

Hello, everyone. My name is Naoyuki Kojima, and I live in Aichi, Japan.

I'm a dual citizen of Japan and South Korea. Since I was little, my mother always spoke to me in Korean, so speaking Korean felt completely natural to me. I used it at home and even outside.

But when we moved to Japan, everything changed. Here, I didn't meet anyone who could speak Korean. At the park or in the supermarket, I started telling my mother, "Don't speak Korean." I was worried people would stare at us. She would pause for a moment, and then speak to me in Japanese.

I still remember the look on her face. It hurts me to think about it even now.

Later, I started attending Korean school a place where kids like me, with Korean roots, could learn the language and culture. Going to Japanese school on weekdays and Korean school on Saturdays wasn't easy. Most of us were better at Japanese, but we studied together and encouraged one another. We didn't want to lose the language that connects us to our families in Korea.

After I finished elementary level Korean cram school, I said to my mother, "Mom, I want to keep learning Korean, even in middle school." "I want to talk with you, my uncle, and my Korean friends." She looked like she was about to cry with happiness.

One day, at the Immigration Services Agency, I saw a girl in a school uniform interpreting Japanese for her mother. The girl was getting upset because her mother couldn't speak Japanese. At that moment, I looked at my own mother. I noticed she was watching the girl too with a very sad expression. That memory stays with me even today. I don't think the girl was angry because she didn't love her mother. Maybe, like me, she felt embarrassed because of how society looks at people who are "different."

I used to feel the same way when my mother spoke Korean in public. But I've changed since then. I no longer think any language should be hidden. In fact, being able to speak two languages is something to be proud of. Even today, many children in Japan feel pressured to hide their identity. Some feel they have to "become more Japanese" to fit in. But I believe our differences are something to celebrate, not hide.

Now, I'm studying not only Korean but also English. Being bilingual and maybe someday trilingual helps me share my story with more people. It helps me express what I've experienced and what I believe. My dream is to help children like me children with different backgrounds feel proud of who they are. I want them to have more opportunities, happy memories, and fulfilling lives in Japanese society. And I hope sharing my story today will give all of us a chance to think more about language, identity. I hope we understand each other better. That's why I continue learning Korean, even today. Thank you.

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My Story Through Two Languages