This paper presents some of the findings from a study of L1 attrition of Korean during adolescence in an immigrant context in New Zealand. The late bilingual participants were 30 young Koreans who had immigrated to New Zealand at the age of 12-13 years and spent at least 2 years in an English-speaking environment since. The late bilinguals’ proficiency in Korean (L1) and English (L2) was considered through proficiency measures elicited through a vocabulary test and a story-retelling task supplemented by stimulated recall. Background information was elicited through a questionnaire and interviews. The participants’ performance in L1 was compared with their performance in L2 and that of 12-year-old monolingual Koreans. Analysis of their performance in L1 and L2 reveals that the late bilingual participants are L1-dominant and that there is no negative relationship between their L1 and L2 measures. The comparison of their L1 performance with that of the comparison group suggests that they have greater vocabulary knowledge but a narrower range of lexical items available during on-line production, and are more prone to errors than 12-year-old monolingual Koreans. The findings suggest that, while the participants’ general proficiency in L1 has increased, the particular aspects of proficiency—accuracy and lexical diversity—have been affected by attrition since their arrival in New Zealand. The paper discusses the issue of establishing a ‘point of reference’ (Jaspaert, Kroon, & van Hout, 1986) and demonstrates one way to establish attrition that may enable a further discussion of other sociolinguistic variables operating in an attrition phenomenon when a longitudinal design is not feasible (cf. de Bot, 1997; Hutz, 2004; Schmid & de Bot, 2004).

References


