For example, the topics in Chapter Five and Chapter Six were generated by the newly emerged sub-research questions.

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4 See Appendix A for the summary of corpus of my data.
Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation study is my story of two Korean children’s first year experiences at U.S. preschools. At the same time, it is a story of my experiences of learning how to listen to the children’s voices, how to see what I could not see before, and how to modify my understanding of learning and teaching by accounting for the children’s voices. I hope that this dissertation will guide my readers to join in the experiences of listening to children’s voices and learning their perspectives. To do this, I organized the dissertation in the following way:

Chapter 2 details the study’s theoretical frameworks—including cultural psychology, Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism, and de Certeau’s idea of “tactics of the weak,” which have guided me to appreciate children’s nonverbal communication, tactics, and bidirectional relationships between the children and peer culture.

Chapter 3 explores the children’s various nonverbal languages (strategies of communication) for engaging in peer culture. This chapter answers the first research question by examining how the children’s use of nonverbal languages is in accordance with or in conflict with peer culture and how their nonverbal languages contribute to the construction of peer culture.

Chapter 4 examines how the children use tactics to gain control of their lives. This chapter answers the second research question by exploring in what contexts the children use certain tactics and how the tactics challenge the established order in the classroom norms and the peer culture.

Chapters 5 and 6 examine why the children are better engaged at a particular class period and with certain peers from the children’s perspectives. The chapters discuss environmental and interpersonal factors affecting the children’s social engagements and explore the children’s
unique social needs, which seemed to be different from our general understanding. In particular, Chapter 5 describes the value of clean-up time from the children’s perspectives, while Chapter 6 explores what the children value as features of their friendships.

In the epilogue, I include final thoughts to summarize the findings and discuss the implications for early childhood research and practice.
“Sometimes they understand me; but sometimes they can’t really understand the way I am…. I would tell them [teachers] to understand how it feels to be an immigrant child. [If I were a teacher] I would try to listen to them [the children] and [not] rush them. Help them to be successful by giving them things they can do and not things they cannot do. Be patient and encourage them.”

--Rosario, 10-year-old Philippine girl in *The Inner World of the Immigrant Children*

Christina Igoa (1995), in her book *The Inner World of the Immigrant Children*, advised teachers and researchers that the first step for understanding cultural linguistic minority children is listening to them. Some may interpret this phrase as simply passing the problem of understanding on to the speaker: “If you speak, I will listen.” In other words, some educators may feel that it is hard to listen to cultural linguistic minority children due to their limited English skills and unfamiliar actions. For example, I have often heard teachers say, “The children tend to shut them down. It’s hard to let them speak.” “When they are upset, it’s hard to communicate with them.” “They often act rough, and it’s hard to understand the reason.” However, as the immigrant children in Igoa’s book underscored, teachers and researchers may understand cultural linguistic minority children when they listen to the children in the way they express themselves (e.g., non-verbal expressions, unique tactics used to engage with their peers, etc.).
Bruner (1990) described that it is the basic human desire and ability to communicate with significant others. Cultural linguistic minority children also consistently attempt to communicate and engage in the new social world of school even from their initial introduction. Sometimes, their attempts are seen as strange actions; the meanings behind such actions are rarely appreciated. This is not only because of the cultural linguistic differences between teachers and the children but also because of the absence of proper lenses to perceive the children’s ways of being and their unique strategies for communicating.

In this chapter, I share frameworks that have guided me in listening to and understanding two Korean children, newly enrolled in U. S. preschools, through their unique ways of social engagement. The frameworks include cultural psychology, Bakhtinian notion of dialogism, and de Certeau’s idea of tactics of the weak. The frameworks help us recognize bidirectional relationships between children and their peer culture and appreciate children’s various nonverbal languages and tactics. According to these frameworks, the cultural linguistic minority children are capable of negotiating meanings and contributing to the construction of children's peer culture.

**Cultural Psychology**

**Developmental Psychology and the Field of Early Childhood Education**

In the field of early childhood education (hereafter, the field), the discussion of how to teach has been guided by the discourses of who the child is and how child development and learning occur. The dominant discourse of child development in the field reflects the strong influence of the “three grand systems” of the twentieth century: Piaget, psychoanalysis, and learning theory (Damon, 2006, p. xv). Particularly in Piaget’s theory, the child is described as a human being who explores the world, constructs knowledge, and develops necessary skills on
his/her own. Child development in the grand developmental theories is understood as an individualistic process occurring in universal and linear ways (Bruner, 1986; Lee & Walsh, 2001).

This individualistic and universal notion of human development, however, has been critiqued (e.g., Bruner, 1986; Rogoff, 2003; Valsiner, 1997) because of its lack of attention to culture and history within and into which development occurs (Nisbett, 2007). These scholars argued for more systemic views for researching child development. As one such systemic approach, cultural psychology has received renewed attention as a framework that broadens the field’s dominant but limited discourse of child development and that provides meaningful implications for the field (Lee & Johnson, 2007).

**History of Cultural Psychology**

The historical roots of cultural psychology are found in the works of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scholars, such as Giambattista Vico, Wilhelm Dilthey, and Wilhelm Wundt (Cole, 1996; Shweder, Goodnow, Hatano, Levine, Markus, & Miller, 2006). As explained by Cole (1996), Vico was the leading opponent of rationalism and suggested that human nature must be understood through historical analysis. Similarly, Dilthey critiqued positivism in the human sciences, which explained phenomena in terms of cause and effect as in the natural sciences (Shweder et al., 2006). He argued that human nature and actions should be interpreted and analyzed in relation to all relevant (cultural, historical, and social) contexts. In addition, Wilhelm Wundt—the founder of psychology as a discipline—also believed that “one could not understand action by just looking at what people were doing in laboratories,” arguing for the need “to know history and culture” along with biology (Nisbett, 2007, p. 837). Wundt imagined two psychologies: first, experimental psychology and, second, cultural psychology (Cole, 1996).
However, only Wundt’s first psychology, focusing on biology and evolution, was widely accepted by dominant psychologists in the last century, and his second psychology, focusing on culture, was overlooked (Bruner, 1996; Lee & Walsh, 2004).

Since the 1980s, cultural psychology has experienced “a major revival” in response to critiques of universalism and “methodological individualism” in the dominant experimental psychology (Nisbett, 2007, p. 838) and in search of a unit of analysis that is larger than the individual (Bruner, 1986, 1996; Cole, 1996; Goodnow, Miller, & Kessel, 1995; Hatano & Miyake, 1991; Lee & Walsh, 2004; Rogoff, 2003; Shweder et al., 2006; Walsh, 2002).

According to Shweder et al.’s (2006) definition,

Cultural psychology is the study of the mental life of individuals in relation to the symbolic and behavioral inheritances of particular cultural communities. It is the study of the way culture, community, and the psyche instantiate one another and are mutually sustaining, and, thus, how they become coordinated and make each other possible. (pp. 720-721)

Cultural psychology, unlike traditional developmental psychology, assumes that culture and the human mind are inseparable and symbiotic. In this view, “learning and thinking are always situated in a cultural setting and always dependent upon the utilization of cultural resources” (Bruner, 1996, p. 4, emphasis added). Thus, this notion suggests us for conceptualizing children’s social learning and engagement as cultural processes.

**Social Engagement as Cultural Processes**

The dominant tradition of research on child development has either overlooked cultural context or perceived culture only as an independent variable. The area of social development is not exempt from this tradition. Children’s social development is considered an individualistic
process of the serial acquisition of proper social knowledge and skills necessary for development at each stage. This perspective carries the risk of classifying and categorizing children because particular skills and knowledge are considered universal criteria for judging children’s social development, and the cultural context in which the development occurs is often ignored (Schneider, 1993). This risk is particularly high for children from cultural linguistic minority groups because the given criteria tend to reflect middle-class North American and Western values and norms (Marsella & Yamada, 2007; Rogoff, 2003).

Cultural psychology, on the contrary, regards children’s development as a cultural process rather than a universal and individual process. For example, Bruner (1986) emphasized the importance of negotiating and sharing meanings in a cultural system, not merely a personal discovery of the world, in one’s development. Johann Herder, one of the first who emphasized the relation between culture and the human mind in the 18th century, presented the notion of Volkspsychology, “a community of people whose shared language and historical traditions shape the mental processes of its members and provide essential resources for the process of their development” (as cited in Cole, 1996, p. 23). The notions of the Volkspsychology of a community and negotiations of the individual with others in the community shed light on the cultural process that cultural linguistic minority children are involved in school. For example, when a cultural linguistic minority child is newly enrolled in a classroom, the child encounters a group of Volks whose language, meanings, values, and traditions are different from his or her own. As the child interacts with other children and teachers, he or she needs to negotiate with the existing Volks psychology. Through the negotiations, the child attunes some of his/her actions to the group activities while engaging in the on-going construction of shared meanings (Greenfield, 1997). Therefore, research on young children’s social engagement needs to focus on the bidirectional
relations between children’s attuned actions responsive to cultural contexts and children’s influences on co-constructed meanings (Cole, 1996).

**Bidirectional Relations between Culture and People, Peer Culture and Children**

Cultural psychology highlights the interrelations between culture and the human mind, “the dual process of shaping and being shaped through culture” (Cole, 1996, p. 103). This idea states that human beings are not only receivers of symbolic (e.g., ideas, understandings, and beliefs) and behavioral (e.g., routines and practices) inheritances of cultural communities, but are also contributors to the construction of culture (Bruner, 1996; Shweder et al., 1998). Culture is shaped by people in a community as it shapes their ways of thinking and doing. Cultural psychology perceives human beings as active agents in the meaning making process. This is the way people participate in a cultural community, and the shared meanings contribute to constructing individual and group identities (Miller & Goodnow, 1995; Shweder et al., 1998).

Studies on children’s construction of their own peer culture echo some key premises of cultural psychology: the focus on the cultural contexts, the collective meaning making process, and the child’s active agency and contribution to the production of culture (Corsaro, 1981, 1985; Corsaro & Rizzo, 1990; Elgas, 2003; Elgas, Klein, & Kantor, 1988; Evaldsson & Tellgren, 2009; Williams, 2001). The emphasis on child agency and contribution to culture in these studies parallels cultural psychologists’ idea of the bi-directional relationship between culture and people (Bruner, 1996; Cole, 1996; Shweder et al., 1998). Corsaro (1997), in particular, argued that children’s peer culture is meaningful not only to themselves but also to adults as it becomes a part of, and contributes to, the adult culture. Corsaro and Eder (1990) further explained this process: “Children become a part of adult culture and contribute to its reproduction [i.e., modification] through their negotiations with adults and their creative production of a series of
peer cultures with other children” (p. 201). This highlights that children’s culture and adult
culture are not separately existing, but shaping and developing in bidirectional relations with
each other.

**Intersubjectivity**

Intersubjectivity is a key term in cultural psychology, which highlights the human ability
to develop shared understandings and inherit shared meanings in a cultural community. Bruner
(1996) stated that language is an important tool for communication. However, he underlined that
“intersubjectivity” in human nature is more important as the enabling basis of communication:

> It is customary to say that this specialization [human beings’ capability of complex
communication] rests upon the gift of language. But perhaps more to the point, it also
rests upon our astonishingly well developed talent for “intersubjectivity”—the human
ability to understand the minds of others, whether through language, gesture, or other
means. It is not just words that make this possible, but our capacity to grasp the role of
the settings in which words, acts, and gestures occur. We are the intersubjective species
par excellence. It is this that permits us to “negotiate” meanings when words go astray.

(p. 20)

Bruner extends the meaning of communicative language beyond words by illuminating the
human capability to appreciate the role of contexts that grant meanings to words, acts, and
gestures. This idea of intersubjectivity sheds light on nonverbal strategies that cultural linguistic
minority children use to communicate with their peers. Recognizing the intersubjective
capability of cultural linguistic minority children is important because, as Bruner noted, it
enables us to see their negotiations with others even if they do not use English proficiently in
their classroom.
To summarize, cultural psychology suggests children’s social engagement as cultural processes in which they negotiate and share meanings with others. Thus, cultural psychology grounded my inquiry into how cultural linguistic minority children negotiate and share different cultural meanings and practices. Framed by the idea of the bi-directional relations between culture and human development, I focused on the mutual influences between contexts and cultural linguistic minority children’s social engagement. This idea guided me to pay attention not only to the effects of peer culture on the social engagement of cultural linguistic minority children but also to these children’s contributions to the ongoing construction of peer culture. Finally, cultural psychology guided me to recognize the way cultural linguistic minority children communicate and co-construct meanings in their peer culture through their intersubjective capability.

**Bakhtinian Notion of Dialogism**

While cultural psychology frames my understanding of human development and children’s social engagement as cultural processes, Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1981) dialogic theory of language further supports my study on cultural linguistic minority children’s everyday nonverbal attempts to communicate with their peers and participate in peer interactions.

Bakhtin (1986) believed that dialogic relationships are not limited to verbal exchanges but are presented everywhere at any time as the basis in human lives. This belief in the dialogic nature of human relations is the premise of dialogism, Bakhtin’s language theory. His dialogism endorses a broad definition of language, namely, “any communication system employing signs that are ordered in a particular manner” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 430). Framed by this idea, in my study, various actions and words intending communication and social engagement with others are regarded as children’s languages and dialogues. Bakhtin (1986) wrote that “language and the
word are almost everything in human life” (p. 118). It is human life in which each person consciously attempts to make a voice and form dialogic relations with others by selecting proper languages among diverse means (e.g., conversations, speeches, texts, actions, artifacts, etc.). This idea suggests that cultural linguistic minority children’s lives at a mainstream preschool, even when they do not verbally express themselves, also consist of their own languages—signs, symbols, and actions—which open dialogic relations with their peers.

Bakhtin’s theory (1981) also led me to understand language in the sense of it being a socio-ideological system. He argued that meaning resided not with the individual, as the traditionalists believe, but in collective exchanges of dialogue among people. Therefore, the meanings embedded in one’s language should be understood in social, cultural, and historical contexts. Bakhtin (1981) further describes his view of language as “socio-ideological”:

We are taking language not as a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather language conceived as ideologically saturated, language as a world view, even as a concrete opinion, insuring a maximum of mutual understanding in all spheres of ideological life. (p. 271; emphasis in the original)

In other words, a language, a person’s communication system, represents a discourse (i.e., values and beliefs) that guides a person’s actions and understanding of the world. Different discourses, meanings, and ideologies in languages are interchanged through dialogues, and languages are developing ceaselessly—a “heteroglot development”, in Bakhtin’s (1981, p. 356) words. Therefore, one’s languages are not truly one’s own spoken at a particular time. According to Bakhtin (1981), the languages are heteroglot, because they are “half someone else’s” (p. 294) and “teeming with future and former languages” (p. 357). This is the dialogic theory of
language. He (1986) further described the ceaseless development of meanings (i.e., languages) through encounters with other meanings (i.e., dialogues) as follows:

There can be neither a first nor a last meaning; it always exists among other meanings as a link in the chain of meaning, which in its totality is the only thing that can be real. In historical life, this chain continues infinitely, and therefore each individual link is renewed again and again, as though it were being reborn. (p. 146)

This metaphoric description shows the value of “each individual link” in the construction of “the chain of meaning.” It also perceives each individual’s meanings as existing among other meanings. As each individual link takes a part in the chain of meaning, each individual person in a group contributes to the development of languages and meanings in the community whether the person’s words are major or minor.

The Bakhtinian notion of dialogism suggests that a person’s everyday speech—including various expressions and actions performed for communicative purposes—should be understood in relation to social, cultural, and historical contexts. It also guided me in understanding how people, who have different languages (i.e., meaning systems), are able to communicate and contribute to the construction of a new language holding multiple layers of meanings. This became the basic assumption in my study of cultural linguistic minority children’s social engagement.

**Heteroglossia and Dialogic Relations**

Included in these dialogic interactions among people, which were discussed earlier, multiple meanings are presented, and languages are modified and stratified in response to one another. Thus, languages are alive and developing in dialogic relations that have as their aim reaching a maximum of mutual understanding among people living in a world of *heteroglossia*.
Bakhtin (1981) perceived heteroglossia, the myriad discourses and multiple meanings in society, as the locus where dialogues possibly occur. For him, language lives “only in the dialogic interaction of those who make use of it” (p. 183), and every utterance “partakes of social and historical heteroglossia” (p. 272). Thus, this idea of dialogic relations in the world of heteroglossia implies that the different languages and discourses of the cultural linguistic minority children in my study are viewed as possibilities that open dialogues with other children in their preschool classrooms, not as barriers to communication.

According to Bakhtin (1993), people’s acts and speeches are always based on their recognition of others and expectations of others’ responses. Bakhtin (1986) wrote that “every speech genre in each area of speech communication has its own typical conception of the addressee, and it defines genre” (p. 95). In other words, in order to address meanings in a speech more effectively to the addressee, the speaker modifies his/her utterances, accents, and acts based on his/her knowledge of the addressee. Bakhtin called this aspect of human nature *addressivity*. He further explained how addressivity influences people participating in dialogues:

> The utterance of the person to whom I am responding is already at hand, but his response is still forthcoming. When constructing my utterance, I try actively to determine this response. Moreover, I try to act in accordance with the response I anticipate, so this anticipated response, in turn, exerts an active influence on my utterance. (p. 95)

This notion suggests that people’s words and actions are actively altered as they make dialogic relations with others and consider “anticipated responses” of others. Therefore, the two counterparts in a dialogue mutually influence each other.

Bakhtin’s (1981) discussion of heteroglossia suggested that languages and discourses are always intersecting as they come in contact with other languages. This intersection has the
potential to create dialogues, new forms of language that permit mutual understanding among the people at the intersection. Bakhtin (1981) argued that this process of mutual understanding occurs very actively and dialogically: “Understanding comes to fruition only in the response. Understanding and response are dialectically merged and mutually condition each other; one is impossible without the other” (p. 282). Bakhtin believed that addressivity creates mutual understanding among people through exchanging responsive acts.

**Bakhtin’s Appreciation of Otherness**

Bakhtin’s (1986) appreciation of diverse languages and discourses is presented in the concept of “otherness” (p. 89). Otherness can be defined as values, meanings, beliefs, and ways of acting that others hold. Simply put, it can be seen as any type of difference an individual reveals. However, Bakhtin’s idea of otherness calls for changes in the general perception of differences, strangeness, or alienation. Bakhtin valued this otherness—together with “our own-ness” (p. 89)—as a foundation for the world of heteroglossia and the dialogic relations among people. Furthermore, he believed that this otherness enriches communication and interactions among people and facilitates individual and collective development through dialogic exchanges of meanings and values. He elaborated this process:

This is why the unique speech experience of each individual is shaped and developed in continuous and constant interaction with others’ individual utterances. This experience can be characterized to some degree as the process of assimilation—more or less creative—of others’ words. Our speech is filled with others’ words, varying degrees of otherness or varying degrees of “our-own-ness.” These words of others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, reword, and re-accentuate. (p. 89, emphasis in the original)
Bakhtin’s accounts of the role of otherness help us appreciate cultural linguistic minority children and see their otherness as a source of heteroglot development in the language, discourses, and culture of mainstream classrooms. This appreciation of the role of otherness frames the basic assumption of my study.

In sum, Bakhtin’s notion of addressivity supports the claim that cultural linguistic minority children actively alter their actions and words as a result of considering others’ responses in particular social and cultural contexts. Moreover, this idea suggests that the unitary language and shared meanings in dominant classrooms may also be altered in response to cultural linguistic minority children’s actions and words. The appreciation of “otherness” in Bakhtin guides me to perceive a cultural linguistic minority child’s social engagement not only as an outsider’s entry and assimilation into the mainstream cultural community but also as an opportunity to enlarge the horizons of insiders (e.g., their taken-for-granted discourse, values, and practices) of that cultural community.

**Michel de Certeau’s Ideas of Tactics of the Weak**

**Tactics**

In his book, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau (1984) critiqued Foucault’s (1975) focus on the macro-level analysis of power, claiming that it prevents us from seeing the “tactics” used by the marginalized people in their everyday practices. De Certeau described a tactic as “an art of the weak,” “a calculated action” of the people in others’ territory aiming to seize the moment to work for their own ends, not in a way defined by strategies of power (p. 37). De Certeau’s micro-level analysis of everyday practices highlights individual or small group efforts against the larger institutionalized power, the social order and norms.
De Certeau (1984) also introduced la perruque, “the wig,” a popular technique of “diversionary practice” (p. 25). He stated, “the worker diverts time from the factory for work that is free, creative, and precisely not directed toward profit” by using the wig (e.g., a worker navigating a web-site to plan her wedding while pretending to work for the company). An ordinary person in an established order can spend time on his/her own purposes for the moment, while making the authority believe that he/she is working in the ways directed by the system. De Certeau argued that, although the weak reside inside the established system and under the surveillance, the weak are capable of turning “the actual order of things” to “their own ends” by using a creative trick, “the wig” (p. 26). He stated, “[H]ere order is tricked by an art [of the weak]” (p. 26; emphasis in the original). This art of the weak can be used by anyone in any situation, because human beings have the natural desire to control their lives. When a person is consistently subjected to an order that constrains his/her actions, the person begins to develop creative tactics to turn the order to his/her own ends. This notion suggests that young children—minority children, in particular—may develop tactics in their everyday practices in order to resist the established order that constrains their activities. This idea is in accordance with the findings (i.e., children attempt to resist adult rules in order to gain control of their lives) in the literature on children’s peer culture, which I described in my literature review in Chapter 1.

Children’s Tactics for the Secondary Adjustment

De Certeau (1984) refers to tactics as “weapons of the weak” (p. 23), which do not guarantee the change of an established order but which could possibly shake an established order by tricking it and internally manipulating the system. This idea perfectly describes young children’s everyday attempts to challenge adult authority and rules regulating their actions and interactions and even use the rules for their own purposes in order to gain control of their lives.
For example, in my pilot study of a Korean boy, I found that he negotiated a rule, “building blocks not higher than your shoulder,” by using a creative nonverbal tactic—pretending not to understand what the teacher said. I recognized that this tactic helped the boy build much higher than usual constructions, which attracted other children and got them playing with him. This case indicated that a cultural linguistic minority child is capable of developing tactics to use a classroom rule for his benefit even from the area of his weakness (e.g., English fluency). In fact, I found that a child uses more tactics when he or she falls under low status or feels powerless to negotiate directly with other peers or teachers.

Goffman’s (1961) notion of “secondary adjustment” (p. 172) also parallels de Certeau’s (1984) ideas of “tactics.” Goffman, through ethnographic observation of patients at a hospital, claimed that their apparently strange actions were often “understandable secondary adjustments to an oppressive and threatening environment” (as cited in Trevino, 2003, p. 171). Adopting this idea, Corsaro (2001) noted that many children’s actions make sense as collaborative efforts to resist adult authority and rules. He suggested that the secondary adjustments are important moments in which children develop the basic conception of the teacher-student and peer relationship. Likewise, I found that many practices of the Korean boy in my pilot study were related to secondary adjustments to the social system in his classrooms, and these practices played an important role in forming relationships with his peers and teachers. Unlike the children in Corsaro’s studies (1981, 1985, 1997), the secondary adjustments of the boy in my pilot study were individual and against some rules constructed by his peers and by his teachers. This can be explained by de Certeau’s idea of tactics of the weak in which the weak use tactics against the power structure. There are two types of power in a preschool classroom that cultural
linguistic minority children need to address: 1) the institutionalized power of the classroom and 2) the power of dominant children, the order and norms defined by their peer culture

De Certeau’s (1984) idea of tactics of the weak provides a frame for answering questions such as: In what ways are cultural linguistic minority children capable of gaining control of their lives in spite of their seeming weaknesses or powerlessness (i.e., limited language fluency and cultural knowledge)? In what ways are they capable of challenging established order (i.e., class norms and peer culture) and bringing changes into the order? De Certeau’s ideas provide me with frames to highlight these children’s agency. His ideas also inform me about the importance of ethnographic observations of the children’s everyday practices and analysis of the contexts and the meanings of the practices.

**Conclusion**

The theoretical frameworks of my dissertation study are built on cultural psychology, Bakhtinian notion of dialogism, and de Certeau’s idea of tactics of the weak. By drawing on these three frameworks, I was able to see children’s social engagement as a cultural process and focus on their peer interactions for negotiating and sharing meanings. These theories were helpful for me to perceive cultural linguistic minority children in a different light, appreciate their non-verbal languages, and find the meanings of their unique—which might be easily viewed as problematic—actions.

Cultural psychology grounded my research of children’s social engagement in context, particularly in the context of peer culture. This theory informed my understanding of children’s development as cultural and bidirectional (i.e., mutual influences between the child and culture). Jerome Bruner’s (1996) notion of intersubjectivity helped me recognize young children’s capability to communicate with people around them through a variety of communicative skills,
such as joint attention and gestures. This idea encouraged me to carefully observe the cultural linguistic minority children’s non-verbal languages and understand the meanings through these children’s voices. The Bakhtinian notion of dialogism explains how the encounter of different languages contributes to the development of both individual participants’ and a community’s languages. This notion helped me perceive cultural and linguistic differences as sources of communication, not as barriers of communication. Both Bruner and Bakhtin (1981, 1986) presented a broad definition of language, which goes beyond words. Finally, de Certeau’s (1984) idea of tactics of the weak guided me to focus on the children’s creative tactics that they develop to use the established order for their own ends and possibly challenge the classroom norms and the peer culture.

In sum, these frameworks helped me appreciate the children’s nonverbal languages, tactics, and their contributions to the construction of peer culture. The frameworks also informed me about the importance of carefully listening to the children in order to understand their intentions in their actions. In the next four chapters, I demonstrate how each of these frameworks has been applied to my study.
CHAPTER 3

“YOU KNOW I CANNOT SPEAK ENGLISH”:
NON-VERBAL WAYS OF SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT IN PEER CULTURE

“The child has a hundred languages, a hundred hands, a hundred thoughts,
a hundred ways of thinking, of playing, of speaking,
a hundred, always a hundred ways of listening, of marveling, of loving”
--Loris Malaguzzi in *The Hundred Languages of Children*

Children have multiple ways of expressing themselves. Even babies express their needs
and feelings through their languages (e.g., smiles, cries, babbles, eye gazes, motions), and
mothers also understand and communicate with their babies through these non-verbal languages.
However, when children reach certain ages, adults begin expecting children to learn and use
verbal languages more, and the verbal and written languages become the most valued and
accepted ways of communication in school. Loris Malaguzzi, the founder of the Reggio Emilia
Approach, argued that traditional schooling “steals” most of the multiple languages used by
children (as cited in Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998, p. 3). In my dissertation study, I have
been concerned with cultural linguistic minority children within such a culture of schooling.
When the school tends to look more for verbal and written languages, this prevents teachers from
appreciating other forms of languages (e.g., signs, gestures, actions, art works, etc.) used by
children in general and cultural linguistic minority children in particular. Moreover, it may
reinforce the assumption that cultural linguistic minority children are socially and even cognitively incompetent due to their limited English communication skills.

The focus of this dissertation study is two Korean children’s—Hyunsoo’s and Yeji’s—social engagement in peer culture at two U.S. preschools with no or few peers from the same cultural linguistic background. The study has two main topics: the two children’s (a) non-verbal strategies for meaning making and (b) tactics for gaining advantage at times when their verbal language does not work. This chapter focuses on the first topic, nonverbal strategies used by the Korean children for negotiating and sharing meanings with their peers and engaging in the peer culture. In particular, this chapter addresses two of the research questions in my dissertation study:

- How are these children’s non-verbal strategies of social engagement in accordance with or in conflict with peer culture and classroom norms?
- How do these children’s strategies of action contribute to the construction of peer culture and norms in their classrooms?

In the following sections, first, I briefly describe how to conceptualize cultural linguistic minority children’s actions as non-verbal language. Second, I explore the Korean children’s non-verbal languages used for social engagement in peer culture. Third, I examine the contribution of those non-verbal languages to children’s peer culture and class norms. Finally, I end this chapter with the implications of the findings for the work of early childhood teachers.5

**Conceptualizing Children’s Actions as Non-verbal Language**

Before presenting the findings of this dissertation study, I would like to note that, throughout this dissertation, I use the term “language” in a broad sense, which includes and

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5 To avoid redundancy, I do not include a literature review, theoretical frameworks, and a methodology section in this chapter as they are already dealt with in Chapters 1 and 2.
highlights children’s various non-verbal communications (see the conceptual frameworks in Chapter 2). How, then, can we distinguish a child’s non-verbal languages among many of the child’s actions? To offer some clarity, I briefly discuss two important features of non-verbal languages. First, a non-verbal language is combined with a child’s “speaking voice” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. xx), which has a will or desire behind it. Second, a non-verbal language has an “addressee” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 95) to whom the child intends to deliver a message and from whom he or she can receive an expected response. Thus, a non-verbal language is something more than an action. Edwards, Gandini, & Forman (1998) helped us broaden the definition of language with examples of children’s art works:

Thus, a panel where each child’s photograph contains a little animal stamp to stand for that child’s identity is not a language. But a child’s stamp followed by an arrow and another child’s stamp could mean, “Amy likes Zoe.” A simple syntax is born, and with it a new language for children to invent and explore relations... Tree leaves can be arranged on pasteboard in rows, but this is not a language of leaves because it tells us nothing. However, if the children tried to arrange the leaves to show the presence of a strong wind or a weak wind, then the relation among the leaves would constitute proto syntax and the whole enterprise would engage the children to think about the languages of leaves and what the leaves can tell us. These various media, when combined to tell a story, form the 100 languages. (p. 249)

In these examples, a set of symbols becomes a language when presented in a systematic way to convey meaning and intent. Likewise, in my dissertation study, I recognized a child’s non-verbal language among many of the child’s actions by focusing on the meaning and intent in an

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6 Bakhtin (1981) and Bruner (1996) encouraged me to think of language beyond words and understand the human capability to communicate and make sense of other people’s minds.
action. Thus, in this chapter, a non-verbal language used by Hyunsoo or Yeji is identified as a form of *delivering meaning through an action*, such as claiming ownership of play objects through marking them as property. In what follows, I further elaborate how each of these children shared and negotiated meanings with his or her peers through non-verbal languages.

**Social Engagement in Peer Culture through Non-verbal Languages**

According to Corsaro (1997), playing together without interruption is a primary concern in preschool children’s peer culture. Many studies on peer culture have documented how children protect or gain access to on-going play activities (Aydt & Corsaro, 2003; Elgas, 2003; Elgas et al., 1988; Evaldsson & Tellgren, 2009; Feng et al., 2004; Lee & Walsh, 2003). These studies, however, have focused only on a group of children’s collective ways for protecting their ongoing play, not on an individual child’s strategies. In this dissertation study, I found that each of my focal children showed some patterns for protecting his or her play activities or initiating play interactions. Because they did not yet speak fluent English, these patterns were presented mostly in non-verbal ways. I describe the patterns of strategies of social engagement used by these children as belonging to two categories: protecting a play activity and initiating play interactions.

**Protecting a Play Activity**

Hyunsoo and Yeji protected their play activities and even negotiated ownership of play objects with their peers through non-verbal communication. Two typical patterns were observed in this category: claiming ownership of play objects through marking property and showing possession of play objects or a space through persistence.

**Claiming ownership through marking property.** For Hyunsoo and Yeji, keeping ownership of their play objects was an important issue. At the beginning of the school year, they
tended to find covered places where they could hide some toys (e.g., kitchen cabinet, storage cubbies, a box, a garbage truck, etc.). This can be understood as tactics employed by these children to keep their preferred play objects by making them less visible. However, I observed that, gradually, Hyunsoo’s and Yeji’s attempts to protect their play objects became visible. They began to establish property in more explicit ways so that their peers could understand their ownership. For example, before December 2011, Yeji, when she prepared meals, tended to keep the toy foods inside a kitchen cabinet and to close the doors. However, from the second week of January, I noticed that Yeji began using a big tray, a table mat, or a tablecloth folded into the proper size so that food could be placed on it. I asked Yeji about this change.

**Interview transcripts: 02/05/11**

In the video recording used in the interview, Yeji is pretending to cook in front of a toy oven. On the floor beside the oven, there are four cups, a big oval plate filled with toy fruit, and some knives and forks. She places all the objects on a red fabric. She goes back and forth from the oven to the floor to bring more food.

Jooeun: *Yeji, what are you doing [in the scene you are watching]?

Yeji: *I’m going on a picnic.

Jooeun: *Ah, you’re preparing food for your picnic. By the way, Yeji, why are you preparing food on the red fabric?

Yeji: *Because I want other kids not to take them [the food].

In this transcript, Yeji explained that she used the red fabric because she wanted her peers not to take the food. Thus, the red fabric played a role as a marker of her property and conveyed the meaning that the toys on it belonged to her ongoing play activity.

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7 I will discuss cultural linguistic minority children’s tactics in great detail in Chapter 4.
8 All Korean words spoken by the participants in the study were translated into English and are presented in italics in transcripts. Refer to Appendix B for the detail information about my transcription conventions.
Similarly, Hyunsoo, who used to stay in a corner and keep his toys away from his peers at the beginning of the school year, began negotiating ownership of play objects in explicit ways. The following vignette shows how Hyunsoo claimed ownership of his toys by constructing a closed area:

**Vignette 3.1 Video transcripts: 01/31/12**

Entering the classroom, Hyunsoo sees that playtime is already going on. Hyunsoo hurries over to the block play area and quickly constructs four side walls of a big closed area which looks wide enough for three to four children to play in. Using the large wood blocks, he divides the lot into three sections and places mini cars in one section. He places a train track inside another section of the lot. He brings large toy vehicles (a garbage truck, an airplane, and a helicopter) and places them in the largest section. He moves his favorite mini cars—yellow and blue cars—into the largest section. Rachel comes and looks interested in the construction.

Rachel: Hey, you made a big parking lot! (Pointing at a white mini car) I want to come in, Hyunsoo.

Hyunsoo: (Nodding yes)

Picking up the white car, Rachel enters the parking lot. She picks up another white mini car and shows Hyunsoo. Again, Hyunsoo nods yes. Hyunsoo makes a slide using a large plank. Making silly faces and bumping sounds, he rolls his mini cars on the slide toward Rachel. Rachel giggles and joins in his play: rolling the cars, bumping their cars together.

Kyle tries to enter their play area.

Kyle: (Trying to go over a wall of the lot) Hey, what a cool car house!

Rachel: (to Kyle) No-o, get off the wall. You can’t get in!
Kyle: Yes, I can. (Kyle said he could, but he stopped trying to enter and asked Rachel) I want to get in. I played with the trains yesterday. Can I play?

Rachel: (to Kyle) No, you can’t. (Looking at Hyunsoo) He can’t play here, Hyunsoo.

Kyle: (to Hyunsoo) Can I play?

Hyunsoo: (Nodding yes and pointing to the section where he set the trains and tracks)

Rachel: (Looking at Hyunsoo nodding yes and Kyle entering) Ok, you can come, but you can’t play with us, because you don’t have cars.

In this vignette, Rachel and Kyle seem to understand that the parking lot belonged to Hyunsoo. Therefore, they asked Hyunsoo for permission to enter the parking lot and play with the toys in it. At first, Rachel did not want Kyle to enter the interactive play area for Hyunsoo and her, but she agreed to let Kyle come in when Hyunsoo allowed it because she knew Hyunsoo had primary ownership. By constructing an enclosed lot, Hyunsoo successfully marked the play area as his property and claimed the toys inside the area as belonging to him. It also helped him have an active and powerful position when he interacted with his peers who wanted to play in the parking lot.

I found that the preschool children in my study had a shared understanding that, in the block play center, a child had ownership of his/her construction and play materials used to build the construction. Children were supposed to share toys, and they could ask their peers to share play objects. However, they could not take play materials from a construction their peer had already built or that were being used. Hyunsoo seemed to understand the norms in peer culture in the block play area and applied his knowledge of the norm to his non-verbal ways of communication (e.g., creating a closed construction as fast as he could to claim ownership).
Showing possession through being persistent. During their first three months in U.S. preschools, both Hyunsoo and Yeji persistently stayed in a specific play area, playing a particular activity (i.e., Hyunsoo—playing cars, Yeji—pretending to cook). They seemed to be in a hurry to quickly get into the play area and grasp their favorite toys when playtime was announced. This pattern had two functions for their social engagement at the new preschool environment. First, Hyunsoo and Yeji felt secure staying in a comfortable place and playing with familiar play objects. Second, Hyunsoo and Yeji could inform their peers and teachers of their preference and competency in particular play activities.

I often heard their peers said, “It is Hyunsoo’s car,” or “Yeji will come back [to the oven].” The children in their classrooms seemed to develop a shared understanding that Hyunsoo and Yeji had priority when it came to particular toys or areas. This does not mean that Hyunsoo’s or Yeji’s peers did not play with his/her favorite toys or always shared the toys with him/her. Rather, Hyunsoo and Yeji assumed a better position to negotiate the possession with other kids, because Hyunsoo and Yeji had persistently shown their peers their close relation with particular play objects. For example, Hyunsoo always played with two mini cars. He used to bring these cars when his teachers called him over for an art activity, but I found that he often leave the cars at his play area in the block center after January 2012. When I asked him why he did not bring the cars to the art center and did not worry about the cars, he answered, “It is ok now,” as if he knew his possession of the cars had gained a shared understanding among his peers. His teacher also told me in a casual conversation, “The children know Hyunsoo plays with the cars.”

Although it was not clear if Hyunsoo and Yeji had deliberately employed this persistent play only with the purpose of showing and protecting their possessions, it was clear that the
persistency played a crucial role for them in communicating ownership to their peers. Furthermore, their ownership sometimes led Yeji and Hyunsoo to gain access to their peers’ play activities. The following vignette describes how two girls (Sara and Hailey) included Yeji but excluded another girl (Lizzie) in their dramatic play in consideration of Yeji’s ownership of particular kitchen play toys.

Vignette 3.2 Video transcripts & Field notes: 02/17/12

Hailey and Sara enter the dramatic play center. As usual, Yeji is pretending to cook in front of the oven. Hailey and Sara sit at the table.

Sara: I am the mother. You are my baby.
Hailey: No, I am a big sister. I am four.
Sara: Ok. We should hurry. We will have a party.
Hailey: Mommy, we need snacks.
Sara: We need snacks. Ok. Mommy can cook. (Looking at Yeji) Oh, good. She [Yeji] is already cooking for the party.
Hailey: Is she a grandma?
Sara: No, she’s the cook.
Hailey: Yeah, she’s the cook.
Sara: Let’s buy food. Yeji, may we buy the sandwiches?

Yeji giggles and begins setting the table with sandwiches and fruits. Sara also giggles and pretends to hand Yeji money with a big and silly gesture. Yeji pretends to cook more food for Hailey and Sara, who are waiting at the table. Lizzie comes to the oven and pretends to control the oven temperature, standing beside Yeji.

Sara: (To Lizzie) No, Lizzie, you can’t use the oven. Yeji is cooking.
Lizzie: I want to play over here. She can share. (To Yeji) Can I?

Sara: No, you can’t. We are having a party. Mother and the cook use the oven, not you.

Lizzie looks at Yeji again, but Yeji does not express either yes or no. Lizzie leaves.

In this vignette, Hailey and Sara seemed to think that Yeji had priority over the use of the oven and the cooking. In their dramatic play, the mother was supposed to use the oven to prepare snacks for a party, but they seemed to modify the plot (buying snacks from the cook) and play roles (adding the role of the cook), because Yeji was cooking.

In the children’s dramatic play in Yeji’s classroom, every participating child has a particular role, and duplicate roles are usually not accepted, especially when the role is one of the main characters (e.g., a mother, a teacher). The play objects in the dramatic play center are related to particular roles (e.g., stethoscope—doctor, bottle—baby or mother), so children understand that a child who takes a particular role has the priority to own the play objects related to the role. In Vignette 3.2, the children seemed to refer to this implicit norm for dramatic play in their peer interactions. In order to respect Yeji’s possession of the cooking materials, Hailey and Sara, who played a mother and a big sister, tried to find a corresponding role for Yeji and agreed to include Yeji in their play as the cook. However, when Lizzie tried to join in the cooking, they rejected her as a cook based on their shared norms in the peer culture—no duplicate roles and importance of the connection between a role and related play objects.

**Initiating Play Interactions**

Hyunsoo and Yeji tried to initiate play interactions with their peers through non-verbal strategies. Two major patterns were observed in this category: attracting peers through demonstrating competence and inviting playmates through displaying a pair of identical play objects.
Attracting peers through demonstrating competence. Hyunsoo and Yeji had plenty of prior experience and knowledge in their favorite play activities, so they could perform skillfully. For example, Yeji liked to play housekeeping with her sister, a first grader at the time of my study. Therefore, she learned from her sister how to skillfully and engagingly perform this type of play (e.g., setting tables to look attractive), which attracted her peers. Hyunsoo also seemed to take advantage of his ability to make creative constructions to get his peers’ attentions and to initiate play interactions.

Starting in November, Hyunsoo began taking up a larger space in the center of the play area, constructed bigger structures, and became louder. Yeji also began using more toys and looked more confident, although she still stayed around the kitchen oven and table and remained quiet while playing. Their personality and gender differences might have played a role in making these slightly different changes. However, it is more likely that the expectations and norms in the two play areas (i.e., block play and kitchen play) affected Hyunsoo and Yeji differently when they modified their play activities. Creativity and construction skills are valued in the block play area, and a child who can make attractive constructions is considered a competent peer. Thus, Hyunsoo seemed to follow this shared norm in order to demonstrate his competence and attract his peers.

Vignette 3.3 Video transcripts & Field notes 11/08/11

Once the teacher announces the beginning of play time, Hyunsoo runs into the block center, pulls out a box of mini cars, and quickly gathers large building blocks in the center of the block play center. He looks as if he is in a hurry. Soon, he constructs a five-story building that is taller than him. He places some toy cars in the tower. Jay comes over and watches Hyunsoo decorate the building.
Jay: Hyunsoo, what are you doing? (To me who is video-recording) I went to an aquarium, and it had a big parking tower. It was really tall. (Touching the side of the tower with his fingers) Hyunsoo, what are you doing?

Hyunsoo: He—y!⁹ (Pointing to the toy box with cars, as if to say that Jay needed to bring his own cars to play in his building) Jay, you gonna car!

Hyunsoo: (To me, in Korean) Look! I made a parking building. Isn’t it cool?

Jay picks up some mini cars and places them in the parking tower. They both play using the cars and the tower—parking the cars at different floors, bumping their cars together, making sounds, and giggling. Hyunsoo brings over a large plank and, together with Jay, makes a bridge between the tower and toy shelves. They begin rolling cars on the plank.

Josh and Kyle come over and interestedly watch Hyunsoo and Jay.

Kyle: (Pointing to the cars rolling on the plank) Look, Josh. Let’s play it together.

Jay: (To Kyle and Josh, with a bragging and teasing voice) Cool, huh? Look, this [tower] is taller than you, boy.

Jay rolls two cars on the plank to show Kyle and Josh. Hyunsoo brings bigger mini cars to roll on the plank.

Josh: (To Jay) Cool! Let me do it!

Kyle: (To Jay) We want to do it. (Holding some mini cars) It’s my turn, now.

Jay: No—o! Hyunsoo made this parking tower. Only Hyunsoo and I can play here.

Kyle and Josh gaze at Hyunsoo for a moment as if they are waiting for Hyunsoo’s permission, but Hyunsoo does not look back and keeps focusing on the cars in his tower.

Ms. Sunny sees the kids gathering together and asks Josh and Kyle if they have finished

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⁹ To make English words—often used in Hyunsoo’s and Yeji’s Korean speeches—visible, I marked the words in bold.
their artwork for the day. Josh and Kyle go to the art table. Hyunsoo and Jay continue their play.

Hyunsoo, in this vignette, placed himself in the middle of the block play center and kept as many objects as he could bring by his side. Using many blocks, he constructed a tall and unique parking tower, which had five floors and even a bridge to another structure. The parking tower also had many details such as standing signs, divided zones, and an escape rope outside the tower. When Jay saw Hyunsoo’s construction, Jay could imagine a large parking tower in a big city where he had been with his family. In fact, Hyunsoo came from a big city in Korea, so Hyunsoo might have had many prior experiences seeing and exploring a large parking tower.

Hyunsoo’s peers wanted to play in this “cool” parking tower and asked him if they could join in the activity. Although some children (e.g., Lizzie in Vignette 3.2, Kyle in Vignette 3.3) tended to first ask other English-speaking children because of their common language, they all knew that the ultimate decision came from Hyunsoo or Yeji, the owner of play objects. In Vignette 3.3, the attractive construction empowered Hyunsoo to be a final decision maker who could grant his peers permission to gain access to his play area.

Hyunsoo’s actions (taking a central place, quickly gathering many blocks, and constructing a big tower) were performed in a systematic way with the clear intention of calling his peers to the tower and enticing them to play with him. The following short conversation between Hyunsoo and me shows Hyunsoo’s intentions when using this non-verbal language.

**Personal notes of casual conversations at his home: 10/28/11**

Jooeun: _Hyunsoo, how do you make a friend at school?_

Hyunsoo: _You know I cannot speak English._
Jooeun: *I know you cannot speak some words, but you can speak some other words.*

So...*how do you play with other kids at school?*

Hyunsoo: *Umm... when I make big and cool stuff and make the play fun, the kids come.*

According to this dialogue, Hyunsoo tried to create “big and cool” constructions in order to have his peers “come and play” with him. This expectation turned his actions and constructions into non-verbal languages that he used to communicate with his peers, and the boys in Vignette 3.3 responded as Hyunsoo anticipated. As Bakhtin (1986) discussed in his language theory, Hyunsoo’s actions were dialogic as they were shaped by the anticipated responses of the actions’ addressees, his peers.

**Inviting playmates through displaying a pair of identical play objects.** I often found that Hyunsoo and Yeji assembled a pair of identical play objects or constructions. For example, I observed Yeji bringing two trays and setting out toy foods on those trays in a similar way and Hyunsoo making two of the same objects, such as two robots, two towers, and so forth.

Vignette 3.4 Video transcripts & Field notes: 01/25/12

Yeji is sitting at the kitchen table alone. Two sets of toy meals are prepared on the table: one set is on Yeji’s side and another set is on the other side of the table. Each set of the pretend meal is placed on a tray, which includes a cup, a knife, a fork, a spoon, and a plate with some food. The two meals are placed very similarly, although some of the included foods are different. Yeji plays with the food tray in front of her but does not play with the other tray. Yeji looks at me,

Yeji: (To Jooeun, picking up and showing a pancake) *Do you want to try some?*

Jooeun: Yeji, why don’t you play with the tray there?

Yeji: *It is for other friends.*
Jooeun: *Other friends?*

Yeji: *Yes, in order to play together. You’re supposed to play with other friends together.*

Jooeun: *Together? Together with whom?*

Yeji just smiles and continues her play activity.

Adults often observe a preschool child playing with an imaginary friend and interacting with the imaginary friend in his/her play activity. This pretend play with an imaginary friend may provide a child with chances to develop social and cognitive skills and make sense of the world while the child feels free to control his/her play and the imaginary peer interactions (Friedberg, 1995; Harris, 2000; Piaget, 1968). Thus, some people might think, in Vignette 3.4, Yeji prepared another set of play objects in order to play with an imaginary friend. However, unlike children’s usual play activity with an imaginary friend, Yeji did not talk to herself or interact with the other set of play objects. Yeji indicated that the play objects were to invite “*other friends,*” her real peers, while emphasizing the importance of playing “*together*” with other kids. I had similar answers from Hyunsoo, too.

**Interview transcripts: 11/26/11**

In the video recording, Hyunsoo is making two robots by using blocks. Hyunsoo places one robot in a spot a feet away from him and another one in front of him. He places some cars, airplanes, and some block pieces in the space between the two robots.

Watching this video recording, I asked Hyunsoo:

Jooeun: *Hyunsoo, what are the block pieces [you are seeing in the scene]?

Hyunsoo: *The robot’s...uh... weapons. They are weapons. I will use them later to transform the robot.*
In the scene, Hyunsoo is playing (e.g., flying and making motions and sounds) only with the robot in front of him, not with the other robot. He sometimes put some block pieces on the other robot and moved them several times from place to place.

Jooeun: *Hyunsoo, why didn’t you play with the other robot? You made it, too.*

Hyunsoo: *You know it was not for me.* (Looking at Jooeun as if he thought the answer to this question was quite obvious.) *[Each friend] should have the same [type of] toy together.*

What made this pattern interesting was that Hyunsoo rarely interacted with one of his robots and placed it at a certain distance away from him. In the aforementioned three patterns of non-verbal languages, Hyunsoo tended to keep things to himself in order to protect his ownership. Even when he tried to initiate play interactions with other kids, this ownership played a crucial role. However, in this case, Hyunsoo acted in a contrary manner, displaying the same or a similar play object at a short distance away, even if his intention was similar: playing together with his peers. This act could be understood, according to a norm in children’s peer culture. Some studies on children’s peer culture (Elgas et al., 1988; Feng et al., 2004) found that the possession of the same play objects functions as a marker of membership in a play group. Children in these studies utilized the possession of particular objects as a strategy to include or exclude their peers in play activities.

It seems that Hyunsoo’s and Yeji’s action of displaying another set of play objects was in accordance with this shared norm in children’s peer culture. It is unclear why they left a certain distance between each set of play objects, but the distance—which was not too far and not too close—was probably their active expression of an invitation that communicated the message, “this is not for me but for you to play with me,” to their peers. Hyunsoo and Yeji often got the
responses they expected from some of their peers. The following vignette shows how Yeji’s actions of displaying another set of dinnerware ended with play interactions with Hailey.

**Vignette 3.5 Video transcripts & Field notes: 01/23/12**

Hailey comes and sits on the seat where Yeji has placed another food tray. Yeji looks at Hailey but does not say anything. Hailey picks up a burger, makes eye-contact with Yeji, and pretends to eat it like a monster. They both giggle. Yeji picks up her burger and imitates Hailey. They laugh loudly and say something silly to each other. They go to the kitchen oven together, bring out some toys (a big basket, more dishes, food, and an iron), and place them on the kitchen table. They sit back at the table and arrange the new toys together.

The cultural idea found in both Hyunsoo’s and Yeji’s interview regarding this non-verbal strategy was “gachi,” a Korean term, which means being “together” or doing or having “same/similar” things. Their intentions may reflect the importance of relatedness in Korean culture (Choi, Kim, & Choi, 1993). Kashima and his colleagues (1995) described Korean indigenous psychology: “Koreans place importance on the mutual understanding of true sentiments and feelings, and many Korean behaviors can be interpreted in terms of this motive” (p. 934). Therefore, this emphasis on relatedness can be explained through an understanding of Korean values, such as the use of woori (we) and gachi (being together, doing or having the same/similar things). Shweder et al. (1998) discussed the interdependent self valued in East Asian communities. According to this perspective, the self is “naturally understood to exist interdependently with others,” and the “self-in-relation-to-other(s) is focal” in daily experiences (p. 753). Thus, sharing and creating a bond with others are important cultural values shared among many East Asian communities.
Many daily practices of Korean families emphasize the value of *gachi*. For example, both Hyunsoo and Yeji had a sibling, so they might be asked by their parents to do something *gachi* (together) with their siblings or make something *gachi* (in the same manner or similar) for their siblings. Therefore, displaying a pair of the same objects was Hyunsoo’s and Yeji’s unique language, based on their understanding of their home culture as well as of their peer culture. Because the intention behind this language—becoming interdependent selves by doing or having the same things—was implicit and cultural, the strategy seemed unfamiliar to Hyunsoo’s and Yeji’s peers who came from different belief systems (i.e., the independent self valued in many middle-class European-American cultural communities). Thus their peers often did not understand that the other toy set was available to and meant for anyone who wanted to play and be friends. However, gradually, their peers understood the implicit meanings and began engaging in play activities using the toy set, as shown in Vignette 3.5.

**Contributions to the Construction of Peer Culture and Class Norms**

In the previous section, I described my two focal cultural linguistic minority children’s non-verbal languages. Each example showed that their non-verbal languages created dialogic relations with their peers, because the non-verbal languages conveyed their meanings to the other children and gained responses from the peers. In dialogic relations, according to Bakhtin (1986), every participant’s speech, voice, and meanings are shaped and developed by others’ influences. Bakhtin wrote that, to individuals, such experience in a dialogic relation “can be characterized to some degree as the process of *assimilation*” (p. 89, emphasis in the original). As this idea suggests, I found that Hyunsoo and Yeji modified their non-verbal languages based on their knowledge of peer culture and norms in his or her classroom in order to share their intentions with their peers. Likewise, Hyunsoo’s and Yeji’s peers were influenced by his/her actions and
assimilated to some degree, as they gave the expected responses to him/her. As a result, the peer culture and class norms were also influenced by the two Korean children’s presence and voices. This whole process was possible because of the intersubjectivity and addressivity commonly shared by all of the children, the ability to read meanings in others’ minds and address expectations of others in verbal and non-verbal languages (Bruner, 1996; Bakhtin, 1986). In this section, I further describe how Hyunsoo’s and Yeji’s non-verbal languages contributed to the changes in the peer culture and norms in their classrooms.

**Contributions to Peer Culture**

First, Hyunsoo and Yeji contributed to bringing new play themes and creative usages of toys into the peer culture. Hyunsoo’s or Yeji’s skillful performances in his/her favorite play activities invited the other children to play together with him/her. The children, then, adopted the play themes and the manners of using certain toys—which they learned from Hyunsoo or Yeji—in their own play activities. For example, Hyunsoo’s parking tower was adopted by many other children as a play theme as well as a way of building a tall construction and adding details. Yeji liked to make glasses with blocks and wear them. Her peers began using blocks to make glasses like her, and it became a popular play activity in her class. The following vignette describes how a child was influenced by Yeji’s simple but unique play activity.

**Vignette 3.6 Video transcripts & Field notes: 01/19/12**

Yeji is sitting at the kitchen table. There are some dishes filled with toy foods. Yeji brings three empty cups to the table. She goes to the block play center and brings some sticks and small round wood blocks that have holes in the middle like donuts. She attaches a stick to a wood block. She looks at me and says in Korean, “Candi!” It looks like a big lollipop. She makes some more candy using the wood blocks and sticks. She

In this vignette, Lizzie became interested in Yeji’s unique lollipops made out of blocks. Yeji understood Lizzie’s interest and invited Lizzie to join her play activity by handing her a cup of lollipops. In this episode, Yeji and Lizzie were influenced by each other. Yeji taught Lizzie a unique play activity—how to make lollipops using blocks, and Lizzie taught Yeji the English word for the candy, lollipop. From Lizzie’s point of view, Yeji’s non-verbal language introduced a new play activity to Lizzie. From Yeji’s point of view, it not only extended the chances of peer interactions but also provided her with a chance for learning English.

Second, children in the two preschool classrooms began learning new means of communicating—incorporating some of Hyunsoo’s and Yeji’s non-verbal languages into their own—just as Hyunsoo and Yeji were learning the English language. For example, some of the children began using a tray, a play mat, or an enclosed area as a marker in order to communicate their ownership of some toys with the other children. Therefore, Hyunsoo and Yeji were engaged in dialogic exchanges of languages (both verbal and non-verbal) with their peers and contributed to the heteroglot development of languages in their respective preschool classrooms. Although some cultural meanings (such as gachi, the importance of relatedness) were not initially clear, as Bakhtin (1986) described, the cultural values embedded in Hyunsoo’s and Yeji’s non-verbal languages also probably added a layer of meanings to his/her peers’ languages.
Contributions to the Class Norms

First, Hyunsoo’s and Yeji’s non-verbal languages led to some changes in the class rules. For example, as I already mentioned, Hyunsoo’s parking tower became a shared play theme among the children in Hyunsoo’s class. They enjoyed making ornate features on their parking towers when they constructed them. However, there seemed to be something more important than playing with the tower. The children likely felt that they were getting away from or breaking down some of the teachers’ control (Corsaro, 2003).

In fact, the children were encouraged by the teachers to build constructions at a “safe” height, which might be “not bigger than [their] friends’ height.” However, for some reason, the teachers did not stop their students from building the tall towers. Ms. Sunny, the lead teacher, once told me that she tried to ignore Hyunsoo’s minor violations of class rules, because it might make him feel more secure and help him learn the unfamiliar class rules over time. This might be the reason why she did not stop the construction of tall towers. Or, she might think that the construction looked safe despite its height. Anyhow, the teachers sometimes ignored the children challenging the implicit classroom rule, “not to build things too high.” The teachers might have been engaged at one point from reinforcing the rule or modifying some parts of the rule with the children, if there were any significant conflict or complaints about the tall tower. However, there were no conflicts and no teacher intervention, so the need for the explicit rule diminished in Hyunsoo’s class.

The class norms around the boundaries among play areas were also challenged. Both of the classrooms had an implicit rule that controlled children’s play with particular toys only to the play areas to which the toys belong. However, Hyunsoo often used play objects belonging to the dramatic play area to decorate his block constructions (e.g., little people, a rope, a first-aid kit,
small furniture, etc.). Yeji also often brought small blocks into the kitchen area and made funny shaped foods or common pretend items using the blocks (e.g., lollipops, Korean sushi, glasses, etc.). This use of play materials—in unusual play themes outside of the designated play areas—extended the play boundaries. Many of Hyunsoo’s and Yeji’s peers also began following this pattern, because these practices were attractive and made their play activities richer. Moreover, they could challenge the implicit rule that constrained their play interactions.

At first, the teachers did not say anything about toys used outside of permitted areas. Sometimes, they seemed to feel good about the children’s creativity and increased quality of artifacts the children created with various play materials. However, the teachers became aware of the disorganization created by children moving toys back and forth among several play areas. Some girls began complaining that some toys necessary for their play roles were missing. The clean-up time also took longer. These problems brought the teachers and the children to modify the tacit rule in both classrooms. Yeji’s lead teacher decided to allow the children to move play objects anywhere if they did not hurt or bother anyone else. Hyunsoo’s lead teacher reminded her students of the rule, using toys within a designated area, but allowed them to use some toys in other areas only when the toys were helpful for the children’s play activities.

Second, Hyunsoo and Yeji influenced some of their peers to include various non-verbal languages (e.g., gestures, signs, artifacts, humor, and facial expressions) when they communicated with other children. This likely made the children’s sharing and negotiating meanings more harmonized. Just as the Reggio Emilia Approach demonstrates, a school becomes a more warm, caring, and inclusive community when children are allowed to express themselves freely using various languages. I found that children’s increased use of non-verbal communication played a positive role in building community in Hyunsoo’s and Yeji’s classes.
For example, Hyunsoo and Yeji often used humor to initiate play activities and develop social bonds. This humor often worked to relieve tensions among children and create an inclusive mood in the class environment.

Vignette 3.7 Video transcripts & Field notes: 02/07/12

Sara is playing with a puzzle of a dinosaur. Yeji stands nearby and looks at her matching the puzzle pieces. Jake comes, messes up the puzzle, and takes one of Sara’s puzzle pieces. “NO—o-o,” Sara shouts, but Jake runs away. Sara looks very annoyed. Looking at Sara for a moment, Yeji gathers back the puzzle pieces and hands them to Sara. Sara still looks annoyed, but she seems to decide to ignore the one puzzle piece Jake took. Sara resumes playing with the puzzle, while still maintaining an annoyed facial expression. Yeji begins making funny sounds (e.g., pretend bell and xylophone sounds), as Sara finds matching places for the puzzle pieces. Sara seems to like it and tells Yeji, “(laughing) Yeji, what are you doing?” They giggle together. Yeji pretends roaring like a dinosaur and makes a silly face. “Yeji, you look so silly!” It seems that they are not interested in the puzzle any more. Yeji picks up some of the puzzle pieces and playfully runs into a table next to them. Sara playfully chases Yeji.

Yeji’s humorous actions relieved Sara’s unhappy feelings and the tension between Sara and Jake. Yeji seemed to intentionally repeat what Jake did, taking puzzle pieces and running away. However, using her non-verbal languages (e.g., gestures and funny sounds), she expressed to Sara that she was initiating a playful interaction and was not making trouble. As Sara responded to this instigation, Yeji turned the problem that had annoyed Sara into a playful activity.
Implications for Early Childhood Practice

Throughout this chapter, I explored how two cultural linguistic minority preschoolers used various non-verbal languages. In my descriptions of their non-verbal languages, Hyunsoo and Yeji also presented themselves as active social beings who could negotiate meanings and values with their peers, engage in a cultural system, and contribute to the on-going development of the culture (both peer and class cultures). It is my hope that educators and researchers who read this chapter will begin looking at cultural linguistic minority children, who are developing English and bilingual skills and who utilize various types of non-verbal languages, in a different light. In this section, I would like to share some ideas about how we might expand our imaginations about young linguistic minority children’s possible resources for communicating in classrooms.

First, there have been efforts to perceive art and crafts as children’s multiple languages in the fields of early childhood and special education (e.g., Gallas, 1994; Holliday, Harrison, & McLeod, 2009; Malchiodi, 2012; Pollanen, 2011). However, children’s actions have been overlooked in the discussion of multiple languages. In this chapter, I tried to demonstrate how to see and understand some of the non-verbal languages of cultural linguistic minority children. Recognizing cultural linguistic minority children’s non-verbal languages has the potential to be a path for engaging the children. Just by acknowledging an action as a non-verbal language, educators and researchers can begin to see the meanings behind the action. They can move beyond seeing these students as having a list of incompetence and learn who the children are, instead. Ayers (2001) argued that when teachers focus on children’s strengths, the teachers can get insights or clues into how they might “engage a child in a journey of learning” or “invite a child into their classroom as a student” (p. 30). Finally, as educators and other children begin to
see cultural linguistic minority children’s competency and abilities through their non-verbal languages, the children can be included as valuable members of the classroom.

Second, the findings in this chapter show that many of my focal children’s non-verbal languages were related to their concerns about protecting their play activities or initiation of peer interactions. These concerns are also in accordance with young children’s peer culture. Thus, I suggest that teachers and researchers investigate this context as a potentially rich setting for both cultural linguistic minority and other children’s development of communication and social skills. When a teacher recognizes a child trying to invite other children through an action, the teacher could join in the child’s play activity and respond to the non-verbal expression in order to demonstrate ways of engaging for other children. Sometimes, teachers might play the role of interpreter in order to make a minority child’s intentions for an action clearly understood by other children. Bakhtin (1986) described that a speaker tries to act with an “anticipated response” in mind (p. 95). Thus, teachers might consider the anticipated responses to cultural linguistic minority children’s non-verbal languages and think of ways to help the children get meaningful responses from their peers.

Third, at the beginning of this chapter, I shared Loris Malaguzzi’s and my concerns about the cultures and practices of schooling, which tend to focus on verbal and written languages and teacher-directed curriculum. I suggest that teachers rethink the culture of their classrooms and teaching practices that could possibly prevent them from appreciating children’s various non-verbal communication. For example, in Yeji’s and Hyunsoo’s classroom, I noticed teachers tended to stay in a literacy or art center and called over each child to complete daily tasks. Although completing those tasks as a shared learning experience in the classroom is important, I also think that respecting the child-initiated activities, such as play, is equally crucial. For that
reason, I wonder if teachers can be more flexible to find the time for a child to complete the shared learning activity while being sensitive to what is going on in his or her play activities and negotiation with peers. For example, if Yeji’s and Hyunsoo’s teachers understood how much effort and time had been spent by these children to secure their play materials and activities, the teachers might have deferred calling over the children to complete teacher-directed tasks at that moment.

In addition, in the school culture emphasizing verbal language use, teachers may not appreciate children’s non-verbal expressions of humor, such as tickling, chasing, joking, etc. However, the findings of this study showed that such expressions support social engagement and feelings of social competence for these children. Bergen (2007) argued that “expression of social humor requires a safe environment in which children can take the risk of humor expression” (p. 34). Lessons learned from observing and understanding Yeji’s and Hyunsoo’s creative means of communicating can help us to envision classrooms as places where both cultural linguistic minority children and their peers feel supported and safe to express themselves by using both verbal and non-verbal languages.

Finally, the findings presented in this chapter highlight the importance of balancing between appreciating non-verbal language and teaching verbal and written language. Supporting non-verbal languages and teaching verbal and written language are not contradictory ideas. In fact, these different types of languages are complementary. Studies on young children’s non-verbal communication found that non-verbal communication and play correlates with later verbal language development (Bull & Frederikson, 1995; Mundi, Sigman, & Kasari, 1990). Just like verbal language, non-verbal language also delivers the speaker’s meanings, values, and beliefs (Bakhtin, 1981). Therefore, understanding children through non-verbal languages and, then, finding teachable moments to extend their languages entail the art of teaching. For example, we could gain insight into how to support cultural linguistic minority children’s English acquisition
from Lizzie’s and Yeji’s mutual teaching and learning, as shown in Vignette 3.6. This encounter suggests that dialogic teaching and learning based on mutual understanding is crucial for English as a second language education.
CHAPTER 4

"ONLY I KNOW":

A KOREAN CHILD’S TACTICS FOR SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Hyunsoo, a three-year-old Korean boy, and I were watching video recordings of the play events that happened in his preschool classroom during the month of November 2011. Relaxed in a beanbag chair and enjoying some cookies, Hyunsoo looked so excited to watch his peers and himself as they appeared on the screen. He also seemed to enjoy explaining things and people in his new U.S. preschool classroom to me in his native language, Korean. In one scene, Hyunsoo is picking up mini cars from a toy box and lining up the cars on the floor. Two boys approach Hyunsoo and pick up some of the mini cars from the long line of his cars. Some other children come and sit close to Hyunsoo’s play area. Hyunsoo looks apprehensively at the children and the remaining mini cars for a while. Suddenly, Hyunsoo goes to the toy shelves and retrieves a garbage truck that had a large closed-in bed in its back. Hyunsoo carefully puts the remaining mini cars inside the loading bed. He then drives the truck far enough away from the other kids. The other kids do not seem to recognize what Hyunsoo is doing. Watching this video episode, I was wondering what he would do if his peers or teachers realized that he put toys in the truck. I asked Hyunsoo what would happen if someone knew the mini cars were in the truck. Hyunsoo, shaking his body rhythmically, smiled at me and said loudly in Korean, “Only I know! Nobody knows I can put many [toys in the truck].”
This story describes a part of my first interview with Hyunsoo. I began video-recording in November right after collecting all of the consent forms from the parents of the children in Hyunsoo’s class, so the first video-cued interview was delayed until the end of November. In preschool, at that time, Hyunsoo appeared quiet and rarely played with other children. However, when he watched a set of video recordings that contained his play activities and interactions with peers at the interview, Hyunsoo was eager to comment on the episodes in the video recordings and describe the contexts of his and his peers’ actions. Moreover, Hyunsoo looked confident when he explained his unique tactic for keeping toys. I was amazed to see his sense of competence in his words and expressions, even at a time when one might see him as silent, choosing to remain alone, and not engaging with the other children. Unlike the dominant image of cultural linguistic minority children, Hyunsoo declared himself capable of gaining control of his life at a mainstream preschool when he watched himself using the tactics. These types of tactics were often observed when he dealt with similar situations, for which I will describe the contexts and meanings of such tactics in detail later.

In this chapter, I explore what Hyunsoo, a three-year-old Korean boy newly enrolled in a U.S. preschool, was able to accomplish and use as tactics for shaping his everyday practices in his classroom, or “other people’s territory” (de Certeau, 1984). This chapter is mainly framed by Michel de Certeau’s (1984) idea of “the arts of the weak,” which describes the weak—those who lack power and resources—as neither helpless nor constrained by the social order, but active and creative in articulating the order for their own ends. I further elaborate why Hyunsoo is associated with de Certeau’s definition of “the weak” and “tactics” in the following section. Although there is a noticeable lack of focus on cultural linguistic minority children in regard to

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10 For data collection, I used participant observations and video-cued child interviews. This chapter was originally written in a publishable journal format, but I deleted the methods section in order to avoid redundancy. Refer to Chapter 1 regarding research methods.
children’s peer culture, studies on peer culture also framed my understanding of young children’s capability, agency, and desire to influence, defend, and construct the social order of preschool (Corsaro, 1985). This chapter describes how a cultural linguistic minority child got cues from the peer culture, actively applied them in his tactics to trick the established order, and increased his chances for social engagement.

**Hyunsoo, the Weak**

In the hierarchy of a preschool classroom in an English-speaking country, a cultural linguistic minority child like Hyunsoo falls under the status of the weak. Hyunsoo, in his first school year, did not have proficient English verbal skills yet, which were necessary for interacting and negotiating with his peers and teachers. As studies on peer culture have shown (Corsaro, 1981, 1985; Corsaro & Nelson, 2003; Corsaro & Rizzo, 1990; Elgas, 2003; Elgas, Klein, & Kantor, 1988; Evaldsson & Tellgren, 2009; Williams, 2001), in order to play together, children negotiate with their peers and shape a structured order—play rules, themes, and turns—for themselves. Besides the peer culture, there are also other structured orders and class rules that are negotiated and constructed by the teachers and the children. Not being able to fully engage in these negotiation processes yet, Hyunsoo became part of the weak, those who might have no other choice but to live under the constraints of the order constructed by others.

However, de Certeau (1984), by using a similar characterization of an immigrant worker in Paris, argued that this member of the weak tries to create a space in which he can find ways of using the constraining order for his own beneficial outcomes:

> Without leaving the place where he [an immigrant company worker] has no choice but to live and which lays down its law for him, he establishes within it a degree of *plurality*.

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11 See Chapter 2 for further discussions about the theoretical frameworks of this study.
and creativity. By an art of being in between, he draws unexpected results from his situation. (de Certeau 1984, p. 30; emphasis in the original)

According to de Certeau, the art of the weak does not directly challenge the order but follows it at a surface level and uses the order to maneuver for what the worker might need. The weak consistently develop tactics that trick the imposed order and, in this process, often bring “plurality” into the system by creating unexpected moments. I found that Hyunsoo also developed creative tactics in order to trick the constraining order, seize the moments to gain advantage, and be an agent actively engaged in the social world.

In the following section, I include three episodes that show the representative types of tactics used by Hyunsoo. I examine how Hyunsoo created the tactics in spite of his seeming weaknesses or disadvantages as a cultural linguistic minority child and how those tactics were in relation with the established order in his classroom: class norms and the peer culture. I also explore what Hyunsoo gained through the use of tactics and discuss meanings of tactics for cultural linguistic minority children and their social engagement. At the end of this chapter, I include my conversations with Hyunsoo’s lead teacher, Ms. Sunny. Her insightful reflections on Hyunsoo’s tactics will be helpful for teachers and researchers to rethink our views on children’s cunning use of the established order—which might be perceived as misbehaviors—and find better ways to provide appropriate resources for the social engagement of cultural linguistic minority children.

**Hyunsoo’s Tactics**

In this section, I explore three of the representative tactics used by Hyunsoo. I describe each tactic in a separate section with a vignette written from my field notes and the video transcripts. Acknowledging de Certeau’s (1984) definition of “tactics of the weak” which is
“ways of using the constraining order” for one’s own ends (p. 30, emphasis in the original), each section has a heading that identifies both the form and the purpose of the tactic.

**Hiding Toys in a Garbage Truck: Protecting Play Activities**

Vignette 4.1 Video transcripts: 11/18/2011

Hyunsoo is playing with toy airplanes, one red helicopter in his hand and seven large and small airplanes in two rows in front of him. Rachel comes over to Hyunsoo and grabs a yellow airplane. She plays with the airplane briefly, puts it back on the floor, and leaves the area. Kyle approaches the area and picks up two airplanes. “Weeee!” He pretends the airplanes are flying. Another boy, Josh joins in Kyle’s play by holding a bigger airplane than Kyle’s. “Doo-doo,” Josh pretends his airplane is shooting Kyle’s. Rachel comes closer to watch the boy’s play interactions. Looking at Josh and Kyle playing with the airplanes and Rachel approaching, Hyunsoo gently slips out of the area, goes to the toy shelves, and picks up a big garbage truck. Hyunsoo brings the truck to the area where he has been playing with airplanes and carefully puts some of the airplanes inside the truck’s enclosed loading bed while Josh and Kyle are focusing on their pretend airplane war. Carefully watching the other kids and measuring the sizes of the airplanes at a glance or with his hands, Hyunsoo successfully puts more than six airplanes in the truck. Making truck sounds, Hyunsoo drives the truck around the area several times and, then, moves to a corner of the block center while watching what the other kids were doing. Although he arrives at a corner far enough away from the other kids, he does not pull out the airplanes immediately. Rather, he begins to construct a parking lot by putting four long wood blocks around the garbage truck. After he completed the closed lot, he opens the door, pulls out the toy airplanes, and parks them in the lot.
In this first episode, Hyunsoo was playing with eight airplanes. He brought in the airplane box, pulled out the airplanes, and placed them in two rows. It seemed that he needed to keep all eight airplanes for his play. However, other children, who were interested in the airplanes, approached his play space and took some of them. In addition, there were imposed play rules in his classroom, such as “sharing toys” and “not owning too many toys,” which made it difficult for him to keep all of the airplanes under his control. In this case, in order to keep the airplanes, he should have negotiated his case by using a complex process: persuading other kids why all of the airplanes were necessary for him, sharing his ideas and rules for playing with the airplanes with them, and allowing some of the kids to join in his play by assigning each child a play role. This process required refined communication skills not yet available to Hyunsoo, a newcomer from a cultural and linguistic minority group. Therefore, without the refined verbal skills, Hyunsoo might be considered unable to keep his ownership of the many airplanes, having no choice but either following the rule, “not owning too many toys,” or having trouble with the other kids. However, this episode shows that Hyunsoo was able to develop a clever tactic, using a garbage truck (see Figure 4.1), which helped him keep his ownership of the toys while not directly challenging the classroom rules.

![The Big Garbage Truck](image)

*Figure 4.1 The Big Garbage Truck*

During his first semester, I often found that Hyunsoo used the garbage truck to hide his favorite toys, such as small cars or airplanes. Especially when there were many children or more
powerful peers around him, Hyunsoo tended to retrieve the garbage truck, quietly load it with as many toys as it would hold, and play with the truck until he found a safe place to pull out all of the toys. It looked as though he was trying to make it appear to the other children that he was only playing with the truck. I showed this event to Hyunsoo and asked his descriptions of the episode at a video-cued interview.

**Interview transcripts: 11/26/2011**

In the video recording, Hyunsoo puts airplanes inside the loading bed of the truck and moves it to another place.

Jooeun: *Hyunsoo, what are you doing [in the scene]?

Hyunsoo: *I’m playing with the truck.*

Jooeun: *Uh, you are playing with the truck. How about the airplanes?*

Hyunsoo does not respond and keeps watching the video recording in which he picks up long wood blocks and places them around the toy truck.

Jooeun: *What are you making with the long wood blocks?*

Hyunsoo: *Making an airplane house.*

Jooeun: *A house for the airplanes inside the truck?*

Hyunsoo: *Yes.*

Hyunsoo, in the video recording, begins to pull out the airplanes.

Jooeun: *Wow, the airplanes are coming out!*

Hyunsoo: *The house is done, so now the airplanes can come out.*

When Hyunsoo watched his own actions, putting toys inside the truck and moving the toys in the truck to another place, he stated that he was playing with the truck and avoided answering the question about the airplanes in the truck. During the event, he certainly seemed to hide his toys
in the truck, but when he narrated the event to me, he was probably trying to emphasize the fact that he was only playing with the truck, not the airplanes hidden inside. Interestingly, after Hyunsoo watched himself in the scene creating a safe place, he began talking about the airplanes freely. It was probably related to his sense of security about the airplanes surrounded by four wood blocks.

His actions looked very careful and “calculated” (de Certeau, 1984, p. xvii), consistent with de Certeau’s descriptions of the tactics of the weak. The episode shows that Hyunsoo carefully looked around to seize the moment to hide the airplanes in the truck and measured the size of the toys to select just the right ones to fit into the truck. This measuring seemed to help him shorten his reaction time and secure his tactics. After putting enough toys in the truck, he brought the truck to a corner and pulled out the small toys after he constructed a closed parking lot where the physical closeness of the parking lot could help him claim ownership of the toys. In the above interview, Hyunsoo called this closed area an “airplane house,” which might represent his feelings of wanting to secure his toys. According to de Certeau’s description, Hyunsoo’s detailed and well-calculated system is one of the most important characteristics of “the arts of the weak” (p. 23). Using the garbage truck, Hyunsoo created a temporally safe “space” for himself in which he could get what he wanted and control his play activities in an “others’ territory.” As I discussed in the prior section, there were imposed rules in his classroom, such as “sharing toys” and “not owning too many toys.” However, Hyunsoo did not directly break the rules by appearing to play with only one truck, while avoiding the potential risk that his favorite toys would be confiscated by his peers and teachers who had the discernible power in the classroom.
Checking Shoes at Circle Time: Escaping from a Challenging Situation

Vignette 4.2 Video transcripts: 11/21/2011

It is circle time. All the children are sitting on their spots around the carpeted area. At the front of the room, Ms. Sunny is pointing to numbers on the calendar. She moves her pointer to a number chart and begins explaining how to count numbers by 2’s, 5’s, or 10’s. Hyunsoo looks out the classroom window to the right side of the teacher for a while. During the teacher’s long explanation, Hyunsoo keeps slouching down. He repeatedly corrects his position. Now, Ms. Sunny is talking about shapes. Hyunsoo takes off one of his shoes, which has pictures of cars on it, and begins investigating its outside, the pictures, the bottom, and the inside, in turn. Ms. Sunny tells him with a gesture, “Hyunsoo, put it back on.” Hyunsoo puts the shoe back on, but soon, he takes it off again and seems to play with it. Ms. Sunny calls his name again. Looking at her, Hyunsoo holds the shoe upside down, checks out the inside, and begins shaking it gently. Ms. Sunny asks him, “Hyunsoo, is there sand in it?” Pointing to the garbage can in the corner, she asks him to go to the can to shake out the sand. Hyunsoo slowly goes to the trash can. The assistant teacher, Ms. Corny, takes the shoe from him and shakes it out above the can. Nothing seems to come out of the shoe. Hyunsoo, then, very slowly comes back to the carpet and sits down. He giggles with the girl next to him and sits still to focus on Ms. Sunny.

In the second episode, Hyunsoo was at circle time. Although the time was planned to be short enough (approximately twenty minutes) for three-year-old children, one can imagine how long this would be for a second language learner who could not understand most of the spoken words of the teacher. At circle time, there are some basic rules, such as “sitting still,” “being
quiet,” and “focusing on the teacher.” Sitting still without anything to do was probably challenging for Hyunsoo, but it was required. Without any resource to make the time meaningful for him, this context might make Hyunsoo powerless and constrained.

In this episode, however, Hyunsoo found a resource—his shoe—to make the circle time enjoyable. He could keep some of the rules, such as “sitting properly,” “being quiet,” “not having a play object,” by touching and playing with his shoe, a familiar daily item available to him in this situation. When his teacher recognized this, he pretended to check his shoe and was able to gain a free moment in which he could escape from the space and have a short break. Like the first episode, Hyunsoo found resources for his tactics from familiar rules or familiar items (i.e., toy truck and shoes), but his use of the familiar was not the same as other children and teachers. It was rather the twist of the familiar. This finding parallels de Certeau’s (1984) idea underlining the existing social order as the source of tactics and tricking the order as the art of the weak.

This finding also suggests that cultural linguistic minority children have the sensitivity to and intersubjectivity for learning the order and rules in a social system through non-verbal communications and careful observations of others’ actions and context. When Hyunsoo was interviewed regarding this second episode, he was able to explain what his teacher asked him to do and why.

**Interview transcripts: 11/26/12**

Jooeun: *Hyunsoo, what is your teacher telling you?*

Hyunsoo: *She is asking me not to touch my shoe.*

Jooeun: *Why is she asking you not to touch the shoe?*

Hyunsoo: *Because [she is] afraid that it may bother the other kids.*
(In the video recording, Hyunsoo is walking to the garbage can.)

Jooeun: Hyunsoo, what are you doing?

Hyunsoo: [I’m] going to the garbage can. Ms. Sunny told me to shake out the sand and come back.

Jooeun: Was there sand in your shoe?

Hyunsoo: umm... If you have sand in your shoe, you have to shake the sands out in the garbage can. The teachers said not to shake out the sand anywhere.

According to Bruner (1996), young children develop their ability to “read other minds” (p. 50) and understand what others are feeling or thinking through intersubjectivity. Although Hyunsoo knew only a few English words at the beginning of school year, this interview showed that he understood what his teacher verbally asked him and even her feelings and thinking behind the verbal words. I found that he also developed knowledge of the class rules. He might have developed this knowledge of the class rules as he read others’ minds and shared meanings through his careful observations of the contexts and practices of others and his non-verbal communication with others. His description of the rule, “shaking out sand in the garbage can,” was clear. Hyunsoo seemed to apply his knowledge of this rule to his tactic, “checking shoes,” for escaping a challenging time and place and for having a short break. Although his use of this rule was tricky, it should be noted that his purpose was not to break the rule. In fact, he followed the rule, “shaking out sand in the garbage can,” with his teacher’s permission to do so even though it was circle time. At the end of the episode, Hyunsoo appeared to be refreshed to focus on circle time thanks to the tactic. This represents a special meaning for such tactics for Hyunsoo the weak, a cultural linguistic minority child.
Mailing a Letter to Himself: Gaining Recognition as a Member

In order to explore the third tactic, which I named *mailing a letter to himself*, it is necessary to understand a mailing activity in Hyunsoo’s class. Figure 4.2 shows a writing center in Hyunsoo’s classroom.

![Writing Center](image)

*Figure 4.2 Writing Center*

At this center, a child could write a letter to a friend or draw a picture in a letter. According to Ms. Sunny, the lead teacher, this center was created to motivate her students to recognize the alphabet letters in their friends’ names and give them chances to write down the names. There were big yellow envelopes lining a wall in this area. The envelope wall had a big sign that read “Post Office,” and each envelope was marked with a child’s name. So, after writing a letter to a friend at the writing table, a child could mail it to the friend by putting it in a recipient’s envelope. At the end of school, Ms. Sunny distributed the mail to the recipients. The children were very interested in who got mail. When a child was called, the child looked excited and proud to not only get mail but also to get attention and questions about the mail. Therefore, as shown in Vignette 4.3 and Figure 4.3, sometimes children came to the writing center and checked each other’s envelopes to see how many letters each child got. Some kids got mail by asking other kids to write letters to them or by exchanging letters.

**Vignette 4.3 Video transcripts & Field notes: 02/23/12**

Sara, Jinu, and Josh are in front of the “post office” wall. They are looking inside of each envelope. Sara tells Josh, “Oh, Kyle has some.” Jinu says, “I have one.” Josh looks
disappointed. Sara tells Josh, “I can write one if you want.” “Hey, Hyunsoo got one!” Jinu exclaims. Sara and Josh come and look inside of Hyunsoo’s envelope. “Hyunsoo got one, too; I got one, too,” repeatedly speaking this like a chant, Jinu goes to the other play center. Kyle comes and checks the letter in his envelope and, together with Josh, begins searching the mail in the other kids’ envelopes. Kyle says, “Some people don’t get [any].” Josh finds a letter in Lucy’s envelope and shouts to Kyle, “What? She got mail!” Kyle quickly comes, sees Lucy’s mail, and exchanges a surprised look with Josh. Lucy is a newcomer to the preschool and has been enrolled for a week, so they seem to be surprised to see her already getting mail. Kyle tells Josh as he goes to the writing table, “You would get your mail. You will get it, Josh.” Sara, writing something at the table, tells them, “I’m making Josh’s mail, too!” Kyle sits next to Sara at the writing table and tells Josh, “Josh, I will make your mail, [and] you will make my mail. Ok?” Sara tells Josh, “Josh, make me mail since I’m making your mail.”

*Figure 4.3 Checking Who Got Mail*

Although the prime purpose of this activity was developing writing skills, this activity revealed the children’s social relationships, power, and status. Getting more letters reflected a child’s popularity, as well. For example, a popular kid like Kyle—who was also the oldest and tallest boy in the class—got many letters frequently, but it might be hard for a child like Hyunsoo to get mail, a cultural linguistic minority child who had not fully entered into the class’s social network yet. Moreover, the procedures of this activity—writing letters, putting them in
envelopes, and receiving the letters in a large, attentive group—probably served as a visualization of who had power and who did not. Therefore, children in Hyunsoo’s class consciously came to the writing center and regularly checked to see if they got mail. Some children were able to negotiate with other kids in order to give and receive mail. However, not having such communication skills and close social relationships yet, Hyunsoo became the weak in this context. The following vignette describes the tactic Hyunsoo used to trick the established order of the mailing activity in order to gain recognition as a member of the classroom.

Vignette 4.4 Video transcripts & Field notes: 02/15/2012

Hyunsoo goes to the writing center. Two children, Paulina and Josh, are also at the center working on their letters. Hyunsoo sits on a chair, picks up a blank paper, and draws a car and a tree. Josh puts his letter into Kyle’s envelope and leaves. Hyunsoo stands up in front of the envelope wall holding his letter in his left hand. He, hesitantly, begins checking the inside of each envelope. After checking each envelope, he puts his letter in Alice’s envelope, a small and quiet girl. He stays in front of Alice’s envelope for a while, takes his letter back and puts it in Lucy’s envelope, a newcomer who has just enrolled the week before. Again, he comes back and puts it in the envelope of Jay who is absent. A moment later, when there is nobody else at the writing center, Hyunsoo comes back and takes back his mail in Jay’s envelope. Looking around to make sure he is not being watched, he puts his letter into his own envelope. He opens his envelope again to confirm that the mail is actually in his own envelope. Smiling and galloping, he leaves the center.

Hyunsoo wanted to get mail. When I asked him if he wanted to get mail, Hyunsoo told me that “everyone wants to get mail” with a shy smile. This episode shows that Hyunsoo’s tactic
for getting mail and recognition was mailing a letter to himself. However, he knew that the rule of the activity was placing a letter in another child’s envelope. His tactic was putting his letter in another child’s envelope temporarily while there were other children in the center and, when there was nobody in the writing center, taking it back to put it inside his envelope. By doing this, later at the dismissal time or during play time, he could be recognized as a child having a minimum of popularity, good standing, and power in the classroom. This seemed important for a child like him, because showing such a position might attract his peers and raise the chances of developing and extending his friendship.

In Vignette 4.3, the fact that Hyunsoo (a cultural linguistic minority child) and Lucy (a newcomer) got mail seems to be big news for the other children. Kyle and Josh especially showed an exaggerated reaction to Lucy’s mail, as if they had never expected she was popular enough to get mail yet. Their accentuated words may represent the dominant perceptions on minority children’s or newcomers’ social status because language is, as Bakhtin (1981) described, not “a neutral medium” of the speaker’s intentions but “a concrete heteroglot conception of the world,” which includes the intentions of others (p. 294). The children’s assumptions about Hyunsoo and Lucy might be challenged when they found that Hyunsoo and Lucy also got mail just like other children. Bakhtin (1981) would say that this is a dialogic moment that extended the children’s understanding of Hyunsoo and Lucy and that created a heteroglot change in the majority children’s actions and words towards the minority children. This kind of change was found in Jinu’s actions and words; Jinu, in Vignette 4.3, chanted, “Hyunsoo got one, too; I got one, too,” as if he highlighted his recognition of the commonality between he and Hyunsoo, getting mail.
After he completed his letter, Hyunsoo took his time in deciding on an envelope in which he could temporarily put his mail for safekeeping. He looked very intent on selecting just the right envelope. He changed his choice three times before putting his mail in his own envelope. His first choice was Alice’s envelope, who was quiet and the smallest girl in his class, but he moved his mail to his second choice, Lucy, a newly enrolled girl’s envelope. Again, he moved his mail to the envelope of Jay who was absent on that day and, finally, left the area. When I asked Hyunsoo at an interview why he moved his mail several times and why he put his mail in his envelope, he avoided answering or simply answered, “I don’t know.” It was hard to get his direct answers to questions regarding this tactic, but it can be assumed that his careful selection of an envelope might be related to his efforts to minimize the risk that his mail was found out by other children or got mixed with other children’s letters before he took his mail back. The three children named on the envelopes (Alice, Lucy, and Jay) were small, quiet, newly enrolled, or absent. Hyunsoo might have intentionally picked children who were not popular and rarely got mail or who tended to stay in other play areas, not in the writing center. This suggests that Hyunsoo had already gained an understanding of the dynamics of the social relationships in his classroom and his peers’ play interests. Interestingly, although there was still a minimum risk of being found out by others, Hyunsoo put his letter in another child’s envelope temporarily rather than hiding it in another place for a while. This suggests that he understood the order of the activity and tried to find ways to get what he needed within the order.

By using the above three episodes, I described the patterns of tactics used by Hyunsoo. I found, although Hyunsoo became the weak and experienced feelings of powerlessness, this did not mean that he could not do anything but feel helpless. De Certeau (1984) argues, because of the consistent experience of the constraining orders, the weak begin developing tactics, ways of
resistance against regulations. Hyunsoo’s case provided good examples of the tactics developed by a cultural linguistic minority child. The three patterns of Hyunsoo’s tactics suggest that we can identify young children’s tactics by looking at four features: (a) a particular context in which a child is placed into the position of the weak; (b) constraining orders and rules that regulate the child’s actions; (c) the child’s creative and cunning ways of using the orders and rules as resources; and (d) the advantage the child gets as a result of using tactics.

**Relations between Hyunsoo’s Tactics and Peer Culture**

Another finding is that Hyunsoo exercised his knowledge of peer culture when he used the tactics. In fact, the tactics in the above three episodes reflect his understanding of rules, themes, and values shared by the children in his classroom. It was amazing to observe his sensitivity and intersubjectivity to the peer culture through his use of non-verbal communication and his adherence to the contexts. He got cues from the peer culture and applied them when using tactics.

For example, in the first episode, in order to create a safe space to claim ownership of the airplanes, Hyunsoo constructed a closed parking lot before he pulled out the toys. Through close observations, I found a shared rule among children that once a child constructs a closed area, such as a parking lot and a building, the child has ownership of the construction and the play objects within it. If another child wants to play with the construction or the objects in it, this child should get the permission of the constructor or owner. This is not a rule established by an adult, but one of the rules constructed through the negotiations among children. These rules and the order constructed by children are what Corsaro (1985) called peer culture.

The first episode shows how Hyunsoo understood and used a rule in the peer culture in his practice. It helped him to raise the chances of attracting other children’s attention and
interacting with them while protecting his ownership of the toys. In the second episode, he used
his shoe as the object for initiating his tactic. For the children in his classroom, shoes were
distinct and interesting objects among their personal belongings. Children’s shoes usually have
attractive features (e.g., children’s favorite characters, lights, sounds, etc.). This classroom was a
mixed-aged group of three and four year olds, and many of them began wearing shoes that tied.
Therefore, the children were often checking their shoelaces or the insides of their shoes.
Hyunsoo seemed to use his peers’ interest in shoes in his practice in the second episode. In the
third episode, “being recognized by having more mail” was valued by the children of Hyunsoo’s
class, because it revealed popularity in peer relations. This value played a role as a motivator for
developing and practicing a tactic.

The aforementioned findings showed that a cultural linguistic minority child was capable
of understanding the social relationships, rules, and the order in his classroom. Furthermore,
Hyunsoo was not only influenced by the peer culture but also actively used his knowledge of the
peer culture in his everyday practices. This means that Hyunsoo was already engaged in the peer
culture and taking part in the on-going construction of the peer culture even when it looked like
he was playing alone and not verbally interacting with other children. I argue that Hyunsoo
shared the peer culture with other children in his knowledge and his practices. Like his peers,
Hyunsoo, a cultural linguistic minority child, could create unique ways to protect his play
activities, develop a sense of belonging to the classroom community, and resist the social order
that regulates active engagement. Most of his everyday practices were for these purposes, and,
in some contexts, the practices turned to a form of trickery, because a tactic as the art of the weak
helps a cultural linguistic minority child grab an effective moment to be engaged in the peer
culture more deeply. Hyunsoo’s tactics were carefully developed based on his knowledge of the
social order and peer culture in his classroom. While recognizing his limited cultural and linguistic resources, Hyunsoo was clever enough to use the order in his classroom as resources for raising chances of his interactions with materials, events, and peers. The tactics seemed to be changed and the frequency of tactics tended to decrease as Hyunsoo confronted new social challenges or became more engaged and empowered in the social world of his new preschool classroom.

**How to Respond to Children’s Tactics**

Possibly, tactics of cultural linguistic minority children could be seen as strange, improper or manipulative behaviors by adults. However, these stories of Hyunsoo’s deployment of tactics to trick the established order, can lead us as educators to researchers to reconsider our views on and reactions to children’s unusual actions, which we broadly categorize as problematic behaviors. I argue that, rather, we should carefully see if some of those actions are the tactics of children who have less power, and might important value in their social engagement. The four features of tactics I discussed earlier can help teachers and researchers identify children’s tactics.

We should rethink the meanings of tricking the orders and rules. Sometimes, it might seem like overt misbehavior or breaking the rules. However, we can see that Hyunsoo used the rules as resources, because there were no other available resources he could use to his advantage. According to de Certeau (1984), flipping the rules for their own benefit is the wisdom and the art of the weak, and anyone who finds himself or herself in situations of limited resources and power would attempt to do the same. In this regard, Hyunsoo—and his demonstration of creativity and cleverness—is not an extraordinary case. Furthermore, we should consider that Hyunsoo did not fully break the rules. His tactics could be understood as his attempts of doing both: challenging the regulations and staying at an acceptable level or resisting the constraints
and living in the social system. We need to understand that tactics can empower cultural linguistic minority children to be members of the mainstream and live in the social system.

**Dialogues with Ms. Sunny: Connecting Tactics to Teaching Practices**

There might be some teachers and other adults who would still feel uncomfortable accepting a child’s trickery of the established order, and they may be afraid that such tactics would challenge the established order and their authority or affect other children’s feelings and attitudes. To allay their concerns, I share Ms. Sunny’s insightful reflections on Hyunsoo’s tactics, which help us further explore the implications for early childhood practice. After the school year had ended, I met Ms. Sunny and shared my findings on Hyunsoo’s tactics. I showed her each episode, which I had used in this chapter, and asked for her comments. The following includes some of the excerpts from the interview with Ms. Sunny.

**Interview transcript: 05/15/2012**

Jooeun: So, as you read in episode one, one tactic he developed for keeping his toys was using the big truck. I’m wondering if you noticed this tactic before.

Ms. Sunny: I knew that he was possessive of the cars. Even at the beginning of the year, that was like a security blanket. He walked in with cars in his pocket, in his backpack. He always had cars in his hands, always. Yes, cars have always been obsessive with him, like he really wanted them. I didn’t know [what his tactic was], but I knew that he tried to keep cars to himself more. So, I went out, had gotten more cars from a store, put them out, and tried to have more available. Because, at that time, he was still learning the whole situation of [sharing and negotiating (gesture of giving and taking)], it was hard for him to communicate.
Other kids would even say, “I would like the car” or take out a car from his hand.

I guess putting them away was his way of keeping them. (Smiles)

Jooeun: Usually, tactics are very careful and not easily noticeable. What do you think about Hyunsoo’s tactic?

Ms. Sunny: I’m surprised that they [the kids] did not notice that. To be honest, the kids are so aware of who has what all the time. I am surprised they did not notice that, and they did not tell me anything, because they are so possessive of their stuff already. If they did not notice that, or if they noticed that but, for some reason, it did not bother them, I think it [the tactic] was good.

Jooeun: Episode two. It’s related to the teacher time.

Ms. Sunny: So, maybe, because it was something hard for him to understand, so he found something to focus his attention on, like a shoe, right?

Jooeun: Although fifteen minutes are good for three to four year old kids, it was hard for Hyunsoo.

Ms. Sunny: Exactly. I knew that. (Laughs) That was why he was making noises or touching something. In that way, kids around him would laugh, and he could get attention from them. You know, it was ok with me. But, I also think, even if he had done that, maybe, eight out of ten times he didn’t, then it sunk in a little bit every time. They hear it again, again, again, like a circle, shape… then, eventually, it will sink in. At first, it might be way too much, but it will become better, right?

Jooeun: Hyunsoo seemed to use the shoe, because it was like something he could touch officially. (Laughs)
Ms. Sunny: (Laughs) I knew he also found a toy on the floor and pointed to it; then, I nodded yes. Then, he moved it back to its place, you know, [he was trying to get away from the circle time], but he was helping. (Smiles)

Jooeun: You mean that you knew that he could get a short break from the circle time by doing that?

Ms. Sunny: Yes, but it was a nice thing to do that. (Smiles)

Jooeun: Ok, please read this [third] episode.

Ms. Sunny: Ok, so he put it in his own.... (Reading the video transcripts of “mailing himself”) Do you think he did it because he wanted his own drawing, or do you think he just wanted his mail in his envelope? Could you tell me based on what he was doing?

Jooeun: If he wanted his own drawing, he could freely put it in his book bag.

Ms. Sunny: That is right.

Jooeun: I think he wanted to get mail.

Ms. Sunny: Yes… (Nodding her head as an expression of agreement)

Jooeun: Or, maybe he wanted to show other kids or you that I am getting,

Ms. Sunny: Mail, too. (Nodding) Ok, that’s understandable.

Jooeun: So, what do you think about this [tactic]?

Ms. Sunny: Well, I feel bad for him, because he had to do that. I know that everyday it’s different. As the year went on, it became less to put mail. It was just an opportunity for kids who wanted to write…umm. It makes me think more about next year’s class to make sure they have a way, they check off, you know. Maybe,
once a week do a mail… I should have tried at the beginning to make sure that

did not happen. Actually, it breaks my heart a little bit.

Jooeun: Well, if he could be happy at the end of the class for getting mail, even though it

was from himself, I think it was good for him.

Ms. Sunny: Right.

Jooeun: I think it was also an opportunity for him to extend his friendship, if he could

show other kids messages like “I’m also getting mail. I’m also as popular as you.

I’m worth playing with” through the action.

Ms. Sunny: Right, it was good for him. But, after that, definitely, it was something to be

more aware of, too. You know, learning something from children would make it

better. Maybe, I can assign [each of] them [one of] their friends’ names to write a

letter!

Ms. Sunny was already aware of some of Hyunsoo’s tactics but did not know all of them.

However, it seems that, when she recognized them, she tried to understand the meanings behind
the tactics and explore better ways to support him. Although she did not notice his exact tactic,
she understood Hyunsoo tried to keep cars because it secured his feelings. Therefore, rather than
asking him to share the toys, she tried to provide more cars to make them available to everyone
by purchasing new ones. She recognized that Hyunsoo was often not focusing on her lesson and
trying to avoid the circle time by using some tactics. However, she understood his feelings. She
acknowledged the positive side of the tactics by giving him a short break—what his tactics
aimed to do—and waited until the learning had “sunk in,” as per her expression. When she
learned of Hyunsoo’s third tactic in which he sent himself mail, she sympathized with his
feelings, rethought her teaching, and considered better and more inclusive approaches for the
next year. As Ms. Sunny did, other teachers could understand their students’ tactics, appreciate their meanings, and respond creatively according to the different contexts: sometimes directly providing what they need, sometimes watching the tactics work for the children’s benefits, and sometimes modifying teaching practices to empower children with useful resources. Ms. Sunny’s insightful reflections indicate the changes we can make when we try to understand and appreciate students’ tactics.

Although this dissertation study focuses on cultural linguistic minority children, I also argue that tactics are employed by many children in their power relationships with adults, regardless of their cultural linguistic backgrounds. As discussed earlier, Corsaro and his colleagues’ research (e.g., Corsaro, 1985; Corsaro & Miller, 1992; Corsaro & Rizzo, 1990) have revealed how young children develop a variety of tactics, what these researchers called “secondary adjustments” in their studies, in order to gain control of their lives at school. Even if I claim that tactics are critical to cultural linguistic minority children, I also would like to remind teachers of the importance of tactics in their children’s developing sense of identity as students in their classrooms and members of their peer culture.

When Hyunsoo watched himself using a tactic, he confidently stated, “Only I know it!” This shows that a cultural linguistic minority child’s tactics are also connected to the child’s sense of competence and capability. Now, it is our turn to acknowledge the social competence and capability of cultural linguistic minority children shown in their tactics and to find ways to support them to feel competent and capable more often at school. In order to do this, we could intervene and provide more resources and supports. However, it is important to remember that sometimes we need wisdom to hold back and wait, respecting the children’s own attempts.
CHAPTER 5

“INCLEAN UP!”

THE VALUE OF CLEAN-UP TIME FOR

SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT IN PEER CULTURE AT PRESCHOOLS

Playtime begins. Yeji, a three-year-old Korean girl, heads to the house-keeping play area. There are already two other children preparing meals on the dining table. Yeji glances at them, but, as always, she goes directly to the kitchen oven without interacting with the children. Although it has been three months since her enrollment in a preschool, this quiet little girl is still speaking very few words, staying in one or two areas—usually around the kitchen oven or at an art table, and rarely interacting with other children during playtime. She begins preparing food and placing dishes on shelves underneath the oven. She picks up one of the dishes and brings it to Ms. Betty in the art area. This seems to be a ritual for her. Usually, this is the only time she leaves the kitchen and answers her teacher’s questions about the food she brings, although her answers may only include smiles and nods. Yeji comes directly back to the oven.

After setting a timer, Ms. Betty announces five minutes are left until clean-up time. When there is one minute left, the alarm starts clicking loudly and rings. The children shout “clean-up time” and sing “clean-up, clean-up, everybody, everywhere.” They look busy wrapping up their play activities, picking up toys, giggling, wandering, or crawling under the table. Yeji also sings the clean-up song and begins wandering, seemingly to search for toys not in order. She picks up a firefighter’s hat and brings it to a costume box. Before she puts it in the
box, she wears it and asks me if she looks cool in Korean. She goes to the block area and picks up two cars near Sean. Sean, who is still playing there, rhythmically chants, “Go, Yeji, go!” Yeji looks at him, drives the cars on Sean’s train track, and begins putting the train and track away in a box. Sean joins her in cleaning-up. She then picks up her teacher’s pointer and acts like Ms. Betty—pointing and counting the numbers on the calendar in English. The youngest girl in her class, Lizzie, passes by Yeji, shouts “two, eight, nine,” and giggles. Yeji smiles back and continues, “ten, eleben.”\(^1\) She then places the pointer back on the teacher’s chair.

This vignette was from a video recording taken at the end of January 2012. Yeji enrolled at New Hope Church Preschool in November 2011, and during the first three months, she seemed to play alone and quietly stayed in the same small areas. I rarely heard her voice and seldom saw her actively moving or interacting. I thought she might not be ready to be expressive and engage with her peers yet. However, when I watched this video recording again for data analysis, I realized that it was I, not she, who was not ready and could not acknowledge her social engagement. From the video recording, I captured two seemingly different facets of Yeji’s social engagements. Unlike the quiet and confined little girl at playtime, Yeji seemed to become an active, busy, and engaged child at clean-up time. Because of my assumption that most peer interactions occur during playtime, I had focused on observing and analyzing playtime. I realized that this assumption (simply, playtime is for play, and clean-up time is for chores) resulted in my missing valuable social engagements that occurred at clean-up time and judging Yeji as not socially ready.

After my recognition of Yeji’s change at clean-up time, I revisited the video recordings of clean-up time taken during the first several months when Yeji and Hyunsoo were seen as quiet and staying only in a particular area at playtime. I found Yeji and Hyunsoo moved freely and

\(^1\) To make English words—often used in Hyunsoo’s and Yeji’s speeches—visible, I marked the words in bold.
confidently throughout the classroom, performed diverse activities, and even interacted with other children as they cleaned up the related play materials. With this finding, I became interested in the possible explanations for this heightened activity, considering two questions:

- Why do these children become more actively engaged at clean-up time, compared to playtime?
- What is the value of clean-up time for the children’s social engagement?

This chapter addresses these questions following Yeji’s and Hyunsoo’s experiences at two U. S. preschools.

In the following section, I examine differences between playtime and clean-up time that resulted in the two Korean children’s different degrees of social engagement at each time, drawing on conceptual ideas such as peer culture in preschool (Corsaro, 1985) and Bakhtin’s (1965) concept of carnival.

**Differences between Playtime and Clean-up Time**

**The Established Order at Playtime**

Adults might assume that preschool playtime is actually “free time,” because it provides children maximum freedom to choose and have the right to play. There is a misconception in this assumption that the structural freedom given by adults may naturally grant children the social freedom to play with anything and anyone they want. Studies on children’s own culture in preschool provide insights, which refute this misconception (Corsaro, 1981, 1985; Corsaro & Eder, 1990; Corsaro & Miller, 1992; Corsaro & Nelson, 2003; Corsaro & Rizzo, 1990; Elgas, 2003; Elgas, Klein, & Kantor, 1988; Evaldsson & Tellgren, 2009; Williams, 2001). According to these studies, children construct their own unique ways of being together, and their peer

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13 See chapter 1 for the literature review on young children’s peer culture.
culture strongly affects and even constrains their interactions and inclusion/exclusion in a play activity.

In fact, preschool children’s play activities are facilitated, constrained, protected, or disturbed by the established order—peer culture and adult rules—which include many complex social and cultural norms and hierarchies. Children understand that some of the norms and rules are negotiable (Chung, 2003; Markstrom & Hallden, 2009). However, for cultural linguistic minority children, the process of negotiation and communication is not easy. First, they have to understand the peer culture, and then they need to develop means of communication and tactics which help them negotiate the rules in peer culture and engage in shared activities. Chapters 3 and 4 described Yeji and Hyunsoo’s careful efforts to develop such means and tactics for social engagement at playtime. However, at clean-up time, these children moved freely, participated (albeit briefly) in a variety of activities, and interacted with many objects and peers without deliberate negotiations or tactics for social engagement. Clean-up time seemed to provide the children with a changed atmosphere in which they did not need to worry about the constraining order experienced at playtime.

**Carnival in Clean-up Time**

At clean-up time, the rules of playtime are defunct, because children no longer need to protect and negotiate for their play materials and spaces. Therefore, at clean-up time, it is much easier for cultural linguistic minority children to feel free to change their social position, interact equally with their peers, and explore a variety of materials and places. Bakhtin’s (1984a) carnival is a metaphoric concept which describes people’s enjoyment of the temporary suspension of the established social order, the reversal of social roles, and equal participation in activities characterized by a mood of playfulness.
Bakhtin’s (1984a) discussion of carnival and its value for people from suppressed groups helps us understand the freedom cultural linguistic minority children might enjoy during clean-up time and the value of having such freedom. According to Bakhtin, carnival means temporary liberation from the established order so that everyone can participate and have an equal voice:

Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws that are the laws of its freedom. (p. 7)

The established social order creates hierarchies, privileges, and norms that make some people’s lives easy while making other people’s lives difficult. In the established social order, people who do not have power or adequate means tend to be subjected to suppression and treated as low-status holders, outsiders, or peripheral observers. However, in carnival, the social hierarchies of everyday life get overturned, people in different social positions mingle, and there are no observers because “it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators” (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 7).

Bakhtin (1984a) explained that people are not required to have power or means to participate at carnival time. The laws during carnival are simple enough to embrace everyone, giving each person equal freedom. In my view, this inclusive aspect of carnival looks very similar to the atmosphere at clean-up time, which invites Yeji, a quiet observer at playtime, to be an active participant, as described at the beginning of this chapter. The norms during clean-up time are easily understandable even by the cultural linguistic minority children, and every child has an equal right to participate and plays the same role in this time. In fact, the clean-up song, which encourages everyone to participate, indicates this equality: “Clean-up, Clean-up,
everybody, everywhere.” Clean-up time marks, like carnival, “the suspension of all hierarchical ranks, privileges, norms, and prohibitions” (p. 10) in the classroom and the children’s peer culture. Therefore, to cultural linguistic minority children, clean-up time seems to open up possibilities of changing the classroom order and of increasing opportunities for belonging.

Besides the sense of equality, another typical aspect of the atmosphere I observed at clean-up time in both Yeji and Hyunsoo’s classroom was a cheerful chaos filled with loud noise, laughter, singing, and various motions (e.g., tumbling, crawling) of active bodies. The teachers in those two classrooms did not push their students to clean up. Clean-up time was usually followed by snack time, so they did not feel the need to make their students hurry. One teacher usually set the snack table, and another teacher joined the children in cleaning up, sang the clean-up song, and called the names of certain kids whom they wanted to praise. Overall, the mood at clean-up time was cheerful and playful. Carnival also has a similar mood, described as “a festive laughter” (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 11). According to Bakhtin (1984a), the chief characteristic of laughter in carnival is its “positive, regenerating, creative meaning” (p. 71). Bakhtin explained that “[c]arnival laughter is the laughter of all the people” (p. 11), so anyone can “laugh out in security” (p. 69). This may explain the security and comfort Yeji and Hyunsoo seemed to feel at clean-up time—their willingness to leave their favorite places where they spent most of their playtime. For example, in the vignette provided in the beginning of this chapter, Yeji seemed to seek the security of body and play activities by staying in her comfort zone, the kitchen play area, during playtime. However, once she felt comfortable at clean-up time, she came out of the kitchen area, became an active participant and challenged herself to try many other things she might have desired to do during playtime. The dramatic changes in Yeji’s actions can be perceived as natural when we account for the shifts in the environment and expectations at clean-up time in her classroom. In the following section, I explore the value of
clean-up time for Yeji and Hyunsoo with close observations of and reflections on the two children’s actions during clean-up time.

**Value of Clean-up time**

In this section, I present my findings on the value of clean-up time for cultural linguistic minority children’s social engagement with emphasis on three aspects: i) time to be free and equal, ii) time to learn and practice the peer culture, and iii) time to get recognition.

**Time to be Free and Equal**

The most important value of clean-up time for cultural linguistic minority children is its characteristic of liberating the children from the established social order governing playtime. On one hand, teachers set up class rules for facilitating play activities, minimizing trouble between children, and keeping the classroom culture and order. On the other hand, children have their own peer culture that defines their play activities, such as themes, values, ownership, eligibility for participation, and positions. The social order and many of the cultural rules are taken for granted by either children from the dominant culture or the children who have been participating in the construction of the rules. However, for cultural linguistic minority children, the social order at playtime may be unfamiliar, complicated, and constraining.

At clean-up time, the norms and prohibitions in peer culture are loosened, because children’s primary concerns with protecting and maintaining their play activities disappear. In addition, the adult rules given at playtime are changed or expire, and new rules appear: stop playing and put the toys back in their places. These rules are, for cultural linguistic minority children, much simpler and clearer than the rules at playtime. I observed that Yeji and Hyunsoo, following relatively simple rules, enjoyed a variety of activities at clean-up time. Table 5.1 lists some typical changes in the implicit/explicit rules at playtime and clean-up time.
I found that such changes opened up more possibilities for social engagement (i.e., exploration, interaction, communication) for Yeji and Hyunsoo. I present my findings by focusing on the types of freedom the children enjoyed at clean-up time: 1) freedom from power relations among children, 2) freedom from the pressure of verbal language, and 3) freedom from boundaries.

**Power and ownership.** At clean-up time, the peer culture that protected children’s ownership of play materials and spaces during playtime changed. During playtime, a child cannot play with other children’s play materials or enter their interactive play spaces, if the child does not have peers’ permission (Corsaro, 1981). Therefore, there are always some children who dominate making decisions of including/excluding some of their peers who are attempting to gain access in their play activities. Usually, children with more cultural knowledge and advanced verbal language skills have superior positions when it comes to negotiating with other children. During clean-up time, however, this power structure is loosened, and the ownership of play objects claimed during playtime expires. Every child—regardless of his/her linguistic skills or cultural knowledge—has equal chances to access play materials and the right to touch any toy and enter any space without his/her peers’ objections. I found that Hyunsoo and Yeji perceptively identified this change in hierarchy and enjoyed the rights and equal status available at clean-up time as shown in the following example.
Hyunsoo is constructing a parking lot at playtime. There are several mini cars in the parking lot. He decorates the parking lot walls with trees and small wood blocks. Smiling, he looks proudly at his construction. Ms. Sunny calls Hyunsoo over from her seat at the art table. Hyunsoo picks up a yellow car, his favorite car, which his teacher allowed him to hold, and leaves his parking lot. Meanwhile, Rachel, the oldest and tallest child in the class, begins to play with the parking lot. She puts more wood blocks on the walls and places toy animals in the lot. “Look, this is my zoo park,” Rachel exclaims to the children around her. Hyunsoo returns. He looks hesitant, but he resumes his play with the parking lot. As soon as Hyunsoo touches a car, Rachel claims, “No, it’s mine.” Hyunsoo shows her his yellow car, opens the gate he made in one wall, and tries to put the car back in its previous spot. “No, Hyunsoo, don’t put it in my park,” Rachel says in a strict voice. Hyunsoo holds back and observes what Rachel is doing. After a little while, he stretches out one leg and touches the parking lot carefully. “Mine, it mine,” Hyunsoo murmurs and breaks one side of the parking lot. “Oh, Hyunsoo, Nonononono,” Rachel shouts. Hyunsoo shrinks back and leaves the area. Clean-up time begins. Hyunsoo, who was observing a group of boys constructing a big bridge, springs up and runs to the parking lot. Boom! He pushes the parking lot walls, and the construction begins falling apart. Hyunsoo looks at Rachel, and she looks back at him. “All right, Hyunsoo,” and giggling, she joins in breaking up the construction. They look at each other and laugh.

Vignette 5.1 illustrates how children’s power relations play a role in claiming ownership and how a cultural linguistic minority child could be disadvantaged in this process. This
classroom was a mixed age (three to five years old) group, and Rachel was one of the oldest children. According to Ms. Sunny, children conceived her as tall, bossy, and sometimes silly. When I interviewed Hyunsoo, he picked her as both his favorite and his least favorite peer, because, “she’s so fun... but takes my toys.” For young children, their size, age, verbal skills, and fun ideas are important criteria in deciding their popularity and power status. Hyunsoo recognized Rachel had most of these traits, but he noted she was also bossy. Therefore, once he found that Rachel was playing with his parking lot, he was hesitant to react, but he tried to reclaim his ownership of the parking lot in several ways. He showed her a mini car—the same kind of mini cars collected in his parking lot—and the empty spot where the yellow car was previously parked. He also attempted to show her he knew where the gate was as evidence of his construction of the parking lot. However, these attempts through non-verbal communication were ignored, and he could not get Rachel’s permission for gaining access to “her park” (which was, in fact, “his parking lot”). He finally tried to use verbal language to claim his ownership, but Hyunsoo’s voice was not strong enough to compete with Rachel’s voice.

At clean-up time, as seen in Vignette 5.1, this ownership and the power relations disappeared, so Hyunsoo’s assertive attempt to access his parking lot succeeded. Rachel said, “All right,” giggled, and joined in Hyunsoo’s actions. She not only permitted Hyunsoo to deconstruct “her park,” but also considered his actions an initiation of peer activity and responded by imitating his actions. At that moment, the power relationship between Rachel and Hyunsoo was overturned and replaced by a dialogic relationship, in which their voices were equal in communication and interaction. Therefore, at such a moment, clean-up time is just like Bakhtin’s description of carnival time; “social hierarchies of everyday life are profaned and overturned by normally suppressed voices and energies” (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 254).
**Language.** In children’s peer culture, there was a shared agreement about proper language use for particular play activities. For example, when a group of children play family, each child should use certain language appropriate for his/her play role. Moreover, when they negotiate with their peers, verbal skills are important assets. In addition, at this age (three to five year olds), children are encouraged to use more verbal language than nonverbal language, and they are taught to control the volume and sound of their voices as well as their bodies shown in Table 5.1. However, at clean-up time, children begin using their bodies more to clean-up. Therefore, taking advantage of this moment, children often try to use play materials for rough and tumble play while cleaning-up the toys. The following vignette represents the typical rough and tumble play observed during clean-up time.

**Vignette 5.2 Video transcripts: 11/24/2011**

It is clean-up time. Hyunsoo picks up two blocks shaped like pipes. The diameter of the pipes just fits Hyunsoo’s arms. He puts the pipes on his arms. Jay giggles and copies Hyunsoo. Hyunsoo shows Jay how to move his body like a robot. “Robot,” Jay joyfully shouts and copies Hyunsoo’s actions. They begin bumping into each other, pointing the pipes on their arms at each other like guns, laughing, and making various sounds (e.g., cracking, bumping, and shooting sounds) as they move toward the block shelves.

There are diverse forms of non-verbal language (e.g., body language, facial expressions, eye contact, and sounds) young children can use in order to communicate and interact with other children, and these nonverbal communications and interactions are the foundation of mutual understandings (Bruner, 1977). However, at school, nonverbal language, in which children use their bodies, is sometimes discouraged even during in-class playtime by rules, such as “in-class voice,” “walking feet,” and “no rough and tumble play.” At school, the children’s bodies are
free in only a few spaces, and clean-up time provides such a moment. In the above vignette, Hyunsoo and Jay interact and communicate through various body movements and sounds while they clean up their toys. I found that clean-up time provides cultural linguistic minority children more chances for social engagement by allowing them to use their bodies relatively freely. Such chances helped them develop their voices in their classroom communities and mingle together with their dominant peers.

Hyunsoo and Yeji also used non-verbal gestures and strategies during playtime and by doing so often got responses from their peers. However, in some play activities, their non-verbal language was ignored (e.g., Rachel’s actions in Vignette 5.1), because the peer culture required certain language use and verbal skills at particular moments. Vignette 5.1 also shows how Hyunsoo’s non-verbal language became a vivid voice at clean-up time, which led Rachel, a dominant child, to respond. In the vignette, Hyunsoo and Rachel’s non-verbal communication created a humorous atmosphere, which broke the tension around the ownership of the construction at playtime. They became friends, working together for the same purpose. Clean-up time, like carnival, not only overturns the existing order and opens a new order, but also demands that everyone listen to each other and mingle together. Such classroom community is what Bakhtin (1981) refers to as heteroglossia, a dialogic classroom, where everyone’s voice and language can be appreciated.

**Boundaries.** As discussed earlier, there are some general rules at “free play” time—contrary to its name—that prevent young children from playing and moving freely, such as “Do not move play materials out of their designated areas,” “Do not wander,” or “Play only one activity at a time.” Children’s peer culture also makes clear and seemingly impenetrable boundaries around some children’s play spaces. At clean-up time, the breaking down of boundaries among play spaces grants children the
freedom to move around and explore their environments. Figures 5.1 and 5.2 show Hyunsoo’s and Yeji’s movements during playtime and clean-up time on a typical day at the beginning of the school year.

Watching video recordings, I tracked their movements at playtime and clean-up time and denoted the areas where they stayed more than one minute with dots. In order to make the figure clear, I did not add a new dot if the child did not move farther than the areas already marked. Hyunsoo’s movement at the beginning of the school year was tracked in the video recordings taken before the winter break. Because Yeji was newly enrolled in her preschool during the second week of November 2011, her movement at the beginning was tracked among the video recordings taken until January 2012.
Figures 5.1 and 5.2 clearly illustrate how the children’s play was limited to a small area during playtime but how dramatically the children’s activity areas increased during clean-up time. Figures 5.3 and 5.4 show that Yeji and Hyunsoo were engaged more in various play activities during playtime in the spring semester of 2012. The four figures show the changes in their movements during the two different times. Interestingly, it is observable that many of the places where Hyunsoo and Yeji used to stay at clean-up time during the beginning school year became their activity areas at playtime at the end of the school year.

**Figure 5.3 Yeji’s Movement: Tracked from March 2012 through April 2012**

**Figure 5.4 Hyunsoo’s Movement: Tracked from March 2012 through April 2012**

At the beginning of the school year, both of the children had their favorite play areas and mostly stayed in these areas during playtime. Yeji stayed around the kitchen oven and went to
her teachers at the art table. Sometimes, but not often, she went to the beanbag couch in the reading area and rested there, so I used a thin line to show this movement. Hyunsoo, compared to Yeji, moved around a little more, but he also stayed in one play center, the block play area. During the children’s interviews, I asked Hyunsoo and Yeji what their favorite toys were at school and why. Hyunsoo answered “cars,” because “I have many cool mini cars at home.” Yeji answered kitchen toys were her favorite, because, “I am good at cooking like my mom!” Hyunsoo had prior knowledge and skills about toy cars and related activities. Yeji preferred kitchen play toys, because she had lots of prior experiences, observing and joining in with her mother cooking and her older sister playing. Therefore, the play areas they mostly gravitated towards were places that highlighted their competencies and funds of knowledge and protected their feelings of security.

At clean-up time, Yeji and Hyunsoo could come out of the small areas where they had stayed during playtime and could move around confidently. This reflects that the boundaries of their comfort zone were enlarged to the whole classroom at clean-up time, as shown in the above figures. They felt comfortable enough to move around and interact with others, because the boundaries set by their peers and adults disappeared and because they knew they could be competent anywhere during clean-up time. I once observed that Yeji was dancing around joyfully when clean-up time was almost over. I showed her the video recording and told her she looked happy. She said, “I did cleaning up ALL!” Her words reflected her sense of competence and confidence in any area of her classroom during this time. Bakhtin (1984a) wrote about the “laws of freedom” (p. 7) in carnival that allow anyone to participate in anything. Clean-up time also provides the same “laws of freedom” releasing cultural linguistic minority children from all
boundaries. Using this freedom, the children could have experiences and develop the knowledge and skills shared by their dominant peers.

**Time to Learn and Practice the Peer Culture**

According to studies on preschool children’s peer culture, children share certain knowledge and skills in order to play together. In this section, I describe how at clean-up times Hyunsoo and Yeji learned and practiced the knowledge and skills necessary for play interactions in three categories: play themes, roles, and methods.

**Play themes.** Children’s spontaneous fantasy play involves shared themes that reflect peer concerns and values. Play themes should not refer to mere descriptions of play (e.g., “playing with toy cars”), but rather to the underlying schemata the children use to frame their play interactions (Corsaro, 1985). For example, Corsaro (1985) found that the “danger-rescue” theme occurs frequently in children’s play, which reflects preschool children’s shared concerns about “escaping from danger” and “displays of relief and joy” (p. 202). Hyunsoo’s and Yeji’s peers also shared some play themes, which reflected their concerns and values. These play themes provided the group of children with underlying plots for their play, so knowledge of these themes was essential for engaging in play activities. The following example illustrates how Yeji and Hyunsoo learned and practiced the play themes.

**Vignette 5.3 Video transcripts & Field notes: 01/27/2012**

Jay and Sean shout out to the children playing in the kitchen area, “T. Rex! T. Rex!” Stomping their feet, the boys are coming toward the kitchen. The girls in the kitchen, Yeji, Sara, and Hailey, look at the boys coming. Sara and Hailey scream, “T. Rex is coming! T. Rex is coming!” They leave their toys, open all of the cabinet doors, and hide themselves in the space created behind the opened doors of the sink and oven (see
Figure 5.5. But, Yeji stays still and keeps playing in front of the oven, making dishes. Jake and Noah, who are playing Lego on the floor, run to the costume box. They wear firefighters’ hats and shout out, “Rescue! Rescue!” Yeji steps aside to make way for the boys (the T. Rexes and firefighters) approaching Sara and Hailey. The girls keep screaming while the T. Rex boys are roaring and stomping around. Lizzie comes into the area and speaks to the girls, “T. Rex is coming! T. Rex is coming!” They push one door open for Lizzie to hide, too. The firefighters begin chasing the T. Rexes, “Get them!” They circle around the kitchen table several times. Jay and Sean finally hide in a space between the sink and the refrigerator, and then, everyone joyfully shouts, “T. Rex is gone!” Soon, the alarm rings, and the children begin cleaning up. Yeji puts her toy foods back in the cabinet. Rather than closing the cabinet door, Yeji enters the space behind the opened cabinet door where Sara and Hailey hid. “T. Rex is coming. T. Rex is coming,” she speaks to herself softly, looking up at the empty space from which the T. Rex boys came. Sara is also there, focusing on cleaning up the sink. Yeji does not take any notice of Sara and repeats pushing and pulling the doors several times and says, “T. Rex is coming.” She closes the cabinet door and begins cleaning up the toys on the ground.

![Figure 5.5 Hiding Space](image)
In Yeji’s class, the T. Rex described above had been the most popular play theme. Taking the general plot of “danger-rescue”, the children in this class shared concerns of alerting each other, averting danger, and seeking security as well as their common interests in dinosaurs and community helpers. Because of the classroom’s arrangement—having one big open space with the exception of the kitchen play area, children were always seeking hiding places in the kitchen area where Yeji used to play. However, this occurrence did not seem to garner Yeji’s interest during playtime. In Vignette 5.3, she looked at the children playing T. Rex, but she only gave way to them; she did not interact with them. I interviewed her, wondering about her feelings about the T. Rex play and her reasons for not joining in.

Interview transcript: 01/29/2012

Jooeun: Don’t you like T. Rex Play? Why didn’t you play together?

Yeji: I like T. Rex, and I like better to watch it when they play it.

Jooeun: What parts do you like the most in T. Rex Play?

Yeji: Hiding! When T. Rex is coming, you must hide in a house!

Jooeun: (Showing the clean-up time scene in which Yeji is hiding) Look at you! What are you doing?

Yeji: Oh, I am hiding. See, T. Rex is coming there. (Laughing)

Yeji answered that she liked their play but didn’t join in with the other children, because she liked observing their play better than participating. Her answer goes along with Igoa’s (1995) explanation that cultural linguistic minority children have a quiet stage in which they observe and learn the proper ways of being and acting in a new school world. Yeji’s and Hyunsoo’s teachers also described them to me as “good observers” who were learning by watching their

14 The children called this play activity simply “T. Rex.” If you ask the children what they are doing, they would say, “we play T. Rex.”
peers’ actions. However, I observed that Yeji and Hyunsoo also learned how to act in a play theme by actual practice during clean-up time. Vignette 5.3 shows that Yeji practiced the words, “T. Rex is coming,” which required getting into the hiding place. She also practiced opening and closing the “gates” of the hiding place. It looked like she was rehearsing the plot of the play on her own. She said that she liked the part where the participants hide in this play activity. Perhaps, her concerns for protecting her security fit well with this play theme. In the above interview with me, Yeji said, “hiding,” in English. She might have picked up this English word, which represents a part of the plot learned from her peers. I observed her practicing this theme at clean-up time three times from January to February. Eventually, she began joining in the play activity, taking part in the hiding role at the end of February.

**Role expectations.** In addition to the knowledge of shared play themes, a child must know role expectations in order to participate in role play (Corsaro, 1985). For example, a child taking the role of a cashier should know how to use the cash register, how to count money, and how to speak to a customer. What Yeji was doing in Vignette 5.3—saying, “T. Rex is coming,” and opening and closing the gates—was also an example of the role expectations of hiding. Consider the following example, which represents how Hyunsoo and Yeji practiced their knowledge of role expectations.

**Vignette 5.4 Field note: 12/02/2012**

It was clean-up time. Hyunsoo went to the housekeeping play area and found a baby cradle not in its place. He tried to move it, but he suddenly laid down on it. He looked at me taking videos and said, “I am a baby.” He rocked the cradle and pretended to suck his thumb like a baby. Pointing to a blanket near me, Hyunsoo told me, “You should
"bring me it [the blanket]." I brought the blanket over and covered him. He smiled at me and closed his eyes. After a while, he stood up and moved the cradle to its place.

What Hyunsoo enacted in this vignette reflects his knowledge about the role expectations for a baby-mother role play. However, during the first semester in school, I had never observed him trying to play in the housekeeping play area at playtime. The housekeeping play area may not have been a comfortable place for Hyunsoo at that time, because it was a place where skillful verbal interactions and negotiations were required. Interestingly, as the above vignette shows, he went to the housekeeping area at clean-up time and played there although it was a short time. Clean-up time was for him a chance to challenge himself to go beyond his comfort zone and test his knowledge of role expectations of a play activity.

Methods of play activities. Young children can use clean-up time to learn the methods of play activities and improve their skills. I often found that children (besides my focal children) repeated constructing-deconstructing or attaching-detaching toys at clean-up time for the purpose of being skillful, as illustrated in the following two vignettes.

Vignette 5.5 Video transcripts: 1/19/12

As clean-up time begins, Yeji goes to a puzzle table and holds a puzzle board upside down. Puzzle pieces fall from the board. Then, she places each piece back on the board and puts the puzzle in a cubby.

Vignette 5.6 Video transcripts & Field notes: 1/26/12

It is clean-up time. Hyunsoo goes to the housekeeping play area. He looks at the doll house in the center of the play area and tries to place the furniture and dolls in proper positions. The doll house looks to be in order, but Hyunsoo begins detaching each part of the doll house. In fact, the doors, windows, walls, and the roof are detachable, so
children enjoy detaching and attaching the parts. Hyunsoo, then, begins reattaching the parts to the basic structure. Hyunsoo repeats the same activity, detaching and attaching the parts, and leaves the area.

When a child dissembles a construction or takes apart a toy, they gain knowledge about the structure. They learn how to construct it as they clean up. Hyunsoo in Vignette 5.6 was trying to learn the methods other children use to play with the doll house. I observed that this knowledge made him competent in interacting with other children and even taking a leading role later on, which is described in Vignette 5.7 in the next section.

**Time for Recognition: “I am Clean up!”**

In the process of social learning, it is crucial that individuals possess a sense of belonging to a community and share common meanings and values with others (Rogoff, 1993). Children feel a sense of belonging when they have close relationships, engage in shared activities, contribute to their community, and get recognition for their contributions (Schunk, 2008). Because of their desire for belongingness, I believe, young children are eager to show their competencies and get recognition for their works by others. However, it is not easy for cultural linguistic minority children to show their competencies at a new school where they are unsure of the social and cultural expectations. It is especially hard at playtime, a time of complex peer culture. On the contrary, at clean-up time, the expectations become clearer, and this certainty allows the cultural linguistic minority children to act confidently. Therefore, the children have more possibility for getting recognition for their competent work at clean-up time. In fact, both of the teachers in my study told me that they used clean-up time to praise Hyunsoo and Yeji with the intention of helping with their adjustments and their peers’ acceptance of them as capable members.
Self competency and satisfaction. Young children’s social competence is generally referred to as active participation in social interactions and appropriate actions in specific social contexts (Chen & French, 2008). Among the diverse contexts in a school day, clean-up time has relatively simple norms easily understood by cultural linguistic minority children. The following examples show competent participations of Hyunsoo and Yeji at clean-up time.

Vignette 5.7 Video transcripts & field note: 02/15/12

Hyunsoo is at the kitchen play area. Clean-up time is going on, and he just joined Rachel and Paulina in moving food and dishes on the kitchen table into the cabinets. They seem to take turns moving the toys. As soon as Hyunsoo picks up the final toys left on the table, he finds Paulina has returned and is looking at the empty table. Hyunsoo hands some of the toys to Paulina. Meanwhile, Mia, the shortest girl in his classroom, has been trying to attach a roof to the doll house in the center of the play area. Hyunsoo comes to Mia and shows her how to close the open space of the house. He smiles at Mia pointing to the roof, which she is holding. Mia puts the roof down on the doll house. “Good,” Hyunsoo says. Mia smiles back and nods. They, together, head to the writing center next to the kitchen area.

Vignette 5.8 Video transcripts & field note: 02/16/12

Ms. Betty announces the beginning of the clean-up time. Yeji picks up the sink. The sink can be detached from its furniture, so Yeji sometimes uses the sink like a basket in order to collect kitchen play materials. Holding the sink, she heads to her picnic place near the kitchen where she set up some cups and food. Yeji takes the toys in her sink. Jake also picks up some of the food and throws them to the corner of block area. Sean giggles and runs to the toys Jake just threw. Yeji comes to the boys and shows them her
sink. “Yes,” the boys shout and throw the toys into Yeji’s sink. Yeji smiles and returns to the kitchen.

Because Hyunsoo and Yeji clearly knew the expectations of the time, they also knew what their peers wanted and how to interact with them. In the above vignettes, Hyunsoo’s and Yeji’s initiations were appropriate, which led to their peers’ anticipated reactions. Moreover, Hyunsoo and Yeji were competent enough to help and guide their peers in completing their tasks.

**Teacher’s recognition.** Hyunsoo’s and Yeji’s competencies were highlighted and got recognition during clean-up time as illustrated below.

**Vignette 5.9 Video transcripts & Field notes: 02/16/12**

Ms. Betty announces, “Let’s see who is cleaning up the best.” Yeji looks at the teacher and shouts joyfully, **“I’m clean up. I’m clean up!”** Ms. Betty says, “Yes, Yeji is cleaning up. Look, she is cleaning up the kitchen so nicely.” The classroom is almost cleaned up, and children begin gathering on the carpet. Ms. Betty praises the children for the clean classroom, and she hands each child two M&M chocolate candies. As usual, Yeji is the first child to get the M&Ms.

In this example, we see Yeji’s sense of competence. Her teacher, Ms. Betty, also recognized this and mentioned it at almost every clean-up time. Hyunsoo’s teacher, Ms. Sunny also told me that she intentionally identified Hyunsoo when he cleaned up the toys well, because she wanted him to feel good about himself at school. She believed that this might have a positive influence on other children and make them respect Hyunsoo. Hyunsoo and Yeji seemed to know that clean-up time was an opportunity for them to get praise and recognition from their teachers and peers. This could be a reason why they enjoyed clean-up time and had a sense of belonging and competency.
Implications for Early Childhood Practice

Drawing on the conceptual ideas of peer culture and carnival, this chapter presented the different contextual and environmental characteristics of clean-up time and playtime and explained the value of clean-up time. The findings in this chapter show that clean-up time has special meanings for Yeji and Hyunsoo at their classrooms. These children showed us how they felt secure and free during clean-up time. They explored various materials and acted in many roles. They communicated with their peers and initiated interactions. They told us they were good at cleaning and organizing their classrooms. They sang, danced, and laughed. And, they shouted out, “I’m CLEAN UP,” demonstrating their agency and capability. So what can teachers do as they learn the value of clean-up time for social engagement from these children?

First, I suggest that teachers—and researchers—reconsider their conceptions about clean-up time and recognize its value. As most teachers and researchers might do, at first, I also missed the cultural linguistic minority children’s active attempts to engage in peer culture, which happened mostly at clean-up time. I considered their new actions simply as changes for the cleaning-up time and initially ignored the meanings behind their actions. As I mentioned earlier, this neglect might have resulted from the conception of clean-up time as just a transition between scheduled times for teaching and learning. This dominant conception is also reflected in academia. I searched the literature related to clean-up time, but I found only a handful of articles and text books for teacher education, which discussed either minimizing the transition time to maximize children’s learning at playtime or using clean-up time to teach children self-discipline and responsibility (e.g., Alger, 1984; Larson, 1994).

Clean-up time is, for cultural linguistic minority children—or for any child who is not fully appreciated during playtime or at circle time—a significant moment for engaging with
peers and environments. Although the given time for this interaction and exploration is short, the knowledge and experience gained through clean-up time provide important foundations for expanding their social engagements. If teachers realize the value of clean-up time, they may be able to transform it to maximize the benefits for children by adding more freedom and extending it a little longer, as my focal children’s teachers did. For example, some classrooms have a strict clean-up time rule, which requires children to stay in the space where they were playing at the time of the clean-up announcement. This rule may deprive children of the freedom and all the benefits they could gain from a clean-up time that has the characteristics of carnival. I suggest teachers rethink such a rule. I am not asking teachers to let children play during clean-up time. I agree that teachers should encourage children to clean up and teach them to be responsible. What I ask of teachers is to make efforts to create a place and time for every child in their classrooms. If scheduling clean-up time for a little longer, making the time more cheerful, and encouraging children to go to several places and collaborate with their peers could help children’s social engagement, then why not make it happen? When Ms. Betty and Ms. Sunny intentionally called Yeji’s and Hyunsoo’s names to show how they appreciated these children’s contributions to the group, I saw sensitive and caring teachers who understood these children’s needs and created some moments for them to shine.

Second, clean-up time could also provide opportunities for teachers to learn about their students’ needs and interests. According to Bakhtin’s ideas, teachers can understand the desires of cultural linguistic minority children—who experience many constraints from the established order of playtime (as well as many other times at school)—by carefully observing these children during clean-up time which have the characteristics of carnival. They may see what motivates these children to initiate peer interactions and what discourages their interactions. Teachers then
may gain ideas about how to extend these children’s learning and social engagement that happen during clean-up time to playtime (and instruction time). For example, Yeji practiced a part of T-Rex play activity during clean-up time, and it was an expression of her desire to play it. By observing changes in their actions, we could get clues about what, where, and with whom the children want to play at playtime and provide chances for them to satisfy their desires.

Finally, although I found clean-up time is valuable for Yeji’s and Hyunsoo’s social engagement, there could (and should) be other times and moments in each classroom that may function like clean-up time did in these children’s classrooms. It could be snack time, lunchtime, recess, or any other time that has often been neglected in the daily routine of school. Every school and classroom has different students, cultures, histories, and contexts. Therefore, a time or a moment, which offers some of the characteristics of carnival, could vary in each classroom. I would like to encourage teachers to observe when a cultural linguistic minority child—or any child not yet actively engaged—feels comfortable and when the child becomes most active or shows changes in the way he or she acts. When we find such times, we may be able to create more moments for a child to feel safe enough to initiate social engagement.
CHAPTER 6

“WHO IS MY FRIEND?”

FRIENDSHIP AT PRESCHOOL THROUGH

THE VOICES OF CULTURAL LINGUISTIC MINORITY CHILDREN

“He is not my friend,” Hyunsoo said.\(^{15}\)

Watching video clips of play episodes taken in Hyunsoo’s classroom, we were talking about his relationship with each child in the scenes. Hyunsoo just mentioned this tidbit about Jinu. This was surprising, because in my recent observations, Hyunsoo seemed to have developed a close friendship with Jinu, another Korean boy in his classroom. Besides, when I interviewed his teacher this morning, she confirmed my thoughts by saying that the two Korean boys had become the closest of friends. Hyunsoo claimed again, as if he knew that I was confused, “Jinu is not my friend anymore!!” “Why? You told me last time you like to play with Jinu,” I asked. Hyunsoo said with a frown on his face, “I still play with him, but [Jinu said] he would not say anything to me. So, he is not my friend anymore.” “Do you mean you guys are still playing together but not talking to each other?” I asked again, but Hyunsoo did not reply. “Did you guys fight?” “No, but I know he will not tell me anything.” “Why?” “I don’t know...,” Hyunsoo mumbled. I was still confused, but I thought it was better to proceed to the next question; “Then, who are your friends?”

--Conversation with Hyunsoo, 01/28/2012

Researching two Korean children’s social engagement at preschool through participant observations and interviews, I often faced moments when my initial thoughts about their lives were challenged by their own voices. Chapter 5 is an example of such moments. I learned from

\(^{15}\) All Korean words spoken by the participants in the study were transcribed into English and are italicized.
my participating children that there are times, such as clean-up time, that might not be appreciated by many adults but were valuable for granting them more power and chances for social engagements. Their voices, such as “It is a ‘fun’ time,” “I’m allowed to touch and see ‘anything’ and go ‘anywhere,’” and “I am ‘good’ at clean-up time,” alerted me to view these moments in a different light. Moreover, understanding why the children were more engaged at clean-up time opened my eyes to see the children’s needs, which might not be fully addressed during playtime but fulfilled by some characteristics of clean-up time.

In this chapter, I aim to explore another topic, cultural linguistic minority children’s concept of friendship through their voices. As in the story included at the beginning of this chapter, I often heard, from both of my participating children, their opinions on classmates and peer relationships that differed from the teachers’ and my observations. For example, they might say a child is not nice to them when their teachers think the child has been kind to them, they might say a child is their friend when I rarely observed their interactions with the child, or they might refer to a child as a “friend” at an event but “not a friend” at another event. These differences might happen because children and adults focus on different features for conceptualizing friendship. Or, cultural linguistic minority children like Yeji and Hyunsoo might have slightly different perceptions on friendships because of their unique needs.

Most early childhood education textbooks include sections that advise teachers about how to support children in developing friendships (Hendrick, 2001; Katz & McClellan, 1997; Spodek, Saracho, & Davis, 1991). We can easily find information on specific teaching skills to increase peer contacts, solve conflicts, and promote interpersonal skills, for example. However, the information that has guided teachers mostly originates from an adult’s point of view, not from a child’s point of view.
Vivian Paley (1986), in her article on listening to children, emphasized that friendship is one of the most important topics for young children. According to her, there are “the three Fs”—friendship, fantasy, and fairness—about which young children are most passionate, and these are topics in which “every child could reach into a deep wellspring of opinions and images” (p. 125). Children are chockfull of experience about their friendships, but we have not yet fully accounted for their voices on this important topic. As a result, we may have assumptions about their friendships that are vastly different from their points of view.

This chapter shares what I learned from Yeji and Hyunsoo about their friendships during their first year attending U.S. preschools. The major questions I wanted to learn from them were:

- Who did these children identify as their friends?
- What did they value as features of friends?
- What did they desire from friendships?

Note that my study in this chapter is a sub-study of my dissertation, because it focuses on questions on friendship that emerged during the data analysis for the whole dissertation study. Therefore, while it shares the theoretical frameworks, major literature review on peer culture, and research methodology with the main dissertation study, this chapter includes a literature review and descriptions of data analysis that particularly focus on children’s friendships.

**Literature on Children’s Friendships**

Researchers have used many different versions of conceptual or operational definitions of friendships. Across the slightly different definitions, it is commonly accepted that friendship is a dyadic, reciprocal, and predominantly positive relationship (Furman, 1982; Goldman & Buysee, 2007; Hartup, 1989). Berndt (2004), in his literature review on children’s friendship, recognized

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16 Refer to Chapters 1 and 2 for further information.
Harry Stack Sullivan as a person who first proposed provocative ideas about the nature and effects of children’s friendships. Sullivan (1953) emphasized the importance of friendships in children’s development and discussed that love, intimacy, collaboration, and mutual satisfactions are dimensions of close friendships for children aged 8 to 10 years. He described intimacy as “closeness” and collaboration as “adjustments of one’s behavior to the expressed needs of the other person” in the pursuit of mutual satisfactions (p. 246). His ideas about children’s friendships had been ignored for several decades, but as developmental researchers became interested in peer interactions and relationships, his ideas received attention as being seminal.

Starting from the 1970s, young children’s peer relationships and friendships have received significant attention (e.g., Asher, Parker, & Walker, 1996; Corsaro, 1985; Goldman & Buysee, 2007; Hartup, 1989; Ladd, 2005; Muller & Vandell, 1979; Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 1998; Youniss, 1980). Many researchers have attempted to explore what friendships are like, and multiple possible signs or features of friendship have been discussed. Bigelow and La Gaipa (1975) coded 480 Canadian children’s (aged 6 to 14) essays on their expectations of their best friends and found that reciprocity of liking, sharing, and ego reinforcement (i.e., bolstering self-esteem) were commonly expected regardless of the age of the participating children. Berndt (1982) added knowledge of each other, responsiveness to each other’s needs, and similarity between friends as important features of friendship for children older than 6. Developmental psychologists, who conducted clinical interviews with children of different ages (e.g., Selman, 1980; Youniss, 1980), discussed a general trend in the developmental changes in friendship concepts—a trend that begins with relatively superficial ideas (e.g., proximity, common activities, one-way helping or sharing) and ends with ideals (e.g., interpersonal intimacy, mutual sharing, loyalty, commitment). These scholars argued that young children conceive of friendship
solely based on physical closeness or one-way assistance and are not aware of reciprocity and mutual adjustment until they become 6-12 years old.

On the contrary, scholars who took different disciplinary and methodological approaches for understanding children’s friendships (e.g., Corsaro, 1985; Rizzo, 1989) suggested that young children, aged 3 to 6 years, implement more complex knowledge of friendship in their real life than the children participating in the aforementioned studies constructed in clinical settings. These scholars observed that young children can enact concepts like loyalty, acceptance, and sharing in their interactions with friends and, as they grow, further develop and internalize the concepts. For example, Corsaro (1985) studied nursery school children’s peer culture and friendships through a microsociolinguistic analysis of 129 videotaped play episodes. His analysis showed that the social-ecological features of nursery school and peer culture (e.g., possibilities for disruption of peer play, difficulty of gaining access to play groups) affected the structure of friendships and children’s use of the term “friend.” He suggested that the nursery school children formed stable relationships with several playmates and used the concept of friendship “in an effort to deal with practical problems encountered in being a member of and participating in a peer culture” (Rizzo & Corsaro, 1988, p. 197). Features, such as acceptance, stability, sharing, mutual adjustment, and trust—which were related to major issues in the peer culture—were considered important by the nursery school children when they referred to friendships.

These findings differ from descriptions in the stage models of child development (Piaget, 1965; Selman, 1980; Youniss, 1980). Rizzo and Corsaro (1988) critiqued the possibility of underestimating children’s social knowledge through the use of research methods far from children’s real life. They stressed “the efficacy of detailed, cultural historical investigation of
specific life events” for accurate understanding of human action and development (p. 236). Studies on friendships of very young children, approximately 2 years old, also emphasized the use of close observations, descriptions, and detailed analysis of daily peer interactions in order to understand the nonliteral nature of young children’s friendships (e.g., Dietrich, 2005; Howes, 1983; Musatti & Panni, 1981). The research approach and findings in these studies seem applicable to studies on friendships between cultural linguistic minority children and their peers from the dominant culture when analyzing non-verbal communication in such friendships.

**Data Analysis**

This study was designed to understand children’s friendships through their voices. Graue and Walsh (1998) wrote that interpretive research should be designed “to maximize the opportunity to change focus, modify questions, find new ways of generating data, identify issues that are unaddressed within current data sources, and shape writing through local ideas” (p. 159). In order to maximize my focal children’s local ideas and minimize my assumptions, I used three levels of data collection and analysis in a recursive way.

First, in order to identify whom the participating children considered their friend, I consistently checked my data (video recordings and interview transcripts) and recorded whether a peer was called a friend or not by Hyunsoo and Yeji or by their teachers. I placed their peers’ names into four groups: peers called “friends,” peers described as “I don’t like him/her,” peers described as “I don’t know” or not mentioned, and children described as Hyunsoo’s and Yeji’s playmates/friends by their teachers. I checked this grouping with Hyunsoo and Yeji at informal conversations or at interviews in order to clarify their thoughts. If a child was identified as a friend by a teacher but not mentioned by Yeji or Hyunsoo, I asked their thoughts about the child. If a child was not mentioned at an earlier interview, I asked their thoughts about the child again.
in later interviews. Likewise, if a child was called or described as a friend or as a least favorite child only one or two times, I asked Hyunsoo and Yeji about the child again in later interviews to see if they consistently had the same thoughts about the child. Through this process, I identified three categories of their friendships (see Table 6.1).

Second and third level data analyses were used for identifying Hyunsoo and Yeji’s concepts of friendship: what they valued as features of friendship. For the second level data analysis, I revisited current data sources (video recordings and interviews) related to Yeji’s and Hyunsoo’s interactions with or reflections about their peers in their three friendship categories. I coded and compared common characteristics of Hyunsoo’s and Yeji’s interactions with peers in each category. The third level data analysis was used to confirm the findings from the second level analysis with the children. Yeji and Hyunsoo were interviewed again and asked why they considered a certain child a friend or not a friend. The findings in the third level analysis were compared to the findings in the second level analysis in order to explore what features were important for Hyunsoo and Yeji in determining their friends.

**Hyunsoo’s and Yeji’s Friends**

**Friends Indicated by the Focal Children**

From the first level data analysis, I identified children who were, by Hyunsoo and Yeji, (a) consistently referred to as friends, (b) claimed as friends at some points but not at other times, and (c) considered not really friends although the teachers thought so. Table 6.1 shows the names of children in each of these three categories. In accordance with the findings of Corsaro (1985), Hyunsoo and Yeji also reported stable relationships with four to five children as regular friends. Sara is marked twice, because she had been placed in the third category for the first three months but later moved to the second category. Although the times when each friendship
emerged or was acknowledged were all different, the categorized friendships were consistent for Hyunsoo and Yeji until the end of the school year, except the relationship between Yeji and Sara, which I will further elaborate later.

Table 6.1

Categories of Friendships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hyunsoo</th>
<th>Yeji</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>Paulina, Mia, Amy, Jay</td>
<td>Sean, Myles, Lizzie, Owen, Hailey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes Friend but Sometimes Not</td>
<td>Jinu</td>
<td>Sara (after Feb. 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not really Friend although Teachers Thought So</td>
<td>Claire, Rachel</td>
<td>Sara (before Jan. 2012)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Friends Identified by the Teachers**

Hyunsoo’s and Yeji’s teachers identified his/her friendships slightly different from these children’s descriptions. In casual conversations, I often asked the teachers questions about the focal children’s peer relationships. According to Yeji’s teachers, Yeji mostly stayed by herself before the winter break but began interacting with Sara and Hailey in January and became consistent playmates with them after February 2012. According to Hyunsoo’s teachers, during the first three months, Hyunsoo “frequently played” with Jay, “sometimes played” with Rachel and Claire, and “often interacted” with Mia and Paulina. Jay was seen as Hyunsoo’s most frequent playmate. Rachel was described as “an active curious” girl who was often interested and joined in Hyunsoo’s play activities. Claire was considered caring, “who liked to help Hyunsoo.” Although Mia and Paulina rarely played with Hyunsoo during playtime, they were perceived as close with Hyunsoo because of frequent interactions at art, snack, and circle times.

In November, Hyunsoo’s interactions with Jinu increased, and the teachers thought Jinu had
become Hyunsoo’s closest friend after December 2012. Figure 6.1 and Figure 6.2 are diagrams of friendships in their classrooms, which Ms. Sunny and Ms. Betty drew at teacher interviews. Each line indicates a friendship. To make the comparison easy, names of friends identified by Hyunsoo and Yeji are marked in a bold font.

*Figure 6.1* Ms. Sunny’s Identification of Friendships (teacher interview: 02/14/12, 05/15/12)

*Figure 6.2* Ms. Carry’s Identification of Friendships (based on teacher interview: 05/17/12)
There might be various personal factors that influence friendships. The information on children in these two classrooms can be found in Tables 6.2 and 6.3 as a reference. Children are listed in birth order, and the peers whom Hyunsoo and Yeji called their friends made in a bold font.

Table 6.2

*Children in Hyunsoo’s class* (*Birth order; Friends indicated by Hyunsoo are in a bold font*)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Birthday</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Native Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kyle</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>Jun 2006</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josh</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>Aug 2007</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jinu</strong></td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>Sep 2007</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td><strong>Korean</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hyunsoo</strong></td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>Sep 2007</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td><strong>Korean</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jay</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>Oct 2007</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>Sep 2006</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>Oct 2006</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>Mar 2007</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>Mar 2007</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>Apr 2007</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paulina</strong></td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>Sep 2007</td>
<td>White/Asian</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.3

*Children in Yeji’s class* (*Birth order; Friends indicated by Yeji are in a bold font*)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Birthday</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Native Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sean</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>Jan 2008</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jake</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>Mar 2008</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>English</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Owen</strong></td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>Apr 2008</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>English</td>
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<tr>
<td>Noah</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>May 2008</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>English</td>
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<tr>
<td>Will</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>May 2008</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>English</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>Jun 2008</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>English</td>
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<tr>
<td>Myles</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>Sep 2008</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>English</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Yeji</strong></td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>Feb 2008</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Korean</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>Mar 2008</td>
<td>White</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hailey</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>Aug 2008</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>English</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lizzie</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>Sep 2008</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>English</td>
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In this chapter, however, my major focus is not the personal factors that might influence friendship formation. Instead, this chapter examines the children’s conceptions of friendship, characteristics that children value and desire in their friendships, which might be different from the adults’ points of view. Yeji’s and Hyunsoo’s teachers determined their friendships based on their observations of physical closeness (“playing/staying together”) and frequency of interactions between two kids, while Yeji and Hyunsoo focused on some other features for choosing their friends. In the following sections, first, I present Yeji and Hyunsoo’s thoughts on important features of friendship with their peers from the mainstream culture. Second, I move my focus to two Korean boys’ (Hyunsoo and Jinu’s) friendship and discuss the role of a shared verbal language (Korean) in their relationship at a mainstream U.S. preschool.

Three Important Features of Friendships

Shared Means of Communication: “He Understands My Mal”

Yeji and Hyunsoo used a Korean term, mal, most frequently when they described their interactions/relationships with a peer whom they considered a friend. They explained to me that a peer was their friend, because “he understands my mal,” “he/she listens to my mal,” “he/she presents mal like me,” and “we speak the same mal.”17 The term mal can be translated into English as language, speech, expression, voice, intention or meaning. In Hyunsoo and Yeji’s use, the term mal broadly indicated a system (e.g., signs, words, symbols, or gestures) shared for communicating with their friends. It seems that they highlighted the existence of shared means of communication and dialogic exchanges of meanings as important facets of friendship. The following two vignettes show the contexts in which they described their friends as “understanding my mal” or “speaking mal like me.”

17 To highlight the broad meaning of the Korean term, “mal,” I use it as it is in Hyunsoo’s and Yeji’s utterances although I translate all other Korean words.
Vignette 6.1 Video transcripts: 1/24/2012

Hyunsoo and Jay are wandering around the classroom during playtime. Hyunsoo finds and picks up a puzzle board on the floor. Hyunsoo flips the board over to prepare to play with the puzzle and gazes at Jay. Looking back at Hyunsoo and his puzzle, Jay nods his head as if he answers yes and sits by Hyunsoo. Each puzzle piece has a matching piece, and the color and letters on each puzzle piece seem to be cues for finding the matching piece. It looks a bit hard for Hyunsoo and Jay. Coincidently, Hyunsoo and Jay each accidently drops a red piece. They look at each other and giggle about this amusing event. With a smile, Hyunsoo gently throws some more red pieces into the puzzle box and makes eye contact with Jay. “Red!” Jay shouts and repeats throwing red pieces in the box just as Hyunsoo did. It seems that they have found a more fun and easier way to play with the puzzle – throwing the puzzle pieces in color order. “Blue!” Jay throws blue pieces. “Blue!” Hyunsoo repeats the color name and throws some blue pieces. “Orange!” Hyunsoo, this time, names a color first. Together, they throw some orange pieces. The small puzzle pieces make clinking sounds as they land in the puzzle box.

The boys giggle.

Vignette 6.2 Video transcripts: 1/19/2012

Yeji is pretending to cook in the kitchen area. Hailey comes by—nestling a baby doll in her arms—and asks, “Yeji, are you making food for this baby?” Yeji does not say anything, but she makes eye contact with Hailey and looks at the prepared meals on the table (two drinks, dishes filled with fruits and sandwiches, and forks) for two people. Hailey looks at the food at which Yeji is also looking and says, “Good!” They, then, sit together and pretend to have a meal. Hailey pretends to feed the baby. Yeji brings a

18 To make English words—often used in Hyunsoo’s and Yeji’s speeches—visible, I marked the words in bold.
baby crib and places it beside Hailey. Hailey says to Yeji, “Yes, you are right. It’s time for bed.” Hailey lays the baby doll down in the crib and hums a lullaby. Yeji hums along.

In these two vignettes, Hyunsoo and Yeji rarely speak any words to their peers. However, it is evident that each dyad shares systematic ways of communication. Bakhtin (1981) wrote about the dialogic nature of language, which consists of continuous utterances and responses. This dialogic nature was observable in Yeji’s and Hyunsoo’s interactions with peers whom they called “friends”, whether non-verbal or verbal language was used for the interactions.

In preschool children’s peer culture, forming and modifying a play activity with a peer group to maintain the joy of their play is a major concern (Corsaro, 1985). For Hyunsoo and Jay, particular ways of eye contact, gestures, and imitating played the role of shared verbal language for initiating, modifying, or maintaining their play activities. Using a video-recording of Vignette 6.1, I interviewed Hyunsoo regarding his relationship with Jay.

Interview transcript: 1/28/2012

Jooeun: (Showing Vignette 6.1) What are you doing [in the video recording]?

Hyunsoo: I am playing puzzle with Jay.

Jooeun: You and Jay are throwing the puzzle pieces. It looks fun.

Hyunsoo: Yes, Jay dropped one... uh... Jay had a good idea.

Jooeun: Jay had a good idea to play with the puzzle? How did you know? I mean, how did you and Jay decide to play in the same way?

Hyunsoo: Because... umm... You know, [we both are] speaking “mal” in the same way.

Jooeun: How? Like Jay says blue, and you say blue?

Hyunsoo: Yes, and... if I say let’s do this in this way, Jay does it like that.
Jooeun: *Do you mean if you show him how to play something, he does it as you showed him?*

Hyunsoo: *Yes, he does understand my “mal.”*

Jay, from Hyunsoo’s viewpoint, was a friend who could play in a shared way, because they had a shared means of communicating—speaking/understanding *mal* in the same way.

Hailey and Yeji’s interactions described in Vignette 6.2 were particularly interesting, because their communication appeared as complex, detailed, and in sync as a dialogue between an English-speaking dyad. Although Hailey mostly used verbal language and Yeji used non-verbal expressions, their interactions were proceeding smoothly. For instance, Hailey’s action of feeding a baby doll, Yeji’s non-verbal expression of bringing over a baby crib, and Hailey’s verbal utterance of “Yes, it’s time for bed” composed perfect sets of speech and response.

Hailey and Yeji repeatedly played some shared themes, such as taking care of a baby, sharing a meal, and putting puzzles together. They constructed a shared knowledge and means of communication for their play interactions, which seemed to be the foundation for their friendship.

When I asked Yeji why Hailey was her friend, she answered in Korean, “*Hailey is nice. [She] sometimes does the same thing with me ... and speaks the same mal, too.*” For Yeji, shared acts and modes of communication defined a friend like Hailey.

Myles and Lizzie were the youngest children in Yeji’s class, and Paulina was the youngest girl in Hyunsoo’s class (see Table 6.2). Compared to their peers, these three children tended to use more non-verbal language during playtime (e.g., making funny faces/sounds, playful touching, crawling). This similarity in frequent use of non-verbal language seemed to make Yeji and Hyunsoo develop close relationships with Myles, Lizzie, and Paulina. Usually, Yeji kept quiet during play activities, but her actions became loud and exaggerated—such as
playing monster (i.e., stomping and roaring) and crawling under a desk—when she was with Myles or Lizzie. Her play interactions with these two children were not frequent, because Myles and Lizzie liked to wander around the classroom while Yeji liked to stay around the kitchen area. This different tendency might cause her teachers to perceive that these two children were not Yeji’s friends. However, Yeji indicated that they were her “friends.” Yeji did not explicitly mention if she appreciated having playful non-verbal interactions with these friends, but she described that she felt “more joyful” when she played with them. She might have valued the more active and vocalized nature of her relationships with them.

Paulina’s seat during circle time was next to Hyunsoo’s. At a transition time or during a time when he felt bored, Hyunsoo liked to playfully touch or make faces at Paulina. Paulina always responded to Hyunsoo’s playful actions in a positive manner (e.g., giggling, imitating). The following vignette shows how Hyunsoo felt about Paulina’s reactions. It is continued from the introductory story of this chapter, in which Hyunsoo claimed Jinu was not his friend.

Vignette 6.3 Interview transcripts & Field notes: 01/28/2012

“Then, who are your friends?” Rather than answering my question, Hyunsoo pointed to the video recording of his peer interactions, which I showed him for recollection and to ask for his responses. In the scene, waiting for Ms. Sunny to begin circle time, Hyunsoo sits next to Paulina and seems to attract her attention by making funny sounds. Watching the scene, Hyunsoo laughed and spoke loudly to me, “See? I said ‘e-coo’ (meaning “oops” in Korean), and she says ‘e-coo’ back. It is funny.” He seemed to be happy to see she repeated what he said in Korean. I asked, “Is she your friend?” Smiling, Hyunsoo nodded his head yes.
Hyunsoo did not interact much with Paulina during playtime. However, he always listed Paulina as one of his friends, because he appreciated Paulina’s consistently positive reactions to his non-verbal expressions.

Shared means of communication have not attracted much attention from researchers who study the features of friendships. They tended to be taken for granted, instead of being considered critical features of friendships. Although the means of communication is not discussed separately, studies on children’s peer culture suggest that it is important to communicate and interact in a shared way in order to be in a peer group. My study also found that having a shared means of communication and understanding is important for friendships. If children share their first language, they would use it to communicate and develop friendships. However, as Bruner (1986) highlighted, if children find themselves staying in a situation “where words go astray” (p. 20), they can develop a shared means of communication by using their intersubjectivity. The findings of my study revealed effective non-verbal communication between my two focal children and their friends. Yeji and Hyunsoo, luckily, had peers who had willingly developed a shared means of communication with them.

**Respect for Each Other’s Play Activities: “He Didn’t Want to Mess up My Play”**

In addition to the use of shared means of communication, I found that Yeji and Hyunsoo counted respect for their play activities (e.g., play space, materials, and ideas) as a defining feature of friendship. For them, the frequency of peer contacts—which was a criterion for the teachers—appeared to be less important than respect when determining friendship. For instance, this is apparent in Yeji’s descriptions about why she thought that Sean, who rarely interacted with her, was her friend and Sara, who often joined in Yeji’s activity, was not her friend.
Interview transcript: 01/14/2012

Jooeun: Yeji, who is your friend at school? Who do you play with?

Yeji: Hailey...

Jooeun: Hailey. Who else?

Yeji: umm... I don’t know. You know, I can’t speak English well.

Jooeun: I know, but you still play with some kids. How about boys? Are any of them your friend?

Yeji: umm... Sean.

Jooeun: Sean is your friend. What do you play with him, then?

Yeji: umm... I don’t know.

Jooeun: Then... what kind of friend is Sean to you, Yeji?

Yeji: [He is] nice to me.

Jooeun: How is he nice to you?

Yeji: umm... when I play, [he’s] being nice to me.

Jooeun: Ok, then, who else is your friend?

Yeji: I don’t know.

Jooeun: How about Sara? You often play with her.

Yeji: (shaking her head no) [She is] not my friend.

Jooeun: Why isn’t Sara your friend?

Yeji: Sara... always plays only in the way she likes with what I’M PLAYING.

Hailey was the girl in Vignette 6.2, whose interactions with Yeji were most dialogic. Thus, Hailey was an anticipated choice. However, it was surprising that Yeji named Sean.
Sean was the oldest boy in Yeji’s class (see Table 6.3). He stayed mostly in the block play area with other boys, so he rarely had any contact with Yeji. Sean could be described as the most popular, dominant, and masculine among the boys. He seemed to feel that boys had the priority to play in the block area, so he had a tendency to take some toys from girls playing in the block play area, saying, “No, girls can’t play with it.” Therefore, I often heard other girls complaining to the teachers about Sean, such as, “Sean is not nice to me,” “Sean doesn’t let me play with the blocks,” and “Sean took my toys.” Interestingly, Yeji told me the opposite about him: “[He is] being nice to me.”

After repeatedly watching play scenes in which Yeji and Sean appeared together, I found an interesting pattern. If a girl sat near Sean’s playgroup and gathered some block toys that might be useful for Sean’s play, Sean would usually feel free to take some of her toys. However, this was not the case with Yeji. I often observed that Yeji played in the block area pretending she was going on a picnic. She used to bring toys (e.g., toy foods and plates) from the housekeeping area, but she also used some blocks for her picnic. However, I never observed an instance in which Sean took the blocks that Yeji was using. I also found that Sean tended not to enter Yeji’s play space. Even when his friends ran over into Yeji’s picnic area, Sean went around the play space. Sometimes, he and his playgroup entered the kitchen area, but he appeared to keep his distance from where Yeji played. It seemed that Yeji equated these patterns (i.e., not touching her toys and not interrupting her play space) as Sean being nice to her.

In a sense, it might be possible that Sean simply did not care for Yeji. In fact, many cultural linguistic minority children have experienced loneliness or being ignored at school (Igoa, 1995). Therefore, as a way of member checking, I showed Yeji video recordings of Sean
keeping his distance from her play area and wanted to understand how she viewed the episode herself.

Interview transcript: 02/05/2012

Jooeun: Yeji, what is Sean doing?

Yeji: He is passing by where I am playing.

Jooeun: Why do you think he didn’t go over to where you were playing as his friends did?

Yeji: umm... because he didn’t want to mess up my play.

Vignette 6.4 Video transcripts: 01/19/2012

It is clean-up time. Yeji goes to the block area and picks up two cars near Sean. Sean, who is still playing there, sees her picking up the cars and rhythmically chants, “Go Yeji, go!” Yeji gazes at him for a moment and drives the cars on Sean’s train track. “No, Yeji, girls can’t play cars here,” says Jake, who played with Sean. Sean tells Jake, “She’s ok. I said she can play.” They all roll cars on the track a little more and begin cleaning up the train track together.

Sean and the boys in his playgroup tended to exclude girls. However, when Jake told Yeji “girls can’t play,” Sean said Yeji was ok. For some reason, he seemed to see Yeji as different from the other girls. According to the above interview, Yeji understood that Sean kept his distance from her play area, because he respected her space and did not want to interrupt.

In contrast, Sara, according to Yeji, “always plays in the way she likes” when joining in Yeji’s play activities. The following two vignettes may illustrate what Yeji meant.

Vignette 6.5 Video transcripts: 01/10/2012

Yeji is drawing on an easel. Sara comes and watches Yeji drawing a girl. Sara tells Yeji, “I like a princess with a tiara.” Yeji looks at her. “A tiara, not flowers on her head,” Sara
points at Yeji’s painting. Yeji pauses to select another color among the red, blue, and yellow brushes. Sara says firmly, “Yellow is good. I like a yellow tiara.”

Vignette 6.6: Video transcripts: 01/17/2012

Yeji is playing cooking. She set two meals on the kitchen table as usual. Sara, dressed up in a princess costume and carrying a clutch bag, comes and sits at the table. “Hurry, Yeji. We should go to the party soon.” Yeji hands her a fork and a spoon, but instead of eating, Sara goes back to the costume box. She brings a big bag and a big fancy hat and hands them to Yeji, “We don’t have time for dinner. Pack the food in the bag. We shall be late.”

In these two episodes, Sara entered into Yeji’s play space and attempted to join in Yeji’s play activity. However, she did not care what Yeji was playing but tried to dictate Yeji’s actions or usurp the play activity. Sara’s interactions with Yeji in these two episodes do not seem as dialogic as Yeji’s interactions with peers who she called “friend” (see Hailey in Vignette 6.2). Moreover, Sara’s interactions seem to force Yeji to change the ideas and themes of her play activity. Perhaps due to these reasons, Yeji claimed, “[Sara] always plays in the way she likes.”

Sara’s interactions with Yeji up until January tended to be dominant and monological, as shown in these vignettes. However, as the contact between Yeji and Sara increased, Sara seemed to understand typical patterns of Yeji’s play activities (e.g., play theme, roles, favorite toys) and followed the patterns when she joined in Yeji’s activities. From February, Yeji began to describe Sara as “fun,” “playing together,” and a “friend.”

Like Sara, Rachel, who was indicated as “not really a friend” by Hyunsoo, garnered mixed feelings from Hyunsoo. She was the tallest and oldest girl in Hyunsoo’s class. She was active and good at constructing blocks and had lots of creative ideas. However, she tended to
dominate play activities and toys. When I first interviewed Hyunsoo, he selected Rachel as both his favorite and least favorite classmate. Hyunsoo told me he liked Rachel, because she was “silly and fun,” but sometimes, he did not like her, because she was “bossy” and was “interrupting” his play by “taking” his toys. His answer had been consistent throughout the school year, and he never mentioned her as a friend, although they often played together.

In contrast, Amy was perceived as a friend who respected Hyunsoo’s play activities. If she was interested in Hyunsoo’s activities, she tended to take time to observe and not immediately interrupt the on-going play. Hyunsoo also seemed to feel comfortable with such approaches and reacted positively, as shown in the following vignette.

Vignette 6.7 Video transcripts: 02/22/2012

Amy comes over to Hyunsoo, who is rolling mini cars on two wood planks placed together like a racetrack. Hyunsoo rolls a blue car, but it stops in the middle of track. He rolls a yellow car to the blue car. It bumps into the blue car, and they roll to the end of the track. Amy is watching attentively. Hyunsoo looks at Amy, who is standing behind him and crosses to the other side of his racetrack. Amy, now, has a better view of the track. Hyunsoo rolls another car, and it falls off the track. Amy picks it up and hands it to Hyunsoo. “Thank you,” Hyunsoo says in English. He gives a mini car to Amy. She begins rolling the car on his racetrack.

As shown in this vignette, Amy was often included in Hyunsoo’s play activities, while not challenging the focus of play. Hyunsoo described Amy as “nice” or “good,” which seemed to designate her careful approach to and respect for his on-going play activities.

Children strive to maintain the specific frame that defines their play activities (Kyratzis, 2004). Each play activity has a particular theme, plot, and object as its focus, and a group of
children share the focus in order to play together (Corsaro, 1985; Elgas, 2003; Elgas, Klein, & Kantor, 1988). The findings of this study also showed that Yeji and Hyunsoo appreciated peers who respected their play activities or carefully observed and maintained the focus of their play.

**Mutual Assistance: “We Like to Help Each Other Nicely.”**

Mutual assistance was also appreciated as an important feature for Yeji’s and Hyunsoo’s friendships. Yeji selected Owen, and Hyunsoo selected Amy and Mia as their friends because of this trait, helping.

Owen was a boy newly enrolled in Yeji’s class in February 2012. He was shy and quiet when he first enrolled. At playtime, he tended to wander around slowly, stayed in a corner, and rarely interacted with other children. Yeji was interested in this new boy. Her eyes sometimes followed him to check on what he was doing. February was a month when Yeji began to make a noticeable change in her actions. Her play interactions with some girls, like Hailey and Sara, became consistent, and her time playing outside of the kitchen area increased (e.g., puzzle table, drawing easel, costume boxes, and block area). Moreover, after her fourth birthday in February, she began to feel more confident about herself, as she was often saying loudly, “**I’m a big girl. I am four!**” to her teachers and other children in English. She became vocal and began to communicate with some of her peers using English. In this changing context, Yeji met a new classmate, Owen. For several weeks, until he developed stable relationships with some boys (e.g., Noah, Will), Yeji tried to help him. For example, Yeji often helped Owen do morning rituals (e.g., hanging up their coats, putting their name cards on a board). She also showed him how to play with some toys and, sometimes, brought him toys he might like as described in the following vignette:
Vignette 6.8: Video transcripts: 02/22/2012

Yeji arrives in her classroom a bit late. The other children are already playing at each play area. Yeji picks up her name card and puts it on the name board. She searches the names on the board and calls to Owen who is playing with a puzzle alone at a table.

“Owen, Owen, your name, your name.” Yeji picks up Owen’s name card and brings it to him. Owen puts his name card on the board and goes back to his puzzle. Yeji follows him and stands nearby him. She begins watching him matching the pieces. Owen seems to struggle to find some puzzle pieces. Yeji looks at him, points out the pieces, and smiles. Owen smiles back. After finishing the puzzle, Owen finds a yellow toy bus on the carpet. He sits there and begins checking out the toy bus—the doors, the little people inside the bus, and the wheels. Yeji gathers some mini cars scattered around the block area, sits next to Owen, and arranges the cars in a line. After arranging the cars, she looks at Owen. Owen looks back. Yeji leaves there and begins playing cooking.

I interviewed Yeji with the video recordings of Vignette 6.8.

Interview transcripts: 03/04/12

Jooeun: Yeji, what are you doing [in the scene]?

Yeji: I just found Owen’s name card and gave it to him.

Jooeun: Why did you do that?

Yeji: (laughing) Because, he doesn’t know he’s supposed to put on the name card.

Jooeun: Ah-ha, you helped him remember.

Yeji: Yes, I like helping him.

Jooeun: Then, why did you just leave after nicely placing the cars?
Yeji: *It was my good idea.* (Laughing) *When the people [in the toy bus] get off the bus, they can ride in the cars.*

Jooeun: *But, you didn’t play with the little people in the bus. You just left.*

Yeji: *It’s ok. Owen can give them a ride with the cars. Then, I can cook for them.*

Jooeun: *So, the cars were for Owen to play with?*

Yeji: *Sure!*

Yeji seemed to enjoy helping Owen. She carefully studied his needs and tried to help him in a gentle manner. For example, although she thought it would be better for Owen to have cars for his toy bus play, she did not push him to follow her idea. Rather, she brought the toy cars close to Owen, had them available for him, made eye contact with him, and left him alone to play. The possible message she tried to convey to Owen with the eye contact was likely, “Here are some cars. If you want, you are welcome to play with them.” For Yeji, having a newcomer to offer assistance seemed to prompt her to have a sense of competence. From the middle of March, Yeji and Owen’s interactions decreased as Owen began spending most of his time at the block play area with other kids; however, she still indicated Owen as her friend, who was “nice” and “helping other kids well.”

Mia, a small quiet girl, was also described as a friend by Hyunsoo, because: “she helps me well” and “I also often help her.” During playtime, Mia mostly stayed at an art table or at the dramatic play area, so Mia’s interactions with Hyunsoo were not frequent. However, when they sat at an art table together, Mia, who was very skillful at art, often assisted with Hyunsoo’s crafts and gave him some ideas. Hyunsoo also often helped Mia during clean-up time. In addition, Amy, who was described as respecting Hyunsoo’s activities (see Vignette 6.7), was also considered working collaboratively with him. In Hyunsoo’s words, “we [Amy and I] like to help
each other nicely.” According to Ms. Sunny, Amy had a twin brother, so she liked to work with boys. Amy liked to play with blocks and cars. Hyunsoo and Amy often collaborated to build constructions and played cars together. Hyunsoo was good at constructing buildings or parking lots, and Amy got his assistance in doing such activities. I also observed that they helped each other lift bigger objects, such as a toy box filled with blocks or a big plank, during clean-up time.

Hyunsoo and Yeji did not merely seek one-way assistance from their peers. In fact, they did not like some of their peers trying to help them not in consideration of their needs. The following vignette is continued from the episode in Vignette 6.1.

**Vignette 6.9 Video transcripts: 01/24/2012**

At a place between an art table and the block play area, Hyunsoo and Jay are enjoying their new game with puzzle pieces: throwing the puzzle pieces into the puzzle box. The small wood pieces are making funny sounds. The boys giggle. Claire comes over to them and watches what they are doing. “No, no, no, it’s wrong. You can’t play like that!” Claire shouts. Jay frowns, “It is ok. We can do this. Right, Hyunsoo?” Claire ignores Jay. Not waiting for Hyunsoo’s answer, Claire begins talking to Hyunsoo. “Look, Hyunsoo. This one should go here.” She shows Hyunsoo how to put one of the puzzle pieces with its matching piece. “See? This and this go together.” Ms. Sunny, sitting at an art table looks at Claire talking to Hyunsoo, “Thanks, Claire, for helping Hyunsoo!”

Claire was an active and talkative girl. She was one of the oldest four year-olds in this mixed-age group of three and four year olds. According to Hyunsoo’s teachers, she was sweet and caring to the other kids. In fact, she was interested in taking care of her peers, who seemed to be clumsy, and telling her peers the right way to do something. She attempted to help Hyunsoo many times because she viewed Hyunsoo as if he was talking like a “baby,” in her word, and not
having knowledge of how to act in the class. As seen in this episode, she tended to correct him in many cases. Hyunsoo told me that, “Claire always says that I am wrong.” Although Claire meant to help him, one-way assistance that was not respectful and sensitive to his needs was not counted for Hyunsoo as a feature of friendship.

In Vignette 6.9, we can also see the different perspectives between Hyunsoo and his teacher. Claire’s acts were praised as helpful by the teacher, although Hyunsoo did not appreciate them. In fact, in both of the two classrooms, the teachers tended to view peers who looked more skillful and knowledgeable as helpful for Hyunsoo and Yeji. Thus, from the teachers’ perspectives, a child like Claire, who attempted to teach another child, would be a good friend for Hyunsoo and Yeji.

Researchers have suggested that helping and collaboration is an important feature of friendship regardless of age. For example, Goldman and Buysee (2007) described helping as a feature of friendships found in children’s early years. Like the findings in these researchers’ studies, helping was also valued by Yeji and Hyunsoo. Developmental researchers, such as Selman (1980) and Youniss (1980), described one-way assistance as being shown among young children, and responsivity and mutual assistance are found in older children’s friendships. However, my study revealed that even for young children, mutual assistance is important. As suggested by some other researchers, the findings in my study highlight collaboration, accompanied by responsiveness to each other’s needs, as an important dimension of friendships (Bernt, 2004; Corsaro, 1985; Sullivan, 1953).

In sum, I found that there are three features of friendships that Yeji and Hyunsoo appreciated: (a) shared means of communicating and understanding, (b) respect for each other’s play activities, and (c) mutual assistance and responsiveness. I also found that these features
were different from the teachers’ points of view in some respects. While their teachers saw a frequency of peer interactions and physical closeness for determining their friendships, Yeji and Hyunsoo focused more on the quality and traits of peer relationships for identifying their friends. Moreover, while Hyunsoo and Yeji desired collaboration and dialogic contributions in their interactions with a friend, teachers (and some peers) perceived that they needed assistance from more competent friends.

The facets of friendships discussed in this section were based on examinations of the two cultural linguistic minority children’s relationships with their peers from the mainstream culture. However, there was another Korean boy, Jinu, who shared his first language and cultural background with Hyunsoo. Hyunsoo and Jinu’s friendship has different characteristics from what I described above. In fact, Jinu was the child whom Hyunsoo claimed as not his friend in the conversation that began this chapter. In the following section, focusing on Hyunsoo and Jinu’s relationships, I explore the role that a shared verbal language plays in friendships of cultural linguistic minority children in a mainstream U.S. preschool.

**The Role of Shared Verbal Language in Friendships**

Although my findings highlight the role of non-verbal communication between cultural linguistic minority children and their counterparts, I cannot ignore the importance of shared verbal language in children’s social engagement. To be a member of a community, a child should understand and negotiate meanings with people in the community and also participate in practices that are embedded with shared meanings. Language is critical to this meaning making process. It is indeed a gift, as Bruner (1986) stated, which makes human interactions rich and communications clear, although human nature has “intersubjectivity” and non-verbal language that work wonderfully when “words go astray” (p. 20).
Hyunsoo and Jinu’s relationship in their classroom was unique, because they exclusively shared their native language, Korean. The following two vignettes show how the shared verbal language worked in rich ways in their interactions.

**Vignette 6.10 Video transcripts: 12/06/11**

Hyunsoo and Jinu are at the sensory table. At this table, there are big magnets and various objects, so they are exploring which object is magnetic. Jinu pulls out a key holder from his pocket and finds it to be magnetic.

Jinu: *Look, Hyunsoo. It is attached.*

Hyunsoo: *Cool. Let’s try this [mini car].*

Hyunsoo’s mini car is made of plastic, so it is not magnetic. Hyunsoo looks frustrated.

Jinu: *It is so [not magnetic], because it is so small. I watched on TV: a big car was pulled out by a big magnet.*

Hyunsoo: *Really? (Pointing to the big toy cars on the shelves) Then, are the big cars magnetic?*

Jinu: *Absolutely!! Let’s bring them [the big cars], and explore how it goes.*

Hyunsoo: *Ok, that’s a good idea.*

In this vignette, the boys exchange information from their prior experience, build up a hypothesis, and extend their exploration via their shared verbal language.

**Vignette 6.11 Video transcripts: 01/09/12**

Hyunsoo and Jinu stand next to block shelves holding big cars—two police cars, a garbage truck, a fire truck, and two school buses. They are discussing what they will play with.

Jinu: *How about the big cars?*
Hyunsoo: *Ok, then, let’s play with the police cars. You have the long [police] car, and I have that big one.* (Pointing to the doll house in the dramatic play area) *Let’s say we need to secure the house.*

They go to the shelves, but before they get to the police cars, Kyle begins playing with one of the police cars, the bigger one. “Uh-huh!” Hyunsoo and Jinu both shout. There is only one police car left for them.

Jinu: *I will drive the police car. You follow me.*

Hyunsoo: *I will drive it because* (pointing his t-shirt) *I have Buzz Lightyear*[^19] *on my t-shirt*.  

Jinu: *I have Spider-Man! Besides, I am supposed to have this big one; you said that.*

Hyunsoo: *Umm... you know what? My uncle will come to my house next week. He will bring many toy cars. Then, I will bring some. Why don’t we just play cars at that time?*

Jinu: *That sounds good! It’s too boring to play with only one police car.*

Hyunsoo: *Yes, we can just go there* (pointing to the dollhouse) *without cars.*

Jinu: *Right, let’s say we need to fix the house. I’m an uncle.*

Hyunsoo: *Ok, I’m a little uncle. Let’s go.*

In this vignette, Hyunsoo and Jinu discuss how to play with a limited resource and try to persuade each other why they should get to play the driver’s role when playing with the police car. The shared verbal language worked to deliver the logic of their arguments, negotiate, and reach an alternate agreement.

Jinu had been enrolled in the preschool for two years. During the first two months, Hyunsoo and Jinu did not interact much with each other, because Jinu already had friends and

[^19]: This is an action figure from the popular animated movie *Toy Story*, which has strong heroic characteristics.
used fluent English with them. However, they became closer after November 2012 as their mothers became friends and picked them up together after school. During the winter vacation, they often had play dates, and when the school resumed in January, Hyunsoo and Jinu appeared to be best friends.

In an interview conducted on January 28, 2013 (as shown in the conversation which began this chapter), Hyunsoo suddenly claimed that Jinu was not his friend, because Jinu did not speak to him. I did not understand what he meant by not speaking to him at that time. Later, I found that Jinu’s parents had become concerned about Jinu’s use of Korean at school, so they asked Ms. Sunny to make Jinu use English. Whenever Ms. Sunny noticed Jinu speaking in Korean with Hyunsoo, the teacher called Jinu over to her and advised him not to use Korean at school. At such times, Jinu seemed to feel that it was unfair to get a warning and got upset with Hyunsoo, who seemed to be the cause for him receiving a warning. The following vignette shows one such incident.

Vignette 6.12 Video transcripts: 02/02/12

Hyunsoo and Jinu are on the carpet in the block center. They have four long wood planks on the carpet and try to put them together like a racetrack for their mini cars.

Jinu: (Laying down all of the wood blocks together) Like this, Hyunsoo.

Hyunsoo: (Having the two planks in the boundaries standing up) No, like this.

Jinu: (Laying down the planks again,) No, like this, like this. Hyunsoo, like this.

Ms. Sunny: (from the art table, with a small but firm voice) Jinu, English.

Jinu pauses for a second and places the wood planks as Hyunsoo has shown him.

Jinu: (With a mumbling voice) You spoke Korean, Hyunsoo.

Hyunsoo: (Glancing at where Ms. Sunny is) It was “Jinu, English” [that Ms. Sunny said].
Jinu: *Can only you speak in Korean?* (Pause) *That is dumb.*

From somewhere, a kid says, “What is it?” Instead of answering Jinu, Hyunsoo repeats the English words, “**What is it.**” Hyunsoo looks at me, who is video recording, and gives me an awkward smile. Meanwhile, Jinu finishes up the racetrack and begins rolling a car.

Jinu: (Rolling a car on the racetrack) *This is an exercise! Hyunsoo, you can only turn on the engine in “Please-Start-the-Car” game.*

Hyunsoo, not answering Jinu, just stares at the floor and begins rolling a police car.

Jinu: (Stopping Hyunsoo’s police car) *No, I said you can only start the engine.*

Ms. Sunny: (from the art table,) Jinu, come here for a second.

Jinu hesitantly goes to Ms. Sunny. She says, “Can you speak in English?” and something more in a whispering voice. Jinu comes back and stands in front of Hyunsoo.

Jinu: (With a shaky voice and a frown on his face, he says in English) Hyunsoo, why are you so mean to me! You always did it to me.

Hyunsoo, clutching the police car, just stares at Jinu. Jinu says “No,” and Hyunsoo says, “Yes.” They repeat, “No,” “Yes,” “No,” “Yes,” …

Jinu: (Pulling Hyunsoo’s jacket, in Korean) *No, you can just turn on the engine, right?* Hyunsoo: (trying to get away from Jinu, with a strict face) *If you do like this again and again, I will go back to Korea.*

Jinu: (coming to Ms. Sunny, with a crying voice) Ms. Sunny, Hyunsoo speaks Korean.

Ms. Sunny: That’s Ok. You can speak back in English and help him learn English, Ok?
Jinu comes back slowly. He stands on the racetrack and stares at Hyunsoo.

Jinu: (with a mumbling voice) *Do not play with cars!*

Hyunsoo: (with a frown on his face) *I don’t care. Then, I will go back to Korea.*
Jinu comes and sits in front of Hyunsoo. Paulina and Claire come to see what is going on. Jinu: (with a crying voice) I only get in trouble, but you are ok with no English. It is so-o stupid.

Hyunsoo leaves Jinu and stands in a corner. They begin staring at each other. No one speaks or does anything for a while, even the girls who are watching this happening.

I still remember the tension. Jinu could not understand why the same rule, “speaking English at school,” did not apply to Hyunsoo or why Hyunsoo was so mean for using Korean even when Jinu was scolded. Hyunsoo was wondering why Ms. Sunny kept asking Jinu not to use their shared language that had enriched their play interactions and why Jinu was upset at him and not at Ms. Sunny. I do not think either of them got a teacher’s explanation for any of these questions. This vignette shows how the control of a shared verbal language harmed these two boys’ friendships and their views on each other. Whenever Jinu was scolded about the use of Korean and became upset at Hyunsoo, Jinu did not speak to Hyunsoo for a while (sometimes for an hour and sometimes for one or two days). They did not even exchange eye-contact when tension developed, although they seemed to continue their usual play activities (e.g., playing cars, building LEGO). Thus, Hyunsoo was probably referring to this blocked communication and the loss of the shared language when he said that Jinu was not his friend, because Jinu would not speak to him.

There have been a few studies that emphasized the importance of shared verbal language for cultural linguistic minority children’s friendships (Feng et al., 2004; Lee & Walsh, 2003; Lopez, 1999). For example, when Lopez (1999) asked Antonio—a fifth grade migrant boy from Mexico—the reason for his friendship with his best friend, Jose, Antonio answered, “Because we both speak the same language” (p. 148). Lopez found that it was something more than just the
ability to speak Spanish that grounded the two boys’ friendship. She discussed that “the bond between friends” created by “sharing” a language was more important for the boys (p. 148). The findings in my study also support the ideas that sharing a verbal language and building a bond are something cultural linguistic minority children desire in their lives at mainstream schools. In the following section, I further discuss how teachers can support cultural linguistic minority children’s friendships that are responsive to these children’s needs.

**Discussion: Supporting Friendships Responsive to Children’s Needs**

Previous studies have been in agreement that cultural linguistic minority children have unique needs and that schools should make efforts to address their needs. Likewise, children’s friendships should be supported in ways that address their needs. McCarthy (1998), in his review of the literature on immigrant children’s adjustment to school, categorized their unique needs as learning a new language, living in two disparate worlds, and confronting prejudice. However, this way of categorizing is still too broad and general to understand each child from a different context. Graue and Walsh (1998) stressed the importance of understanding children in context. In other words, in order to understand Yeji and Hyunsoo’s friendships, it is important to account for the context of their friendships, as listed below:

- Enrolled in a U. S. preschool for the first time;
- Speaking Korean fluently at home;
- Having teachers and peers predominantly speaking English;
- Understanding some English words but rarely speaking in English.

In what follows, I discuss how Hyunsoo’s and Yeji’s conceptions of friendships reflect their unique needs in these contexts. In each discussion, I share my thoughts about how teachers can
support cultural linguistic minority children’s friendships that are responsive to the children’s needs.

First, from Yeji and Hyunsoo’s perspectives, *respect for their play activities* was important for their friendship, because they were in a preschool where children were mostly concerned with “the protection of on-going play activities” and “social participation” (Corsaro, 1985, p. 172). However, maintaining play activities and achieving social participation at the same time is challenging for cultural linguistic minority children. Allowing the involvement of dominant peers increases the possibility of deviating from the purpose of their play. Therefore, Yeji and Hyunsoo sought peers, who respected their play space, carefully observed and understood the theme of their play, and joined in their play according to the ongoing theme.

Many teachers may think that cultural linguistic minority children appreciate peers who make frequent contact and who are involved in their play activities. For example, Hyunsoo’s teacher viewed Rachel—who liked to intervene in Hyunsoo’s play activities—as his friend. However, Hyunsoo felt she interrupted his activities. The findings of this dissertation study shed light on the fact that cultural linguistic minority children do not appreciate *anyone* who approaches and plays with them but *someone* who is considerate and respectful. Hyunsoo’s and Yeji’s experiences help us to see that that all young children seek to be empowered and to be active agents in their play activities (Kyritzis, 2004) and in their friendships.

Second, *mutual helping* and *collaboration* were important for Yeji and Hyunsoo in relation to their desire to be competent members of the community. People seek to have a sense of belonging in a community through participation in and contributions to the community (Bruner, 1986; Rogoff, 2003). Because of their positions as newcomers and cultural linguistic minorities, Yeji and Hyunsoo had more chances to receive help than opportunities to help others.
However, they appreciated mutual helping more than one-way assistance because they also had the desire and capability to contribute to their community. Based on this finding, I argue that as educators, we need to revisit our assumptions about cultural linguistic minority children as needing friends who can lead, teach, and help them. In fact, Katz and McClellan (1997) suggested that teachers pair “a less-liked child with a more popular child” or a less-competent child with a child having more social knowledge and skills in order to promote social development (p. 96). This suggestion represents the dominant discourse in education that knowledge is transferred from top to bottom, from an experienced/skillful person to a less-experienced/competent person. Moreover, it does not account for children’s perspectives in their social engagement. Although such advice might be helpful for some children in certain situations, it has the risk of preventing teachers from seeing a so-called “less-competent” child or a minority child as an active agent who can also teach and help other children. For example, Hyunsoo and Yeji developed friendships and a sense of belonging by helping younger children (e.g., Andrew, Lizzie) and a newcomer (Owen) and from their collaborations with some peers (e.g., Amy, Mia). Thus, making various types of peer contacts available for children could promote mutual help and mutual learning among children.

Third, the shared means of communication was important for Yeji and Hyunsoo in regard to the peer culture of their preschools and the linguistic disconnection they might have felt at school. Research on peer culture suggests that children should be able to communicate in shared ways to play together and negotiate meanings. This dissertation study found that Yeji and Hyunsoo also sought peers who understood and communicated with them in order to negotiate meanings and play together. For example, Jay and Hyunsoo constructed shared means of communication (eye-gaze, gestures, and imitating) exclusively used for their play interactions.
Andrew, Lizzie, and Paulina, by using more non-verbal expressions, interacted with Yeji and Hyunsoo better than other children, who predominantly used English. We can learn from Yeji and Hyunsoo to recognize the importance of non-verbal communication for cultural linguistic minority children in their relationships with their peers from the dominant culture. Building on this recognition could lead educators to make efforts to create an environment in which every child could feel free to express his or her feelings and thoughts through both verbal and non-verbal languages.

The findings in this study show that not all children have to use the same verbal language to develop a shared communication system. However, we cannot ignore that a friend, who shares the same native language, has special meanings for cultural linguistic minority children attending a mainstream school. Such friendship secures these children’s feelings and helps their adjustment to school. For example, through the use of Korean, Jinu and Hyunsoo could share rich ideas in order to conduct an experiment of magnetic objects and solve problems. They also shared cultural knowledge embedded in the peer and school culture in their classroom (e.g., class rules, play themes, interests). Had the teachers and parents allowed Jinu and Hyunsoo to speak their native language, Korean, Jinu would have been able to share not just English but his knowledge gained in his previous two years of experience in the preschool. Also, Hyunsoo could have taught Jinu what he knew and felt a bond and power through the use of shared verbal language. I felt saddened that adults deprived Hyunsoo and Jinu of opportunities for such mutual learning, hindered the development of their friendship, and, even worse, promoted negative feelings about their native language and identity. There has been a debate around bilingual education and the use of children’s primary languages in school. The findings in this study suggest that teachers and parents need to recognize the crucial role of shared verbal language
between children from the same cultural linguistic background in their social engagement and adjustment to school. I argue that banning the use of native language with peers in school to just expedite language minority children’s learning of English is shortsighted and detrimental to their healthy development and learning, and could also be counterproductive.
CHAPTER 7

EPILOGUE

“The key is curiosity, and it is curiosity, not answers, that we model. As we seek to learn about a child, we demonstrate the acts of observing, listening, questioning, and wondering. When we are curious about a child’s words and our responses to those words, the child feels respected. The child is respected.”

–Vivian Paley in *Listening to What Children Say*

Throughout this dissertation study, I have attempted to listen to Hyunsoo’s and Yeji’s voices in order to understand their social engagement in the peer culture at two U.S. preschools. Perceiving social engagement as a cultural process of participation in meaning making, it was my focus to find strategies used by Hyunsoo and Yeji to negotiate meanings and engage in peer interactions. In Chapters 1 and 2, I discussed the methodology and theoretical frameworks of this dissertation study that I used for understanding and listening to these children. Chapter 3 highlighted these children’s intersubjective communication and meaning makings with their peers through non-verbal languages, and Chapter 4 shed light on these children’s tactics used to trick the social order that situated them as the weak. Chapters 5 and 6 explored these children’s perspectives on clean-up time and friendships that have special characteristics for satisfying their unique needs and supporting their social engagement. The findings presented in Chapters 5 and 6 also revealed that children’s points of view could be different from adults’ perspectives regarding what would be helpful for enhancing cultural linguistic minority children’s social engagement. In each of these chapters, I have already discussed some implications for early childhood educators and researchers. In this epilogue, I summarize some key implications of this
study. I end this dissertation with an image of the future teacher who makes every child’s voice heard in her classroom, as my final thoughts.

Implications

For Early Childhood Educators

Young children engage with each other through non-verbal interactions as well as verbal communication. This study highlights the importance of non-verbal communication between cultural linguistic minority children and their peers from the dominant culture. Because of the context in which their native verbal language does not work, the two focal children in my study were able to “read” other children’s minds more carefully and make meanings through systematic use of non-verbal languages. For example, Yeji and Hyunsoo claimed ownership of play objects or invited their peers to their play activities through demonstrations of patterned actions, and, sometimes, they got anticipated responses (see Chapter 3). Some researchers have argued that minority children are overrepresented on indices of school disciplines, and in many cases, this disproportionality in school discipline is caused by prejudices and cultural misunderstanding of these children’s actions (Garcia, 2001; Irvine, 1990; Monroe, 2005). I argue that the first step teachers should take to understand cultural linguistic minority children is to look at their seemingly strange actions in a different light. If teachers understand some of these children’s non-verbal actions as their languages, teachers could be more careful to find what messages are conveyed in these children’s actions instead of simply judging them as problematic.

In addition, in order to understand cultural linguistic minority children, this study suggests the value of a teacher’s systematic and intentional observation of children and communication with each child. I was able to understand (albeit still partially) my focal
children’s intentions of actions through participant observations and formal/informal conversations with each of them by using a shared verbal language, Korean. Considering the fact that the majority of teachers do not share cultural linguistic backgrounds with minority children, it is crucial for teachers to have more careful observations of the children’s actions. However, unfortunately, teachers in both of the two preschool classrooms in my study were too busy to fulfill many other responsibilities while trying to work with all children in their classrooms. During playtime, I noticed, the teachers mostly stayed in the art center or the literacy center to help each child complete his or her tasks. The teachers seemed to feel pressured to send parents their children’s work, which might represent the children’s progress at school. However, I found that, by staying only in one or two areas during playtime, the teachers lost chances to know and support each child’s development through various play activities.

Bakhtin (1986) argued that an understanding comes only in the responses of dialogic relations. If teachers varied their vantage points in the classroom, they could be closer to the children in order to make dialogic interchanges. As Vivian Paley (1981, 1988, 1991, 1993) has demonstrated with her persistent use of a voice recorder and personal narratives, the more teachers seek to learn about children, the better means they will be able to find to observe, listen, question, and wonder.

The findings in this study emphasize the importance of accounting for children’s perspectives in teaching and learning. The voices of children in Chapters 5 and 6 challenge teachers to critically reflect on their teaching practices and assumptions. For example, many teachers have overlooked clean-up time as simply a transition time, but it meant something more to Hyunsoo’s and Yeji’s social engagement and learning (see Chapter 5). Teachers may think that cultural linguistic minority children need socially and cognitively “competent” friends, who
can take a leading role and teach the language and culture of the new school. However, the voices of children in Chapter 6 teach us that, for cultural linguistic minority children—and, in fact, for all children, dialogic relations and mutual help are better than what Bakhtin (1981) called “authoritative discourse” (p. 351) and one-way assistance or instruction. Recently, because of the national and state level emphases on accountability in today’s schooling, even preschool teachers tend to focus more on the transmission of knowledge in content areas (e.g., early math concepts and literacy skills) rather than listening to children’s voices during their peer interactions (Kim, 2009; Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005). This dissertation study shows that the child is not a passive receiver of knowledge but an active constructor of meaning through his or her interactions with other children. The findings of this study also highlight that children have clear opinions on their learning. These findings encourage early childhood teachers to create environments promoting children’s peer interactions and make efforts to consider both the teachers’ voices and children’s voices when designing curriculum and teaching practices.

For Early Childhood Researchers

As noted earlier, cultural linguistic minority children have been overlooked in research on children’s peer culture. This lack of research may reflect the predominant view on cultural linguistic minority children as not capable of engaging in peer culture because of cultural linguistic limitations. This dissertation study highlights two Korean children’s agency and capability in meaning making and their contribution to the construction of peer culture in their preschools. I demonstrated that the concept of intersubjectivity and a broad sense of children’s language, including non-verbal communication, deserve researchers’ attention when trying to understand cultural linguistic minority children’s social engagement in peer culture at mainstream schools. I call for further research on this under researched area, particularly the
experiences of young cultural linguistic minority children in English dominant classrooms with no or few peers from the same cultural linguistic background.

Although this dissertation study emphasizes the role of non-verbal communication used by cultural linguistic minority children, it also recognizes the role of a shared native language between children from the same cultural linguistic community. As discussed in Chapter 6, this study raises questions about the effects of banning the use of a first language at schools on cultural linguistic minority children. There have been long debates around bilingual education, and the focus has been mostly on how the use of a first language affects cultural linguistic minority children’s academic achievement and acquisition of English proficiency (Crawford, 1989; Hakuta, 1999; Lucy, 2001; Rossell & Baker, 1996). Considering the increasing numbers of cultural linguistic minority children, further studies are necessary to examine how the use of first language is treated at school and how the encouragement or prohibition of the first language use affects cultural linguistic minority children’s social engagement and identity development.

When studying cultural linguistic minority children, it is important and challenging for researchers to select proper research methods to understand these children’s voices. It is also imperative to choose research methods responsive to these children’s lives (Rizzo & Corsaro, 1988). I adopted the video-cued ethnography (Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009) in this dissertation study (see Chapter 1) and found it effective in studying cultural linguistic minority children because they have few chances to express their feelings and thoughts about their lives in English dominant classrooms. More specifically, my focal children enjoyed watching and commenting on video recordings of their and their peers’ actions in their classrooms. The presence of a researcher sharing a native language with the children and the joyful atmosphere
created by prepared snacks and crafts were also crucial to helping the kids enjoy the interviews and comfortably share their thoughts.

**Final Thoughts**

In this dissertation study, what I was most concerned about was how to highlight my focal children’s voices, not mine. This was because I knew that, oftentimes, their voices were silenced at school. When I heard from Yeji’s mother that Yeji said it was so fun talking to me about her school experiences and that Yeji was looking forward to the next interview, it was the most rewarding moment for me in this research process.

Just after I defended my dissertation, I shared with Hyunsoo and Yeji’s families how much the audiences of my presentation appreciated learning about the children’s feelings and thoughts on their first year school experiences. Hyunsoo and Yeji looked proud as if they were feeling that they had taught me and other adults something important. Some days later, I brought them and their siblings to the biggest toy store in their town for treats. In front of the toy store, Hyunsoo talked to the other children, “You guys have to thank me. Auntie Jooeun buys you toys, because I helped her study something important.” His face was shining with proud. We exchanged eye contact. He might have understood what I wanted to say to him was, ‘Yes, you really did. You were a wonderful teacher for me, as you will be for many other educators, as well.’

Sharing the findings of this study with Hyunsoo’s and Yeji’s parents, I could feel how anxious the parents were about their children learning English and their first language use. Hyunsoo’s mother told me,

* *I didn’t know that speaking Korean with JINU [the other Korean boy in Hyunsoo’s class] helped Hyunsoo feel supported and have more chances for being engaged in the class. It*
[knowing this fact] relieves me a lot. However, even if I knew it, I am not sure how I would have explained to Hyunsoo about using Korean at school. It is because... I was always worried what if Hyunsoo was hated by his teachers, because he was using another language at school.

According to Hyunsoo’s mother, many Korean parents think that learning English is the correct path for ensuring their children’s adjustment in U.S. schools and feel pressured to help their children become fluent in English and adhere to the school’s norms as soon as possible. Therefore, some parents even take the risk of letting their children only use English at home and do not care if the children lose the Korean language and culture, which could cause other issues for their children’s growth. After I talked to Hyunsoo’s mother, I also realized the importance of accounting for parents’ voices as well as children’s voices. This is another important area we need to work on for teaching cultural linguistic minority children, including relieving parents’ concerns, developing their trust in teachers’ respect for their home language and culture, and collaborating with the parents.

In my first graduate course, I was asked what metaphor I would use to describe a good teacher. After taking a long time to think about it, I selected an orchestra conductor as a metaphor for a good teacher. I thought about how a classroom full of different children looks like the various shapes and voices of instruments in an orchestra, and the role of a teacher is similar to a conductor who illuminates each instrument’s sound in harmony with the other instruments’. In an orchestra, each instrument is valued and encouraged to make sounds. Later, I found a very similar metaphor in Bakhtin’s (1984b) idea of a novelist’s “orchestration” of his characters. Bruner (1996) also used the same metaphor to give suggestions for the future of education:
One of the most radical proposals to have emerged from the cultural-psychological approach to education is that the classroom be reconceived as just such a subcommunity of mutual learners, with the teacher orchestrating the proceedings. Note that, contrary to traditional critics, such subcommunities do not reduce the teacher’s role nor his or her “authority.” Rather, the teacher takes on the additional function of encouraging others to share it. Just as the omniscient narrator has disappeared from modern fiction, so will the omniscient teacher disappear from the classroom of the future. (pp. 21- 22, emphasis in the original)

The common theme in these metaphoric concepts is the power of orchestration, which creates a dialogic world whether in a novel or in a classroom, to highlight multiple voices.

Closing this dissertation, I want to imagine a dialogic future classroom where each different tone of voices, including a cultural linguistic minority child’s or a parent’s voice, is appreciated and accounted for in teaching and learning. I imagine a classroom in which every child can feel respected and safe to express his or her thoughts and feelings. I imagine a classroom where every child can freely interact with each other and have chances for contributing. Following Bakhtin and Bruner’s insights, I firmly believe that the model of orchestrating teachers is our hope for the future of education, an inclusive education for all children.
REFERENCES


# APPENDIX A

## SUMMARY OF CORPUS OF DATA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Collected Data</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participant Observation</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Field notes)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Video recordings at focal children’s classrooms</td>
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<tr>
<td>Video-cued child interviews</td>
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<td>(Audio recordings and memos)</td>
<td>(approximately 250 min. of audio recordings)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher interview</td>
<td>4 times for 30-60 min. (approximately 170 min. of audio recordings)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Audio recordings and personal memos)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Informal conversations with parents</td>
<td>*Additional information about the focal children was recorded in my personal notes.</td>
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APPENDIX B

TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

Italics: Korean utterances by the participants or a researcher

Bold fonts: indication of English words used by Hyunsoo and Yeji

( ): indication of behavior or facial expression

[ ]: added text to clarify for the reader

…: omitted text from the original transcribed data