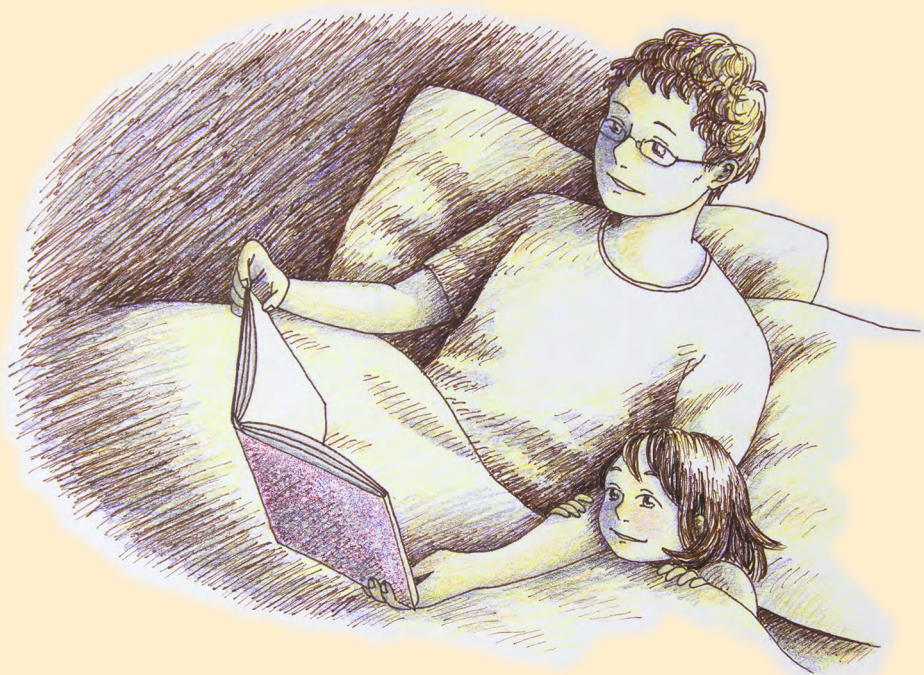


Raising Bilingual and Bicultural Children in Japan: Essays from the *Inaka*

Monographs on Bilingualism, No. 18

Edited by
Darren Lingley
Paul Daniels



Raising Bilingual and Bicultural Children in Japan: Essays from the *Inaka* (Monographs on Bilingualism, No. 18)



JALT Bilingualism SIG

The JALT Bilingualism SIG has published an extensive collection of monographs on both scholarly and practical topics related to raising children bilingually, particularly in Japanese contexts. Whether you are a new parent looking for advice or an educator wondering about how to deal with bilingual children in your class, the wealth of personal experiences in these books will provide you with plenty of directions, and perhaps even some answers. See the following link for further details: www.bsig.org/monographs



JALT East Shikoku Chapter

Raising Bilingual and Bicultural Children in Japan: Essays from the Inaka, Monographs on Bilingualism No. 18 is a project of the East Shikoku chapter of the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT). The East Shikoku JALT chapter serves language teachers in Kochi, Tokushima, and Kagawa. This volume deals with the unique challenges faced by parents living in the more rural areas of Japan, outside of the megaregion urban corridor of Tokyo to Kobe where more educational and community resources are available to parents raising bilingual children. Our collection of shared stories will be of value to both parents and language educators.

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Introduction: Framing Our Shared Stories

Darren Lingley

THIS EDITED VOLUME monograph celebrates the experience of raising bilingual and bicultural children in Japan. Our shared stories specifically focus on the unique challenges of raising bilingual children outside of Japan's large urban centers, in the so-called *inaka* or more peripheral rural areas. While the *inaka* can have a very positive meaning for many of us, it is often contrasted negatively with the cosmopolitan dynamic of big cities where access to key services and facilities is taken for granted. Indeed, the term 'inaka' evokes complex feelings and different meanings, from the more romantic and traditional images of Japan's rustic countryside featuring mountain villages, step farming, and tight-knit communities far removed from the hustle and bustle of urban concerns, to more pejorative meanings like 'the sticks' where rural villages and towns are disadvantaged, hopelessly facing economic stagnation and population decimation. Oddly, however, the term *inaka* can also refer to fair-sized urban areas like the Shikoku cities of Kochi or Tokushima, or any other city outside of Japan's Honshu urban corridor from Tokyo to Kobe, a linear megaregion of cities connected through transportation networks and economic relationships that are sustained through heavy population density. It is in contrast to this population density, including within it a larger number of foreign residents than is common in other parts Japan, which situates the specific remit of this volume of stories about raising bilingual children in the *inaka*. In the more peripheral or rural areas of Japan, outside the main urban corridor, there are virtually no formal English education options such as international schools or private schools with English curriculums, and because there are so few foreign

residents in any one rural area or community, even informal educational initiatives like Saturday language lessons or weekend cultural events, where parents and community can together nurture a bilingual ethos, are difficult to sustain. Our reality of circumstance, purposefully chosen or not, is that in the more rural parts of Japan, even in more populated areas, it is extremely challenging to establish and sustain even the most basic face-to-face social and community-level bilingual support networks that are more likely to flourish elsewhere in urban centers where the number of people committed to bilingualism is greater. Quite simply, there are not enough of us living in *inaka* areas to develop and sustain such networks over the long run.

It was in this context that members of our local East Shikoku chapter of the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT) met for a weekend family retreat in Maikawa, Kochi in the fall of 2015 to share our stories and discuss the many challenges we face in raising bilingual children. The Maikawa retreat was held in an old, abandoned elementary school-house; a common sight, unfortunately, in Japan's deep *inaka*, though an inspiring venue for our project theme in terms of ambiance and symbolic meaning. The stories we shared, the questions we asked each other, and the discussions that resulted from the meeting were meaningful and informative for everyone present. As expected, our stories showed that there is considerable variation and richness of experience in the way parents deal with raising bilingual and bicultural children. These stories are uniquely context dependent, extraordinary in the personal insights they offer, and represent differing stages and philosophies in our respective journeys as parents committed to bilingualism. But the common thread to each of our stories and experiences was how difficult it can be to effectively face the challenge of raising bilingual children on our own in the *inaka*. To more formally share the variation and richness of experience that emerged from our meeting in Maikawa, and to create a tangible resource to help meet, at least to some small degree, the unique challenges that parents face in raising bilingual children in *inaka* areas, we encouraged the retreat participants to write about their particular experience of raising bilingual children. Just because we were separated by distance and limited by numbers did not mean that we couldn't help each other by sharing our stories and experiences in some meaningful way. Building on the momentum of the Maikawa retreat, we put out a formal 'call for stories', first locally among retreat participants and chapter members, and then more widely through the JALT network, asking contributors to frame their submissions within the following thematic areas: Personal essays, narratives, reflections, and experiential accounts of raising bilingual children; Perspectives on identity and educational (or other) issues facing bilingual and bicultural children; Position papers on strategies and approaches for raising bilingual children; 'Best Practice' methods for the

development of literacy skills in bilinguals; Rich description 'linguistic family portrait' case studies; Accounts about raising bilingual children in a language other than English; Accounts of nurturing bilingualism and biculturalism in special family circumstances. Although we were not specifically looking for research-oriented submissions, we welcomed any stories that were framed within research on bilingualism. However, we wanted this project to be more personal, accessible, and reflective in scope. The 12 essays published in this monograph, *Raising Bilingual and Bicultural Children in Japan: Essays from the Inaka*, are the result of the unique remit of this special project. They represent an outstanding contribution to an under-represented aspect of bilingualism in Japan, and give new meaning to our sense of community and sharing.

This volume aims, at least partially, to address the following broad questions: What particular challenges do parents face in raising bilingual children in the *inaka* areas of Japan? What educational opportunities are available to bilingual kids in the peripheral areas of Japan with limited or no access to international schools and community networks? How is bilingualism nurtured or maintained in families where both parents are Japanese? What are the language and cultural hurdles when both parents are non-Japanese? Is raising a bilingual child in Japan significantly different when the non-Japanese parent speaks a language other than English? How is bilingualism nurtured in non-traditional families, or in challenging family circumstances? What can we learn from each other as parents? As language teachers? As language-teacher parents? For those of us sitting at the intersection of language teaching and parenting, are our expectations materially different from, say, a musician, an artist, an athlete, or a company employee who happens to find themselves married to a Japanese and raising children in the *inaka*? In other words, do language teachers approach the parenting of bilingual children differently from parents who are not involved in language education? What language choices and parenting strategies do parents of so-called 'haafu' (half) children make? What are the issues, concerns, and challenges for parents of such children? What language and cultural issues do our 'haafu' children face, and how do we as parents help them to deal with these? And how do we as parents deal with these issues? Does 'haafu'-ness affect the parent-child relationship or influence our public communication? Does the experience of being so obviously 'haafu', and therefore different, influence bilingualism in a way that is distinct from, say, a Canadian child of Francophone and Anglophone parents? And more broadly, what does it really mean to be bilingual or bicultural here in Japan, and what should we make of labels like 'haafu', especially in *inaka* areas where people of mixed nationality/ethnicity/race are still so few in number. For our overseas readers, the term 'haafu' (half) is used to describe people raised in Japan who have a Japanese and a non-Japanese parent. When the foreign par-

ent is non-Asian, their children tend to stand out with different physical features from the general Japanese population and they are more clearly identifiable as a 'haafu'. Though the term originally carried discriminatory connotations, and can still at times, its use has increasingly become more common and acceptable, and perhaps even a source of pride among the growing number of mixed race people living in contemporary Japan. However, 'haafu' people still face challenges fitting into Japanese society and often struggle with bullying and otherization, subtle or outward, and in negotiating their identities and their place within Japanese society as they grow up. In Japan's *inaka* areas, just as with the comparatively low number of permanent foreign residents and intercultural couples, 'haafu' people are still quite few in number and they tend to stand out even more than in larger urban areas which are becoming increasingly diverse.

To give our readers an idea of how few of us there are in our particular *inaka* context, and how much geographic distance separates us in the area where this project was initiated, our JALT chapter has only about 30–40 members spread over three prefectures, and not all of these members, of course, are raising bilingual children. As well, there are others in the area who are not affiliated with JALT who are raising bilingual children in English, and others still who may be raising children bilingually in Japanese and a language other than English. But it is extremely unlikely that such people would have a built-in network available to them that is even remotely comparable to what a local chapter of a professional language teaching group such as JALT might offer, limited though that is too. Whether members of JALT or not, there may be a few couples raising bilingual kids who help and encourage each other by spending time together and trying to create an English play environment, or even larger groups who organize educational and social events centered around English. While such efforts must be encouraged and applauded, there is a certain fragility to them in the *inaka*. With such a limited number of people, the few kids who take part are often of different ages and interests, and these initiatives, well-intentioned though they are, tend to fizzle out over time, or rely too heavily on an extremely energetic leader to carry the load; in larger communities there is, we can presume, a greater critical mass of people and adequate human energy to more effectively sustain such groups with new people cycling in and older parents moving on to different stages in their parenting journey. In brief, those of us who are trying to raise children bilingually in the *inaka* are very likely to be without the support of both sides of our extended families, without a large and supportive community of people in similar circumstances, and too often isolated and left to our own best devices. This is compounded, and perhaps even confounded, by the conundrum that is Japan; we are all doing so in areas where the larger unilingual host community/host culture

can be essentially unaware of the issues we face in our great challenge and commitment to maximize meaningful exposure to both languages.

Of course, any parent or intercultural family in Japan engaged in the purposeful process of raising bilingual children, regardless of whether they reside in urban or rural areas, will likely share similar burdens. Not having one side, or both sides, of the extended family nearby is something we all must deal with. And we all must face other common challenges. Much is made, for example, of the linguistic distance between Japanese and English (and the European languages). But even beyond this great linguistic divide, our educational systems and communicative cultures are so fundamentally different, that many parents often express frustration that the development of one language usually comes with some form of sacrifice of the other. While most of our focus in this volume is understandably on how we develop and maintain the minority language (usually English), we mustn't forget the time and energy required to appropriately maintain Japanese as the majority language. As we are all well aware, Japanese is a language that demands much of its native speakers throughout their school lives. Missing significant time from learning how to write Japanese kanji characters can be painful later; it can seriously set a child back in their school work, not only in Japanese language arts but also in other subjects. For instance, language gains made from a year abroad at school in an English-speaking country will likely come at the expense of Japanese literacy development, especially in the primary school years. This can cause considerable stress and worry for any parents who are committed to raising bilingual children.

And it need not be an entire year away that can cause such stress; balancing languages is also about balancing cultures which, in raising children, most often gets operationalized in the form of balancing cultural differences related to education. Decisions about whether to take a child out of Japanese school for a month to visit relatives, or about how seriously to take the dreaded summer homework while abroad, or whether to commit to competitive test-oriented education, or whether a child should attend a cram school *juku* or club activities at the expense of family time or free play are just a few of the culture clashes that can occur within any family trying to balance languages and cultures. Add in the financial commitments and international lifestyle balancing act required to develop both languages and cultures to some reasonable degree of fluency in terms of exposure, use, and education further intensifies this incredible challenge, no matter where a family resides. These, and other common concerns such as how to balance and negotiate language use at home, or whether it is enough to simply be a parent and communicate in the other language rather than explicitly teach the minority language to our children at home, are challenges that affect us all. It is the added variable of living in rural areas, however, which can compound these challenges

in ways that are hard to imagine or quantify. Just as culture shock is not caused by any one single event but rather an accumulation of small, seemingly unimportant everyday cultural encounters that we may not even be consciously aware of, so too does the everyday experience of living in *inaka* areas covertly influence us by limiting our bilingual childrearing options and activities. As hard as it is to raise bilingual children and to find English education opportunities anywhere in Japan, it is even harder when options are further limited by the geographic reality of living in the *inaka*. As a good example, the option of sending our children to an international school would be a difficult decision for any parent based on factors such as costly school fees and worries about majority language development. But for people living in Kochi, for example, the option is simply not on the table for most of us because of the great distance. The closest international school would be in Kobe, a five-hour drive that is prohibitive in both time and expense.

We therefore see this monograph of shared stories as a potentially valuable resource for the growing number of people raising bilingual kids throughout Japan, but especially for those of us living in Japan's wonderful and yet often exasperating *inaka*. We have not resolved the challenges we must continue to face, but we have hopefully softened them somewhat through this shared outlet. It is fair to say that we will have accomplished our goal simply by encouraging personal reflection on our bilingual journeys. Several contributing authors have spoken of the therapeutic value of drafting and sharing their stories; just the act of getting down their ideas on paper has helped a little in personally framing their parenting process. Some have expressed fulfillment simply in learning of how others so proactively approach their challenges. Others have appreciated the freedom of expression afforded by a thematic volume of 'shared stories'. Submitting authors have been encouraged to write for a general audience of parents and language educators, but have been given great freedom to share their story in a register and style that best suits their unique situation. This is reflected in the many voices and writing styles presented in this monograph; they range in style and register from deeply personal and incredibly moving reflective essays that celebrate the craft of writing and expression, to valuable 'nuts and bolts' advice for what has worked to nurture bilingualism in varied and unique family situations, to richly textured family case studies that are framed within bilingualism and language education research. Those who have shared their stories have presented them with an honesty and tenderness that has been most extraordinary. Our enormous effort in meeting the *inaka* challenge and guiding our children towards bilingualism, exemplified by the shared stories in this book, is as genuine an expression of unconditional love as one will find anywhere.

An entire volume examining bilingualism could be dedicated to any one of the broad questions that this project set out to address; our mon-

ograph of shared stories is merely a start. Thematic volumes devoted solely to such topics as, for example, receptive bilingualism, or the use of children's picture books, or how Japanese couples cultivate bilingualism with their children would be of great value. Still other thematic volumes focused specifically on community building efforts in support of bilingualism, or bilingualism in Japan when paired with a language other than English, or Japanese majority language maintenance, would all be most worthy of exploration in their own right. These shall remain for now our untold stories, but we would like to encourage future work in thematically studying the many fascinating and multidimensional aspects of bilingualism in Japan in accessible ways. Our volume has turned out to be quite eclectic in scope, perhaps a result of the dispersed *inaka* experience. We have organized the book into three sections that best situate the stories. Our first section is entitled 'Inspirational Reflections: Rising to the Bilingual Challenge'. It comprises a collection of tender and thoughtful stories in which parents share some of the more challenging aspects of bilingualism. Strength and vulnerability are powerfully interwoven in these stories. Our second section, 'Family Portraits: Learning Through Shared Stories' includes more descriptive family portrait accounts of how bilingualism is nurtured in particular family contexts. These stories are much more than just good advice; they are about hope and self-assurance, compromise and acceptance, each story emphatically representing thoughtful and informed bilingual parenting in its own way. Our final section, 'Community-building in Support of Raising Bilingual Children', is a group of papers that deal more specifically with promoting bilingualism at the grassroots community level. There is much to learn from these three stories, each unique in how 'community' is conceptualized in support of bilingualism, and how a sense of community can be nurtured to promote bilingualism with a little 'above-and-beyond-the-call' effort and thoughtfulness for others.

Most of our stories, understandably, have been drafted by the English-speaking bilingual parent but these are nicely balanced between mothers and fathers. Somewhat surprising was that only one story was co-written by both parents, though many authors have indicated that spirited family collaboration and discussion was a feature in the process of drafting their stories, either through parent-parent dialogues or parent-child family interaction, or both. It has been such a tremendous inspiration to work on this project with my co-editor, Paul Daniels, and with each one of the authors who contributed stories. We would like to sincerely thank each of them for their fine work and inspiring stories. As well, there were many other parents who expressed strong interest in sharing their stories for this project, but just could not find the time in their busy lives. We enthusiastically await their untold stories, and we hope to create future outlets for them. This project has taken over two years to complete

– a long time to wait for submitting authors but we can now finally see the fruits of our labor in public space, and we can be emphatically proud of this contribution. We are grateful to the JALT East Shikoku chapter for supporting this project, and to the JALT Bilingualism SIG for publishing this volume as an open-access digital monograph. We feel that the Bilingualism SIG, with its many other monographs and publications, is a most appropriate home for this volume. Having the Bilingualism SIG host this monograph on their website ensures that our content is freely available to anyone interested in raising bilingual children in Japan.

Raising Bilingual and Bicultural Children in Japan: Essays from the Inaka will be of interest to intercultural families in Japan, and to those more generally interested in bilingualism and language learning. We think it will have broad appeal both to language teachers and to any parent raising bilingual children in Japan, but especially to those who are doing so with the added challenge of living outside of large urban areas without much in terms of local support networks. Although the language of publication is English, we would be pleased if these stories can somehow increase awareness in host communities about just how challenging our task is. It may also be of value to intercultural families living abroad where one partner is Japanese and trying to nurture bilingualism in their children with similar limited community support and exposure to Japanese. We hope it will offer concrete ideas about how to more successfully negotiate the bilingual challenge, emotional support for those who may feel isolated as they struggle through the process without a larger supportive community, and inspiration for others to share their precious stories in some way. Finally, we hope this volume of shared stories will encourage readers to get active in the community to foster bilingualism in a proactive and meaningful way; perhaps even by preparing another monograph focusing on questions or issues left unanswered or unaddressed in this one.

Section I
Inspirational Reflections:
Rising to the Bilingual Challenge

1

Cultivating Bilingual Oracy and Literacy in L1 English-speaking Children Raised in Japan

Meredith Stephens

THIS IS AN account of raising my two Australian daughters, Elizabeth and Annabel, while they attended local Japanese schools from kindergarten through to the first year of high school. We were an Australian family of four from monolingual English-speaking backgrounds, who had moved to Japan to work in Matsuyama, Shikoku. After eight years in Matsuyama we moved to Tokushima, by which time Elizabeth was in the first year of middle school and Annabel was in the fourth year of primary school. The early stage of the elder daughter, Elizabeth's, biliteracy in Japanese and English has been previously documented (Stephens and Blight, 2002; 2004). This account will describe the development of bilingualism of both daughters, and include the development of their biliteracy until the present.

Although attaining balanced bilingualism would be ideal, I considered it to be unrealistic; it was more likely that one of the languages would be dominant. My aim was for them to achieve a good level of Japanese oracy and literacy, and the equivalent levels of English oracy and literacy to their Australian peers, so that they could return to Australia to resume their studies whenever necessary. I was among the fourth generation of English literacy educators in my maternal line; my mother, grandmother and great grand aunts Agnes and Frances had taught children to read English in schools in South Australia, and I was not about to let my own children down, simply because of a relocation to Japan.

Oral Language

As a background to their literacy development, I will explain the importance I attached to the development of their spoken language. One of the most important writers to inform my thinking was Frances Christie:

Oral language is of primary importance and (the point may seem obvious, but it cannot be overestimated) no child could learn to read or write without a very well-established oral language (1984, p.65).

Once we were in Japan I made every effort to ensure our daughters maintained a firm foundation in oral English. The family language was English, television programs were in English, and most of their free time happened to be spent playing with other bilingual children. However, I stopped short of insisting that they speak English. I wanted them to learn to choose which language to speak, and with which interlocutor, by themselves. I did not wish to imply that one language was 'better' than another. After a long day at school Elizabeth would come home and address me in Japanese for the first few hours, gradually making the transition to English as the evening progressed. I made no comment about language choice, and replied to her in English. I did make sure we devoted a lot of time to conversing in English, albeit without labouring the point, to make up for the lack of English input from the society.

It was more natural for our second daughter Annabel to speak English, being the youngest in a family of English speakers. Even in Shikoku, and with no particular encouragement from me, Annabel managed to find best friends who were English speakers. In Matsuyama, she spoke English most days with her best friend Alice. In Tokushima, her best friend in middle school was from Kenya, and they spoke English whenever they were together, except when the teachers reprimanded them for it.

The long school day was conducted entirely in Japanese. The reason why I was not particularly concerned about their English literacy when they were attending Japanese primary school was that I had taken Frances Christie's (1984) explanation above to heart. My responsibility was to give them the best oral foundation possible, and I assumed that the literacy could be learnt later when they were in a community in which English literacy was necessary (see Gee, 2014).

It was not enough to simply converse to our daughters in English. We had to provide the foundations for early literacy by exposing them to the kind of literary English which is not found in everyday conversation. This was in the pre-digital age, and before leaving for Japan in 1999 I sought information from JALT's Bilingualism Special Interest Group. I learnt what a struggle it could be to maintain children's English when they attended Japanese schools. I therefore armed myself with six months of video

tapes of a high quality Australian children's television program called *Play School*. Once in Japan, we had to buy a special video player to play these videos on the alternative format. *Play School* was an ideal entry into literacy, because it featured rhymes, songs and other language awareness activities. It was almost as enjoyable for parents as for children, and my English friend Joyce, soon became a bigger fan of *Play School* than her bilingual pre-schooler daughter, Alice. The reason I was aware of the importance of providing pre-literacy input was because of the writings of the acclaimed children's author Mem Fox (2013), who has alerted parents to the importance of reading to their children. I was particularly struck by her advice to read three stories a day to babies from birth, and that children needed to hear one thousand stories read to them before they started to read. Fox also stresses the importance of rhyme, rhythm and repetition. These were exactly the kind of activities that were featured on *Play School*.

Nevertheless, children cannot learn all they need to learn by being plunked down in front of a screen. I brought a range of children's books with me from Australia, and tried to put Mem Fox' advice into practice by reading aloud to them. My friend Joyce had similarly brought many children's books to Japan from England, and we enjoyed exchanging children's books and videos. Years later I became familiar with the writings of Bryant and Bradley (1985), which confirmed the value of having my children listen to rhyme and having books read aloud to them. Similar to Christie (1984), I considered that it was hearing the sound of the language that mattered, rather than simply decoding the print on the page: 'Measures of children's sensitivity to rhyme and alliteration predict their progress in reading, and teaching them about rhyme and alliteration enhances that progress' (Bryant and Bradley, 1985, p. 66). The timing of developing sensitivity to rhyme is critical; Bryant and Bradley explain that the awareness of rhyme children develop before starting school is predictive of their reading and writing skills after they begin school (p. 50). My awareness of the importance of listening to the sound of literary English was prompted by having read Christie (1984) and Fox (2001), but it was later confirmed to me by Bryant and Bradley's (1985) study.

Another study that confirmed to me the value of rhyme, well after my children had finished pre-school, was Cook's (2000) *Language play, language learning*. Cook explains the function of rhyme and rhythm as 'an aid to, even a precondition, of literacy' (2000, p.26). Concerning nursery rhymes, Cook explains: 'rhythmic breaks not only coincide with linguistic boundaries, they also emphasize those boundaries much more than they would be emphasized in everyday speech. Grammar, rhythm and actions all echo each other.' (p. 15) Leading figures such as Wolf (2008) concur: 'Tucked inside Hickory, dickory, dock, a mouse ran up the clock and other rhymes can be found a host of potential aids to sound awareness- alliteration, assonance, rhyme, repetition. Alliterative and rhyming

sounds teach the young ear that words can sound similar because they share a first or last sound' (2008, p. 99). I have become so persuaded of the importance of rhyme, rhythm and alliteration for the development of English literacy by my own children that I have been advocating it in the L2 English classroom in Japan ever since.

Cross-Linguistic Transfer of Literacy

I was not particularly worried that acquiring literacy in Japanese would be detrimental to my children's English literacy. Rather I believed that the acquisition of English literacy could be facilitated by positive transfer from Japanese. This was because I had been influenced by Jim Cummins's work about the positive transfer of literacy skills between languages. This was the topic their father and I had explored in the 2004 (Stephens & Blight) study, and it informed my decision to encourage my daughters to acquire Japanese literacy.

Therefore, Cummins's (1979) claim that reading skills could be transferred between languages was pivotal: 'the ability to extract meaning from printed text can be transferred easily from one language to another' (p.234). As for writing, it has been suggested that the skill of spelling is language specific and does not transfer to languages which are not related orthographically (Cummins, 1991; Genesse, 1979; Gray, 1986). Nevertheless, underlying discourse competencies may be transferred (Cummins, 1979; 1984a). Having come from monolingual English speaking backgrounds, relatives in Australia expressed concern that we had chosen to educate our daughters in a different language. I stubbornly persisted in the hope that insights from Christie (1984), that I should provide a firm foundation in oral English, and Cummins (1979), that literacy skills would transfer from one language to another, would prove my decision to bring them up bilingually, to be the right one.

Maintaining English

Despite being fluent in English, Elizabeth and Annabel were not granted an exemption from the study of English at school. As a teacher trainer, I am committed to progressive methods of language education (eg., Mickan, 2013), so it was difficult to restrain myself from commenting on the language teaching methodology of reading passages followed by comprehension questions, and fill-in-the blanks exercises, consisting of lists of sentences out of context. Nevertheless, I belonged to the school as a parent and not as a professional, so I made no comment on the content of the English classes.

I was influenced by Kamada's (1997, p. 57) findings that frequent or long stays in the home country facilitated bilingualism for children brought up

in Japan. In order to maintain their English, we returned to Australia in both the spring and summer; Elizabeth and Annabel attended the local primary and then high schools. These periods enabled them to attain a level of spoken English that sounded completely natural. I attribute this to the influence of their peers; the time spent playing with their Australian friends enabled them to use the vocabulary of the peer group, and socialize them into the use of Australian English. After making friends in Australia their spoken English became almost indistinguishable from that of their peers. Nevertheless, traces of my idiolect of English are also apparent, a result of the many hours of conversation we enjoyed in Japan.

Middle School

I chose to send my daughters to a Japanese middle school firstly because I wanted them to maintain and develop their Japanese, and secondly because there was no ready alternative. The nearest international schools were in Kobe, and this would have necessitated boarding. A further reason was the opinion of another parent of a bicultural child, that children would not attain an acceptable standard of Japanese literacy unless they attended a Japanese middle school.

As many readers in Japan will understand, the middle school experience was characterized by extensive testing. Indeed, years later, this is my lasting impression of middle school. Every term students were tested regularly and provided with an assessment record of their grades in each subject. Furthermore, children were ranked against all of the other children in the school according to these grades. Some parents would threaten their children that unless they came within the top fifty they would take their cell phones away from them.

The threat of poor grades in these regular tests prompted me to send my elder daughter to a *juku*. The first *juku* she attended was run by a very strict teacher who told her that even if she managed to get into the high school of her choice she would not survive there. At the second *juku* she was enrolled in a program where she had to complete worksheets. She was having trouble understanding and so I advised her to ask the teacher. Nevertheless, she was chided for asking questions. As an educator, I considered questions to be at the very heart of learning, or at least of the Socratic technique of which I was so fond, and so I withdrew her from this *juku* too.

On the advice of one of the members of the Bilingualism Special Interest Group, who was then the editor of the educational column in the newsletter *Bilingual Japan*, I decided to enlist the help of a home tutor. I asked one of my top former students to tutor Elizabeth. Because he was a student and I had been his teacher, I was in a position to educate him in the methodology I required him to use. I requested him to teach through

dialogue, questioning, providing reasons, and not through lecturing and having Elizabeth fill out worksheets. This worked out very successfully. Although we had been warned that it would be almost impossible for Elizabeth to get into the top high school in Tokushima, thanks to the help of her tutor, she indeed managed to pass the entrance exam.

The wait to receive this happy news however was excruciating. There were more applicants than available high school places. I found this troubling, because I come from a state in Australia where the compulsory schooling age has been raised to seventeen. Meanwhile in Japan, students could only apply for one school, and parents had to guess how many spaces would be open and the likelihood of gaining entry to the school. The newspaper published daily reports of the number of openings available in each school. Those who did not manage to enter a public high school could attend a fee-paying private school instead, attend a distant public school in the countryside, or the special public school for those who had not managed to get into another school. The pressure was intense. Because my daughters were English speakers, they had one fewer subject to study than everyone else. However, because Japanese was not the language of the home, they had to work harder at Japanese than their peers in the other four subjects.

High School in Japan

Because I was employed in Japan I was keen to continue to educate my daughters here. There was no international school within commuting distance, so with considerable trepidation I had them sit for the entrance exams to local high schools. Although they gained entry, neither of them lasted the first year of high school.

As already mentioned, Elizabeth gained entry into a prestigious public high school. Again, there was regular testing and ranking against the class and the entire year level in the core subjects. English continued to be compulsory, so she had one fewer subject to study than the other students. She was particularly challenged in *Kobun*, or classical Japanese, but the teacher kindly let her off because she was a foreigner. I was not tempted to complain of discrimination, and was rather relieved that she had been given special treatment.

The homework and testing were onerous, and Elizabeth began to lose motivation, in a similar way to some of my students at the university. Not only were there school tests, there were also national tests administered by a private educational company, and her grades in the three core subjects of Japanese, Maths and English were plotted on a graph against the school and national average. Her grades began to suffer. I was reluctant to have her follow the same stressful path of cramming for another entrance examination, this time for university. The time was approaching when

it would be the beginning of Year 11 in Australia. I reluctantly decided to send her to a school in Australia, a long way away from Tokushima. She sat for the entrance examination in Maths and English at a university-based senior school, and passed. I attributed her success at least partly to the kind of transfer of literacy skills between languages that Cummins (1979) described.

Three years later, her younger sister Annabel gained entrance into an agricultural high school a few kilometres from home in Tokushima. The most fun event was the volleyball. The sports teachers were enthusiastic and attentive, and Annabel thrived at volleyball. Nevertheless, possibly because of conflict between the players, the volleyball club was disbanded, and the one pleasure Annabel had at school was gone. It was a long cycle to school in heavy traffic. Several of the girls in her group of friends stopped attending school, and it seemed that non-attendance was acceptable. Annabel stopped attending too, and then I decided to send her to Australia to complete her schooling.

High School in Australia

It had been a very hard decision to send Elizabeth to finish high school in Australia, and the Japanese school kindly held her place in case she wanted to return. From the first day at school in Australia, I kept asking her if we had made the right decision, and every time she responded 'yes'. At the time, she was more comfortable in Japanese than English. She preferred reading books in Japanese to English, and expressed concern about having to read books in English. She was initially uneasy at having to speak English with her Australian friends.

Year 11 was a challenging year academically, as Elizabeth made the transition to English-medium schooling. It was perhaps compounded because her appearance suggested she belonged to the mainstream, whereas she had been hitherto educated in public schools in Japan. The teachers were confused because her spoken English conformed to that of the majority and yet she had not achieved the standard of literacy that was typical of her Australian peers. Nevertheless, at age 16 she still had the potential to catch up, and by Year 12 she was able to choose the mainstream English subject rather than English as an Additional Language. By the time she was half way through her Year 12 course she appeared to have caught up with her peers, and the following years at university she managed to achieve good results.

Annabel faced very similar challenges when she relocated to the Australian high school. Again, the teachers were confused, because first impressions suggested she was a local Australian teenager, when in fact she did not have the literacy foundation that her peers enjoyed. In Year 11 the teacher suggested that she take English as an Additional Language rather

than the mainstream English subject in Year 12. I was taken aback at this because, despite having brought her up in Japan, we had made considerable efforts to maintain her English. Instinctively I felt that she would be able to manage with the mainstream English subject, and so I ignored the teacher's advice. Annabel did in fact manage to do well in the Year 12 mainstream subject known as 'English Communications'. Christie's (1984) insights of providing a foundation in oral language, and Cummins's (1979; 1984a) notion of the transfer of discourse competencies across languages, had proven right.

Maintaining Japanese in Australia

The Australian curriculum offers separate language courses for first and second language speakers. In order for Elizabeth to maintain her Japanese in Australia, she enrolled at the School of Languages in Adelaide for weekly Japanese lessons. This public school offers 28 languages, including Indigenous, African, Asian and European languages. Elizabeth enrolled in Years 11 and 12 'Japanese for Background Speakers'. On her first day when she entered the classroom the teacher was confused because of her appearance, and advised her that the Russian class was across the corridor. Similar confusion ensued on the day of the fire drill, when all the students had to group outside according to their language groups. Elizabeth lined up with her other class members, who were mostly international students from Japan, and who had chosen Background Japanese in order to maintain and develop their L1 Japanese during their sojourn in Australia. Elizabeth was conspicuous as a member of the Japanese class, and attracted attention from students in the other language classes. Apart from these isolated incidents, the class members soon became used to her, and she really enjoyed reverting to her Japanese self during the lessons. Thanks to the School of Languages, Elizabeth was able to maintain her Japanese literacy in the Australian educational system.

Similarly, when Annabel returned to Australia, she also enrolled at the School of Languages. Like her elder sister, she really enjoyed the opportunity to make friends with Japanese exchange students. She could find a part of herself that couldn't be expressed in the mainstream English language culture, and looked forward to the weekly lessons. Speaking Japanese with her Japanese peers enabled her to relax in a way that was difficult in English, and she particularly enjoyed their distinctive Japanese sense of humour.

Influence on English from Japanese

The most noticeable influence on their English literacy from the years of living in Japan has been their spelling. When Elizabeth took the Litera-

cy and Numeracy (LAN) test in Australia which was then conducted in Years 3, 7 and 9, she scored higher than the state average for all aspects of literacy other than spelling. Presently both of them are completing their education in Australia, but neither has caught up to their peers in terms of the accuracy of their spelling. They rely on a spell checker to complete their essays. Apart from spelling, reading and writing skills have not suffered from their neglect during the time in Japanese schools. The interdependency of literacy between the languages, identified in Elizabeth's early years of primary school, arguably continues to exert an effect. The only noticeable difference from their peers in spoken English is the occasional use of singular pronouns in object position instead of plural ones. In response to the question, 'Where are your socks?' they may answer, 'I can't find it.' No-one has ever remarked on this however, either because my daughters speak so quickly and naturally, or out of politeness. This error remains a question for psycholinguistic research.

Influence on Japanese after relocation to Australia

First I will discuss the transition of dominance from Japanese to English of my elder daughter Elizabeth. When she was in Japan she preferred to read in Japanese to in English, and it was an achievement for her to read a novel in English. In the Australian high school, she was required to read novels in English, and this initially posed a challenge to her. After the intense reading requirements of senior secondary school in Australia, her preferred language for reading switched to English. This trend continued during her time at the Australian university. This has had implications for her knowledge of Japanese vocabulary. Her knowledge of academic English vocabulary expanded rapidly whereas that of Japanese remained stagnant. She returns to Japan in every southern hemispheric summer, and although still fluent in Japanese, displays gaps in her knowledge of vocabulary. Recently while visiting a doctor in Tokushima, I was surprised to hear her code-switch to English for the term 'side effects'. Elizabeth is concerned about maintaining her Japanese, and colleagues at my current university welcome her to visit their lectures, and answer her questions about them afterwards. She is also determined to read my colleague's books in Japanese. On her latest visit Elizabeth purchased additional Japanese books and shipped them back to Australia.

As other parents of bilingual children will testify, the trajectory of bilingualism is not identical for siblings. This is because the children are likely to have arrived in Japan at different ages, and had different experiences from each other once in Japan. Annabel's pattern of linguistic dominance and preference differed from her elder sister's. When we lived in Matsuyama, the children went to school every morning with the designated group, known as *tokohan*. When I moved to Tokushima for em-

ployment, Annabel was in fourth grade primary school and Elizabeth in middle school. There was no *tokohan* in Tokushima, and instead children walked to school with their friends rather than with a designated group. Although few children were accompanied to school by their parents, I acted as I would have done in Australia, and accompanied Annabel to and from school daily. I have been afflicted for many years with a condition my Japanese students tell me is called *shokugyobyō*, which refers to the need to extend your working habits into every sphere of your life. This condition is not limited to Japan, and indeed my forebears who had been teachers had had serious cases of it. Accordingly, I acted as Annabel's English teacher during our thirty minute journeys to and from school. I may have been too successful, because Annabel was in the unusual position of being dominant in English despite having attended Japanese schools since kindergarten. Annabel may have sounded like a middle-class teacher when she got back to Australia, but since arriving there has largely managed to pick up the new register of 'teenager talk'.

Besides English input from her mother, Annabel had two very close English speaking friends in Japan. In primary school Annabel played most days with her bilingual friend Alice, and in middle school she spent most of her time with her Kenyan friend. Both of these friendships were conducted in English. This was not due to my influence; Elizabeth also had a close bicultural friend, but they nearly always spoke in Japanese. Because Annabel had always had a preference for English, she did not need to switch language preferences once she relocated to Australia.

Conclusions

In total, my daughters spent three years of kindergarten and nearly ten years of primary and middle school in the Shikoku education system. I am grateful for the insights from researchers such as Christie and Cummins because even in a remote part of Japan they were able to develop and maintain their spoken and written English while being educated in Japanese. In retrospect, I think the effort devoted to the development of oral English that has provided the foundation for the later development of their literacy, and that discourse competence in written Japanese has played a role in supporting their written English.

As for their Japanese, their proficiency is due to the many hard-working, professional and dedicated teachers who taught them from kindergarten through to the first year of high school. In Shikoku we were very unusual, because we came from English speaking backgrounds. Although English speakers may sometimes be excluded from the need to speak Japanese, the local teachers took the task of educating Elizabeth and Annabel in Japanese extremely seriously. In primary school in Tokushima the children had to keep a daily diary entry, which the teachers responded to

daily. Their proficiency in Japanese was due not only to their homeroom teachers, but to all the teachers of sport, music and art, and the principal who unfailingly greeted the children at the school gate every morning come rain or shine. All of these teachers who gave them individual attention contributed to their Japanese oracy and literacy. Being part of the local community, and having a sense of belonging and inclusion, provided the necessary background to their learning of Japanese.

Achieving a balance between the proficiency in the respective languages has been a difficult objective to attain. The environment of the society exerts a huge influence on their proficiency in each language, and since returning to Australia the pendulum has swung towards English. In their mid-teens issues of identity became increasingly important for my daughters. They began to identify more keenly with peers in their country of origin, Australia. Perhaps for this reason, their spoken and written English is flourishing and their Japanese is suffering from some degree of attrition. Although I have not been able to ensure that they attained balanced bilingualism, it is at least possible to demonstrate that English oracy and literacy may be developed and maintained for children up to the first year of high school in the Japanese educational system.

Note: Pseudonyms have been used for friends and family members, other than great grand aunts.

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2

The Sound and the Worry

Suzanne Kamata

WHEN WE BROUGHT our baby Lilia to the pediatrician for a check-up, my husband Yoshi said, 'I don't think she can hear.'

'But she stopped crying when I put on a CD,' I argued. I recalled how, another time, a music box had soothed her in the NICU where, after being born 14 weeks premature, she'd spent the first four months of her life. Even my mother-in-law who had been coming over to our house every day to help out was sure that Lilia could hear.

My husband was not convinced.

'Why don't we test her?' The doctor set up an appointment for an ABR (auditory brain stem response test).

A couple weeks later, she was sedated and electrodes were taped to her forehead. Earphones were fitted over her head. A machine produced bleeps of up to 100 decibels, but my daughter's brain waves exhibited no response.

When I got home from the hospital, I cranked up the blues. The music was too loud for babies – for hearing babies, that is – but Lilia was oblivious. She stared at her hand, a starfish swimming in the light. She didn't move or even blink when I called out her name.

I spent the afternoon sobbing. How would I communicate with my daughter? What kind of relationship would we have? I didn't know anything about deafness. I had heard of Heather Whitestone, the first non-hearing Miss America, and I'd seen *Children of a Lesser God*, starring Marlee Matlin, but I'd never known an ordinary deaf person – a clerk, say, or a housewife. The only deaf person I could recall meeting was a girl in the fifth-grade class at the school where I'd taught English as a foreign language. Because I had been teaching the other kids for five years already and she was new on the scene, and because I wasn't sure how much she

could comprehend, I was hesitant to call upon her. I knew virtually nothing about deafness or deaf culture. I had no idea of what was in store for Lilia, or for our family. How would we cope with a deaf child? This was the kind of thing that would change our lives.

We would never be able to engage in girtalk, I thought, irrationally. We wouldn't be able to go to Paris. I could feel the world shrinking around us.

I took Lilia to the hospital for more tests. The young woman doctor who examined her told me that the results may not be entirely accurate as Lilia's cognitive development wasn't complete. The doctor said that in some cases, a child who exhibited no response as an infant might be tested again at age three and turn out to have normal hearing. But without sound, a child's brain will not develop normally. If she can't hear anything at all, her intellectual growth may be affected.

We were referred to the Tokushima School for the Deaf, which served the entire prefecture. My daughter was fitted with a hearing aid and we scheduled early intervention training sessions starting in the fall.

I called my family in South Carolina. My mother cried. I called my brother, father of a healthy toddler, and told him that I was grieving. 'We're grieving too,' he said. 'But blind would have been worse.' I wasn't sure that I could agree, but I understood that I had my family's love and support.

I was most concerned about my mother-in-law's reaction. A foreign daughter-in-law was bad enough. What would she make of a disabled granddaughter? On the other hand, by this time, she had been rocking and feeding and changing Lilia for months now. Surely, they'd formed some sort of bond.

'She can have an operation later,' my mother-in-law said. I wasn't sure what she was talking about, but at least she wasn't turning away.

A few days later, she said that we needed to inform the relatives before rumors got started. She mentioned a scandal concerning a dairy company that had been in the news that week. Something about tainted milk. I wondered what the hell that had to do with our family.

Of course shame about disability is not limited to Japan. There are many stories about parents who institutionalized their children on the advice of medical professionals, never to visit them again. Some of the parents became famous, or were famous already. Think Arthur Miller, who never bothered to mention his son who had Down Syndrome in his autobiography, or Pearl S. Buck, who kept her mentally challenged daughter's existence a secret for a long time.

Attitudes are changing in the United States, but Japan is a deeply conservative country, where one of the worst things you can do is to create a burden for someone else – someone outside the family, that is. One of my friends told me that she and her husband never barbecued outdoors because the odor would drift over to the neighbors' house, thus imposing

upon others. In this country, it's best to make yourself as unnoticeable as possible. Don't make noise, don't dress conspicuously, don't disturb the harmony. *The nail that sticks up gets hammered down.*

The Japanese mothers at the deaf school talked about how people stared when their deaf children made weird, animal noises in public. Another mother worried that her hearing daughter wouldn't be able to get married. Maybe a prospective groom's family would worry about bad genes, or the future responsibility of looking after a sibling with disabilities. Although Yoshi and I had married for love, marriage in Japan is often a practical arrangement.

It was hard to tell how well Lilia could hear with amplification. In the beginning, she yanked out the hearing aids almost as soon as I put them on her ears. She hated them. They probably felt strange, nestled in the whorls of her ears. Even with the hearing aids, however, she didn't respond to voices or banged pots. Everyone told us that it would take time.

The teachers told me that I should help Lilia learn to listen by drawing her attention to sounds.

'Hey, hear that?' I said. 'That's the bread maker.' I took her to the machine and let her feel the vibrations and watch the mixing of the dough.

'Listen!' I commanded, as a jet zoomed over our house, making its descent to land at the airport only a few miles away. I pointed to the sky and made the sign for airplane.

The doctors and teachers and books also instructed me to speak to Lilia as much as possible.

I spoke to her in English. The teachers told me that I should use only Japanese. They had little experience with bilingual families – or at least with mothers who aspired to raise their children bilingually. I later discovered that there were two other bicultural kids among the forty plus students at the school – the daughter of a Filipina mother and Japanese father, and the daughter of a Brazilian mother of Japanese descent and her Japanese husband. As far as I could tell, the others had followed the teachers' instructions without question, but I wanted to try using English.

I brought them anecdotes from books and websites – about a Russian girl in New York City, for instance, that I'd read about in Leah Hager Cohen's book *Train Go Sorry*. This girl spoke two languages in addition to signing. The Japanese teachers were unconvinced. 'It's too difficult for your daughter,' they said.

When I married my husband, I knew he would never leave this country. As the oldest child and only son, he was responsible for his widowed mother. Plus, he loved his job as a high school teacher and baseball coach, and he was employed for life. He'd heard stories about my friends and family members in America who'd been laid off more than once. Why would he want to give up security, especially now that we had kids? He

had never lived abroad, or even thought about it seriously. I was the one who wanted to try out another culture.

But I couldn't help thinking that Lilia would be better off in the United States. I had fantasies of her going to Gallaudet, the Washington D.C. College for the Deaf, and becoming a doctor or a lawyer. In Japan, deaf individuals were often steered toward careers in barber shops and beauty salons. In fact, there was a vocational program in hair-cutting at the Tokushima School for the Deaf. I was sure that there were so many other things that my daughter would be able to do, and I wanted her to be aware of them.

In the meantime, it was too dangerous for us to travel. Airports were full of germs. A trip to my home country would be an unacceptable risk. So I bombarded Lilia with my language, preparing her for entry into the world.

Yoshi and I began reading up on deafness – he in Japanese, me in English. I ordered a couple of videos and mastered the alphabet in American Sign Language. I started using simple signs with both of our babies – a thumb tilted toward the mouth for 'milk,' fingers of both hands touching for 'more.' I read up on cochlear implants.

I'd never heard of this new technology before, but the possibilities excited me at first. I told Yoshi about what I'd discovered: A flap of skin behind the ear is cut open, and electrodes are placed in the otherwise useless cochlea. A speech processor worn outside the body sends electronic impulses to the electrodes inside, which are then conveyed to the brain. This enables profoundly deaf individuals to hear a simulation of speech. Most deaf people can hear only a limited range of sounds, and a hearing aid can only amplify those sounds, but with a cochlear implant, a deaf person can have access to a wide range of sounds, from the low frequency of a boom of thunder, to the high frequency of whistling.

At first, Yoshi was skeptical. This operation was not widely performed in Japan at the time. Only one child in Tokushima had been implanted, and the jury was still out on the results.

Kimiko Nagao, the head of the early intervention program at the deaf school, was a competent and committed teacher. She was registered as a simultaneous interpreter of Japanese Sign Language and had many disabled friends. She knew about laws concerning the deaf in Sweden, about the latest happenings at Gallaudet University, and she had seen the deaf percussionist Evelyn Glennie in concert. She also seemed to be against cochlear implants and believed that Lilia could hear well enough with just a hearing aid.

She recommended that I use only Japanese with Lilia, saying that it would be too difficult for a deaf child to master two spoken languages at once. Although I wasn't convinced of this, I did believe that it was impor-

tant to use the same language all the time with my children. Switching from English to Japanese and back again would only confuse them. Until then, I'd used only English along with some American Sign Language at home. But now I would be accompanying my daughter to her early intervention sessions, and speaking Japanese to her teachers in her presence, and I would have to review and reinforce the Japanese she learned at the school. I suppose I could have refused, but I didn't feel qualified to take on her education all by myself. I needed outside support. I also knew that we would be living in Japan for a long time, and that my daughter needed to learn how to function in this country. I started speaking to Lilia in Japanese, but I continued to use only English with my son.

At the beginning of September, I attended my first meeting of the Koala Club, a support group for the mothers of the one- to three-year-olds who attended the Early Intervention sessions at the School for the Deaf. There were seventeen mothers in all, but not everyone was in attendance. Two or three of us were new. There was another mother of twins, and a young woman with dyed blonde hair, now five months pregnant, who also gave birth to twins at twenty-six weeks. Only the boy survived, and apparently became deaf after birth.

The mothers talked about their month-long summer vacation while the teachers moderated. One told about her three-year-old daughter's operation, in which she received a cochlear implant. The girl, Nozomi, was shy and clingy. She sometimes communicated with her mother via signs. Apparently the mother was disappointed that the results had not been immediate and dramatic. She was not altogether sure that her daughter could hear, though the girl sometimes widened her eyes in response to sound.

There was another little girl whose hearing aids were connected by a yellow cord to keep them from getting lost, like mittens on a string. It seemed as if all of our children tended to take off their hearing aids. This little girl scribbled on the blackboard while loudly saying, 'Wa wa wa wa.'

Her mother greeted my daughter. She moved her flat hand over Lilia's head as if she were polishing an invisible halo. 'Yoi ko,' she said. 'Good child.'

Because of my experience in teaching English as a foreign language, and because I was hoping that my daughter would learn my native tongue, I was interested in visiting English classes at the School for the Deaf.

I made arrangements to sit in on two junior high school English classes. In the first, there were usually two students, but one was absent. Keiko, the attendee, was a good-natured girl with long limbs and glasses. She seemed to be embarrassed by the prospect of two teachers at once, but gamely embarked upon the lesson.

On this day, the teacher and student played at shopping. Keiko ordered

things – eggs, cheese, milk – from a list. I could just about understand her pronunciation, though comprehension would have been difficult if Keiko hadn't been pointing at pictures. When finished 'shopping,' she counted out construction paper money to pay for her purchases.

'She can do math,' the English teacher told me. 'Fifty percent of the students here can't do basic calculations.'

Would Lilia be able to count to one hundred, fifty, even ten one day? Would she be able to add and subtract? And if she couldn't, how would she get by? I wondered.

In the second class, I met Chie. Although Chie had the black hair common to most Japanese, her eyes were an impossible cornflower blue. I wondered for a second if she wore contact lenses, but then the teacher said, 'Look! Our visitor has eyes like yours!' I realized that the girl had probably been teased all of her life. I later discovered that blue eyes in Japanese often indicate a genetic aberration paired with deafness.

Before Chie had stumbled late into class, the English teacher had told me that her pronunciation would be difficult to understand. Now, as I listened to her read aloud a passage from her textbook, I found the words utterly incomprehensible.

For years, this school discouraged the use of sign language and pushed lip reading and vocalization. It was clear, however, that not everyone mastered speech. I didn't know how Chie would be able to communicate in the wider world outside this school, away from this kind and patient teacher who at least pretended to understand her.

The featured speaker at the next Koala Club meeting was Ms. Onishi, the sole deaf teacher at the School for the Deaf. She was slender and attractive, in her thirties, with a flashy silver hearing aid. When she spoke, I understood her completely, and she in turn comprehended my American-accented Japanese. At last, a role model for Lilia, I thought. I figured she must have a husband and kids, and I wondered if they could hear. She was asked to talk to us about her experiences as a deaf person.

She told us, in clear Japanese, that her deafness was not discovered until she was in the fifth grade. During the preceding years, she had realized that she was different from others and wanted only to be understood. Instead, she was relentlessly bullied. On the way home from school, kids ripped the rucksack from her back and threw it in the bushes. She had memories of searching for her books with her parents in the night.

Many of us were moved to tears by this portrait of adolescent misery. I was amazed that she functioned well enough to pass for a hearing person, albeit an odd and disobedient one. All those years of reading lips, of paying attention.

And now she had a job, a bright disposition, a normal life with e-mail and travel to foreign countries.

'I enjoy living by myself,' she told us.

Of course we'd all been wondering if she was married, worrying about our own children's prospects.

I didn't believe, as many Japanese women do, that marriage was essential for happiness. Even so, I hoped that my daughter would one day experience falling in love and that she would be loved in return.

Someone asked Ms. Onishi if she wanted to marry.

'Yes,' she replied. 'If I have the chance.'

Her response broke my heart. In this provincial Japanese town, the odds of a thirtysomething deaf woman finding a partner didn't seem good.

I needed to get out of Japan for awhile. Although there was much that I loved about living in the country, I sometimes found life in that small town stifling. There were so many rules. After many months of feeling big and awkward and not fitting in, I needed to be in a country where I could speak freely and not attract stares. I also needed to see my family, and I wanted my children to be able to spend time with their grandparents, aunt, uncle, and cousins in America. I decided to take the twins back to South Carolina for the summer. I booked a house on the Atlantic coast, thinking I'd fulfill my dream of a beach vacation, deposit non-refundable. And then Lilia got sick again. Luckily, with a doctor's note, I was able to get back the money I'd paid for plane tickets. The beach house apparently remained empty for a week.

At the end of September, I tried again. Yoshi stayed behind, and I managed to get my three-year-olds from Tokushima to South Carolina via Tokyo and San Francisco. We arrived just in time for my 37th birthday. My mother baked a chocolate cake for me, and the twins helped me blow out the candles. It was still warm enough for t-shirts or just a windbreaker. My dad took us out for a ride in his motor boat – Jio and Lilia's first boat ride.

We went to the zoo with my brother and his wife whose parents were born in India. Both sets of our kids are a mix of German-American and Asian. They could easily pass for siblings. Jio and his cousins darted from the elephant enclosure to the penguin house, chattering away in English while I pushed Lilia in a stroller, signing the names of the animals.

One noon, my parents took us out to eat at a house-turned-restaurant. As we pulled up to the table, the middle-aged waitress looked from my kids to me and asked, 'Where'd you get them from?'

I was taken aback. 'They're my biological children.'

'Well, they don't favor you at all,' she said, plunking down our water glasses. 'I thought they were adopted.'

Jio and Lilia devoured their plates of fried chicken and macaroni and cheese but, obviously, I was experiencing reverse culture shock. Although people in Japan sometimes treated my children as a novelty because they were clearly half-Japanese, they rarely spoke in such a direct fashion.

A couple of days later, Lilia got sick again. Although she wasn't as weak as before, I took her to see a doctor at a nearby clinic.

'Why are you with this child?' he asked me.

'She's my daughter,' I said, a bit defensively. 'I'm her biological mother.' It's true that there are few people of Asian descent in South Carolina. In another city they would have been less remarkable, but it made me feel a little sad that my twins stuck out in my country just as they did back home in Japan. Lilia was diagnosed with pneumonia, given some medication and sent home, or at least to my parent's house.

On our way back to Japan, we were supposed to stay with one of my old Tokushima friends, who was half-Japanese-American, in San Francisco, but she herself had just given birth prematurely. It didn't seem like a good idea to have a kid recovering from a respiratory ailment in the house with an underweight newborn baby. We stayed with her parents. Her father just happened to be a pediatrician, and I asked him what he thought about my daughter, who was such a poor eater, who'd get food caught in her throat and start coughing and throw up, who never seemed to gain enough weight. He thought a tonsillectomy might be a good idea.

Although I hated the idea of another operation, Yoshi and I both thought it might help and that it was worth a try. We were told that tonsillectomies were not typically recommended for children under four years old in Japan, but after consulting with her Japanese doctor, we decided to go ahead with it.

Afterwards, Lilia spent a couple days recuperating in the ICU due to respiratory-related complications, and then she finally began to grow bigger and stronger. Tests revealed that she was indeed profoundly deaf. At her healthiest, even with hearing aids, she could hear almost nothing at all.

Once again, Yoshi and I began to discuss the possibility of an implant for our daughter. We knew that it wouldn't cure her deafness, but if it were successful, the operation would provide access to the spoken word. If she could hear what we were saying, she might be able to learn to speak herself. This was starting to seem a lot better than the sink-or-swim system of deaf education in Japan where, no matter how intelligent a child is, only the best lip-readers go on to college and professional careers.

In the United States at this time, a cochlear implant for a deaf child was a controversial choice. One of the arguments against this relatively safe operation was that it threatened Deaf culture. Here in Japan, where deaf children were frequently mainstreamed and might very well grow up having little or no contact with their deaf peers, there wasn't much deaf culture to speak of, but cochlear implants were not yet common.

Japan didn't even have a standard form of sign language. And while many schools and universities had sign language clubs, JSL wasn't offered

as an academic course as it was in American schools. Even at the Tokushima School for the Deaf, the signs taught in the Early Intervention Program were different from the signs taught on NHK's sign language program on TV, or even different from the signs taught in the junior high school. Signs varied from generation to generation as well as from region to region. I'd also figured out by now that the teachers at the deaf school weren't really using JSL, with its particular rules of grammar, but were signing Japanese as it would normally be written or spoken. There was also a heavy emphasis on fingerspelling, which can be very tedious to follow, but which would help students to become literate in Japanese.

My own remaining reservations about a cochlear implant had to do with a fear of the unknown. Cochlear implants were relatively new in 2000. They had been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration less than twenty years before. In a brochure provided by the manufacturer, I read 'The long-term effects of electrode insertion trauma or chronic electrical stimulation are unknown.' Hardly comforting words. But I was beginning to think that this was Lilia's one big chance. I wanted her to have every advantage that we could give her, and I reasoned that if something went seriously wrong, the implant could be removed.

After a CT-scan and X-rays at a hospital in Matsuyama, a city on the other side of the island of Shikoku, our daughter was proclaimed to be a good candidate for the procedure. We made a decision for Lilia to have the operation.

The hospital provided a coloring book and a teddy bear with a toy speech processor beforehand. Although I showed her the book and the teddy bear, I wasn't sure how much she understood. The afternoon before surgery, my husband took Lilia to a beauty salon on the first floor of the hospital. The beautician shaved a curved path over her right ear. The following morning, her father carried her to the operating theater. Lilia waved cheerily as he made his exit.

The operation lasted for six hours. When I next saw Lilia, she was no longer cheerful. A huge wad of gauze was taped to the side of her head. She was in pain and she was angry. How could I explain that this operation was a gift? That we were providing her with sound, expanding her future possibilities? Neither the coloring book nor the teddy bear had prepared her for the pain.

I sat by her hospital bed for the next few days. We didn't know anybody in Matsuyama. No one came to visit us. Her father had gone back across the island to work, and her twin brother was staying with his aunt, so it was just the two of us. 'Moon River' blared from the town hall every evening at 6 p.m. Soon, when the swelling went down and she was hooked up to the speech processor, Lilia would be able to hear it, too.

The day before Lilia got sound, I asked Yoshi what he expected her reaction would be like. He acted it out: wonder blossoming into joy.

I had braced myself for a total lack of response. According to the Parent's Guide: A Handbook for Parents Considering a Nucleus Cochlear Implant for Their Child, initial reactions to sound ranged from 'no reaction at all' to 'surprisingly matter-of-fact' and from 'sheer delight' to 'absolute terror.' I tried to hold my expectations in check, but I was excited all the same.

We arrived at the hospital the following evening. It was after hours and the second floor was deserted and dark, except for the sofa where a female graduate student awaited us. She assured us that Dr. Takahashi, the audiologist who would oversee Lilia's rehabilitation, would be along shortly.

He bustled in with a computer, a bag of toys, and another graduate student and led us into a carpeted room. The young doctors who had assisted at Lilia's operation were called in as well.

Dr. Takahashi was present during the insertion of the electrodes. Now, he explained each step of sound input to the physicians. He affixed the magnetic coil, which would transmit electrical signals to Lilia's brain, to the side of her head. He hooked the microphone over her ear and connected it to the speech processor, a device about the size of a Walkman. The speech processor was connected to his computer. And then he gave Lilia sound.

By the look on her face, I knew she'd heard something. This was the look she got when she saw a smear of mud on her leg, or when a crab got too close. This furrowed brow face told me that she heard something and she didn't like it.

Over the next hour, she removed the coil and microphone several times and tried to return the apparatus to Dr. Takahashi: Thanks, but no thanks. Her response wasn't exactly what we'd hoped for, but it was encouraging all the same. *She could hear.*

It would take a while, but in the years to come she would learn to recognize the bark of a dog, and the doorbell's chime. She would learn to say words like 'What?' and 'Mama' and '*urusai*.'

Back home, just after the operation, I sat by the window and listened. Frogs croaked. Insects chirred and buzzed. I could hear the man in the house behind ours coughing up phlegm, cars whooshing along Highway 11, a neighbor's telephone ringing. Sirens, the sougning of wind, cats in heat. The world was noisy, and Lilia would find the ability to hear a mixed blessing.

(A somewhat different version of this essay was originally published in *Brain, Child*)

3

Challenging the Values of Being Bilingual

Elizabeth Stigger

RECENTLY THERE HAS been a story making its rounds on different social media sites. You may have seen a version it, which goes something like this:

When I was in the 6th grade, my teacher put on a DVD and told us to take notes. After a short time, she suddenly turned on the lights and yelled at one kid, Billy. She said that he wasn't following her instructions, he should be taking notes, but he wasn't. But Billy was taking notes, I saw it, we all saw it. The teacher asked if anyone wanted to stand up for Billy. A few kids hesitantly murmured some words of defense, but they were immediately suppressed. Very quickly the whole room was silent. Billy got sent to the principal's office. When the teacher came back into the classroom, with a stern face she said, 'See how easy that was?' We were reading *Anne Frank*. I started to understand. Don't ever let anyone tell you that what you see with your own eyes isn't happening.

The reasons why this story is currently making the rounds on the Internet may be politically based, yet this story is of relevance to raising bilingual children in Japan, as in essence it is about values. Values are interwoven within all parts of society, they are inherent within education, and the way we bring up our children. However, have you ever stopped to consider what happens to a child when the social values and the values that they are exposed to within the school system do not support the values that are held within the home? This situation affects bilingual children, and it is important that parents recognize how different values influence the bilingual's self-esteem and confidence.

My husband and I separated when our eldest child was in grade three.

Since then I have been a single parent. I am also the foreign parent of children who were all born in Japan, and who have only ever gone to Japanese public school. In raising my children, I have had to help them navigate between the different values which society and the education system places on the uniqueness of being Japanese in opposition to the part of them that is considered as foreign. Japan, like many cultures, places great emphasis on developing national pride. However, in doing this, generalizations are made on the assumption that the 'Japanese way' is the correct way, and that the 'different ways' of non-Japanese cultures, are not (Hashimoto, 2013). This is a rather precarious situation, as by birth my children are Japanese. It is me their mother, a representation of *Other*, who has created a situation where my children are marginalized, simply because they speak English proficiently. As the only parent of three bilingual children I strive to help my children to cope with and to navigate the interpretation of *Otherness* that has, perhaps unfairly, been placed upon them in society in general and in their school experiences, and help them develop a positive self-identity.

Challenges with Social Values

When we talk about language learning, often we discuss the need to incorporate cultural knowledge. Here sociolinguists and communication theorists might discuss the importance of the connection between language use and cultural values. This entails understanding how the social situation influences how or what is said. These are important skills which bilingual children pick up, and use effectively depending on the situation. Take for instance, the phrase 'I want to die'. Depending on the situation and tone of voice, a child that says this in English might be expressing great excitement, embarrassment, or anger. However, as the Japanese mother of my daughter's bilingual friend once told me in tears, it is usually only taken in its literal sense in Japanese. While the child here was attempting to use both her cultural and linguistic knowledge to her advantage to get what she wanted, this represents how cultural knowledge is of importance in communication.

The connection between language use and cultural values often negates or relegates to a passing mention of the social value of learning a second language or being bilingual. The social status of being bilingual and the cultural imagery attached to this influence how the bilingual child is accepted within society. English is the favoured foreign language to learn in Japan. A knowledge of English is valued in Japan because it is a tool which Japanese can utilize to compete in the global economy. Here the learning of English has been equated as a tool for international interaction which has subsequently set the parameters of where and how English usage is deemed socially acceptable. This parameter has sanctioned

English as a school subject, and as a language for international business communication. However, in many rural areas in Japan outside of school and business, English usage has yet to be socially accepted, and users of English outside these parameters are often considered as unusual or different.

In a situation where the acceptable usage of English has been assigned to a few select social spaces, bilingual children in Japan often feel resistance to use English in the public sphere. As I am the foreign single mother, I often find that my children feel uncomfortable being with me in crowded public spaces. In other bicultural families that my family know of, the mother is Japanese and the father is foreign. Their children happily go shopping, to the pool, or do not mind being picked up from their various after school activities by their mothers. My children do mind. When they were young, they would always suggest we go to play at the quietest park. If the quiet park was not so quiet, my older children would try to distance themselves from me, by asking me to take the baby to the sand pit, while they played at a distance from us. I could see that they were trying to avoid being connected to the foreign woman. At shopping centers, it becomes more difficult, especially if tummies are hungry. Sometime we eat at family restaurants or at the Food Court at a shopping center, although we try to avoid peak times. As a parent, what do you do when someone standing in line in front of you turns because you spoke with your children, in English, about what they wanted to eat? I am not talking about casually and briefly turning around to see who is speaking in English. I am talking about the jaw hitting the ground, gaping stare. That kind of stare that is impossible to pretend did not happen. Do you stay in line, and try to pretend it did not happen? Do you stare back, or tell the gaping jaw that to stare is rude, no matter what culture? If it was a one-off incident, it is easily explained and perhaps will be forgotten by your children, but this, unfortunately, happens with all too much predictability.

It is not only the stares of strangers that bilingual children attempt to avoid. Any child's peer group has a huge impact on them. The peer group influences how children talk, how they identify with the group, and how they relate to adults. As I was a contract English teacher, we often had to move because of my job to a new city, and my children have often been the new kid at school. For any child, fitting in is of importance and a child will attempt to hide what they think differentiates them from others. For the bilingual child in Japan, an attempt to fit into the new school environment often means hiding their other language from their new friends. I understand their feelings, however in a culture where the mother is expected to help at school, whether she works full-time or not, enabling my children to hide their bilingual abilities can be difficult to navigate. Given that once children enter the school system, where they are developing a friendship culture that doesn't include adults, it is understandable that

my children would want to attempt to create relationships where they feel comfortable acknowledging their differences to their peers. Developing this comfort takes time, and is not going to happen quickly. For my family, this seems to take longer as we are often in a situation where I am usually the only foreign female in the area, and my children are the only biracial kids in the school. My children want to fit in and establish friendships before their friends truly understand that they are bilingual. As my son, when he was in the second grade of elementary school, once eloquently said, 'It is not that I mind you picking me up from soccer, it's just that you talk. When you talk, the others stare.' In this case, my son was not just referring to the other kids who would stare, but also their parents. All my children look much more Japanese than Caucasian; often it is not until I am connected to my children that others realize that they are biracial. Until this time, they are just 'the boy with the long hair' or 'the girl in pink'. After this connection is made they are 'the half' kids. The point here is that these feelings of being different are coming from people who know them, who know their names, whose kids play with them; people who accepted them as being Japanese – or normal – until I showed up. For these people, once a connection has been made to a non-Japanese parent, my children become *Other*.

The parameters of where it is acceptable to use English in public spaces represent a resistance to change, and the maintenance of the dichotomy of Japan and *Other* (Hashimoto, 2013). This dichotomy is felt by bilingual children and their families. It represents how we are not socially accepted. We all want to be accepted and valued, particularly children who have yet to develop an identity of themselves which accepts all their unique qualities and differences. When part of who we are is not accepted, that part can become devalued, and often the bilingual child may attempt to hide this part so that in the eyes of others they are not seen as different, as *Other*. As a parent, I am conflicted with this logic. Part of me wants to be able to just take my kid to the beach or to the shopping mall without considering the time of day, and how busy it might be, and who might 'see' us. That part of me often wonders how I might protect my child from feeling ostracized within their own culture. The other part of me wants my children to get with it, and to realize that if we were in a different culture or place that people would be staring at us for some other reason, not the fact that we speak English together. That is what people do when they see something different, they stare – although admittedly not always with a jaw hitting the ground, gaping stare. While difference might be tolerated, as the opening quotation suggests, the pressure to conform is powerful. I often feel that in Japan the pressure to be Japanese has been defined by what is not Japanese. This unfortunately extends to children who are biracial; because one parent is not Japanese, their children who were born and raised in Japan, are also not socially considered Japanese. Yet I, as the

parent, have to understand that the issue of being different is also related to confidence. A child and young adult has not had the time it takes to develop a confidence in who they are. As the parent, I must find ways to help my children develop this confidence as they navigate between the dichotomy of being both Japanese and *Other*.

Challenges with Educational Values

Children learn the mores and norms of their society in part through the education system. In an age where globalization is a key word in education, increasingly education focuses on providing students with a base of knowledge to be active in the international community. Here it is perhaps of importance to note that typically the definition of globalization is concerned with interconnections between different nations across national boundaries. In the educational system, teaching about globalization often also includes teaching children about their own cultural diversity and national identity. In Japan, this means that English education has been introduced in conjunction with safeguarding Japanese national culture and language (Hashimoto, 2013; Premaratne, 2015). This situation has created a duality between cultures which focuses on differences, but does not necessarily focus on the understanding of these differences. For bilingual children, this impacts the development of their identities because it is connected to acceptance.

Japan is often described as a homogenous, monolingual country. Japanese is the national language and it dominates all parts of society. In such a context, other languages are considered foreign, and it might be surprising that children grow up bilingual in Japan at all. However, how children develop as bilingual could be influenced by which language they are learning in conjunction with Japanese. As noted above, English is valued because it is a tool from which Japan can interact and compete in the global society, and thus there are positive connections for learning English in general in Japan. For this reason, it may be easier for the English-speaking bilingual to acquire their second language than other bilinguals whose second language might not have such positive connotations, such as Thai. However, classes that focus on developing intercultural understanding and foreign language development in the Japanese education system are taught in conjunction against classes which focus on developing children's understanding of national values. Within this situation, it is important to acknowledge that nationalistic pride in Japan is not any greater than other nations, and that the Japanese education system is still developing how foreign language and cultural education can coexist with Japanese language and cultural education (Hashimoto, 2013). However, the fact remains that bilingualism within the current Japanese educational system is being accepted as an oddity rather than a norm.

In official documents, bilingualism is classified differently depending on whom the term is referring to. Hashimoto (2013) describes how terminology used in official educational policies connected to bilingualism has a labeling function in Japan. A simple term such as the loanword ネイティブスピーカー (native speaker), which does not indicate a specific language has become equated to someone who is a native speaker of English. This labeling is not limited to just foreigners in Japan; Japanese children who accompanied their parents abroad due to work are also labeled: 帰国子女 (returnee children) or 在外日本人子女 (overseas Japanese children). When the term bilingual is used, it is often used as a compound term: bilingual foreigner or bilingual of Japanese descent (Hashimoto, 2013, pp. 20-21). These terms all illustrate that within the educational system, bilingualism is connected to the foreign; either by being a foreigner in Japan, or having lived outside of Japan for an extended period of time. Understanding the official rhetoric on bilingualism is important, as it exemplifies that in Japan bilingualism is connected to the *Other*. It also highlights that being bilingual is not considered a part of mainstream society. Furthermore, the mere fact that these labels exist in educational policies imply that the Japanese language abilities of the bilingual are in some way insufficient. The bilingual child in Japan is labeled, and however harmless the intention is, these labels do mark the bilingual as different from other Japanese. To avoid this, many bilingual children go to great extent to hide the fact that they can speak another language besides Japanese.

My children are still in the Japanese school system. Like any child, my children have experienced highs and lows while at school. As they are usually the only biracial children within their respective schools, I often feel that the lows they experience are more pronounced than many of their monolingual – their Japanese – friends. Bullying, thumbtacks in shoes, bruises, books or other school materials suddenly disappearing from their desks are a part of our lives. We have learnt that complaints to school are typically swept aside, often with the remark, that as a working mother, I obviously do not spend enough time with my children, otherwise these things would simply not be happening. We also have learnt that it was not only other children who view my children as different, their teachers do too.

When we first moved from Okinawa to Aomori, I was asked if my son could speak Japanese by his teacher. We moved to Aomori soon after his father and I separated, and at that time my son went through a phase of only speaking in Japanese. However, having only ever lived in Okinawa, my son spoke Japanese in a heavy countryside Okinawan accent. His teacher couldn't understand what he was saying, and presumed that because he is the son of a foreign woman, he must be speaking in English. By first grade my son was well aware that he should not use English at school, and he only spoke Japanese at school. I was shocked at this teach-

er's reaction and interpretation of my son's use of Japanese, and question if she even bothered to listen to the words he spoke. The sheer denial of who his is, a bilingual child, was overshadowed because of the fact that his mother was not Japanese; somehow my being foreign makes my children foreign too. At the end of the school year I voiced a concern over my son's reading ability, to which this teacher responded 'Yes, he does not read well, but as he is not Japanese, it does not matter so much'. But this does matter, because he is Japanese. Nevertheless, this is a common perception. Whenever we move, we are often asked, 'Do your children speak Japanese?' despite that all their school records are from Japanese public schools.

The phenomenon of not understanding that my children speak Japanese has happened multiple times. When out, a child might politely ask a stranger a question in Japanese, such as, 'Excuse me, could you tell me what time the next bus is?' That person will often turn to me for a translation, as if they did not even hear my child speaking in Japanese. This may stem back to an identity issue within the interpretation of Japan and *Other*. Within this logic, the Japanese language is unique to Japan and therefore only Japanese people can speak the language fluently. When faced with a foreigner, or someone who does not look only Japanese, the physical attributes of that person overshadow their linguistic abilities. The fact that the foreigner spoke in Japanese is completely unnoticed, as their physical qualities somehow cancel their linguistic abilities. It is in this that parents of bilinguals often find that the desire to be accepted as Japanese has put pressure on their bilingual child to adopt the linguistic mannerisms of the community they live in (Kyratzis, 2004). From my experience, it seems that many bilingual children in Japan are much more apt at Japanese than their peers. My children quickly learnt to hide their Okinawan or other regional accents in an attempt to integrate into the local community and be seen as Japanese, rather than foreign.

In all the time that they have been in school only one teacher has ever understood that for the bilingual child, confidence – or more accurately a lack of confidence, is part of their identity. This teacher told me, that after watching a talk show where Becky (a Japanese television personality) was a guest, she understood that '*haafu* (biracial) children often feel as outsiders in Japan'. This was after I voiced my worry that my daughter did not seem to be making friends after moving to a new school. While I was assured that my child did play with other children at school, my concern was that outside of school her friends, according to my daughter, were always busy. This may be true, but it is more likely that inviting friends to play at our apartment, particularly if I were home, would let them know that my daughter is not only biracial, but also bilingual. Rather than expose her dual linguistic abilities, she has chosen to not have friends over to our home. This strategy, as seen from the child's point of view, may

be to help them gain membership and acceptance with their peer group. Nevertheless, it is at the same time blocking this very thing from developing, as the bilingual child is minimalizing a part of who they are and preventing deeper, more trusting friendships from developing.

Keeping me separate from school life has been a sore point between my children and me. Throughout the school year there are several open school days where parents come to watch how their children study in class, sports day, or some sort of special assembly. While the parents, usually the mothers, of other children attend these functions, my children ask me to stay away. Once some of their friends have made the connection between my children and their foreign mother, I may be given permission to attend but this comes with strict instructions: 'do not talk in English, do not smile at me, stand away from other parents'. I understand that from the child's perspective this is to minimize how foreign they appear to their classmates, as when I do go to school other children do point and stare at me. However, if I were to follow such antisocial behavior, it would draw attention by the parents who would wonder what is wrong with that child's mother. This is a point of contention, as I want to make my children comfortable with who they are; yet in their school life, they are not just a child, they are labeled, they are the bilingual child. My children want to belong, and in this natural desire they are attempting to organize and manipulate how they present themselves to others. This is a natural social function that children develop to facilitate the feeling that they belong to their cultural group.

Within school life, there is one other significant problem that I would never have imagined developing. This is homework. All my children seem to get a lot more homework than I ever had when I was in elementary school. Furthermore, this homework is often complicated and requires help from a parent. For the single foreign mother, this can be problematic. My eldest daughter once had the homework assignment to write the pronunciation for a list of kanji. Many of the kanji were new words which the class had just learnt how to write, and some, my daughter insisted had not been taught in school. She did the ones that she knew first, but was only able to complete about half of the list. While other kids may have found this assignment difficult, they had someone at home who could help them, but my daughter only had me. Without knowing the pronunciation of the kanji, we could not look them up on the electronic dictionary or computer. Tears were abundant, not only because we could not do the homework, but also from my daughter's perspective, because this would label her as different, as not Japanese enough to know the kanji. Luckily, we had a big book of kanji, which was divided into grades, so together we looked page by page through all the fourth-year kanji to find the pronunciation of the words she did not know. An assignment that should have taken twenty minutes at the most, took us hours to complete. It is not only homework

related to Japanese which is problematic. Other homework such as math or science can be difficult, not because of the equations, but because the descriptive language used in Japanese is different from English, or the process to complete the equations are not the same as how I learnt to do them. These problems are easier to solve, as we can look them up on the computer in Japanese to find explanations. Homework can be a challenge for any parent. As the foreign parent, it can also be a point of contention, as it distinctly highlights how different we are from other parents, and how this difference does have consequences – imagined or real – for the bilingual child. It has meant that I must find extra help for my children, but I do not feel comfortable sending them to a cram school. What has worked well for my family is the hiring of university students to be private tutors. The university student gains practice in teaching, and my children have a relatively young person to whom they can relate to, as well as get the help they really need in Japanese.

For children struggling to belong to a group or even just to gain entry to the group, anything that differentiates them from their peer group is reformulated. In Japan, the result of this is that the foreign parent is often minimalized, particularly in the public sphere, so that the child can fit in socially. This is despite the fact that English is valued in Japanese society, as the favored foreign language to learn. The rhetoric behind learning English in Japan, to develop international connections, however is in stark contrast with the reality that bilingual children face, where the conditional acceptance of their dual linguistic abilities marks bilinguals as not wholly Japanese, which does influence their identity. What I am seeing is that there is a dichotomy between rhetoric on English learning and acceptance, which is often unacknowledged in both society and the educational system.

Challenges with Personal Values

A definition of a parent could be a person who cares for and raises their children. This for me includes being a protector. A natural part of being a parent is to question if we handled a situation right, or if we could have done something done better or differently. However, when we live in a culture where identity is formed through a distinction between what is Japanese and everything else lumped together as an *Other*, these types of questions become more pronounced. Many parents want their children to grow up with confidence and to be proud of who they are. Yet as a single parent, and the foreign one to boot, I find that my personal values are challenged frequently.

Language use is integrally connected to cultural production. Particularly for children, language use is connected to participation and membership within a culture. As Nakamura (2016) reports, I have always

thought that exposure to Japanese at school would be sufficient enough for my children's Japanese language skills to develop; that my not talking Japanese with my children would not matter. My concern was that if I did not speak English to my children that I would be hindering their English as well as not adding any benefit to their Japanese development (Hoff, Rumiche, Burrige, Ribot, & Welsh, 2014). I firmly believe that the input conditions are of importance in the development and maintenance of my children's English language development. In my reasoning behind my children's language development, however, I neglected to factor in the influence of Japanese cultural ideologies into the linguistic and identity development of my children.

While English is set to become a regular subject in Japanese elementary schools by 2020, this does not mean that English is valued for more than anything beyond a tool from which Japanese can interact within the globalized community. Increasingly there are radio, television and movies shows where English is used, and furthermore, language schools that teach English are easy to find, even in rural Japan. In all these circumstances, a specific time and place has been set for English use; a boundary has been created where English use is deemed as acceptable. As noted above, to use English outside of these boundaries is still seen as an *Other*. This creates a problem for the bilingual child in that the boundaries where they use English are much more fluid than they are for their monolingual Japanese friends. The dilemma is that when they use a language other than Japanese, they become conspicuous, and it can be negatively perceived by Japanese speakers around them (Nakamura, 2016). Accordingly, bilingual children often use Japanese as a way to blend in.

The values for being bilingual do not only develop at home. While these values may begin at home, they are also influenced by the social and educational spheres of society. This means that as a parent, it is not just my personal beliefs and practices which have influenced how my children develop and use their English in conjunction with their Japanese. This is where it is important that parents of bilingual children understand that the social and educational values of being bilingual do influence how their bilingual child copes with the public sphere. As the rhetoric in Japan is that Japanese society takes great pride in the uniqueness of its culture and language, and this is defined against what is not Japanese, it has led to a situation where many bilinguals attempt to downplay their language abilities almost as if their other language is a secret.

As a parent, I understand how difficult it is for the bilingual child to blend into a society that prides itself on being homogenous. I have seen how this can negatively affect children's confidence, and I find that I must also respect my children in their attempts to deemphasize their bilingual abilities. While my children might not acknowledge that their English abilities are actually a secret, it is how they have chosen to cope with being

bilingual in a society that takes pride in its monolingual status. However, I never realized how much my children have been able to downplay their English abilities until we took a trip to mainland Japan, and on our way home we made a stop at Costco. As we had a long drive home, we ate dinner at Costco. While eating, I noticed that one Japanese woman was staring at one of my children. Then, across the tables she started talking to my child, in foreigner talk – the slow and heavily punctuated English that some teachers might use with learners of a foreign language, typically accompanied with gestures. This woman said something like ‘Hi! How. Are. You? Did. You. Buy. Lots. Of. Things?’ My immediate reaction was who is this crazy woman, and why is she talking to my child? It turned out that she was the Japanese-American ALT – assistant language teacher, at my child’s school. The ALT was unsure how much or if my child could speak English at all. My daughter had been able to trick her second-generation Japanese-American ALT into thinking that she did not speak English well.

The fact that my children are not only bilingual, but also biracial combined with my minimal interactions with school does mean that my children’s secret is not such a secret, rather it is an unacknowledged truth. As a minority within their immediate surroundings, this has perhaps been a key coping mechanism for my children. With regards to this, it is important that parents of bilinguals recognize that their desires for their children to be bilingual are their desires, and this is not always what their children want. The best we can do is to facilitate a language learning atmosphere which encourages and enables our children to develop as an individual as well as what they can do linguistically.

As a parent, I want to not only care for and bring up my children, I also want to protect them. Sharing ideas and hearing the stories of how other parents have or are dealing with the challenges of raising bilingual children in Japan is of importance. It is also important, however, that as a parent I am sensitive to the unique needs of my children. A solution that works well for another family, cannot simply be imposed upon my own. This has meant finding the comfort zone for my children and allowing that zone to influence how our public life proceeds. Yes, we do go to the beach, the movies, the shopping center. The beach however may not be the nice sandy beach, the movie will not be seen on a holiday, and the shopping center will not be on a busy, wet Sunday afternoon. To expand this comfort zone also means finding role models. Living in rural Japan, there often are no other bilingual children nearby, this means that literal role models have to be substituted with parents who do understand some of the challenges of integrating into Japanese society and being different, and who are able to be supportive in their children’s bilingual development, so that they develop a sense of belonging.

The most important element of being the parent of a bilingual child is to acknowledge what we see is happening to our children in Japanese

society, simply because our children are different. I desperately want to protect my children from the stigmatism that they do experience from being bilingual. To do this requires that both I and my children acknowledge that this does happen to them. However, a child often does not have the confidence to acknowledge this. After all, who would want to tell their parent that they are being bullied or treated differently from other children? It is, unfortunately, natural that the bilingual child does attempt to hide the negative things that happen to them from those who could help them, somehow feeling that it is their fault for the unpleasantness. Helping the bilingual child deal with this situation by talking and developing strategies with them is of importance. As the bilingual is apt at hiding their linguistic skills in public, it is also important that as parents we are aware that they also hide some of their negative experiences from us. This is why the opening quotation is of importance here. As parents, we can see what is happening to our children, simply because they are bilingual. It is something that we must acknowledge, so that we can help our children to navigate how they want to use their linguistic abilities, but just as importantly so that they can develop pride and confidence in who they are, and feel like they belong. As the single, foreign mother of Japanese children, this has meant that I must be observant, and not let anyone, including my children, tell me that what I am seeing happening is not happening. I must do this so that I can help my children develop confidence within Japanese society, and not reject one language over the other, but rather to develop a sense of belonging and roots in both.

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4

Bilingual Child-Raising: ‘And We Thought This Would be Easy...’

Maiko Ogasawara and Gerard Marchesseau

MANY PEOPLE MIGHT think that children raised in a multilingual environment will simply acquire the languages to which they are exposed, naturally. In Japan, where Japanese is dominantly spoken in public at every level, there are many families where one parent is Japanese and the other is a native English speaker, in many cases from one of the core English speaking countries; the UK, the US, Canada, and so on. Surely, all that is required to become perfectly bilingual is for one parent to speak English to their children, right? Following the same logic, if one parent is a native Swedish or Thai speaker, will the children effortlessly acquire those languages in the same way? At one point, this is probably what we believed, but when we had children we soon discovered, as many interracial families in Japan are well aware, that this is not the case.

Based on our experience, in this chapter, we will discuss how hard it is to achieve a balance, both linguistically and culturally when raising children bilingually. To be certain, we can find no evidence that there is a finite space in the brain which has precisely enough capacity for just one language. Multilingualism is an attainable goal and it can be argued that two or more languages support each other, sharing the same conceptual base. However, there are still trade-offs. Most interracial families face a number of issues to varying degrees in their journey to raise bilingual and cultural children. Delving a little deeper, we have found that many of the common problems that bilingual children face overlap with developmental disorders. This can be a problem because it can be difficult to distinguish behavior that is simply the product of a child’s environment in a multi-lingual household from behavior which is a signal of unhealthy

stress or a mild development disorder. Therefore, it is important that parents are aware of age appropriate behavioral and linguistic development. For parents who have concerns, there are various kinds of support for children with behavioural or developmental disorders but it may be difficult for parents who do not speak Japanese to access this kind of support, especially in rural areas. With this in mind, we would like to share stories from our own personal experience as well as some of our friends

About Us

To give a little more perspective, we should first explain a little about ourselves. I am a part-time English teacher at two universities while my Canadian husband teaches English education at another university. We live on Shikoku and have two children, Eric, aged eight years and one month (8;1) and Li, aged six years and six months (6;6) at the time of this writing. My first language is Japanese and I use English as a second language in various capacities, from daily conversation to academic environments and research. I lived in Canada for two years in total, in 1992 and again in 1997. My husband came to Japan in 1995. He is very functional in Japanese dealing with daily matters. We both have Masters Degrees in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) and when our first child was born we had a very clear idea of how we wanted to raise our children bilingually based on this experience. We started speaking only English at home when our first child, Eric was born. He was born in February, 2008 and his sister was born in September, 2009. They both started going to Japanese daycare twice a week at the age of three months. Eric then started going every day when he was 4;2 and continued for two years until he entered elementary school. Before he started nursery school every day, his English was more advanced than his Japanese. We limited his time at nursery school so that he could have more exposure to English. In this chapter we will focus mainly on Eric's language development and the various challenges we have faced with him thus far.

A key feature of our bilingual child-raising policy was that we would both speak only English at home without code-switching or mixing languages. We have also tried to avoid 'baby talk' in both languages and we have tried to be very interaction-oriented instead of depending too much on TV programs or DVDs. When we do use media, we show the children both English and Japanese material in order to expose them to both cultures but until recently we used English exclusively even when discussing the Japanese material. The goal we set when Eric was born was to develop his English verbal communication skills to a native or near-native level for communicating with English-speaking family and friends and to foster a positive image of speaking English and of foreign cultures. On the other hand, we had no intention to concentrate on teaching English lit-

eracy unless he showed interest in reading and writing. At this point Eric has learned most of the letters of the alphabet and basic phonics through DVDs, flashcards, and various applications but we never explicitly sat down and taught him literacy skills. We also did not expect the two languages to develop equally across the various functions that they perform. We expected that Japanese would eventually arise as his 'first' language and certainly his academic language. Meanwhile, we have also tried to foster a strong interest and age-appropriate understanding of foreign cultures and world issues. The main function of English at the moment is to communicate with family members. If Eric wants to use English as an academic language or in a specific international context in the future, he might need to hone his literacy and perhaps oral skills a bit, but we are of the belief that having an interest in world issues should provide motivation to brush up his English ability if necessary in the future.

To foster a positive image of speaking English and experiencing foreign cultures, we were very fortunate to have had chances to spend time with people from various cultural backgrounds. Three months after starting nursery school, Eric met a new classmate who arrived from Thailand. In no time they became best friends. His father was Japanese and his mother was Thai. His mother did not speak much Japanese at the time so we used English to communicate with her. This experience showed Eric and his sister that English could be used not only within the family, but also with people in the community. We also recognize the significance that the boy's mother was not a 'typical' white native-English speaking person. English is an international language that anyone can use, rather than something that belongs only to native speakers like Eric's father, and seeing two non-native speakers using English to communicate sends this positive message. Eric is still good friends with the boy. Around the same time, in a children's sports class that Li was enrolled in, we met a Swedish dad who speaks English as a second language as well as other languages such as Japanese, German, and Swedish. He had a daughter the same age as Li and we became good friends. Our families spent much time together until they recently moved to the United States.

Currently at the age of 8;1, Eric is confident and comfortable in both English and Japanese in most situations, however, Japanese is his primary social and academic language. Sometimes he cannot fully express specific things that he knows in Japanese using English. For example, he knows a lot about prehistoric eras and outer space which he can express comfortably in Japanese but not in English. Japanese is clearly his first language when talking about the atmospheric conditions of various planets, and he has expressed that he is more comfortable using Japanese in more general situations as well.

A Turning Point

When Eric was 3;4, he was hospitalized for pneumonia for five days. After that, he continued coughing for a long time. He wasn't sick, but he coughed occasionally and that was when I first suspected he had 'ticks'. One of the most common ticks is blinking and most people are probably familiar with this type of tick. Coughing and making nasal sounds are also common types of ticks among children aged four to six. Some children get these ticks when they are stressed or nervous, for example, before a big event. I initially started learning about ticks on the Internet and then some of my friends told me that their children also had them, so I was not particularly concerned. It was not noticeable in public at that time and his teacher from nursery school also said that she hardly noticed his cough and that it was not a cause for concern. However, I soon learned that ticking is a common symptom observed in children with developmental disorders.

His cough eventually stopped but a new, more obvious tick arose in March, 2013 when Eric was 5;1. His Canadian grandparents were visiting Japan for a couple of weeks and while everyone was having a very good time, the tension around the house was obviously higher with our foreign family visitors. We soon noticed short but rather loud, involuntary verbal ticks sounding like short screams. The new tick quickly became more frequent, to the point where it would interrupt his speech when he was talking. Also, when it was quiet at nursery school, for example when the children were listening to the teacher reading a book, sometimes his peers would notice his verbal ticks and tell him to be quiet. We surmised that the stress of having to use two languages in his daily life was accentuated by his grandparents' visit when he had to use English more intensively and had to compete more for attention. Having heard of other bilingual children developing stutters or ticks, it seemed to fit the pattern, but this new tick was more pronounced and we worried that it might elicit damaging, negative feedback from his peers or others. Right after his grandparents went back to Canada, his new year at kindergarten began and we took the opportunity to speak with the head teacher about Eric's new tick. The teacher then made an arrangement to get counseling with an official (who actually turned out to be a dietician) from the public health center.

This is when we shifted our language policy and his mother started using more Japanese when just the two of them were together. His teacher also regularly reported how he was doing at school. It seems that miscommunication with his classmates sometimes arose not just because his language development was slightly behind, but also because he was less familiar with certain cultural background knowledge topics like cartoon characters. We were worried that miscommunication stemming from a language and/or cultural gap would lead to negative feedback from his

classmates which would cause further stress and, in-turn, aggravate his ticks or other behavior. In our professional fields, we were also familiar with notions such as 'double-limited-bilingualism' (Cummins, 1984), wherein children use two languages for different, mutually exclusive functions and end up having limited ability in both languages but a full command of neither. We were sure Eric would eventually develop a full command of Japanese since we knew he was going to have a formal education in Japan, however, we were concerned that a gap between him and his peers in the interim might have a lasting negative impact on his confidence. Even when his language ability catches up in the future, issues relating to self-esteem might deter him from making the best of his abilities or talents in other areas. The shift in our language policy was not just designed to give him more Japanese language input. We also started exposing him to more Japanese media so that he would have a better understanding of topics that other children were talking about.

On reflection, we had heard stories of idealistic parents who started out using only a foreign language with their children (like English in Japan) and then panicking when their children couldn't communicate fully in the local language upon starting school, only to drastically change their language policy to the detriment of the foreign language. The literature that we were familiar with, however, indicated that children in such situations catch up quite quickly when they start school and we had not intended on changing our rationally-determined, English-only language policy. We had firmly believed that increasing Eric's Japanese exposure by reducing his English input was unnecessary. Providing reliable and consistent English input would give him a conceptual framework that would be beneficial to his Japanese as well as English. In reality, however, his ticking lead us to view his language development as part of a bigger picture, related inextricably to his behavioral and social development. Making Eric more confident in Japanese should lead to overall growth, extending to his ability to communicate actively in English as well.

The Influence of Our Professional Backgrounds on Child-raising

Anyone who has contact with children knows that making mistakes is a part of first-language acquisition. Children repeatedly test their use of words or expressions, form rules from which they generalize, and eventually they make fewer mistakes. Language development with children in bilingual environments follows the same general sequence as mono-lingual children, yet patterns emerge in the observations of parents who are raising children bilingually. For example, children in bilingual environments often produce their first words later, or they may produce word-like utterances that their parents cannot recognise in either language. Also, as bilingual children begin to speak, they may mix languages, saying

things like, 'Hurry up dekinai' (I can't hurry up). Once children realize that the two languages represent two distinct systems, they stop mixing, but transfer errors are likely to occur wherein they transfer the structure from one language to another (Lightbown & Spada, 1999). For example, we have heard our children say, 'She is not good at writing animals'. In Japanese, the word 'kaku' means both 'write' and 'draw' so they seem to be assuming that English follows the same rule. Though bilingual children go through the same developmental sequences when they learn to speak, there seems to be more diversity at each stage. Individual factors such as personality and the varying types of exposure of each language combine to create a much more complicated picture.

In our case, our children did not mix languages often, even from a very young age, but they continue to make transfer errors in both Japanese and English. Their pronunciation also is not necessarily affected by the other language, but is often generally unclear. In English, since they only have to communicate with their parents who know them intimately, there is a much lesser burden to be clear. Generally, we believe that errors are natural and need not be corrected, and moreover, that excessive correction may negatively impact their development. However, since our children have very limited exposure to English, we have tried to systematically use error correction to expose our children to richer language input, influenced by our research interests in our professions. The most common type of corrective feedback (error correction) that we use is recast, in which teachers or parents paraphrase a mistaken utterance using the correct form. Lyster and Ranta (1997) explain that recast is a way of addressing errors without interrupting the flow of the conversation. In other words, it is a way of briefly drawing attention to form while maintaining the focus on meaning. In our case, for example, if Eric says 'goed' instead of 'went', we might recast the utterance with the correct form to maintain the focus on meaning. We would not, on the other hand, point out his error explicitly by saying, 'You have to say went when you talk about the past.' The following two examples are interactions transcribed when Eric was three years old.

Example 1

Eric/ Daddy, I goed to the park that has a yellow *suberidai*.

Father/ Oh, you did? We went to the park that has a yellow slide last week too, didn't we? How many times did you go down the slide?

Example 2

Eric/ My feet hurts.

Parent/ Which foot? Your right foot or left foot?

Eric/ This foot (pointing to his left foot).

Recast does not always elicit self-correction but it gave us a chance to intentionally expand the conversation and, as a result, the children are exposed to more English.

Since error correction was a main focus of our research for some time, Eric's errors caught our attention more than other aspects of his development. After a while we developed a knack for classifying and analyzing Eric's errors in Japanese. Some errors seemed to be the same as those made by monolingual children where there was no apparent influence from the second language. Other transfer errors seemed to indicate interference from the other language. On the other hand, when Eric speaks English, I am less confident in my ability to identify and analyze errors because English is not my native language. This has hindered me from giving recast as often as my husband when using English with the children. Although it could be said that I have reached the highest level of English as a Japanese speaker (having passed the first grade of the English proficiency test, Eiken), I feel that I am lacking the intuitive ability to accurately assess errors in English. I have a friend who has very limited Japanese ability and her son goes to a local elementary school. Her husband is Japanese and English is their family language. When I asked how his Japanese was at school, she immediately replied that he is perfectly fluent and is actually more talkative than other children. However, when I consider my own lack of confidence identifying errors in English despite being relatively proficient, I realize that parents who are less proficient might have an even harder time recognizing potential problem areas. When a parent is not a native speaker of the language that his or her child is speaking, we tend to judge the child's language ability on the surface level. In situations where neither parent speaks the local language as a first language it could be very difficult to identify problem areas in their children's linguistic or behavioural development.

Problems and challenges that bilingual children face vary depending on their bilingual environments. How parents deal with difficulties which arise, and their ability to recognize those difficulties varies from family to family.

Getting Assistance in the Public Health Care System

Ticking is only one of the symptoms that are common among bilingual children and children with developmental disorders. Okada (2012) wrote that in addition to ticking, pointing to objects instead of verbally expressing what they want, exhibiting unclear pronunciation, repeating what people say and being generally poor at expressing feelings are all characteristic traits that children with developmental disorders often present. These are also all common traits of bilingual children. Among our friends, some have said that their children started speaking later than

other monolingual children while others have said that they have been unable to understand what their children say. Our own experience also fits the pattern. While any child may exhibit some of these behaviors, if they persist as children get older, parents should consider meeting with a specialist. In the case of bilingual families, children often exhibit more of these traits, and for a longer period of time, so it can be hard to identify the problem.

In Japan, most cities and towns have regular check-ups for children before they enter school. When our friend who was raising children in a Japanese-Swedish bilingual environment went to the eighteen-month check-up, her child's language ability may have been a bit behind so he was probably flagged for further examination. A couple of months later, a health nurse called to check the child's language progress. Eager to lay the nurse's concerns to rest, our friend replied that her child was saying 'many' words. She was then asked to list ten words that her child could say. She could not think of ten Japanese words off the top of her head, but coming up with five Japanese words and five Swedish words was not a problem. In this case, the health nurse might have been concerned about the child's development without taking into account his bilingual background.

A second check-up is commonly carried out when children are around three and a half. In our case, that was around the time that we first noticed mild ticking. When we went to Eric's three and a half year check-up, we had intended to ask about the ticking but the person in charge was most likely a health nurse or dietician. She did not seem to be familiar with the term 'ticking' and did not inspire confidence. I then mentioned it to a pediatrician who was there to administer a physical check-up, but he was dismissive since there was no physical manifestation: His body was not shivering with ticks. Eric did not show any obvious signs of delay in language development or communication, so I was not asked any further questions about his language development. In contrast to this experience, other parents are sometimes asked to observe their children systematically to assess their communication and interpersonal skills for the three-and-a-half year check-up. Children who then show any signs of abnormality are asked to come back for further counselling with a clinical psychotherapist.

When Eric developed the more obvious verbal tick at the age of 5;1, his teacher made an appointment to meet an official from the public health center. After waiting a couple of months for the appointment, the official turned out to be a dietician and was not equipped to provide any meaningful help. At that point we went a step further and made an appointment for counselling with a clinical psychotherapist at the same public health center. It took another two months before we were able to get an appointment. Finally, after waiting almost four months to get appropriate help, the meeting was successful. The therapist gave us very useful advice

and information on how to deal with Eric's ticks and eased our anxiety also.

Judging by the inconsistencies in the public health system and considering how long it took us to meet with a qualified professional, there is a serious lack of qualified pediatric specialists in our area. For those with specific developmental disorders such as Autistic Spectrum Disorder or ADHD, it was not until 2004 that Japan passed a law to secure opportunities for education and employment. While there are classes and other options for therapy in rural areas, unfortunately most instructors are not licensed therapists but rather kindergarten or nursery school teachers who have received some form of non-specific training in child development or health. In the case of bilingual children, the situation is complicated further, but our experience has shown that with persistence, adequate help can be found.

Since bilingual children exhibit many of the same behaviors as children with developmental disorders, we encourage parents to monitor their children's development carefully and be aware of their own limitations which might stem from dealing with such matters in a second language. If a characteristic behavior persists, it is important to see a specialist and carefully observe the child's development. If necessary, children can receive specific therapy or attend classes to work on communication and social skills. Bilingual children whose language development is delayed at the age of two or three will usually catch up within a few years. However, when neither parent is competent in the local language which their child is acquiring, the parents may have difficulty assessing the child beyond the surface level. They might not realize that their child could benefit from seeing a specialist and their challenges with Japanese may further serve as a barrier to access public services such as counselling or therapy. In rural areas especially, parents who do not understand Japanese tend to be isolated. In areas such as Aichi, Shizuoka, and Gunma where there are communities of migrant Brazilian workers, they can access information in their native language. Many services are provided specifically in Portuguese in those areas. In rural areas, in contrast, it is difficult to obtain information even in English. We hope that the professionals involved in regular health check-ups at public health centers pay specific attention to the increasing number of children in Japan who are acquiring more than one language. Especially in cases where neither parent speaks Japanese, additional effort should be made to provide information about public services that are available.

Cases where bilingual children are pulled aside for additional testing can also be daunting for the parents. Multilingual children with no developmental issues might be flagged because they exhibit some of the characteristic traits of children with developmental disorders. When children are sent for further assessment they are commonly given an IQ test. Aside

from Eric, there were two monolingual Japanese children at his nursery school who were pulled aside for this type of assessment, so we can provide some insight into this process as well. Just before starting elementary school the children were given IQ tests and the parents were then explained the various options. It is the parents who then have the right to decide which option to pursue; whether their child attends a special needs school, receives special needs support in a regular school, or joins their peers entirely in the mainstream. In the case of a bilingual child, it is important to note that IQ testing and therapy is administered over a series of visits and done completely in Japanese. If a child's Japanese is the weaker of two languages, it is possible that they will not be able to perform to the best of their ability. In the worse cases, some caregivers might rely on results which do not accurately reflect the ability of the child and this can add additional pressure and stress on the child and parents. Families may also be unduly pressured to focus exclusively on a child's Japanese at the expense of the family language, believing that this is what is best for the child. This, however, may not be the case. We strongly believe that in any minority or interracial family, each parent should be able to communicate with their children in a language that they can speak comfortably. It is crucial for children and parents to share a common language to develop a close relationship and for the children to feel secure. We hope that medical and educational professionals realize this importance, and pay extra attention and give extra care and support to interracial or minority families and their children.

Conclusions

Who knows the cause of Eric's ticking? We might have overreacted to some degree, but the experience lead us to consider language development as part of a much bigger picture, inseparable from behavioral and social development. Raising children to be bilingual will not happen magically, simply because one or two parents speak a language different from the local language. Bilingual children face complicated and unique challenges, which often manifest in behavior which can mimic developmental disorders. As we went a little further down the rabbit hole, we gained unique insights into the health care system. While inconsistent and sometimes inadequate, there are a variety of services for parents who are concerned about characteristic behavior which happens to be common in both bilingual children and children with developmental disorders. These services are sometimes hard to access, all the more so if parents have trouble with Japanese. It is our hope that our experience might also inform other parents in a similar situation. In our case, we are lucky that Eric's mother speaks both English, our family language, and Japanese,

the local language. In cases where neither parent speaks Japanese, it can be more difficult to access assistance, but help can still be found.

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5

When Minority Language Interest Falters: Parenting the Receptive Bilingual

Sean Burgoine

FROM THE PARENT'S point of view, the benefits of bilingualism are clear and those of us who live and raise children in Japan spend significant time and energy, and not a little worry, to ensure that our children achieve an acceptable, yet often vaguely defined, level of bilingualism. The benefits include wider communication opportunities, not the least of which is an opening to meaningful communication with extended family living outside of Japan. There are cultural and cognitive advantages as well, in that development of bilingual skills can nurture greater tolerance of other cultures and sensitivity to the importance of communication. On a more practical level, there are also scholastic advantages based on the status of English in Japan and, many agree, easier access to the learning of a third language. Finally, in an increasingly competitive and global world, there are economic and employment benefits and most parents raising bilingual children try to nurture the skills that will reap such career benefits through the provision of two languages. Yet despite being conscious of all of these benefits and wishing to nurture them, our motivation as parents trying to raise a functionally bilingual child has been, primarily, the desire to create a family environment in which each parent can communicate naturally with our child using the language in which we can most effectively express ourselves. In this chapter, I will describe some of the issues related to bilingualism as they relate to our journey as an intercultural family living in a rural part of Kochi Prefecture.

Framing our Family Portrait: Defining Bilingualism

There is no single, universally agreed upon, definition of bilingualism. Whilst it undeniably involves the acquisition and use of two languages, bilingualism is best broadly conceived along a spectrum of language competencies. Whereas stricter and more traditional definitions include something along the lines of native-like control of two languages, other linguists have tempered this lofty standard with a more inclusive notion of bilingualism. Haugen's (1953) definition was among the first to more flexibly conceptualize bilingualism, noting that it essentially begins 'at the point where the speaker of one language can produce complete, meaningful utterances in the other language' (p. 7). Such inclusive definitions reflect the reality of how bilingualism is operationalized for most of us who are dealing with dual language use in daily life. Viewing bilingualism along a continuum and framing a definition of bilingualism that includes, for example, someone with native-like competency in one skill but not in another, or someone who can process a second language receptively at a high level but less so in terms of production skills, brings us more in line with how many of us actually function when living and working in two languages. Indeed, Crystal (1987) notes 'people who have perfect fluency in two languages do exist, but they are an exception, not the rule' (p. 362).

When discussing childhood bilingualism for the purposes of this paper, the focus will be on simultaneous bilingualism, and also receptive and productive bilingualism. Applying the 'one parent-one language' (OPOL) approach, as was done initially with our child, is an example of how simultaneous bilingualism is nurtured, with both languages being acquired in tandem from birth. This is contrasted with sequential bilingualism, which involves acquiring a second language at a later stage, such as at kindergarten or elementary school, or as an adult immigrant, for example. But more importantly for this chapter, and in situating our family context, it is necessary to understand the difference between receptive and productive bilingualism. Receptive bilingualism is concisely defined by Harding and Riley (1986) as when 'the individual concerned understands the language, but cannot, will not or does not speak it' (p. 34). Productive bilingualism, as the name implies, requires not only the comprehension of language, but also the ability to produce it.

The 'Haafu' Label

To further situate our family's bilingual journey, a brief discussion of the term 'haafu' is necessary. Haafu is a word used in Japan to refer to the offspring of a Japanese and a foreign parent. Although this may refer to a child born overseas, it is more commonly used in reference to such children born in Japan. Aside from appearance, they are essentially Japanese

as, being raised in Japan, they share the same education and Japanese language abilities as children born to Japanese parents (Kavanagh, 2013). While some foreign residents in Japan resist the use of this term as discriminatory, or to mean something less than the whole, it is widely used in Japanese society to describe children of mixed nationality, and is not considered to have derogatory connotations. I will use this expression throughout this paper based on the idea that it is the most commonly used and increasingly accepted word to describe children like our daughter. As I will show later, 'haafu' identity has an influence on bilingual language development among children in Japan.

Initial Commitment to the One Parent-One Language Approach

One of the greatest difficulties in raising a child to be bilingual is creating an environment where exposure to both languages is equal. Our situation involved English (minority language) input from myself and Japanese (majority language) input from my partner, both native speakers in our respective languages. Prior to the birth of our child, the home language had alternated daily between Japanese and English as a method for developing our proficiency in each other's language. Although we chose to adopt the one parent-one child approach, it is necessary to clarify the degree to which this was applied. Due to the fact that we were residing in a rural setting in Japan, we felt, even in the early years, there would be an inevitable imbalance in the amount of English and Japanese input, as exposure to the language of friends and family would be predominantly in the majority language. Also, despite our efforts to iron out gender imbalances, work commitments required that the duties of child rearing mostly fell on the mother and, as such, most parent-child communication would likely be in the majority language. To compensate for this, although wanting to maintain a relationship with our child in her native language, my wife often communicated in the minority language during the early years of infancy. Therefore, ours was not a one parent-one language approach in its purest form, though in spirit we tried to remain as faithful as possible.

The popularity of the one parent-one language approach, and the rationale for why this approach is so attractive to parents raising bilingual children, has been described in Paradowski and Michalowska (2016). In their study of 29 bilingual families, 25 chose to adopt the one parent-one language approach. One respondent in their study mentioned that the adoption of the one parent-one language approach felt the most natural as it allowed both parents to communicate in their native language and thus form a close bond emotionally with their children. We too were attracted to an approach that allowed for natural communication with our child and hence adopted the OPOL strategy that allowed us to use our respective native languages as much as possible.

In our family situation, the result of adhering to this OPOL method was an initially strong tendency by our child to respond with consistency in the language that was being spoken to her. Although in the period from 1–3 years of age there were regular instances of code switching, the relatively balanced input of both languages led to a period where our child developed into a relatively productive bilingual, able to speak and understand both languages, perhaps even with a tendency to be slightly dominant in English. In line with the findings of Paradowski and Michalowska (2016) this was a fairly typical result: ‘As far as the one parent-one language strategy is concerned, out of the 25 families who followed this method the majority (88 per cent) emphasized its usefulness by providing such answers as “so far excellent”, “very useful” or “very effective”’ (p. 56).

Reflecting back on this early period, I consider it to be the easiest on the road to raising a bilingual child. The parent can largely control the environment that a child moves within before they enter pre-school education, such as kindergarten, where language use increasingly becomes influenced by factors outside the basic family unit. In that early period, the majority of our child’s language input came from communication with us as primary care givers, or from media and children’s books chosen by us as parents. Also, seeing our efforts produce bilingual results during this stage was inspiring and rewarding, as I am sure all parents in similar situations have experienced. This early period is often a magical time for parents as they experience the rapid linguistic gains of the child on a daily basis. It is a time when children experiment freely with language, and when parents are filled with wonder about the language their child uses.

Beginning Kindergarten

The influence that our child’s entrance into kindergarten had on her language abilities cannot be understated. With most social interaction during the daytime now being outside the home and involving activities in Japanese, the balance of language input swung heavily to the side of her majority language. Although the change was gradual, we began to notice a marked increase in instances where, despite being spoken to in English, replies were made in Japanese. I continued to communicate in English for reasons of convenience, but more importantly to maintain minority language input in our household. Effectively, however, my communication with my daughter after her entry into kindergarten slowly became a dual-lingual interaction. While every family case has unique circumstances, Nakamura (2017) reports a similar family situation in her recent study of an English-speaking father and his Japanese-speaking daughter. Such studies are not only important contributions to research; they also provide a roadmap for parents about how to deal with such cases. To partially compensate for this increasing dual-language situation, and to maximise

exposure to the minority language, communication between us as parents was also shifted primarily to English, contrary to the 50/50 division we had used prior to our child's birth. We considered this language choice an important part of our strategy, and again our instincts were backed up by Paradowski and Michalowska's findings in this regard. They noted that parental language choice when communicating with each other strongly influenced family communication as a whole. The strategy of

... communicating with each other in the minority language worked to the children's advantage, as it increased their exposure to the minority language and helped balance the dominating influence of the language of the community. (Paradowski and Michalowska, 216, p. 51)

However, as the greater exposure to Japanese at kindergarten led to increasingly significant gains in majority language speaking proficiency, a relationship between mother and child based mostly on majority language use gradually grew stronger and stronger over time. Kamada (1999), in a study of receptive bilingual acquisition, notes of a bilingual mother,

(she) admitted that she often found herself unwilling to let go of communication between her daughters just for the sake of linguistic development when they were better able to express their immediate and important feelings in Japanese instead of the ML (minority language). Kamada (1999, pp. 11–12).

This was also the case in our situation where the mother chose more efficient communication over 'linguistic development'. This should in no way be perceived as a failure in our bilingual process; I can't emphasize enough how important this shift is for a parent and child in terms of communication, and sticking to a bilingual agenda at the expense of what is natural from the perspective of a parent-child relationship can potentially do more harm than good. As parents, we have had no issues with this natural development in our family communication, and if there is anything to be taken from our experience by younger parents seeking advice about raising bilingual children, it is that stubbornly sticking to a single approach can be harmful.

With the exception of the periods that I will explain in the following sections, the production of English at home by our daughter all but ceased to exist. Kavanagh (2013), in his study on raising bilingual haafu children also mentions the effect of entering the Japanese education system, which seemingly confirms that our child's decreased minority language production at home was not an exception. He notes that despite the huge potential that haafu children show in developing their minority language skills in their early years, integration into the Japanese educa-

tion system can result in far fewer situations where the minority language is required. This, in turn, often causes the early promise to fade.

The influence of kindergarten is not exclusive to the Japanese experience. Chumak-Horbatsch's (2008) study on the effects on Canadian migrant children's L1 minority language (ML) after entering childcare, highlight similar results:

The L2 dominance and preference of the pre-schoolers in the present study showed that L2 exposure for young ML children, who do not yet have an established L1 system comes in tandem with serious reduction of L1 experience and use. The young ML child finds herself in a subtractive-replacement process, as L1 deteriorates, L2 *increases steadily* and becomes the dominant language. (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2008, p. 22)

This study speaks to the need to be realistic about the linguistic gains of bilingual children during the early stages at home. While the language development of our daughter, in both Japanese and in English, was quite pronounced and often brought us a sense of great excitement as parents during the early stages, it was nevertheless a time when neither language was fully established, and therefore the resulting shift to the dominant language of Japanese upon entry into kindergarten, was very much in line with the results of the Chumak-Horbatsch study despite the difference in bilingual context.

For two parents who have shared a strong interest in language and language education, this was an admittedly disappointing result at the time. It was mutually agreed, however, that rules enforcing the speaking of English were to be avoided and that the overall wellbeing of our child was more important than attaining the status of being 'bilingual'. We knew of bicultural/bilingual families who had had success making strict rules pertaining to the use of language at home, but chose not to take that course. But we were also increasingly aware, both as parents and through our work as language teachers, that the process of raising a bilingual child was, indeed just that – *a process*. Stages of success and disappointment are natural, and bilingualism is emphasized and de-emphasized as needed according to situation and circumstance as the child-raising journey progresses through to adulthood. Knowing when to take advantage of bilingual opportunities, and when to pull back in terms of expectations, is something parents must be prepared to negotiate.

Trips to Australia

When earlier defining receptive bilingualism, those who 'will not' speak the language was included in the definition. For all intents and purposes, English had become a language that our daughter was unwilling to speak

at home. Having said this, however, it was not at all outside our daughter's capabilities to produce English. Therefore, simply applying a term, such as 'receptive bilingual', may not be accurate for all children as there are degrees of how productive/receptive children are which are dependent on growth phases, circumstance, and comfort. Perhaps then, in the case of our child, it would be more accurate to describe her as a partly receptive bilingual, because although production was not impossible, ability to comprehend her minority language far exceeded her ability to produce it. The production of the minority language was also limited to specific situations.

In an effort to encourage our child to maintain the minority language skills she had acquired, and also to foster stronger relationships with the family members of her minority culture, we made an effort to travel to Australia, my home country, at least once a year. Arnberg (1987) notes that interaction with not only other children who speak the minority language, but also interaction with grandparents and extended family are important factors in developing bilingualism. It is a testament to the active nature of language input in a child that after refusing to produce language at home for almost an entire year, this minority language could be reactivated in a very short period of time during a visit to Australia. What we discovered on our annual trips to Australia was that after an initial 'warming-up' period, our daughter could produce sufficient language to communicate with both adults and children her own age or younger. Although the degree to which she could communicate in English was obviously not at par with the communication level of her peers in Australia (cousins and neighbourhood children), it appeared to be perfectly sufficient for the purpose of play and everyday activities.

It is from this point that the lack of production of the minority language and its reactivation began to swing back and forth and would continue until the present. Slavkov (2012) notes a similar effect of latency and reactivation of his daughter's minority language (Bulgarian) in his case study. Although initially being a balanced productive bilingual, after the introduction of day care, his daughter's production of the father's Bulgarian language slowly decreased until the point where there was no production at all. A ten-day, highly intensive period of exposure to Bulgarian reactivated the child's productive abilities.

For our child, the reason for this annual reactivation of language was obvious: necessity. It is a sad irony that often bilingualism in a parent can lead to reduced language abilities in the child. Kamada (1999) notes in her study on receptive bilingualism that,

... another factor found to correlate with minimization of ML (English) input was the bilinguality...of a parent. A child from such a family was found to be at greater risk of not acquiring productive bilinguality com-

pared to a child of a monolingual ML speaker. Why would having a bilingual parent tend to inhibit the child from developing productive bilinguality?...Children understand the degree of their parent's linguistic abilities and respond accordingly (Kamada, 1999, pp. 10–11).

Being a relatively proficient speaker of Japanese, our child had determined that my Japanese language skills were sufficient enough to not warrant her speaking English. Family and friends in Australia, however, with no Japanese ability, required the production of the minority language that was not necessary at home in Japan.

This ability to reactivate language after long periods of supposed dormancy highlight that even when language is not produced over time, some language development still occurs. Kamada (1999) chooses the term 'receptive bilingualism' over the more commonly used 'passive bilingualism' for this reason. She refers to 'the dynamic state of the developing inter-language in which the subject actively receives input' (p. 4). According to Kamada, the active process that occurs when receiving language input renders terms such as 'passive' inaccurate. Indeed, labels can be problematic. I prefer the term 'receptive bilingual' to 'passive bilingual' although they are often used interchangeably. For me *receptive* implies more active processing of language than does *passive*.

It can also be noted that once our daughter's ability to produce the minority language had been reactivated, even after returning to Japan, it would take several weeks before English was no longer deemed a necessity. These 'cooling down' periods grew shorter as she progressed through elementary school. Something important to note here, is that it has gradually become clear to us that our desire to raise a child to be bilingual far exceeded our child's desire to be fluent in a second language. She was content to get by with the bare minimum necessary to communicate with friends and family in Australia. Whilst this was discouraging, if there was still minority language input at home, we felt there was still hope for progress, or at the very least, maintenance of her English language abilities. We are hopeful, and there is evidence to support this, that even if our daughter continues to grow up here in rural Japan as a passive/receptive bilingual, she will still be able to convert her receptive skills into productive skills should opportunity and circumstance allow for this. Therefore, we have come to feel that her unwillingness to speak English at home would not necessarily condemn our daughter to a life of receptive bilingualism. We agree as parents that this is a healthier way to think about our daughter's overall bilingual journey rather than to view her limited or dormant bilinguality from the perspective of disappointment or discouragement.

Bilingualism/Biculturalism: Positive or Negative?

As mentioned earlier, the necessity of our child's minority language determined whether or not the language was actively produced. Rural Japan does not lend itself to an abundance of English speaking situations where minority languages can be used outside the family. Nor does it provide much of a multicultural experience. Despite efforts that have been made with regards to English education, Japan essentially remains a monolingual and monocultural society, so the need to actively produce the minority language has remained virtually absent from everyday life here. This leads to the question of whether bilingualism and biculturalism in a child, receptive though this bilingualism may be, has positive or negative effects. Negative experiences as a result of being the haafu child of an international marriage in Japan do exist. In her study of six mixed-race adolescent girls, Kamada (2010) documents both the marginalized and privileged aspects of the girls' identity. She observes that the girls are as likely to be singled out for their ethnic 'otherness' as they are to take advantage of the global aspects of their dual identity.

While it is certainly the case that in many parts of the world bilingualism is the norm and monolingualism may even be considered an increasing oddity, that is simply not the case in Japan in spite of its internationalization goals. Still, there is a certain cachet in being able to speak English in Japan, even in the rural areas. We therefore consider ourselves fortunate to be raising our child to speak a high-profile language like English as the minority language. Morita (2010) refers to English as

... a prestigious minority language, due to its status as a language of international communication and business.... Proficiency in the language is highly esteemed in many sections of society and education. (Morita, 2010, cited online)

Yet, despite this, a sense of embarrassment or shame of a bilingual status is often felt by haafu children. Instances where haafu children have expressed embarrassment when being spoken to in English in front of their friends are noted by Kavanagh (2013):

Some fathers of half children have recited stories of their children playing down their English ability in English class or pleading with their fathers not to speak English with them in front of their friends, as it is embarrassing. (Kavanagh, 2013, cited online).

The reason given for such embarrassment is the desire to assimilate; to not stand out from one's peers. This embarrassment does not appear to have been shared by our daughter, at least until the present stage of late prima-

ry school. To the contrary, there have been occasions when our daughter has deliberately chosen to switch to her minority language in front of her peers, despite the fact that this contrasts with the language she would usually produce when communicating with her parents. This would seem to indicate, if anything, a certain pride in her bilingual abilities rather than shame. It is perhaps the status of English as a 'highly esteemed' language that is responsible for this pride. It also serves to highlight the extremely individual nature of bicultural identity and attitudes towards minority languages.

Despite this perceived pride our daughter has of her bilingual/bicultural status, the experience has not always been a completely positive one. There are unwanted expectations that are connected with her bicultural identity and one of these is the expectation of fluency in her minority language. Since 2008, English education has been introduced into Japanese elementary schools as part of the curriculum for all Grade 5 and Grade 6 children. Having begun Grade 5 this year, my daughter is also required to take English classes. The class is taught by a monolingual native English speaker and the Japanese homeroom teacher, who has limited English abilities. When communication breaks down in the class, our daughter is regularly called upon to resolve the break down. Her language skills are often not sufficient for the task and she has expressed feeling great pressure with the expectation that she is fluent in English and able to understand and communicate everything. This situation highlights the myth that bicultural children are necessarily fully bilingual.

Attendance at an Australian Primary School

It was a pleasant surprise when our child recently expressed a desire to attend primary school in Australia for a month with her cousins. The reasons behind this decision are important as they divulge the motivating factors of an otherwise linguistically unambitious child to improve her language skills and hence identify more closely with the minority language and culture. The reasons were threefold: 1.) A desire to emulate an older haafu friend, who had chosen to attend primary school in her father's home country, 2.) Increased confidence after making friends using English on a recent overseas trip (not Australia), and 3.) the realization that she was the only member of her class in Japan, or indeed in her whole school, for whom this opportunity was available and a desire to make use of this opportunity.

Of the above reasons, the first reason was the strongest motivation and also the most important. As mentioned previously, there are some haafu children who, in an effort to assimilate, deny their bicultural/bilingual identity and feel it is a cause of embarrassment. In complete contrast to this, our daughter observed an older haafu child, with strong produc-

tive bilingual abilities and aspired to be like her. This would seem to be further evidence of not only a lack of embarrassment of the dual nature of her identity, but instead a feeling of pride. The other two reasons (to study abroad) stem from a growing self-confidence that could be seen as the result of positive identification with the minority language and culture.

The results from spending an entire month in the classroom and on the playground with peers, whose common language was English, were extremely positive. Previous trips had been much shorter and had involved far more time together with her immediate family, which allowed for more communication in Japanese. Whilst the value of this experience on our daughter's language was evident, the cultural value cannot be ignored either. Many of the students in her Australian primary school class were from non-English speaking backgrounds, opening her up to the multicultural make-up of urban Australia. The style of education also differed greatly from what she was used to in Japan. Being 10 years old, she was at an age where she could critically compare and analyse both methods of education and make conclusions regarding which was preferable to her. Having her eyes opened to the myth of 'white Australia' and being exposed to a model of education that differs greatly from that of her 'home' country were surely precious experiences that were rarely available to her monolingual peers in rural Japan.

Also, being accepted into this group of peers in Australia would undoubtedly have had a major influence on how she identifies ethnically and would therefore have had a great influence on her motivation to speak her minority language. Baker (2007) claims that a child begins their ethnic identity at around three to five years old and that a positive ethnic identity leads to greater motivation to learn the second language. By forming close relationships with other children at the school and being involved in a variety of class activities which she viewed favourably, her value of the culture that she was experiencing increased considerably. This, in turn, influenced her acceptance of her minority language. Although the sheer volume of the exposure to English undoubtedly had a great effect, this acceptance also played an important role.

Minority Language Literacy

The advantages of bilingualism discussed at the beginning of this chapter are intimately entwined with biliteracy. The cognitive and cultural benefits of bilingualism are likely to be enhanced with biliteracy, as are chances of employment and achievement (Baker, 2000). Therefore, in our efforts to raise a bilingual child, literacy skills have also been a strong consideration. Through a process of teaching phonics at home and then reading picture books that highlight the target phonics, a basic level of reading competency was achieved. However, although we attempted the simulta-

neous acquisition model, where minority and majority literacy skills were taught together, Japanese skills inevitably progressed faster as our child began school. An introduction to an online collection of picture books with a gentle learning gradient gave us access to reading material of an appropriate level, but low motivation made progress slow. Yet, as with oral/aural skills, motivation for reading in English increased considerably after the primary school experience in Australia. Quiet reading time of self-selected books was an everyday activity at the school, which greatly increased our child's desire to read. Again, the practical application of learned language skills with peers seems to have elevated the value of these skills and hence had an additive effect upon learning. This increased motivation to continue reading in English has continued until the present.

Concluding Reflections

Until the beginning of kindergarten, our method was successful in raising a balanced, productive bilingual child. Therefore, at that stage of our daughter's development we were quite satisfied with the results. Yet after beginning kindergarten, a gradual decline in the production of English occurred. Was this decline due to our parental management, or our lack of management? We know of a family situation where parents refused to acknowledge their child's utterances unless they were in the minority language. Should we have done this? Each approach to establishing a bilingual home is different and each child reacts in their own individual way to the home environment they find themselves in. After the success of our daughter's experiences at elementary school in Australia, should we regret not forcing her to attend school (in Australia) earlier when there was less self-motivation? These are difficult questions to answer but linguistic development is only one facet of raising a child and, considering the fact that many of us achieve bilingualism when we start learning as adults, maybe too much focus on bilingual language skills is just not the most important.

In reflection, as parents, our initial ideas on bilingualism were perhaps tainted with a degree of naivety and overenthusiasm. Individualism and personality perhaps play a larger part on language acquisition than we had initially thought. Yet our journey to raise a bilingual child has had as many successes as it has 'failures'. Something that has become obvious is that neither cultural identity nor language ability remains static. When needed, language skills that seemed dormant can be reactivated and although the current form of our daughter's bilingualism falls short of our original ideal, what we have achieved is a means of communicating within the family using language that is satisfactory and comfortable to us, and an apparent acceptance of our respective and evolving cultural identities.

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Section II
Family Portraits:
Learning Through Shared Stories

6

Confidently Raising the Confident Bilingual

Elizabeth Stigger

SOMEONE ONCE TOLD me, after I had been in Japan a few years, that foreign men and foreign women come to Japan for different reasons. They said that men come because they fell in love with the country before they came, and later found love in the country, and women come because they fell in love with someone, and then came to the country. While this is arguably not true for everybody and certainly is not based on any academic reasoning, it does explain in part, why I came to Japan. I met my husband at university in Canada, before we traveled to Thailand so that he could pursue his PhD research. While we were in Thailand, his mother fell ill and I got my first experience of what it meant to be a *chonan's* wife, the wife of the eldest and in our case, only son. Despite the fact that he had two younger sisters, both of whom were unemployed at the time, my husband and I were the first ones called upon, and to arrive, to help my mother-in-law die. When she did die two months later, it was the *chonan's* duty to stay and care for his father.

This was my introduction to Japan. It was my introduction to rural and patriarchal Japan. When my mother-in-law died, I was three months pregnant with our first child. We had planned this pregnancy. My husband had begun the writing of his thesis research, and we planned to stay in Thailand until the last possible moment before coming to Japan to give birth. We had decided that we wanted to have the baby somewhere where at least one of us understood the language in case there were problems. Then we would go back to Canada where, in our dream scenario, my husband would defend his thesis and we would make our home.

This background information is important because it shapes how our life in Japan has developed ever since. After my mother-in-law died, we stayed the seven weeks of mourning, so as to ensure that her spirit would

go to heaven and not follow us back to Thailand. Then we returned to Thailand so that my husband could finish any loose ends in his research before we had to return to Japan to have the baby. We arrived back in Japan just ten days before our eldest daughter was born. When we came to Japan, I knew nothing of Japanese culture, except for death rituals, nothing of the Japanese language, and I had no friends. But I had a beautiful baby girl. For me this meant two things. First, I had to accept the challenges that our situation presented us, but more importantly I had to learn to be confident so that I could teach that confidence to my own children. Being confident is an important factor of raising children, but perhaps of greater importance when raising a child of mixed heritage in rural Japan.

Raising the Bilingual Child

Bilingualism has always interested me. Growing up in Vancouver, Canada, I had had many friends whose parents or grandparents did not speak English. Some of my friends and their parents could talk *at* each other but not *with* each other. My Chinese, Vietnamese or Polish friends had a passive ability to speak their parents' language and their parents had a passive ability to speak English. Each could basically understand what the other was saying, but could not reply in that language. I did not want to have a similar situation with my own children. I did not want to feel like they did not fully understand me, nor that we could not have complicated discussions. I knew that if my children were to be able to use English to the same extent that they used Japanese, it was important to not treat the two languages as different, in terms of situation or people. I also felt it was important to have the same expectations of them in both languages. Raising my children as bilinguals was never seen as a daunting task, despite the fact that I did not speak Japanese, aside from the few medical terms I picked up while my mother-in-law was dying. Ensuring that our children could speak both English and Japanese, was not only my own responsibility, it needed, and still does need, the support of both their bilingual father and their monolingual grandfather.

The Bilingual

The bilingual not only has the ability to produce and process more than one language, but also has the ability to choose which language to do this in. Along the stricter end of the bilingual definition continuum, not only does the bilingual have near equivalent skills in each of their languages but they also regularly use both their languages. From my friends' language experiences, I understood that bilinguals use their languages in different domains, and their cognitive processing skills varied accordingly. Sometimes my friends simply could not explain a cultural tradition of

their parents, because there were no direct translations for the tradition in English. There was always a sense of uneasiness in these situations. I realize now, many years later, that my friends were most likely experiencing a conundrum in their bilingual-bicultural existence. They understood their parent's cultural traditions, but as they only had a passive ability in their parent's language they could not have intricate conversations with their parents about their cultural traditions. Yet at the same time, because they had never had those discussions with their parents, they also could not extensively talk about their ancestral cultural traditions to others in English. This, I know now, is part of a displaced identity (Duff, 2002). My friends at a very young age were geographically displaced and were newcomers to English Canada, where adapting to using English outside of the home, and particularly in school, was never questioned; yet to bring English into the home was.

The ability to cognitively process their language skills means that bilinguals not only have a degree of communicative competence, but also have knowledge of how to use language according to the cultural context the speaker is in. Accordingly, it is not only language that bilingual children are acquiring but also a cultural awareness which feeds into how they use both languages in similar situations. Language use within any cultural environment is comprised of shared experiences and assumptions, therefore biculturalism is an unequivocal component of bilingualism. Yet, in a country like Japan, where what it means to be Japanese is set against predetermined characteristics which are defined by ethnicity and language use, how can the biracial child, who does not 'look' Japanese gain confidence and self-acceptance in who they are? Over the years, I have come to realize that this requires not only encouraging the bilingual child to acknowledge that they are different from others, but also that everyone has their own unique qualities, even their monolingual Japanese friends and teachers.

As a parent, it is important to realize that the language skills and how bilinguals use either of their languages vary. Most bilinguals have a preferred language, which is usually the language that they feel most comfortable using depending on a particular situation, but this is often connected to the language which they feel they are more competent in. What we must recognize is that each of our children is different, and as they enter different situations, the situation will influence what language they use. Yet, in the initial process of acquiring languages, most bilingual children, who learn both their languages simultaneously as two mother-tongues, learn a language in a remarkably similar manner to a monolingual child. Any parent with a toddler excitedly anticipates their child's first words; waiting for the babble to turn in to comprehensible dialogue. The parents of a child growing up in a bilingual household are no less excited. When something what sounds like a first word springs out of the

bilingual child's mouth, parents anxiously attempt to attach meaning to it. Meaning is the essence of conversing with others. When the bilingual child first begins to talk, parents are not only searching for meaning, but also are having to search through two languages to make that meaning comprehensible.

Enabling Input

At the time when my eldest daughter was born we were living in rural northern Okinawa, and I did not know any other English-speaking people, except for my husband. I soon found that while our daughter was cute, she definitely lacked conversation skills. I also found that my own conversation skills when talking to my baby were limited. I found that, on countless occasions, I was repeating the same comments on the 'big, blue, beautiful sky' or the 'trill of the birds singing their song' to her. Not only was it intensely boring for me (and perhaps for the baby too), but I also realized that the vocabulary I was using was limited. My daughter certainly was not going to gain a native proficiency in English with the language exposure that I was offering her. It was at this point that I realized, that just having me as her mother, talking to her in English was not going to enable my baby to become bilingual. I did not want to impose a regimental structure towards language exposure. However, I also realized that a haphazard approach to her English exposure was not going to be so successful, and I was in risk of putting myself in the same situation that my friends have with their parents, never fully being able to interact using common language, and thus always slightly wondering if the other understood what was being said.

In a house where two adults were monolingual (grandfather and myself), and one was bilingual (father), but more importantly in a community where there were no other native English speakers how could I ensure that my baby would develop a native-like proficiency in both her languages? I cannot honestly say that I sat down and thought of a compelling plan of how to help my baby acquire both Japanese and English. What seemed logical to me back then was for grandfather to speak only in Japanese and me only in English because that was where our language proficiencies lay, and for my husband to use both languages, depending on context, with the baby. At that time, we did not situate language: Japanese outside the house and English inside. It did not seem realistic or possible, given that neither grandfather nor I could speak the other's language. What was of importance was that because my husband could speak both languages, that he did. It was important for the baby to understand that it is natural and possible for someone to speak more than one language. Language usage in our household naturally became very situational. The situation the

baby was in, depending on the adults present, determined the language used in the first couple of years of her life.

Given that we lived in rural Japan, exposure to Japanese quickly outweighed exposure to English. Since I was the primary source of English exposure, it became necessary for me to consider how I could make that exposure of quality, and not just incessant babbling about what we saw and heard when walking outside or when playing inside. It meant that I had to consciously think about ways that I should be introducing English to my children.

I found exposure in part through reading. Reading has always been an important part of my life. As a child, I loved the rhythmic tone of my father's voice when he read me bedtime stories, and as I grew older I cherished the imagined adventures that reading extended to me. While researchers interested in child development might exhort the benefits of reading to young children, in the raising of bilingual children, just as in the language classroom, reading exposes our children to a wider range of vocabulary. This was of extreme importance to me, as reading not only encouraged a developmental bond with my children, but also exposed them to a wider range of vocabulary and language usage than I would have presented through conversation alone. My eldest daughter's first word was 'glub'. It was from her favorite book, a peek-a-boo themed story with some of the characters from Sesame Street. Ernie was scuba diving, hiding with the fish who say 'glub, glub, glub.'

When my children were very young, and I was on maternity leave, we would have story time several times a day. Later, when I returned to work, the children very rarely went to bed without a bedtime story. Initially reading to my children was something I thought a parent should do. However, as my children got older, the stories we read became more complex. I realized that reading longer novels exposed my children to concepts that they might not experience in Japan, but also allowed me to present my culture to them. Reading provided a different base for questioning and conversing with each other, as well as providing a springboard for that magical imaginative escape. I am lucky my children have inherited my love for reading. It was a sad moment for me when my youngest daughter was in grade three and announced that she was too big for a bedtime story, and she could read a Japanese book on her own. I know, however, that the adventures we had through books did lay down the foundations for her and her siblings' English language development.

While reading to my children was engaging, it would not suffice as the only source of English language exposure. In Japan, English books can be expensive, and often in rural Japan, they are not sold in book shops. Furthermore, while books allow children to imagine different worlds, the different worlds that they can imagine are also limited by their experiences. In addition to reading, watching movies or television provided both

linguistic exposure and an opportunity to identify with a different type of imagined world. Before my eldest daughter entered grade 1, we only watched English television. There were several bilingual children's programs on NHK. We would sit and watch them together. If my children had questions about the show, I would answer them. However, mostly I would listen for phrases or idioms that I did not think my children would understand and I would ask them what they thought the language meant from the context of the program.

As there were very few other English speakers in our area, I felt that English language exposure through watching television was important for my children. However, I had to remind myself that from my children's point of view, the television show was a chance to relax, it was entertainment, not a time to explicitly study English. Yet the act of sitting with my children to watch television programs or movies, and also incorporating language and content from the programs into discussions can create and maintain dialogue. There is another important function of watching movies and television programs together. The characters in the programs become role models for how conversations occur in English. Discourse is more than just words; it also incorporates body movements, eye contact and guttural sounds. Children learn these non-verbal language functions through interaction with others, but in a situation where there are almost no other role models for English conversation, watching television or a movie may be an inferior but acceptable substitute. As the monolingual parent, and especially when the language you speak is not spoken by the majority in your area, it is important to not only create channels for communication with your bilingual child but to maintain those lines. Otherwise it is too easy to fall into a pattern where the parent asks complex questions and receives monosyllable responses from the child.

Understanding Bilingualism

It was not until I started my master's degree that I realized that there were many technical terms for what it means to be bilingual and the type of bilingual. I learnt that language, as a cognitive tool, is an integral part of the psychological system in which the uses and representations of language are created and distributed. It follows that language use will vary according to relationship constraints between the speaker and the environment around the speaker, and this will also influence how a bilingual differentiates between their languages. This knowledge gave me confidence and understanding of how my children were gaining their linguistic abilities. When my eldest daughter was first learning to speak, I was often disturbed when she switched from talking to me to talking to her grandfather. She would offer me some 'fish' and then politely ask her grandfather if he would like some '*fishu*'. While she, at the tender age of two, had not

yet fully made the distinction between her two languages she was very much aware that pronunciation was different. What I needed to be aware of was that she was still sorting her linguistic codes, and that she would eventually be able to do so competently.

From a Chomskyeian stance, language differentiation is an issue of the bilingual's underlying competence. A child who learns both languages simultaneously may understand its two languages as separate organs within their mind (Genesee, 2006); each language has its own channel. Furthermore, from the Chomskyeian stance, bilingualism does not influence thought. This differs from the Whorfian hypothesis, which states that language determines thought and that the structural diversity of language is limitless. This position implies, that as language determines thought, speakers of different languages will have different thought patterns. The strong version of the Whorfian hypothesis, which states that the limits of our thoughts are rigidly determined by linguistic boundaries and therefore knowledge is encoded only in our language and not imaginable outside of language, is rejected by most linguists (Edwards, 2006). However, a weaker version of the Whorfian hypothesis may be acceptable when limited to the notion that language is a predisposition for thought. Here, a bilingual, when thinking in one language but speaking in the other, may utilize that language differently than if they were to speak in the same language that they were thinking in. This weaker version of the Whorfian hypothesis gains importance when considering the basis of the Japanese ideals of *kotodama*. *Kotodama* is the Japanese language spirit, and this can become tarnished and damaged through exposure to other cultures, thoughts and languages. This notion of *kotodama* is of importance in Japan when considering that a bilingual has the ability to not only speak in both languages but also to think in both languages.

People in our community have not always been supportive of the fact that my children are bilingual. This idea of *kotodama* is perhaps what makes other people wary of them. Others may feel threatened by the fact that my bilingual children may think differently and they may question whether or not my children's Japanese spirit, *yamato damashii* has developed. I did not realize it at the time, but when performing rituals for the family altar, I encouraged grandfather to explain what we were doing for the children. I also encouraged my husband to explain these rituals in English, not only so that the children could understand them in English, but so that I could too. This way we could all be a part of the experience. In these actions, we were building how our bilingual children use both languages. It cannot be argued that the bilingual may find it easier or more difficult to recall or draw certain distinctions depending upon the language they employ. However, as parents we can help our children expand their language use through the experiences we share with them. Both the Chomskyeian and Whorfian stances towards bilingualism

demonstrate that within a bilingual there is duality in terms of having two different thought processes. These thought processes are realized in the production of each of the bilingual's languages. As parents of bilingual children growing up in a predominately monolingual environment, we have to provide both the bicultural and bilingual opportunities for our children to develop both their language repertoires.

I have to question however, aside from the research value, to what degree does understanding how a bilingual child acquire their two languages simultaneously influence how the parent interacts linguistically with their child? In our household, specific adults were role models for language use. Watching my children when they were young attempting to interact with their grandfather in English, and his blank expression because he clearly had no clue what they were trying to tell him, I saw the children pause for a moment and try again in other words, in another language. I eventually saw that if I too, purposely gave a blank expression when my children spoke Japanese to me, that they would try again in English. This does sound rather cruel, but you have to remember that at that time I knew about as much Japanese as my young children. However, I did not begin to use blank expressions until I knew that my children had the ability to say the same thing in English. Sometimes I would prompt them by saying something along the lines of, 'You were saying something about a *kuma*, a bear, in Japanese. I'm sorry but I did not quite get the rest.' I did not want to seem unwilling to my children, but I also wanted them to use their English with me. It is impossible to fully understand if young bilingual children learning both languages simultaneously code each lexicon separately, or if the separate codes are mixed into one (Genesee, 2006). However, I found that by allowing my children time to stop and think about the words they were using and whom they were talking to, that as they gained their own language confidence they were also learning to process their different language codes. I needed to give my children room to learn to take command of their language abilities.

Code-switching

The skill of code-switching is developmental. Bilingual children often use a combination of their two codes in their speech, and early mixing of both their languages is different not only formally, but also functionally from code-switching. Unlike code-switching, mixing violates the syntactic and pragmatic constraints on code-switching as it contains features from both codes in use. Children stop mixing when they become what is referred to as functionally bilingual, or balanced bilinguals. At this stage, the bilingual has the ability to understand and communicate in either code in a wide range of interactions as well as translate between codes. Learning to code-switch is part of the process of growing up bilingual; and is an

additional skill that is acquired as children gain an understanding of the grammatical constraints on both their codes. Bain & Yu (2000) note that some sociolinguists believe that this does not properly begin until children develop a social consciousness, which they state is an integral part of code-switching.

Children's code-switching, therefore, is connected with their command of both languages. Children usually start code-switching single words and these are commonly nouns. However, as a parent, in public, code-switching was also a necessary part of survival. I found this especially true if the children and I were at the park or a beach. Code-switching allowed others to understand why I as a parent might be speaking harshly. For example, it always amazed me how my young children would find garbage and believe that this was a prized treasure. Instead of only yelling 'don't touch that!' and having other mothers stare at the crazy foreign mother, adding an explanation such as '*kore wa peipei desu*' (it's dirty) or more simply '*abunai*' (it's dangerous), would give some clue to others why I was upset. My children quickly learnt this trick in their own terms when we were in public. When they wanted something, they would attempt to get sympathy from others by adding a couple of Japanese words. However, this was a developmental process. It took them a while to figure out that saying 'candy *hoshi*' (want) was not likely to get them what they wanted. But, if they said 'my tummy is *akimashita*' (hungry) then they were more likely to get a treat. These code-switches therefore became social functions to benefit our individual needs.

Code-switching accordingly involves a balance in comprehension and production, as well as serving social functions of discourse. However, as parents of bilingual children, my husband and I quickly found that our children were adept at using code-switching to avoid getting in trouble. This is where both partners being onboard with acceptable and non-acceptable behavior is of great importance. While in certain situations parents might adopt the roles of good-cop/bad-cop in their child rearing, as parents of bilingual children it is important that the child understand that, within their family, whatever the bad deed done was, they are in trouble no matter the language used. We all use our language knowledge to present our ill behavior in the best possible light. Bilingual children also have the benefit of a bicultural knowledge, and when combined with language, they can use this to their advantage when they have been caught misbehaving. As parents, it is important that we teach our children that our values are our household values, and that these values transcend language use.

Encouraging Your Child to Talk

As noted above, there has been a great deal of research on young bilingual children's language acquisition (Edwards, 2006; Genesee, 2006). While it is not universally accepted, assessing the level of mixing and code-switching in a young bilingual's speech is a common method to measure their linguistic competence. This method is often used as evidence that a young bilingual's two linguistic systems are not yet separated, and are still one system. However, one has to question if this is really the case. I distinctly remember going to one of the 'Well baby checkups' held by our town's health division with my young son. It must have been around the time he was eighteen months old, as the nurse was assessing not only his dexterity but also his level of comprehension. He had no problem building towers or holding blocks, but when it came to the language assessment we encountered problems. The nurse asked him to perform an action, she told him to *kurappu* (clap), and he would not do it. It is not that he could not do it, but it was an action that no one had asked him to do in Japanese pronunciation of an English word before. At that time, I worked two days a week, and for those two days only, both children went to daycare. The people he played the most with were his elder sister and me, and we played in English. However, my son from a very young age, and even now, has always made a distinction between his two languages. English was English, just as Japanese was Japanese. An English word such as 'clap' pronounced as a Japanese word *kurappu* would not register with him. This however, illustrates a lack of understanding by the wider community of a bilingual child's development. If the nurse had said *hakushu* or *pachi pachi* instead of *kurappu*, I am sure that my son would have clapped. The nurse was disappointed by my son's willingness to interact with her in her usage of English. She clearly did not understand that at his stage of language development, and also at the young age of eighteen months, my son had not progressed to a stage where he was able to make a conceptual leap in comprehending others who could not speak English without a very heavy accent. The nurse did not realize that just as the Japanese person often is unable to understand the foreigner's clumsy attempts at Japanese, an English speaker may not always understand the clumsy attempts of the Japanese speaker's English, particularly if the receiving person is only eighteen months old. The rebuffed nurse gave my son a very low score on his (Japanese) language ability, and warned me that on the next check-up if there was little improvement in his comprehension, it could be an indication of a learning problem that would require further actions. It was during this experience that I first fully acknowledged that there were distinct differences between what type of English or Japanese was acceptable usage by foreign speakers of either language in the wider community outside of our home, and that these distinctions were not always favora-

ble or just. Yet, more importantly it made me realize that in the home, we had to be forgiving. Language learning and use involves relationships. If I did not build a relationship of trust and patience with my children then I would not be building a linguistic atmosphere where they felt comfortable testing out their language and ultimately, I would be inhibiting how they developed bilingually.

Allowing my children to feel comfortable with their language use meant allowing them to mix the languages, as well encouraging them to talk. Through allowing our bilingual children to explore both their languages we are also increasing their opportunities to explore how they understand both of their languages. Thus, as parents, we may find that we are not only teaching our children their other language, but that we are also teaching them about their other culture. Language and culture influence each other, and combined influence how our children develop their identities.

Accepting Identity

My youngest child is just about to enter her teen years now, and the older two are nearing the end of high school. In figuring out who they are, my children like to play different identity cards. Sometimes they are Japanese, other times they are foreign. Sometimes they, like any other teenager in the world, want to pretend that all their problems are because of their parents. Sometimes I want to yell, 'You are not half. You are Eurasian. What about me? I've got a French grandmother and a British grandfather on the one side, and an Irish grandmother and a Russian grandfather on the other side – I'm a mutt. So what are you?' Sometimes my children like to tell me that I'm not Japanese enough, to which I retort, 'How can I be with this face?' However, the fact that they feel free enough to talk to me, even in this way, means that they do have a sense of their identity. They know who they are, yet they are just trying to figure out how to present themselves to the world. This is a normal developmental stage for anyone, not just the bilingual, bicultural child in Japan. And, like any other child, my children are seeking acceptance, not only from their peer group, but also from me, as their parent. This is why ensuring that there is always an open line for discourse is so important.

Discourse is culturally specific and distinctive, and can create positive or negative feelings of social identity and community membership. The valorization of a language is dependent upon the bilingual's social environment, and this is influential to the bilingual's social and cultural identities as well as to the degree of competence attained in both languages. Living in Japan children are taught the *yamato damashii*, the Japanese spirit, and the *kotodama*, the Japanese language spirit. Yet, while parents of bilinguals might do all we can to help our children blend in, Japanese

society, particularly rural society, is not always that forgiving of differences. Often the positive socio-cultural reinforcement that can aid the bilingual in attaining higher degrees of competence in both languages does not exist in such contexts. When they were young, my children and I would walk to school together. Often in mid-sentence they would stop talking to me. This was not because they were thinking or searching for a word, but because they realized that another child from their school was in earshot of our conversation. My children did not want other children hearing them speak in English to me. For a while I tried to persist with our conversation, but my children flatly refused to talk back if others were around. I also found that my persistence to try and talk to them as we walked to school resulted in less willingness to talk to me at home. Clearly, I had a choice, I could battle my children to speak to me in English outside of the home, or I could appreciate the times that they were willing to speak with others or me in English. I had to accept that the way English has been valorized in Japan not only reinforces the bilingual's skills in both languages, it also influences how the bilingual identifies with their being Japanese.

In Japan, the bilingual is often seen as *mezurashii*, as unusual or different. Japanese society places great value on group conformity and group acceptance. This means that as parents of bilinguals, we have to understand how our children navigate between the shortcomings and strengths of both their cultural and linguistic identities. To force my children to talk to me only in English, especially when in public, would have been tantamount to not allowing them to positively identify with both their cultural groups in a way that they felt was beneficial for them. If as parents we cause our bilingual children distress when using the lesser socially spoken language, we are also setting up the situation where children may reject the language. They may experience *anomie*. When applied to the bilingual, Durkheim's term, *anomie*, refers to feelings of rootlessness, social isolation, and personal disorientation (Edwards, 2006, p. 15). *Anomie* may occur when a simultaneous bilingual's two languages have cultural norms that are highly differentiated. It is also possible that the bilingual may not be accepted by other members in their speech community as a native-speaker or a part of either of the bilingual's two cultures. If I had forced my children to talk to me in English while we walked to school, this would have further given other children reason to not see my children as Japanese.

I, as the parent who speaks the other language, have had to accept the fact that in order for my bilingual children to positively accept their bilingualism, they needed time to successfully integrate their two cultures into a single and unique identity. This means that as a parent, I have to be confident in my own ability to teach my children about my culture and to talk to them in English. However, I also have had to allow my children

the space that they needed to explore their other culture and language, and give them the space to decide the way that they would use either language. As the parent of bilingual children, I see it as my duty to lay down strong foundations for their language development. This foundation comes through using our family situation to let language develop and by incorporating English use through reading books and watching television or movies together. Once my children started school, it also meant allowing them the room to decide how they would use both languages. There was never anything but the expectation and the confidence that my children would use both languages, but to do this successfully meant that my children had to be given the room to explore how they would use both their languages. To my children this room equated to a confirmation of trust in who they are, and that they are indeed bilingual.

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7

Promoting Minority Language Development: Personal Choices, Parental Intuition, and Plenty of Picture Books

Jack Ryan

Background

MY WIFE AKIKO and I were married in July 2011 and our first daughter M was born in August 2012 and, as of this writing, is four and a half years old. Our second daughter, A, was born in March 2015 and is now just a little under two years old. As A is still too young to be producing large amounts of language (at least in her minority language) I will not refer much to her linguistic development. Also, as any parent of more than one child knows, the environment for later children is usually significantly different from the first. The amount of time devoted to the second child in the first few years (barring any special needs he or she may have) is almost certain to be less than the first child so the language environments for M and A, while similar in significant ways, are also different. Having said that, discussion of our language philosophy and parenting philosophy obviously applies to both children.

While my wife and I have always planned to live permanently in Japan, before M was born, we never had any serious discussions of the language environment we wanted to create for our children. I have lived in Japan for about fifteen years and, while Akiko speaks quite good English, we have communicated in Japanese since we met.

We live in Kosai City on the western border of Shizuoka prefecture. Kosai is a city of about 60,000 and has a significant population of Japanese-Brazilians and Japanese-Peruvians but a negligible native Eng-

lish-speaking community. As such, the opportunities for our daughters to hear and speak English with people other than their father are limited. Living in an area with limited opportunities to interact with other English-speaking children means we have to be pro-active if we want to be able to provide our daughters with enough input to facilitate the acquisition of their minority language. Before our daughters were born, I was vaguely aware of the rough 30% benchmark of minority language input as mentioned by Pearson (2008) and I also was aware that the quality of the input, not only the quantity, would be important. This knowledge, combined with living where we do, has steeled me to the realization that I will always have my work cut out for me in terms of imparting English to my daughters.

Initial Steps

Because my wife and I have generally spoken Japanese to each other, I remember actually feeling uncomfortable speaking English to a mostly unresponsive M for the first months of her life. Although I eventually got over that discomfort, to this day, I do still occasionally feel slightly self-conscious speaking English to M in a public place with other parents and children around. M is getting old enough to notice how she is different from almost all of her peers and I wonder how this realization is affecting her and will affect her going forward. Of course, I do continue speaking English in these situations. I mention it more as a reflection of how I feel self-conscious and must also adapt to being in a bicultural and bilingual family in Japan. My speaking English in public does sometimes lead to an interesting phenomenon I expect others in similar situations have also encountered; when Japanese parents hear me speaking English to M they sometimes spontaneously start speaking English to their own children. I am sure I am not the first or only person who has experienced this phenomenon.

Part of what helped me get over my initial discomfort at speaking exclusively English to an initially completely passive infant was some good counsel from a friend living in another rural part of Japan. When M was born I canvassed friends and acquaintances for advice on anything and everything about language policy and environment and child-rearing in general. One of the best, most commonsensical, pieces of advice I received was to spend as much time as possible speaking English to and interacting with my daughter as that would most often be the only English input she received. This intuitive advice may seem self-evident, but for a nervous new parent who is somewhat quiet by nature it was useful to have it articulated and to be overtly reminded how important my English input would be. Kamada (1997) has found that, 'The chances of the child attaining bilinguality (*are*) generally much greater' if the minority lan-

guage parent is the mother. Knowing this also helped prepare me to start making a real effort to talk a lot more than I had long been used to doing.

When M was born, and as part of the language environment we hoped to create, Akiko and I consciously learned some sign language and signed to M until she turned about two years old. M learned about twenty or so signs and we remember the great pleasure of being able to communicate with her via sign language before she began producing speech. She was, as might be expected of a baby, particularly good at signing things such as 'more', 'like', 'milk' and 'good'. At the time, in addition to being fun, we were half hoping that it might help her cognitive or linguistic development. However, Kirk et al. (2012), in a rigorously controlled study found that signing to babies had essentially no effect on the language development of children with normal language abilities. The study did suggest that parents/caregivers who signed to their babies were more responsive to their child's nonverbal cues. This rings true to both my wife and I as we do feel we were better able to read our older daughter M's (who we had signed to much more frequently than her younger sister) nonverbal cues than A's.

The Value of Bedtime Reading

Another, much more evidence-based, practice that we consciously committed to do was to read to M in English every night. We literally began this custom in the first weeks of M's life, long before she had any idea what I was reading. Bedtime reading has happily become an indispensable part of the nightly routine in our house. It can go on for as little as ten or fifteen minutes up to well over an hour and end when M has fallen asleep. I almost always do the bedtime reading, however, on the rare occasions when I work late or am away on a business trip, Akiko is happy to take over. I don't know if it is good or not that M associates bedtime story reading with Daddy and with the English language. In the past, she has sometimes expressed resistance on the rare occasions when I am home and Mommy reads to her at bedtime although that has mostly faded over the last year. We think it is possible that M is sometimes resistant because she associates Daddy with reading English books and Mommy with Japanese books. Regarding reading material, we have a fairly large selection of books and have not been rigorous about reading only age-appropriate books. Basically, I will choose a few books and if M likes one she will ask for it to be read to her night after night, sometimes for weeks at a time. Reading the same book over and over may not be good pedagogy but the purpose, at this stage at least, has been to engender an enjoyment of books and reading, not to teach phonics or reading per se. However, there are benefits to rereading the same books again and again. I often have M predict what will happen on the next page, ask her to describe

what the characters are wearing, their personality, or the relationships between characters she knows well. M sometimes knows the books so well that, rather than anticipating what will happen, she can recite the text of the following page verbatim. Often I let her turn the pages at her own pace and she sometimes likes to skip forward, or go back, in the story and describe what is happening on that page. Rereading the same book and knowing the contents so well also allows us the freedom to digress frequently and to make connections to events that have happened in our lives recently. Some other reading techniques I use are having M try to summarize what has happened so far in a story, asking her questions (in various levels of detail) about what is happening on a page, asking her to share her favorite character and why she likes that character, or having her explain her favorite part of the story and why she likes it. All of these are fairly common techniques that I feel are particularly well-suited for use with books that have been read several times. By rereading a book many times, a child can develop a very good understanding of the story and can therefore relate their own life and thoughts to it. Creative parents will certainly know many other techniques for stimulating discussions during bedtime reading.

Popular titles in our house include well-known books like *Dr. Seuss*, *Curious George*, *Amelia Bedelia* and *Moomin* among many others. Many of the books in these series are generally targeted to children a bit older than four but M really loves them and that always takes precedence. In particular, we have found the *Amelia Bedelia* series to be especially popular with M. She has been in love with these books for almost two years now and still can't get enough of them. As many parents will know, this is a series targeted to slightly older children about a woman who takes everything literally. As a result, she repeatedly misunderstands commands and gets herself into comical predicaments. My daughter loves the positive, happy-go-lucky personality of the title character. Recently, we have started discussing the phrases and expressions the title character misunderstands and how they can have double meanings, can be misinterpreted and why they are humorous. This series offers a plethora of both interesting stories and scope for discussion about the books, and continues to be a perennial favorite in our house.

Rather than follow a strict, developmentally appropriate reading plan, I feel strongly that the most important thing at this stage, is that my daughter enjoys being read to in English. The fun of reading and interacting in English is far more valuable than trying to impart some rigor and imposing only age-appropriate titles or starting phonics instruction at exactly the perfect time. Because reading bedtime stories is such an important and valuable part of the routine in our house and M enjoys it so much, I am still happy to read whatever she likes even if reading the same book again and again makes my head spin. Living in a rural area,

and with the lack of English exposure M gets, religiously reading to my daughters everyday is possibly the single most important thing I do in terms of minority language development.

Another piece of sage and intuitive advice I received from a friend was to let my children see their parents enjoying reading. Busy parents, earnestly trying to expose their children to as much minority language input as possible and engender a love of books and reading, can often overlook something this simple but vitally important. Teaching them that reading is not an unpleasant chore but fun and enjoyable is one of the greatest gifts parents can give to their children. Like most others with young children, both my wife and I often feel that we hardly have any time to read ourselves because we are so busy with work and/or parenting duties. Even so, being reminded of the importance of modelling good behavior, if we want our children to develop a love for reading, was much appreciated.

Extended Family Support

I have friends who have Japanese in-laws with extensive experience overseas, who speak wonderful English and are happy to interact with their grandchildren in the minority language. That is not the situation we are in. While I do have wonderfully supportive in-laws who live just a convenient ten-minute walk away from us, neither of them speaks English very well. They help us in many other ways, travel overseas on occasion and understand the usefulness of English as a lingua franca around the world. As a result, they do occasionally use English words and phrases in their interactions with our daughters, and just as common nowadays, is M teaching her grandparents English translations of Japanese words. This is, of course, a very minor act that almost certainly has little impact on their English ability but something we appreciate nonetheless. Living where we do, with so few opportunities to hear and use English, we hope that it at least reinforces in M and A the sense that it is natural and desirable to be able to speak more than one language.

We also try to talk once a week via Skype or FaceTime with M's grandmother or cousins in the United States. My wife's sister lives in Sydney, Australia and we also often talk to her via Line or FaceTime as well. Having family in Australia is especially convenient as we can talk pretty much anytime of day in Japan. These modern technological conveniences are wonderful of course, but getting small children to sit still and pay attention to have any kind of an extended conversation is a constant challenge so I sometimes question how useful these tools are in providing English input. My sister-in-law and her Australian husband visit Japan fairly regularly and usually stay with us when they do. These visits are always exciting and another chance for M to use her English and realize how useful

it can be in communicating with her Australian uncle who conveniently doesn't speak any Japanese.

Trips Overseas

The summer M turned one we spent a month visiting family in Southern California. Even though she wasn't producing too much speech on her first trip to the US as a one-year old, it was useful for her to play and interact with her older American cousins and other relatives in an all-English environment. We did not take another international family trip until the summer M turned three. While ideally we could visit the US or travel internationally every year, for various reasons (not least financial), once every two years seems to be more realistic for our family. Kamada (1995a) reports, in talking about the example of missionary families in Japan, that, 'frequent trips overseas or longer trips of less frequency' can significantly contribute to bilingualism. 'Frequent trips' is not specifically defined but I think it is reasonable to assume that, in the context of promoting bilingualism, once every two years would qualify as frequent enough.

Shortly before our second trip to America, just before M turned three, I often heard her say things like '*wakaranai*' (I don't understand) and '*Nihongo ga ii*' (I prefer Japanese) when talking to me. This was of course perfectly understandable but still a little sad. It was tough to see that M felt frustrated in her inability to communicate with me in English.

Our second trip to California, when M was three years old, turned out to be an amazing experience for our family in terms of minority language development. I would describe M as a strong receptive bilingual before her second trip to California. The first few days in California, she would speak Japanese to everyone, including her uncomprehending but bemused English-speaking cousins. Frequent utterances heard included '*kochi*' (here, come here), '*oishi*' (yummy), '*... tabetai*' (I want to eat ...), '*... e ikitai*' (I want to go ...). However, after about a week she suddenly started speaking English to everyone, including her mother, saying, 'Come here,' 'over here,' 'I want a hot dog,' 'I want to go to the park,' etc. This made all of us happy. In particular, M's American grandmother, who had lamented the fact that she couldn't understand what her granddaughter was saying, was overjoyed. No doubt many parents reading this can relate to the moving and joyful experience of seeing their child's minority language, and that parent's native language, blossom seemingly right before their eyes.

Before our visit we had intended to place M in a local childcare facility for a short-term. This had been recommended by friends as very beneficial for not only English but for social development. For various reasons, we ultimately decided against childcare and did something quite simple instead; we took her to local parks almost everyday. This ended up being

a boon to M's English development during our stay in the US. Every day, she ended up meeting and playing with different kids of different ages; none of whom spoke or understood Japanese. It proved a great motivator for M to know that, if she wanted to play with the other kids at the park, she would have to communicate in English. And she did. Based on our experience, admittedly still very limited, of two roughly month-long trips to the US, Kamada's assertion that frequent trips overseas can significantly contribute to bilingualism certainly has been true.

After returning to Japan, the concern for us became how to best maintain those gains or, perhaps more accurately, minimize the losses. As of this writing, it has now been well over a year since we last visited the US and I would say that M speaks English to me about 70–80% of the time. She started speaking exclusively Japanese again to her mother soon after we returned to Japan.

Over the past six months, and particularly since she started pre-school in April 2016, she has gradually been speaking more and more Japanese to me. I had heard from friends that this was likely to happen and I was psychologically prepared for it. Since April, I have also noticed more frequent disfluencies, code-switching and struggles to find the right English word. Examples include 'Daddy, look this', 'I want to go to the *koen*', 'We should put it in the *reizoko*', and 'That's my *yochien*'. Friends have commented on the difficulty of persisting in speaking English to a child speaking Japanese to them because the child cannot express themselves adequately in their minority language. This is especially true when the topic is important and a serious message must be conveyed. Is it better to set an example of not speaking Japanese to your own child to encourage (or force) them to use the minority language? Alternatively, is it better to demonstrate a fluency with both languages to show that it is not strange or unusual? I don't think there is one simple right answer. I have both heard and read that people who did not grow up in a home with multiple languages can often be less likely to sympathize with this kind of challenge and, as a result, be more resolute in sticking to the minority language. I have a friend with a monolingual upbringing who nonetheless feels that the message to be conveyed is more important than dogmatically speaking only English and switches to Japanese with his children in these situations. He lives a few towns over from us in a similarly rural area and his children go to local public schools. He has told me he is already resigned to the idea that his children will not achieve the level of English he would like for them unless they transfer to an international school or move overseas. On the other hand, another friend is equally adamant in using English in all situations with his kids. Happily, I suppose, this has not become an issue for me yet and I still have some time to ponder how I will handle these issues if and when they arise. Having friends and acquaintances to turn to,

especially when living outside a major urban area, for support and advice when facing language and child-rearing issues has been invaluable.

Work-life Balance & Raising Bilingual Children

In this section I would like to address the topic of work-life balance. This may seem like an odd subject to be broached in a volume about trying to raise a bilingual child outside Japan's main urban areas. However, in my circumstances, working for a Japanese organization and being the parent of two young children who need as much minority language exposure as possible, work-life balance has become a significant consideration.

In order to spend as many hours as possible with both my daughters, I do my best to be home every night in time to have dinner, take a bath and, if that is sometimes not possible, at a bare minimum read to my daughters before bed. I try to leave work no later than 6:00pm and attend work-related social events and parties only when necessary. It is hard to quantify how important social events with colleagues really are. However, Japan is a culture with the word 'nomunication' (literally 'drinking communication'). Nomunication refers to the act of getting to know each other and developing relationships through time spent drinking together. I sometimes feel that my absence at social events has been to the detriment of my career. I have certainly missed out on chances to participate in university projects by virtue of having not been present at important initial discussions held at parties. I have also passed on opportunities to present at conferences if it means a long period away from home. I realize it's very hard not to come across as self-righteous when describing how I'm willing to let my career suffer for my family (i.e. look at me, I'm such a great dad!). However, I don't intend to make myself out to be a martyr. I've simply made a decision to, for the time being at least, spend as much time as possible with my family rather than devoting that extra time and effort to furthering my career. Of course, it is almost impossible to quantify if I am harming my career by choosing to work a '9 to 5' schedule. The fact is, I feel I have a very good relationship with bosses and colleagues and, rather than being purposely excluded from research projects because of not being hard-charging enough, I think it has been more a matter of 'out of sight, out of mind.' Some colleagues do occasionally describe me as an 'ikumen', a father who takes an active part in childrearing. I can never quite tell if it is just an innocuous comment or if they mean it as a slight dig (or even as a compliment). I should make clear that I have never experienced any covert or overt pressure to put in more hours, publish more or present more. I feel that, generally, my department head and colleagues are very supportive of not only me, but every teacher with young children, and our efforts to spend as much time as possible with our kids.

Having said all that, I do feel that, to a certain extent, I have been

defined in contrast to a hard-charging departmental colleague (also a foreigner and native English speaker). My colleague is sometimes described as 'sekyokuteki' (aggressive/active) and is involved in some high-profile university projects, some of which I passed on the chance to be a part of. Again, I have wondered if I am meant to infer that I am not active or ambitious when compared to my colleague. It is quite possible, even probable, that no implication of that sort is intended. Most likely is that I am just a little bit sensitive about the fact that, at the moment, I basically do my job to the best of my ability and go home. However, the fact is that perception can often be as important as reality. No matter how productive I am, if my colleagues know that I will be out of my office come 6:00 pm, there is always a chance that it will, at a minimum, affect others' perception of me.

Of course, proper work-life balance is something that everyone should decide for themselves. While I am devoted to my job and work hard, I have made a conscious decision to spend as much time interacting with my daughters while they are young and still like having me around. As I mentioned above, the main reason I spend so much time with my daughters is because I enjoy it. The fact is that, at this stage of my life, I enjoy being with my daughters and the exposure to their minority language they receive through me is almost an ancillary consideration. However, if a working parent in Japan truly wants to reach the rough 30% benchmark of minority language input as mentioned by Pearson (2008) they have to be prepared to sacrifice something. In my case, I am prepared to sacrifice professional advancement to spend time with my children and try to help their minority language development.

Awareness of Multiple Languages

M has only recently become aware that her ability to speak both Japanese and English is unusual and that most of the people around her cannot speak multiple languages. She hasn't seemed to be embarrassed (yet) in any way about her English language abilities. M's best friend's father happens to be French-Japanese and her friend is a receptive bilingual (in French) herself. We socialize with them frequently and when the families are together it is a constant mishmash of Japanese, English and French. I like to think this has a positive influence on the girls and helps them understand how natural and useful it is to understand and speak more than one language.

In addition to reading to her each night, we also allow M to watch YouTube videos on an iPad for a limited period of time if she makes the request (we never suggest it). She likes watching *Peppa Pig*, *Dora the Explorer*, and various other cartoons. She is also fond of *Family Fun Pack*, a child friendly channel with videos of kids playing with toys, playing games, and cooking among other things. The only rule I try to gently im-

pose regarding YouTube is that the content be in English. I try not to be overbearing about this, but sometimes she will click from video to video and before we know it she is watching something in Russian. Recently, we have also begun using the Internet as a resource to search for answers to questions M asks Akiko or I. Often they are the kind of questions we can't easily answer so it is useful to have a resource to turn to. I usually ask M to type in the letters to ask the question. We also use Siri, the Apple voice recognition software, to let her try asking the computer and see if the computer understands her English. I worry that this could potentially be counter-productive because she can get frustrated if she cannot make herself understood. Even so, it has still been another fun way to use English. The Disney channel DLife and its morning cartoons has also been a good source of English in our house. The girls like *Doc McStuffin's*, *Manly the Repairman*, the *Mickey Mouse Club*, *Sofia the First*, and *The Little Mermaid*. M also attends an English play group once a week. The focus is on songs and games but the Japanese teacher is a well-trained English teacher and has a clear goal of introducing phonics through play.

As our daughters get older we wonder how factors like personality, motivation and emotional connection to the minority language may affect their language development. M is a sensitive and thoughtful child prone to having her feelings hurt easily and, as parents, we wonder if this could affect her minority language development. These affective factors tie into the issue of what kind of schooling we want to provide our daughters. There are no international schools within reasonable commuting distance from us. We plan for both girls to go to the local public schools, at least until the end of elementary school if not junior high school. Akiko and I have already had brief discussions about the option of boarding at an international school in Japan or going to high school in the United States. I suppose any discussion of schooling that far in advance may be a bit presumptuous when our girls are so young. However, friends in international marriages have advised that it's wise to talk about these issues with your spouse and children sooner rather than later. Past Bilingualism SIG monographs, particularly *The Best of Bilingual Japan* (No. 8), *The ABCs of Bilingualism* (No. 10) and *Starting Your Bilingual Child on the Path to Biliteracy* (No. 17), have also been useful resources about schooling options for children of international marriages. Parents from diverse cultural upbringings often end up having different ideas about the type of schooling they want to provide their children and what the purpose of an education is. If these issues aren't discussed, parents may not even know they have different opinions and it's certainly best to reconcile differences early.

In a way, being far from a large urban area with better schooling options makes things easier in that we are, for better or worse, stuck with the local schools. Fortunately, the local schools in our city have a history

of integrating a relatively large number of Japanese-Brazilians and Japanese-Peruvians and generally have a good reputation in terms of adapting to multiculturalism.

Reflecting on the road taken so far, we as parents feel that establishing bedtime reading in English early has been very positive. Children like routines that help them feel secure and bedtime reading is a great way for me to spend time interacting in English with M after I've been away all day. I also feel that being willing to sacrifice professionally has been the right choice. One obvious area for improvement would be to speak more English with my wife so as to make our home more of an English-speaking environment. I also feel that we can and should cast our net wider and try to become more active in the English-speaking community in the surrounding cities. This would mean traveling farther distances to get-togethers and events but could be beneficial if it results in greater opportunities for our girls to hear and use English.

For those of us living outside the major urban areas of Japan and away from the resources urban areas provide, achieving the goal of complete bilingualism in all four skills seems unrealistic. Knowing that, rather than waste the wonderful opportunity to become a successful bilingual, we parents living in rural areas of Japan must be creative and proactive in finding ways to provide our children with as much exposure to their minority language as we possibly can.

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8

Luck and Thick Skin

Robert Luxton

AS A LONG-TERM Canadian ex-patriot in Japan, I wanted my daughters to speak English as much as I have ever wanted anything. Many ex-pats share a similar sentiment, although the intensity with which people feel the need to pass their language onto their children seems to vary. Neither Hana (19) nor Maya (16) speak English as well as a typical child raised in an English-speaking country, but they are both relatively fluent with Canadian pronunciation and intonation. That we can understand each other in English is enormously satisfying to me. Objectively speaking, they are both successful learners of English. Maya is enrolled in Tokushima's best English language program at Tokushima North High School, and Hana is now at Akita International University, which arguably has Japan's best university English program. The question is: How did my wife Naomi and I accomplish this?

There was, without any doubt, some luck involved. There were elements of timing, and circumstances that arose, that Naomi and I cannot reasonably take credit for. However, we can take some credit for remaining resolute and stubborn and taking advantage of the opportunities that presented themselves. They were never allowed to speak Japanese to me or at the dinner table. Ever. The children themselves deserve most of the credit. Growing up half Canadian in rural Japan can be difficult at times (being different from everyone else is difficult wherever you are) but both children rose to the challenge and developed thick skin. They have both felt like outsiders occasionally but have more or less let the extra attention and stereotyping roll off them. We all embraced otherness.

The idea of my coming to Japan developed over a very short period of time in 1994. I had just finished a master's degree in elementary education but faced a brutal job market. My mother, by chance, noticed an adver-

tisement in a newspaper about teaching English conversation in Japan. I sent my resume in, had a short interview in Toronto a month later and was in Japan a month later. The immediacy of the decision meant that I knew no Japanese when I arrived in Japan. I spent a few days at the head office in Takamatsu, and was then sent by train down to Tokushima. Waiting at the train station was a young woman with great English skills from the Tokushima office. Her name was Naomi and we've been married for twenty years now.

In retrospect, this all seems fortuitous. Naomi and I spoke only English on our first date, which happened a few months after I arrived in Japan, and still speak only English to each other today. Although I speak Japanese reasonably well now, neither of us enjoys speaking Japanese to each other at all; it makes both of us feel strangely uncomfortable. If the timing had been different, if I hadn't met Naomi until I'd been in Japan for a few years and learned some Japanese, the situation might have been different, and Hana and Maya may not have learned to speak English as well as they did.

When Hana was born in 1997, we decided to speak only English to her. At the time, it just seemed like the obvious thing to do. In truth, we didn't do any research into raising bilingual children nor did we have any friends who had raised bilingual children. Hana is the oldest child in our current English-speaking community. It was an intuitive decision to adopt a minority language at home (MLAH) strategy. On Naomi's part, this clearly meant that she would need to be indifferent about what others thought. I have a clear memory of Naomi speaking to Hana and Maya at a local playground in English surrounded by other families speaking Japanese. Not only did this teach the children English, it also taught them not to care about strange looks from people. Naomi just didn't care, and the children didn't either. 'Yes, we speak English, get over it.'

In rural areas like Tokushima, 'half' children are often regarded with tremendous curiosity. When the children were small, strangers would often approach us and comment on the cuteness of our children, the whiteness of their skin being of particular interest. Japanese people in general do not address strangers on the street or in elevators or at restaurants, but children with foreign parents seem to create exceptions. I know people who were bothered a lot by this but somehow none of us was ever offended by the extra attention.

Something lucky happened shortly after Hana was born: I got a full-time position at a small private university in Tokushima. Getting a full-time university position in Japan was obviously lucky in itself. However, getting a job with long summer holidays to go back to visit family in Canada was one of the crucial factors in the children learning English.

As many long-term foreign residents of Japan know, Japanese people often frown on the whole concept of holidays. This is very much true at

my university where a strict 8:50 to 5:40 daily attendance policy in place and few people use paid holidays. In fact, the dean of my department once told me that he had never, in 30 years, taken a paid holiday. However, officially, all staff members are entitled to take forty paid holidays a year. The best way to explain why many people do not take paid holidays is that it would be embarrassing to do so, almost shameful. After twenty-two years in Japan, I almost feel embarrassed myself about taking long holidays, but I didn't feel this way when the children were younger. I submitted paperwork for a one-month summer holiday every year and pretended not to understand that while people were saying *yes* they actually meant *no*. The administration became more obvious about their objections to extended holidays on a few occasions, but I ignored this as well. The Japanese proverb that a nail that sticks up will get hammered down applies to me. They really tried to hammer me down a few times, but it didn't work and they eventually accepted me as I was.

There are a few more lucky factors to chronicle here: my parents have a lakeside cottage north of Toronto. This made it quite easy and appealing for my wife to stay with my parents for a month every year. Naomi loves it there, as do the children. As you'll see in the transcriptions below, both children remember summers in Canada with great fondness. Summers by the lake, with their slow pace and easy living, are an aspect of life and culture that few Japanese ever get to know. Hana and Maya realize that taking holidays is wonderful, which I believe is a great example of being bi-cultural. At the lake, there was also another family with two daughters the same ages as Hana and Maya. Jenna, Lauren, Hana, and Maya have spent their summer holidays together for many years now. Hana and Maya learned a lot about Canadian culture, as well as colloquial English, from Jenna and Lauren. Holidays with friends made the acquisition of English and the understanding of Canadian culture natural and easy. They learned to say, 'Take it easy' as Canadians do on parting rather than the Japanese, 'Do your best.'

The girls were exposed to multiculturalism in Toronto, of course, but to some extent at the cottage as well. A short walk from my parents' cottage is a large provincial park with hundreds of campsites and a large beach. We often took the girls to swim there, and Hana and Maya saw hundreds of people who were likely Canadian but did not speak English as a first language, and this was an important lesson

Of course, summers in Canada were not the only English input Hana and Maya received. English books, television programs and movies were also important, although neither Hana nor Maya became passionate about reading in English, which is something that I had hoped for. I read English books to them nightly for many years, to Maya until she was twelve, and it was a fantastic experience for me. When the children were little, my parents sent countless English-language videos, everything from *Barney*,

to *Blue's Clues* to *The Wiggles*. Watching English programming is something that they did become passionate about and now, thanks to the variety of programs available on services such as Netflix, they can watch hours of English language television programs, like *Gossip Girls* and *Pretty Little Liars*, in English without subtitles.

The Importance of Having Thick Skin

What strikes me after all these years in Japan is how tightly woven language, culture and identity are. In my own case, this meant clinging to my Canadian identity for two decades by insisting on speaking English. I honestly didn't start bowing in social situations until after Hana was accepted at university and had succeeded in the Japanese system. In recent months, I have even let Maya speak a few occasional words to me in Japanese. She says things to me like, '*hara ga tatsu*' (You are so annoying). I have accepted that both girls *can* speak English proficiently now and that I needn't worry anymore.

Self-identity from the girls' perspective is more difficult, especially as it concerns language development. Hana and Maya were presented with the building blocks of bilingualism by Naomi and me, but they had to put the pieces together themselves. For both of them, there is a degree of paradox, of being two different things simultaneously. On one hand, there is nothing about being Japanese that they are not cognizant of. On the other, while their experiences of being Canadian are limited, they both understand quite well what it means to be Canadian. They haven't gone through a Canadian winter yet, which is essentially the Canadian rite of passage.

To become bilingual, it was necessary for them to simultaneously be both Japanese and Canadian. There are some ways where this duality is difficult to parse. For example, they are both very hardworking and focused. Hard work is, in my opinion, the Japanese ideal, but it may have been being labelled 'half' that drove them to excel and work hard. My inclination has been to explain their thick skin through the lens of the immigrant experience, because that is part of my Canadian family's history. There are some very strong immigrant women in Hana and Maya's family tree.

Hana would have realized that she was different from the other kids on the first day of Japanese kindergarten because she knew very little Japanese at that point. She watched some Japanese children's programs on television and also had interacted with her Japanese extended family. However, I was quite insistent on maintaining a small English world around myself and the children. Naomi's parents did not spend as much time with our children as they did with their other grandchildren, and as a result, Hana understood some Japanese but spoke very little on her first day of school. I don't think that the other students in the class made

a big deal of it. Hana noticed that she was different, but she wasn't outwardly upset by it. After about a year in kindergarten, her Japanese was quite good, and after two, it had replaced English as her first language. At about this time, Hana began to speak with her mother in Japanese. A form of OPOL (One Parent One Language) developed that has remained the norm in our family to this day, with the exception that we all speak English together at the dinner table.

Otherness became much more apparent to Hana when she started Grade 1 at elementary school. We moved to my wife's hometown. This was lucky, too. My wife's father gave us part of his orchard to build a house. Hana and Maya grew up next to their grandparents and later my wife's brother and his young family. In the first week of school, a group (gang?) of Grade 6 boys taunted Hana by calling her 'gaijin' and 'American'. The school dealt with this quickly and effectively. They held talks with the first and sixth grade students and introduced a zero-tolerance policy. However, it's not something Hana ever forgot. Hana's reaction to being called a 'gaijin' was, as I mentioned before, something along the lines of, 'I'll show you.' Obviously, her positive reaction to being stigmatized was not the only possible reaction. Another reaction may have caused a far different outcome.

Do Hana and Maya feel like 'others'? The best answer is probably, but not too much. As I mentioned, we live on a piece of land surrounded by Japanese family. There may have been people who did not consider our two children to be fully Japanese, but when they came home from school each day, they socialized with their Japanese extended family, which reassured them that they were no less Japanese than their friends.

In November of 2014, Hana came in first at the prefectural speech contest and then came in second at the regional competition in Matsuyama, which got her into the national competition in Tokyo. There were a lot of amazing speeches in Tokyo, but Hana managed to come in second. Hana's special talent is not getting nervous in front of crowds, a trait she may have gotten from her Japanese grandfather, who is a political activist and a very good public speaker. When I told the teacher in the office next to mine at the university that Hana had come in second, her response was, 'But she's not Japanese.' When I told one of the administrators of the school, he asked, 'Were there any Japanese people in the contest?'

These types of responses from the Japanese seem somewhat racist, but racism isn't binary; it falls on a graduated scale, with some people being less racist and some people being more. At the 2016 Oscars, the host, Chris Rock, made a stereotypical joke about Asians being hard working and good at math, and the blogosphere erupted in outrage. It is interesting how the stereotyping of 'half' children in Japan resembles the stereotyping of Asians in North America, in the sense that it is essentially

positive but somehow degrading none the less. In Japan, 'half' children are all thought to be cute and effortlessly good at English.

Hana did very well in high school and finished with a nearly perfect report card, but without her second-place finish at the speech contest and her 91 on TOEFL (the maximum score is 120; overseas applicants to Canadian universities require scores over 90), she probably wouldn't have been accepted at the university of her choice, where the standard score is 67.5, the same as Kyoto University. She passed the 'recommendation' *suisen* test in December, and accepted the offer. She was also offered early acceptance at the University of Toronto in Canada, but we all think the university she decided on was the better choice for her. It is a small school with only 800 students who all major in either international relations or international business. All of the classes are taught in English, all of the students are required to study abroad for a year and there are 180 exchange students from around the world. Hana went to an orientation in February and met several other 'half' children from different parts of Japan and this made her feel at home.

To grow up in rural Japan as a bi-racial child requires a certain amount of courage. Maya recently commented that people had been staring at her for as long as she can remember. She didn't seem upset when she said this, which was telling. Getting extra attention is something that she has grown accustomed to. Hana and Maya both speak to me in public in English without any embarrassment. It seems that they have embraced their otherness.

A Transcription of Hana and Maya's Speech

I naively thought when Hana and Maya were born that they would speak flawless English by the time they finished high school, but of course, that didn't happen. In normal conversation, Hana is more prone to making careless mistakes than Maya, which probably has more to do with personality than anything else. As she explains below, Hana's favorite subject is math, whereas Maya's is English.

Hana and Maya occasionally make errors when speaking that children raised in English Canada probably would not. To illustrate a few of these small mistakes, I conducted a short interview with each of them. In the transcript below, Hana and Maya's responses have been put together, but in fact, the two interviews were done separately. The questions are from a TOEFL IBT practice exercise and I basically followed the TOEFL format for interviews – a 15 second preparation period followed by 45 seconds in which to answer the question. However, before conducting the interviews, which were recorded and then transcribed, I noticed two words, *inspire* and *admire*, that I thought they might have trouble with. The purpose of the interview wasn't to test their vocabulary but was only a method of

illustrating some incorrect features of their speech, and I therefore discussed both words with them before the interview.

The questions ask things about which the girls are familiar. It may have been more revealing to ask questions that were out of their comfort zones, such as questions about world issues. However, the small grammatical mistakes that I sometimes notice in their speech were evident in the transcriptions of their answers, and I was therefore satisfied with the result. They both make small errors with prepositions, articles, tense and singular/plural agreement.

Q: Who is your best friend? Describe this person and say why he/she is your best friend.

Hana: Um, my best friend is Yuri. I met her in high school and we were in the same class for three years. Uh, we were together from, like, the very beginning, and we went to Australia and homestayd together, and we always went together places to trips...we enjoy staying together, so...she's my best friend.

Comments:

1. homestayd: Not usually thought of as a verb.
2. went together places to trips: has incorrect prepositions and should probably be reworded as: we went on trips together.

Maya: Um, my best friend is Riko...she...I can talk to her, about what happened in my life, like sad things, and happy stuff, and she always listens to me...She could talk about things that happened to her, and we like being with each other, uh...and I like her.

Comments:

1. talk to her about what happened in my life: The verb tense should be present continuous rather than past.
2. She could talk about things: The verb tense should be simple present.

Q2: What is your happiest childhood memory? Describe it and give reasons to explain why it is your happiest memory.

Hana: My happiest childhood memories are going to Canada with my family and visiting my grandparents and cousins because I get to see them, uh, in a long time, and, uh, I get to do things that I can't do at home in Japan, and experience new things, and, spend good time with people I don't see in Japan.

Comments: in a long time: This is quite possibly interference from Japanese in which Hana had wanted to say '*hisashiburi*' (long time no see).

Maya: My happiest childhood memory is going to Canada because I get to see my family and all of my friends and because I only see them once a year. They are very happy to see me and they try to make me happy, so I think it's my happiest childhood memory 'cause I like the nature and the food and my family.

Comments: No obvious errors.

Q3: Talk about a person in your life who has inspired you. Describe the person and explain why you found him/her inspirational.

Hana: Uh, my friend Yuri has inspired me because, um, before, well, because she...never says bad things about people...if she doesn't like that person she just laughs and makes jokes about them, uh, that changed how I am, uh, and that made me now.

Comments:

1. doesn't like *that* person: That should be 'a' in typical English phrasing.
2. that changed how I am: It is possible that Hana was trying to say 'who I am'
3. that made me now: Here, it would seem she was attempting to say 'who I am now.'

Maya: I think the person who inspired me is my Grade 6 teacher, um, he was very strict but very funny, too, and I liked him, and his classes were very fun, but all of the kids knew that he was very strict, so everyone acted, um...very good...we had a very, very good class.

Comments:

everyone acted...very good: Should probably be 'everyone was well behaved.'

Q4: What was your favorite subject at school? Describe it and explain why this subject was your favorite one.

Hana: My favorite subject was...[in a quiet voice] can I have two? Uh, one is P.E. and another is math, uh, the reason that I liked P.E. is that, well, it was obviously fun, and you get to do things...like sports that you've never tried before...then the second one, math was because, uh, it's just fun solving problems that, uh, you've never done before, and, uh, it's fun, uh, understanding math.

Comments:

one is math: the verb tense in the first sentence changes between present and past and should all be past because the question was asked in the past tense.

Maya: My favorite subject was English. I like...my father is from Canada, I really like Canada, and we speak English...and I often use English to talk with my favorite people, so I really like English a lot...and uh...it's very interesting because I can understand stuff by thinking in different languages.

Comments: There are no obvious mistakes.

Transcriptions of interviews are notoriously error-filled before edited versions appear in print. Nonetheless, the errors that emerge in these short interviews are representative of the errors Hana and Maya make in daily speech, in my opinion. The point I would like to make is that a fifteen-year-old or eighteen-year-old who grew up in an English-speaking country probably wouldn't make the same errors. Hana and Maya's spoken English is close to native-like, as the transcript shows, yet they make small errors that native-speakers probably wouldn't. A different example of this would be Hana saying, 'my jeans is on the bed'. A teenager who had grown up in English Canada would simply never say this.

Hana and Maya also have quite a strong Canadian pronunciation and intonation, although like the grammar detailed above, they are ever-so-slightly different from teenagers who grew up in English Canada. Maya pronounces *th* as *d* sometimes (which sounds French Canadian). I honestly thought Hana's pronunciation was almost perfect until I tried a Jazz Chant with her and heard that her pronunciation doesn't snap, which is to say it isn't quite as precise, as a native speaker. While neither Hana nor Maya speaks English quite like a native speaker, they are both comfortable speaking English. They can chat effortlessly with their Canadian friends and family and neither of them seems to be too concerned about making an occasional mistake.

I have been in Japan for almost twenty-three years and I am relatively comfortable speaking Japanese. However, almost all of the conversations between my family members and me are still in English. The topics of conversation at our dinner table vary from pop music and movie stars to immigration and Confucianism. The girls are fluent, opinionated, and willing to say what they think.

Naomi and I worked hard to encourage the children to speak English, but the circumstances we were presented with were nevertheless admittedly lucky. All of us were thick-skinned enough to keep going, to essentially be unembarrassed about speaking English in rural Japan. We

all embraced otherness and accepted the paradox of duality. I alluded earlier to the fact that I have relaxed a bit about maintaining my Canadian identity and insisting that the children speak to me only in English. The change in my feelings can be dated precisely to December 26, 2015, when Hana received her acceptance at university. It gave us all a sense of having succeeded in the Japanese system, on our own terms. Hana and Maya can, as I had always hoped, speak English.

9

A Parent's Perspective on Raising Bilingual/ Bicultural Children: A First-Person Account

Erika de Jong Watanabe

Definitions

BEFORE I BEGIN to tell the story of our adventures with bilingualism and biculturalism, it may be helpful to explain what I mean by these terms and why I define them as such. What does bilingualism mean? Is it solely the ability to speak two languages fluently, or does it encompass the capacity to talk, listen, read, and write with equal fluency in both languages? For me, I consider bilingualism to be the latter and that is what my family strove for. Likewise, my definition of biculturalism is strongly identifying with and actively practicing the customs and traditions of two cultures. Again, this is the ideal that my family tries to practice. In some ways, it was easier to be bicultural than to raise bilingual children.

Furthermore, it was my dream, and perhaps to some extent my husband's, that our children would go to Canada for schooling from Junior High School. Since I am Canadian and grew up there, ideally I wanted to move back and live there, but years later, reality set in and I realized that this would not happen. However, I have kept true to my feelings that living in Canada would offer my children a better life balance and that they would be happier there. Maybe it is a biased opinion since I am Canadian, but it is my truth.

Background

Our family's adventure with bilingualism started one day at Narita airport, of all places. My soon-to-be husband and I were there, eating lunch in a

restaurant, waiting for my flight to Canada. I was going home in order to prepare for our wedding which was to take place one month later. Sitting next to us was a family of four, all Japanese looking. The parents and the two young children were all speaking English. Nothing remarkable with that, but my ears perked up when they switched into Japanese and proceeded to speak that language with ease. Right then I declared to my husband, 'that was what we are going to be like'. A family that could function in both languages fluently.

The Early Years

Fast forward to the next year and our daughter was born. Since she was born in Canada, the first language she was surrounded by was English. This was the only language she heard for the first six weeks of her life before returning to Japan. Living in Iwaki City, Fukushima meant that I had no foreign friends, since I did not know of any living there at the time, and if we wanted Emily to understand and function in English, it was up to us. My husband and I decided that only English would be used inside our house. This, of course, would only be enforced if my husband's relatives were not around. So how did we go about doing this? Lots of reading, lots of singing, lots of talking, and limited television/videos. In addition to what we were doing at home, we visited Canada twice a year for six weeks at a time. The reasons for this were two-fold. One was for language learning, but the other, and most importantly, was that I wanted my children to know their Canadian family, to be close to their aunts, uncle, and cousins. I also wanted them to experience Canada, the culture, the customs, the people. I wanted them to feel comfortable in both Canada and Japan.

The reason I focused my attention on my children's English language learning was because, since we lived in Iwaki City, my children most often would be surrounded by Japanese. Their schooling would be conducted entirely in Japanese, their friends would be Japanese, and any extracurricular activity that they participated in would be in Japanese. I was not concerned about their Japanese ability but I was quite worried about their English. Before they entered primary school, they were 'taught' hiragana, katakana, and simple kanji from the staff at my husband's work. Once they entered elementary school, every day I would quiz them on their daily kanji and listen to them read from their Japanese textbook. They also went to Kumon, where they studied Japanese and math, and later on, my daughter also studied English.

Prior to my children entering kindergarten I had no friends in Japan. I had some adult English students who I talked to in English, but that was it. Our social circle comprised my husband's family. I would frequently visit my husband's grandmother and sit for hours with her, watching sumo

and eating fruit. She only spoke Japanese, and Iwaki dialect at that, which I was very poor at, but somehow we managed to communicate. When I worked, my children would go to work with my husband and were looked after by the staff there. Luckily, we were able to do this because my husband owns a family run business and half of the staff are family members. My daughter was doted on by one uncle and my son by another. Both children loved spending time with their family during the day and I was happy because I knew that they were well looked after. However, the disadvantage of me working meant that the time they spent apart from me was time without English. Consequently, they became very proficient at speaking Japanese in the local dialect. Amusingly, I had no idea that this was the case. I thought that they were speaking 'proper' Japanese. It was only when we visited my husband's relatives in Tokyo, who would be humored by my children's Japanese that I realized that perhaps we should try to 'fix' this. We never did though, and it was just over time that my children began to speak standard Japanese.

From birth to around the age of three, English language learning mainly focused on vocabulary building. Any 'formal' learning was achieved using flash cards and playing games. At this age, language acquisition happened naturally. My husband and I read to our children a lot in English, before bed and at naptime. Books were readily available, even in the bath. I was constantly talking to my children in English, even before they could speak. I pointed out and named everything that was around us, objects, animals, plants, vehicles, food. We listened to music, sang, and danced. We went out and experienced life. Language surrounded us.

Japanese and English language acquisition was easier for my daughter than for my son. Perhaps this was because she was first born, and I was able to spend a lot of one-on-one English time with her. We would spend every waking moment interacting. However, when my son came along, my daughter was two and demanded a lot of attention. Emily did a lot of talking and interpreting for Cort. I would talk to him in English, she would translate what I said into Japanese, he would answer in Japanese, and, even though I understood him, she would then translate that into English. I tried to make her stop but she thought that she was helping. She must have been one busy little kid! The conversations I had with my children were mainly me speaking in English and Cort speaking in Japanese and Emily acting as the interpreter. It was only when Emily entered kindergarten that Cort's English ability improved. He would speak English with a moderate to strong Japanese accent, which has decreased somewhat over the years.

Despite our best intentions, over time Japanese did become both our children's preferred language. However, when we returned to Canada for our visits, my children's English ability did pick up. This was especially true for my daughter. However, once we returned to Japan, Japanese

would take over again. Even in Canada, they would prefer speaking Japanese between themselves. A funny thing happened one day while we were shopping at the local mall. My children would frequently say *だめ* (da-me – stop it) to each other. The looks we got from other shoppers were ones of disgust. Then I realized that they thought my children were saying ‘damn it’. I quickly had to explain to them that *だめ* sounded like a bad word and that they were not allowed to say it while we were in Canada. I also tried to encourage them to speak English when they were around our Canadian family members because it was rude to exclude them. Funny enough, years later, I am having to encourage them to speak Japanese while we are with their Japanese relatives because they now favor English over Japanese.

Another amusing incident happened on one of our trips back to Canada. I woke up one night in a lot of pain and had to go to the hospital. We called my sister to come to watch the kids. No answer. So we called her close friends. They rushed over and we left. Cort woke up a few hours later and was upset. Then he wanted to watch a video which we brought with us from Japan. It was *My Neighbour Totoro*, but Cort only knew it as ‘Totoro’, which he just kept saying over and over again. ‘Totoro, Totoro, Totoro, Totoro...’ Everyone was confused and Cort just got more and more upset. Emily woke up and saved the day. Looking back, we get a big laugh out of that as well. Over the years, there were many more incidents similar to the ones I just described. All quite humorous. Nevertheless, as the kids grew older and became more fluent in English, such problems decreased.

I made my first friends in Japan once my daughter entered kindergarten. They were not kindergarten mothers, however, as none of them really talked to me. They weren’t even women whose children went to school with mine. What happened was that one day I took my children to a local festival and we were waiting to watch a children’s show. Standing near me was a foreign woman with a daughter about the same age as mine. She was talking to her daughter in English (her daughter answered in Japanese) and so I took the chance to introduce myself. We started talking and that is how our friendship started. From there I was introduced to a few other ‘foreign’ families and my circle grew. There was a group of six families, some with children and some without. We came from all over the world and the families were of either mixed-marriage or just foreigners. Interestingly, to this day I have not made any Japanese friends. School mothers would not talk to me unless they saw me at the grocery store. I felt very alone at all the school events. My friends are all foreign women and having only foreigners in my social group is enough for me. The interesting thing with this group is that all of the parents spoke English fluently and this was our common language. But for the children, Japanese was their common language. So while the parents spoke English to each other, the

children spoke Japanese. It must have been puzzling to some to see the kids playing at the park, all foreign looking, but all speaking Japanese. Our English-speaking group did lots of things together, and while these bonds may or may not have helped to develop the language skills of our children, they did reinforce our national cultures and customs. The children had opportunities to experience the food, special days and customs of other countries through this small group. Emily and Cort were the strongest of all the children in English and they would communicate with the other parents in English but when the other children were around, they would revert to Japanese. I am very thankful for these friendships as it made living in a small city in Japan somewhat bearable, and even in some ways enjoyable. Unfortunately, over the years, this group of friends grew smaller and smaller with families either moving back home or to other cities within Japan. I look back fondly on these years as they gave me and my family a taste of what life is like 'back home'.

The Elementary School Years

About the same time that my children entered primary school, I began to formally teach them English. Since we lived in Fukushima, our only option was to send them to the local Japanese school. If I wanted my children to read and write in English, then it was up to me to teach them. I have to admit that I agree with those who say it is very difficult to teach your own children. I much preferred teaching English to other people's children than to my own. We started with phonics, as I personally believe that having a strong understanding of phonics makes reading easier. I tried to have a sit-down lesson with both of my children two or three times a week. They were busy with extra-curricular activities at this age so we tried to fit in English whenever we could. Normally lessons would incorporate both reading and writing. My daughter was an excellent student, both at home and at school. She was very serious and strove to be the best. However, teaching her could be difficult at times, mainly because of my own expectations. Since she caught on quickly, I would get annoyed if she didn't try as hard as I thought she should or if she made simple mistakes. These issues were solely mine and had nothing to do with her. Emily was an avid reader in both English and Japanese. No sooner had I bought her a book, was she reading. She did not favor either language and was equally strong in both. She read through books so quickly that I couldn't keep up. Amazon proved invaluable to us. Starting around Grade 4, Emily started voicing her desire to go to school in Canada, and she tried very hard to keep up with her English studies.

On the other hand, trying to teach my son was an exercise in frustration. He had no interest in reading or writing English at all. It would be a fight to get him to sit at the table, a fight to open the book, a fight to do

the work properly, and a fight to get him to take what I was trying to do seriously. While he enjoyed school, he was not partial to the studying that was involved. He was an average to a slightly above average student at school, but he hated Japanese class because he hated reading and writing. Later on, social studies, like Japanese, would join his list of least favorite classes. Trying to teach Cort got so bad that I recognized that perhaps I was teaching him to hate English. I decided that since he didn't want to learn from me, there was no point in me trying to teach him. I figured that he would eventually learn English at junior high school. Looking back, I should have persevered and not given up because it would have helped him later on in high school. Furthermore, it may have taught him that a person needs to work hard, even at things that they do not like, in order to succeed.

To complement the work I did with them during our 'English lessons', both my daughter and son would write English journals. When they were young, they would draw a picture and then write a few sentences about it. As they grew older, the number of sentences they wrote would increase. I would also encourage them write letters to their grandparents in Canada and then read the letters they received in return. During this time, I was teaching English to Japanese children privately at home. I would have my children sit in on the classes with their peers to provide additional opportunities for them to interact in English. Of course, they were at a higher level but I felt any exposure to English was valuable. They also took the Eiken exams and both passed the pre-first level when they were in grade 5.

However, over time the frequency of their formal English lessons decreased as they became busy with other things. Emily continued to read a lot and she started taking English lessons at Kumon to improve her writing skills. She attended Kumon for about one year, but we stopped after we realized that her actual level was higher than the level they had her doing. We made this discovery when the teacher accidentally gave her a third-year high school set of prints, on which she made only one mistake. Even after agreeing with us that Emily was capable of doing the work, when we asked the teacher to continue giving her this level of work, the teacher refused because Emily had to work through the Kumon system to get to that level. So in other words, Emily would be working at a level far too easy for her.

Once Japanese elementary school started our trips to Canada were cut back as well. Instead of going twice a year for six weeks, we would go once, or, if we were lucky, twice a year for shorter periods of time. Until both children entered junior high school, we tended to leave on our trips about a week prior to the start of the school holidays and would stay about one week after school began again. I justified this by saying that the last week of school and the first week back after vacation were a waste of time since it seemed to me that not much academic work was being done. I thought

that they would not miss anything. Whether this is true or not, I am not sure. We always took the summer homework that the Japanese schools assign with us, which would bring strife when I asked my son to do it.

When we could, I would enroll my children in the local public school near my parents' house. We were very fortunate that the principal and the teachers welcomed my children warmly. It was here that my children were able to experience and appreciate the differences between 'Canadian' and 'Japanese' schools. They much preferred school in Canada, but for different reasons. Emily liked the freedom to learn and to think. Although she loved structure and memory-exercises she also liked having the chance to explore and learn on her own and she had less stress at school in Canada. It was for these reasons that she wanted to move to Canada to attend school. Cort, on the other hand, loved Canadian school because he felt that every day was a play day. For example, for some reason when his class was doing a unit on teeth, he came home every day with packs of gum. He thought that this was normal. He also liked the fact that there was no homework. I told him that the reason for this was that school was just starting for the year (September) or that it was just before or after a holiday (December or March). Nevertheless, he loved it. I was so appreciative of the chance my children got to be 'regular' Canadian children during these brief stays in Canada.

Trips home in the summer were also full of experiences to learn and use English. Each summer I enrolled them in activities, starting with day camps, sport camps, swimming lessons, and from the age of 12, overnight camps. They have very fond memories of these activities, especially of the three-week residential camp which they went to for four years.

Junior High School and Beyond

The choice of Japanese junior high school was limited to the local public school or a newly formed private school. We chose the private one for my daughter because we had already decided that she would move to Canada to attend high school. We felt that this school would better prepare her for moving into the Canadian system. All classes were in Japanese, but it appeared as though there were more hours dedicated to English. In addition, the school was small so we thought that she would get more attention. She attended only first year there, and because of her birthday (November), she entered high school in Canada the same year that she would have become a second-year junior high student in Japan. She was young when she left home, and looking back now, for personal reasons I wish that she had remained in Japan a few more years. However, at the time, we believed that it would be easier for her to settle into the Canadian education system if she started from grade 9.

Emily moved to Canada, lived with my younger sister's family, and

attend the local public high school. It wasn't easy on many fronts. Socially she was 'younger' than the girls in Canada, but she made friends quickly. Living with my sister was also difficult as she always felt left out of the family dynamics. But one of the biggest challenges she faced was studying in English. In Japan, she was a top student, but after the move, she struggled. Although her verbal skills were on par with her classmates, her written skills were much lower. Added to this was the fact that she did not know specific terms relating to subjects such as math, science, grammar, etc., and so she frequently felt disadvantaged. Her confidence was negatively affected and in some ways, she lost the drive that she had shown in Japan to learn. Unfortunately, her teachers were not initially informed of her background, even though I had met with the principal and guidance counselor and asked them to inform the staff that, up until that time, Emily had been schooled in Japan and in Japanese. Also, because it was a public school, unless a student asks for help, teachers are simply too busy to identify students who need extra attention. Emily has never wanted to stand out, let alone be looked upon as needing help, so she would not let her teachers know that she did not understand. There was only so much I could do from Japan. I would email her teachers and go talk to them when I was in Canada, but the situation continued this way for the entire time she attended high school.

Furthermore, similar to Japan where she never felt 100% accepted because she looked different and had a foreign mother, she also felt different at school in Canada because the school she attended was very 'white'. While Emily didn't look 'Japanese' in Japan, she didn't look 'Canadian' in Canada. This feeling continued until she moved to Toronto for university. Now she feels happy and comfortable in a city where people from many ethnicities live.

My son's experience at junior high school was a rough one. Cort missed the first six months of his first year because of the March 11, 2011 earthquake. Being so close to the Fukushima nuclear power plant (42 km away), my husband and I felt that it was better for him to spend some time in Canada. A few days after the earthquake, Cort went to Canada. There he was registered in and attended grade 9 classes at the local high school. Due to work commitments, I had to return to Japan but Cort stayed in Canada. Fortunately, Cort enjoyed himself and made many friends there, but unfortunately, the teachers had little expectations of him. He was not assigned homework nor expected to do well on tests. Again, Cort thought that this treatment was normal for all students and his love of 'Canadian' school grew.

The move back into the Japanese system was a rough one. By this time, I was tired of the education system in Japan – the rules, the tests, the homework. We decided not to send Cort to the private junior high school that Emily had attended because it was overly academic and competitive

and was not the right environment for Cort. While Cort was in Canada, we did occasionally visit and talk to his homeroom teacher and it quickly became clear that the teachers were not going to help Cort catch up on the work he missed. That was our responsibility. Upon his return to Japan he was enrolled in a cram school in order to get extra help. He never did catch up.

His best subject in Japan was English even though he was never the top student. His classmates would ask him why he wasn't the top student in English since he was 'Canadian' and his answer was, 'Well, why aren't you number one in Japanese class since you are Japanese?'. The reason he wasn't number one was because he was bored in class and the tests are set so that the students just memorize the information in the textbook and then recite the information on exams. Cort refused to do this and although his answers were often technically correct, they weren't what was written in the textbook so they were marked incorrect. At first, I went to the school and complained, to no avail. I told Cort what he had to do if he wanted to bring up his marks, but he refused. After a while I stopped complaining because I realized that the teacher would also mark things correct that weren't. His English spelling was atrocious.

By the end of second year junior high school, when we were faced with *juken* (high school entrance exams), we started debating what to do with Cort. Sending him to Canada to live with my sister was not an option. Sending him to Canada to attend private school was also not an option. We were stuck. I looked into international schools in Tokyo, but they did not have dormitory facilities, not to mention the costs involved. Public high school in Iwaki was not something we wanted because the education style did not match Cort's learning style. Fortunately, I heard about an international school in Hokkaido which was reasonably priced and had dormitory facilities, and that is where he went.

In order to prepare him for the move, we sent him to a private English tutor, who helped him develop his ideas and opinions in English and then helped him to write them down. However, even with his ability to speak fluently and with the help of his tutor, it was not a smooth transition. Like Emily, Cort had been schooled only in Japanese and lacked the foundation of an English education. He was behind in reading and writing, which proved to be a struggle for him. Language arts was a huge challenge because he couldn't read well enough to keep up with his peers. But unlike the situation with Emily, the teachers at his school were able and willing to give him the extra help, attention and encouragement he needed to catch up. It has been a long, tough and stressful process but after two and a half years, he is finally improving and actually talking about his long-term goals of going to university in Canada.

As I previously mentioned, in their younger years, Japanese was the stronger of the two languages. It was the language my children preferred

and the one they would use when talking amongst themselves. Now is it the opposite. English is their preferred language. For me, my dream has come true – to have a family which is comfortable and able to use both Japanese and English.

Biculturalism

As I acknowledged earlier, in some ways having a bicultural family was easier than having a bilingual family. Biculturalism just came naturally to us, we didn't 'work' at it. Both my husband and I understood and respected the fact that we are a family of two cultures and we celebrate the special days of both countries. My husband comes from a very traditional Japanese family where ceremonies are important. At the same time, we celebrate Canadian traditions as well. I don't think that just by celebrating special days makes a child bicultural as I believe there has to be an understanding behind the reasons the ceremonies exist. My mother-in-law has been a great source of information for me and my family about how to behave towards other people and the need to be respectful and kind to everyone. She is a very gracious woman. Furthermore, both my children spent a great amount of time at my husband's work and they were educated there as well. As for the Canadian customs and traditions, I tried to incorporate as much as I could into our lives in Japan. Luckily, we were able to return frequently to Canada and so our children got to experience life in Canada as well. Both children are very fortunate to have seven cousins in Canada who they are close to and spend a lot of time with. All in all, I think that we managed to find a good balance between the two cultures.

As for which culture they identified with more, this has changed over time. Emily used to favor Canada over Japan – perhaps because she felt different in Japan as opposed to in Canada. Still, as she becomes older, her appreciation of Japan grows. She has even decided to minor in Japanese at university. She tutors other students in Japanese and this past December she took and passed Level 1 of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test. As anyone who lives or has lived in a country other than their own, the feeling of longing to be home is always there. It is not easy. Wanting to be close to your family while at the same time also wanting to live in a place where you feel accepted is a struggle. So, while I do think that Emily will end up living her life in Canada, she does admit to wanting to return to Japan to work for a few years. The reason is not because she loves Japan but because she wants to be closer to her home and family. Conversely, I think that when Cort was younger, he identified more with Japan. He had more Japanese friends than his sister had and felt no differences between himself and his friends. Amusingly, Cort used to call Emily 'gaijin' (foreigner), as an insult and to get a reaction out of her. When he did this I would always say to him, 'Well, what do you think you are then?' Now,

maybe because he is at an international school, perhaps he views himself more as a Canadian.

Reflections

When I first sat down to write this, I thought about our lives over the years and our journey raising bilingual children. When my children were young, the Internet wasn't what it is today and I did not think about researching about how to do so. We just did. It was not always easy or smooth sailing, but we did succeed in the end as both our children are essentially equally fluent in both English and Japanese.

Most articles that I have now read on raising bilingual children tend to give similar advice to parents. Adam Beck wrote an article for *Japan Today* offering '16 Tips for Raising a Bilingual Child in Japan' (October 28, 2012). Some of his ideas were to 'start early, prioritize it, set a goal, get informed, adopt a strategy' and lots of reading. I agree with what he wrote but I also think that consistency is a must. Just because one parent is English speaking and the other is Japanese speaking does not mean that their child will be bilingual. It takes time and effort. I know many 'mixed' families with monolingual children. This is because both parents worked; or the English-speaking parent, usually the father, worked fulltime and the children were home with their Japanese-speaking mother; or raising bilingual children was just not a priority for the parents. In the first two cases mentioned, the children spent more time in a Japanese environment than in an English one. Even if the English-speaking parent talked to their child in English, the child was more comfortable speaking Japanese even though (s)he understood English. As I stated before, we were also very fortunate to be able to travel to Canada as often as we did. These trips abroad helped tremendously with the success of my children's language ability; not only for building their vocabulary, fluency, and ease of speaking English, but also for reinforcing their ties to Canada. I do not think that either Emily or Cort made a conscious decision to be bilingual, it just is a result of their upbringing.

However, upon reflection, I am able to recognize mistakes that we made, and there were a few. One drawback with our strategy to keep our house 'English only' was that my Japanese floundered. By striving to make my children bilingual, to some degree I made myself illiterate in Japanese. Also, when my children were in the later years of primary school and into junior high school they found it hard to take part in the conversations that their friends were having because they frequently centered on television shows which my children did not watch. Another drawback with our strategy was that all of our holidays were spent in Canada. We did not travel around Japan very much nor did we explore other countries. Perhaps we should have seen other parts of the world in order to broaden

my children's knowledge of it. Nevertheless, my children are very close with their family in Canada, which is a good thing. Recently we started visiting other places in addition to Canada, so Emily and Cort are able to experience different cultures as well.

Overall, I am very happy with how things have turned out for my children. Both of their options are wide-open because they can speak, read, and write in two languages. The next challenge is to get them to learn a third!

I will conclude this personal story by providing some input from two children. As a follow-up to what I have written about our bilingual experience, I decided to ask my children a few questions to get their perspective.

A Few Questions to Emily and Cort

Q1: How do you think your English compares to native English speakers?

Emily: Equivalent if not higher in relation to speaking or essay writing but with math and science terms, history and geography, I don't compare at all unless the terms or topics are new to them as well. When I first came to Canada, I had to take time to translate everything in my head into Japanese before I could answer or speak so I was at a disadvantage.

Cort: Compared to Japanese students, high. But compared to native speakers, my speaking level is the same but reading and writing is not. I can't spell. I grew up speaking English, not writing it

Q2: Which country do you identify with more?

Emily: Canada, because I was more accepted here especially after moving to Toronto. In Japan, I tried to be 'Japanese' but I my efforts were ignored. I will never be seen as fully Japanese. Also, the culture in Canada is more welcoming than in Japan. In Japan, I will always be an outsider. Japanese people also have two faces, one they show in public and the other which shows their true feeling. So it is hard to know what they are really thinking. Also in Canada, parents want to know their children's friends, so we spend a lot of time at each other's homes. But in Japan, I never went to my friend's houses. Not even close friends.

Cort: When I am with my Japanese friend, I feel Canadian but when I am around my friends at school who are all Western, then I feel more Japanese because there are many Western aspects that I do not understand.

Q3: What were some problems you faced when you moved into the English education system?

Emily: The language and teaching style. I had to start from scratch and learn all the basics. I also felt that the tests weren't as fair as in Japan. In Japan if you paid attention in class, you could do well on the test. But in Canada, teachers tested on things that they did not teach in class but that were in the textbook. Also, teachers did not care if I had problems or didn't understand. Also, I think that in high school, too much time was wasted on doing things that did not matter. For example, during the Olympics, we watched the men's hockey game instead of studying.

Cort: Everything was in English and I was not used to it, so it was very intense. Also, we go to a 'foreign' school but we are still in Japan.

Q4: What are some advantages and disadvantages of being bilingual?

Advantages:

Emily: I did not see any until recently when I realized that I had more job opportunities, especially if I want to come back to Japan to work. Because I can function in English and Japanese many businesses are willing to train me even if I do not have the skills that they are looking for. Also, because I have the language ability and different views and cultures, I am not afraid to travel and see different things.

Cort: I am an internationally-minded citizen.

Disadvantages:

Emily: Not many. Switching over into the Canadian system was difficult. I think that if I went to an international school or if I was brought up in Canada and was learning Japanese, things would have been easier. I got no help catching up and felt behind and lost. Now what I missed in grade school doesn't matter because I am not studying those subjects. At times, social issues, like indigenous rights, are new to me.

Cort: In Japan, people shouting at me in their bad English. No other disadvantage.

Section III
Community-building in Support of Raising Bilingual
Children

10

Family and Community in Rural Areas: Dual Focus Bilingual Approaches

Paul Daniels

THIS CHAPTER DOCUMENTS a couple's unheralded crusade raising two energetic bilingual boys in a small town in the southern region of Shikoku Island. While the experiences of bilingual families are undoubtedly diverse, it is the author's hope that parents embarking on similar journeys are inspired by the successes and failures encountered by this particular household, as well as by the personal stories and advice shared by other families in this volume. Documenting identifiable events or actions that help to cultivate a bilingual environment, where social, emotional and psychological elements thrive, will hopefully shed light on the infinite number of choices and opportunities that bilingual and bicultural families encounter.

What constitutes a 'bilingual' or 'bicultural' family or individual? Diverse interpretations as well as diverse levels of bilingualism exist (Baker, 2011). Elective bilinguals typically learn a second language in the classroom, whereas circumstantial bilinguals learn two languages because of the situation that they are in. Both elective and circumstantial bilinguals typically possess a 'dominant' language. Growing up in America, I often heard people refer to an individual as being 'bilingual' with little thought to the language components possessed by the individual. The term 'bilingual' was typically used to describe an individual who had learned to speak a foreign language by visiting or living for a short period of time in a foreign country; in this case an elective bilingual. In many cases the ability to 'speak' another language, even if at the basic level required for small talk, promotes one to 'bilingual' status in America. Having lived half of my life in Japan, I can better understand and appreciate the bilin-

gual abilities of my own children. While I can communicate in Japanese well enough to carry out day-to-day activities, I do not possess a fraction of the bilingual abilities that my two elementary school children possess. Bilingualism is by nature a relatively 'broad' term that includes individuals who, for example, are fluent in one language but weaker in the second language, can read in one language but only speak in another, or perhaps understand two languages and two cultures but only able to speak one language.

Family Structure

To gain a better understanding of the two boys described in this chapter and of the determination of the parents, a brief introduction of the family is outlined in this section. I, the father, grew up in America and moved to Japan at the age of 25 where I married my wife who is Japanese, but had several study abroad experiences. My wife and I worked and travelled extensively before starting a family and therefore had kids quite late in life. We both worked at universities in the Tokyo area before heading to rural Shikoku where I was able to secure a permanent teaching position. After moving to Shikoku my wife gave up her full-time job and currently teaches part-time at a local two-year college. Because my wife and I are working in the educational field, we are both very passionate about cultivating our children's scholastic and bilingual skills. We have two boys aged 6 and 9 who are respectively in first and fourth grade of elementary school. They were born and are currently being raised in a traditional and close-knit neighborhood located in an agricultural town. In fact, not only am I a foreigner living in this rural community, my wife and kids are also 'foreign' to this community as we are most likely the only family who has moved into this neighborhood from outside within the last 300 or so years. While we are currently enjoying the local culture and local schools, at this early stage, it is too early to determine if our childrearing measures, or lack thereof, are appropriate or advantageous in producing bilingual children, but from day one, we strongly felt that much of the groundwork for language acquisition needed to be established in the first 5 to 7 years of raising children. From when our first child was born my wife and I knew we had a unique challenge ahead of us in determining how to best make use of the limited educational and international resources available in this rural community. The abundance of nature, outdoor experiences, and parent involvement may perhaps hold the key to our potential success of raising our two boys to be bilingual leaders.

Variables Affecting Bilingual Competency

There are a substantial number of variables at play when examining the upbringing of bilingual and bicultural children. Factors such as, how similar the two languages are, age and gender of learner, dominant language used at home and school, L2 proficiency of each spouse, and international education opportunities all come into play when raising bilingual children. Previous research on the Critical Period hypothesis (Birdsong, 2005; Singleton, 2005; Hakuta, Bialystok & Wiley, 2003) suggests that the age at which children are exposed to language is certainly an important factor when acquiring a second language. If the child is exposed to two or more languages from birth, there is a far greater chance that the neural connections needed for language production will be more developed. The dominant language used in the household is perhaps most influential in the child's language development. In fact, discussions with other bilingual families regarding the dominant language used at home tends to be a delicate topic. For example, it is still relatively common in Japan to raise children in the same home with their grandparents, who often only speak one language. Therefore, it is difficult to switch between two languages as it can lead to occurrences of exclusion. While my children do not live together with their grandparents, I have often witnessed the grandparents feeling a sense of isolation when an unfamiliar language is in play during their visits to our home. There are a number of strategies that parents employ to ensure that their children are being exposed to both languages. Many families designate a specific room in the home that is used for one particular language, and when you enter that room you speak only that language. Other families have experimented with a 'days of the week' schedule where, for example, every other day the family will speak in the father's L1.

In the case of my family, we took a much more dramatic approach to bilingualism as we were not living with any in-laws and we were also living in a rural area of Japan where the children had very few opportunities to speak English outside of the home. We decided from very early on to make English the dominant language at home. Our meal conversations are almost entirely in English as well as most other essential communication used around the home to raise children. At this stage in our life, the two boys are still communicating with each other in English, even though they attend a public Japanese elementary school and use only Japanese with their friends at school. It is interesting that from the time they both started speaking, they used English as their play language, and to this day they still feel more comfortable playing with each other in English.

Naturally using a 'dominant language at home' approach depends in large part on the language proficiency of the spouse who is confronted with the task of communicating in the L2. This can sometimes be a daunt-

ing experience as basic human relationships such as encouragement and trust are highly dependent on language. My wife and I decided to make English the dominant language at home. As mentioned earlier my wife had studied abroad on several occasions and was fairly competent in communicating in English even if her English writing and grammar was not perfect. While both boys were in kindergarten, she did her best to communicate at home with the boys in English, although she struggled from time to time when she wanted to share personal stories about her childhood days or provide more intimate advice to the boys. It was only natural that Japanese was used for these more culturally defined occasions. As the boys are growing up, Japanese is becoming a greater part of the boys' lives and my wife needs to discuss schoolwork or school activities with the boys in Japanese. Still we keep most of our daily discussion and mealtime talks in English as we realize the boys are in school using Japanese from 8 to 5.

Outside the home, educational opportunities and peer interactions are vital links to language input. Raising children in the rural areas of Japan often means fewer choices of schools. In the small town where we live, with a population of approximately 20,000, there are no international schools but we were lucky enough to find an international pre-school in the nearest city, about a thirty-minute drive. My oldest boy, who is now in his fourth year of elementary school, attended international preschool for four years from the age of 3. My younger son just graduated from the same international preschool. After kindergarten or preschool, there are no international schools that I know of on the entire Island of Shikoku, so the only options are either a Japanese private elementary school in the city, or the neighborhood public elementary school, neither being an attractive option when it comes to English education.

Language and Age

Birth

From pre-birth to the start of kindergarten, both my wife and I used predominantly English at home. Our rationale was that, first the boys would be exposed to Japanese outside of the home, so we should balance this inequality by using predominantly English at home. We also believed that the earlier years, from birth to about 4 years old, were the critical years for acquiring sufficient English to guarantee a 'native' English speaker-like command of the language.

Kindergarten

As noted above, both boys were enrolled in an international pre-school/kindergarten from 3 to 6 years old in Kochi City, about 30 minutes by car. The school consisted of predominantly Japanese-speaking

kids whose parents hoped to give their kids a head start with English. Most of the teachers at the school were native English speakers and the instruction was primarily conducted in English. Both boys had slightly different experiences while attending the same school. When our older son attended, there were at least three other children attending who had an English-speaking parent. With a small circle of English-speaking friends, my older son spoke mainly English at school every day, and was far more confident speaking in English than speaking in Japanese. When my younger son entered the same program, he quickly made friends with some of the Japanese-speaking boys and although he used English during instruction time, he mainly used Japanese during play time and when speaking with friends.

Elementary School

With our first son, we felt that the international preschool was a success, and we felt he had achieved sufficient English language skills to be successful if he were to enter a typical elementary school in America. In fact, we did send both boys back to kindergarten and elementary school in America for short periods of time which I will touch upon later in this chapter.

Now that my older son has completed three years of elementary school, we are beginning to better understand how to balance two languages. As the older son progressed through his first few years of Japanese elementary school, the first revelation was that his Japanese ability, particularly his listening, was noticeably lagging compared to his Japanese counterparts. Because of the dominance of English at home and at kindergarten, he struggled in the beginning with oral instructions from the teacher. Interestingly, his productive skills, such as writing and reading seemed to be on par with his classmates. With active children, perhaps more so with males, it is difficult to trace the underlying source of his 'listening challenge'. Perhaps he was just behaving like a typical boy spending more time looking out the window daydreaming rather than concentrating on what the teacher was saying. Perhaps it was that the international and hands-on stimuli which he was exposed to in kindergarten now no longer existed.

After spending the first few years of his elementary school worrying about his lack of attention, our concerns have now somewhat subsided, as by the end of the third year of elementary school, his Japanese skills seem to have improved dramatically. This leads me to believe that perhaps because English was the predominate language at both home and at school for his early ages, he simply lacked the Japanese language skills in the beginning of Japanese elementary school, but was able to catch up within two years. Often the parent's first reaction is to panic when problems like this arise, but in most cases the situation improves after a short period of time.

During our son's initial struggle with Japanese at school, we found that the public Japanese schools were quite supportive. Because his school is in a relatively rural area in Japan with a dwindling population, the class sizes are small. There were only 12 students in his class. In addition, a teaching assistant is in the classroom everyday doing a tremendous job of keeping the students on task. Whenever our son was a step behind the others, the assistant would help him get back on the proper page. Although rural regions in Japan tend to lack international options, the public schools tend to have smaller classes which means that learners are apt to receive greater individual attention.

Fostering English Environments

Regardless of the country or culture, parents are the most influential factor in the learning process. Parents perhaps play a more instrumental role in the learning process than institutional organizations, especially at the earlier years of kindergarten and elementary school. In Japan, *juku* or cram schools are commonplace. Because top schools are notoriously competitive in Japan, studying to pass these entrance exams keeps these cram schools thriving. As a foreigner in Japan, it is easy to view the *juku* system as a way of 'passing the buck' from the parents to the cram schools. Some critics portray the *juku* system as a failure of the institutional educational systems. Why, after spending close to 8 hours in school, would a child require an additional 2 or 3 hours of cram time in the evening?

Fortunately, my wife and I agree that attending a cram school is not the best idea for our kids, at least not at this point in their lives. We hope to provide encouragement and nurturing from within the family, and with friends, to better stimulate the social elements which play an important role in the adolescent learning process. My wife and I have pieced together a number of activities and missions which we feel are important for nurturing children with dual cultures.

From a very early age, we worked hard to organize a local group which we branded *Kochi Kid's English Club*. The club consisted of a loosely knit group of families with one or both parents from a country other than Japan. The group later expanded considerably as interest grew and now includes Japanese families who had lived abroad and Japanese families who genuinely have an interest in English education and possess some degree of confidence in speaking English. Naturally, several of the Japanese children who attend the international preschool with my sons also became involved with *Kochi Kids English Club*. As a group, we organize English events at least once a month, but typically we have two to three events a month. We do our best to include a wide variety of themes which range from science, crafts and music to hiking, camping and kayaking. I took on the role of organizing the club and I strongly encourage the other

participating parents to take a lead role in organizing individual events, although finding volunteers often proves to be a challenge. By far the most popular event is our spring and fall English outdoor camps which run for 2 or 3 days. Camping is an ideal situation to gather internationally-minded families together and provides an exceptional opportunity for children to use English in a non-threatening environment and to provide a setting where parents can be English-speaking role models. While it is not necessary to enforce, it is helpful to gently remind non-English speaking parents that the underlying motivation of these excursions is to reinforce our children's English skills. For the children, to see their parents speaking English in a group can have a powerful effect on their empathy towards a second language. As our children grow up, we may need to shift the focus of the activities to include intensive English camps, such as Lego camp, science camp, or art camp, where kids can gather and be immersed in English for an entire week or longer during the school breaks.

Volunteering

Another ambition of mine was to become part of the social fabric through education. From the beginning of pre-school, both my wife and I volunteered weekly at the International preschool. Once a week I prepared a hands-on English lesson for the pre-school kids. My wife also provided piano lessons once a week after school. Fortunately, the school was accommodating and incorporated our lessons into the school curriculum. This experience has proved to be valuable in not only having an opportunity to shape the school's curriculum, but also to have a chance to understand how the school operates from the inside. We spent the last eight years volunteering at the preschool while both our sons attended. This year both boys are attending the local elementary school, so we hope to focus our attention on volunteering at the local public elementary school, which may prove to be more of a challenge than with the private preschool, as the daily schedule and curriculum in elementary school tends to be fairly rigid. I attend my older son's class whenever there is an 'open' lesson day for parents. I also attend the school trips, almost always being the sole male parent. I also attempt to get to know the school teachers and principal on a more personal level, and volunteer to do book readings or guest lectures. I find that my children's classmates also become more appreciative to foreign cultures when I have a chance to visit the class and interact with them.

The university where I am employed also encourages instructors to organize outreach programs with the local public schools. About once a month I organize an English event that is supported by my university. We have had much success with hands-on English events, including our science English camps, nature hikes, woodworking and craft events, and

kayaking and sailing events. I find that with these English events, the children are much more willing to use English if it is required to complete a specific hands-on task.

Regimented Schedules

One of the most difficult parts of raising our children bilingually is finding sufficient time to work with two languages. During the preschool ages, it was possible as the school day was shorter and the homework was not overbearing. With my older son in fourth grade now, I am still amazed at how much time is spent at school, and the amount of homework he is required to do. When I was younger, I could remember racing home just around three in the afternoon and having at least two hours of outdoor adventures before settling into studies. In the dead of winter here in Shikoku, my son arrives at home just as the sun is setting at 5:00 PM. Those two hours of outdoor time which I valued dearly as a child are uncommon here.

International Schools

As with most rural areas in Japan, international school options are rare. Living close to a city with a population of 300,000, we were lucky to find two international kindergartens/preschools within a 30-minute driving range. Both boys attended the closer of the two international kindergartens for four years for about the same cost as a public Japanese preschool or private Japanese kindergarten. When the boys entered elementary school, we had no international schooling options within reach. The closest International school to our hometown is in Kobe, which is out of the question. Currently, we are satisfied with the local Japanese elementary school as long as we continue to supplement their education with English activities at home and in the community. By the time the boys reach junior high school, there will be an International Baccalaureate or IB school opening in Kochi City, and we are hoping that may be a viable option for us. While the main curriculum will still be taught in Japanese, English will have a greater place than in the standard curriculum, and the curriculum will supposedly focus on international education.

Visits Abroad

While we find it more and more of a challenge to travel abroad as the children grow older, we have been making a point to return to the east coast of America twice a year, once in August and again in March. We have found these trips, although sometimes quite short, to be extremely beneficial in both helping our boys to reinforce their identity as well as

to experience language in a natural setting. We have had good success in finding private schools to enroll the boys in for shorter periods of stay, for example a month-long period. Starting from kindergarten we enrolled both boys in a private school for one month a year where my sister had sent both of her children. We later found a more economical Catholic elementary school that accepted the boys for a month in March. This same school offered a half-day summer camp program which we took advantage of in August. In addition to enrolling in regular schools for shorter periods of time, we discovered that most towns have intensive summer programs with courses that range from reading to crafts. One of more engaging summer programs was a two-week Lego *Minecraft* camp. We also tried an art course as well which the kids enjoyed. Typically, these hands-on summer programs offer plenty of opportunities for speaking and listening but the challenge has been to find reading and writing summer programs. Most of the creative writing or reading programs tend to be scheduled in July which conflicts with the Japanese school calendar. We also joined a local summer beach club which has been a huge success as many of the local children spend their summer holiday at this town beach club. There always seems to be a large group of similarly-aged kids to interact with. In future summer trips back to the US, we hope to find additional opportunities where our children can practice their speaking, reading, and writing skills.

Ideas for Promoting Bilingualism

As with other parents attempting to raise bilingual kids, over time we have built up a trove of resources and ideas, which include both tips from other parents, as well as tried and tested theories of our own. This next section is an attempt to outline ideas that we believe have been successful in attaining our bilingual goals for our children.

The first and foremost initiative, which is rather obvious as it is backed by extensive research, is that we as parents need to spend an extraordinary amount of time and energy reading to our children and expanding on these ideas that are generated from the images and text. My wife and I have set up a straightforward schedule where we read one night in Japanese and one night in English for six days of the week, with the seventh night being ‘movie night’. We have secured children’s books using numerous avenues. We regularly carry large loads of books back from the US when visiting family and friends. Since my wife and I had kids later in life than our family and friends, we were able to secure hand-me-down classics, such as Dr. Seuss, *The Hardy Boys* and the Harry Potter collection. I also made good use of the extensive reading library at my workplace. Oxford’s Magic Key series was not the most engaging, at least from my perspective, but the books garnered the attention of my two boys long

enough to start them off reading on their own. One of the benefits of a series is that the characters' names and relevant vocabulary gets recycled throughout the levels making it more approachable for younger readers. In the beginning, we would start by reading and pointing to each word. Later on, we would have the kids point to the words as we read, and finally they would start to read on their own, even if it meant mom or dad watching over their shoulders to assist them with difficult words as they read.

In the age of technology, we have also been keen on teaching computer literacy. Simple but useful tasks include communicating with foreign friends using email or searching the Internet to find answers to the endless questions that kids have. Each summer upon returning to America, my boys develop friendships, which are sustained over the years by occasional email messages. Online tools such as 'spell-checkers', 'auto-completion', and 'speech-to-text' can speed up the composition process and may even have pedagogical benefits, such as improving word recognition. As our boys barrage us with questions, we undoubtedly need to verify some of our spur-of-the-moment responses. For this purpose, we keep a tablet nearby that we can use to ask Google or Siri for answers. More recently we have found that smart home devices such as Amazon's Alexa or Google Home are not only useful for quickly tracking down facts, they are also proving to be home 'English' assistants. Both my boys find it quite novel to speak to Alexa and listen to her responses. They ask Alexa for the weather before heading out to school, ask for the time, and ask endless questions about countries around the world. Of course, Alexa will typically only answer if the questions are spoken correctly and clearly, so they often need to practice speaking their question a few times. In addition, it provides more chances to listen to English in a setting that is more interactive than, for example, watching a movie.

Interaction and language production is important in language learning but extensive listening also has its benefits. Rather than being overly worried about too much tube time, we have introduced our kids to English movies, so much that they now prefer watching movies in English to watching movies in Japanese. This is somewhat unexpected in that they both have stronger Japanese listening and speaking skills, but when it comes to Hollywood movies, they can better appreciate the English than if watching a movie dubbed in Japanese. I highly recommend popular Disney and Universal Pictures movies, such as *Cars*, *Toy Story*, *Despicable Me*, and *Frozen*, in addition to advocating the idea that Hollywood movies are best enjoyed in English. While not for everyday consumption, we have found that movies play an important role in fostering authentic listening skills and in cultivating cultural identity. Family movie nights with popcorn are popular with the kids as well as road trip movies. We always download plenty of movies on the boys' iPads before long car, train or airplane trips. Since they like to watch the same movie over and over, we

typically purchase movies on iTunes so the media is instantly available on all of our family devices.

Along with movies we have spent an enormous amount of time searching for good English educational apps. As electronic materials are constantly being changed and improved upon, it may not be overly useful to recommend specific titles, but here are a few that we have found to be both engaging and pedagogically sound. At an early age, we started introducing basic phonics to our boys and had both working daily in an app called *Pocket Phonics*. Because the activities were short and the results were logged, it proved to be an ideal task to complete in the car each morning on the way to kindergarten. *Endless Alphabet* and the eFlash App *Sight Words* were popular with my boys when they were younger. We also found that the frequently updated content in the *Brain Pop* app captured my boys' attention. The greatest challenge was to find educational apps with sufficient content. We typically encountered apps that had engaging activities but my kids would tear through all of the content and soon be bored. This dilemma even prompted me to develop my own vocabulary iPhone app which introduced phonics and spelling for the first 1,000 words that children should learn. As the boys grew older, and got accustomed to using notebook computers, and we started them on a literacy program called *Lexia Reading Core5*. Although the content doesn't seem to be overly engaging, the selection of activities is ample and the tasks appear to be pedagogically sound.

In addition to apps, we spend quite a bit of money purchasing children's books on Amazon and reading to them in English each night. We started out purchasing used paperbacks, but as the bookshelves at home began to overflow, we found that it was much easier to stockpile a digital library and the eBooks did not cost much more than the paper versions. A nice benefit of the eBooks is that you can often purchase the audiobook along with the ebook, and the audio proved to be a valuable listening task while carting the boys around in the car.

As with any parent raising bilingual children, we can never be entirely sure that we are doing the right thing, and even if 'the right thing' did exist, there are endless hurdles in life that inevitably change our course. But changing courses and adapting to unexpected environments is what develops a bilingual child's confidence and uniqueness. Raising children in rural Japan left us with very limited institutionalized educational resources, so we had to especially focus on English education at home using a variety of educational content involving film, newspapers, and educational apps. We also cultivated our own English group which brought bilingual families together for outdoor events. Finally, we relied on frequent trips back to America to strengthen our children's bicultural identities. As our two boys progress through elementary school, we are regularly made aware of the challenges ahead of us, particularly with keeping up our boys

English literacy skills. In the near future, I am hoping to have a chance to enroll both boys in elementary school or middle school in America for a year. If one of both of the boys have a positive experience abroad and wish to continue their study in America, my wife and I will certainly support them if they choose to attend high school or university in the US.

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11

Establishing a Community Literacy Programme

Charlotte VT Murakami

CULTIVATING THE ABILITY of a child to speak in the heritage language of her mother, father, or wider family is fairly easy, provided the child has enough natural exposure to the language. A more challenging endeavour is teaching a young child how to read and write in her or his heritage language. This is especially true if the child attends an elementary school that is solely focused on the development of the national or official language.

In the case of Japan, children attending state and private elementary schools will learn how to read and write Japanese – the national language (*kokugo*) – and this will continue until their ninth year of school due to the complex nature of the Japanese writing system. In the elementary school system, children will also learn the letters of the Roman alphabet, which may or may not be the writing system of their home or heritage language. In junior high school, students are required to study English, and a few will have the option of studying Chinese or Korean. Unfortunately, any modern language instruction is primarily geared towards the development of reading skills as opposed to writing skills.

Outside the school system, one way to develop your child's home or heritage language literacy is by joining or establishing a local literacy programme. This chapter will outline the establishment of such a programme based on my experiences of co-founding and directing a K-12 community literacy programme and library in Okinawa. At one point, more than thirty children were enrolled in the program, and they included:

- Children who have one Japanese parent and attend a Japanese school

- Children who have Japanese parent(s) and attend a Japanese school
- Children with no Japanese parent(s) who attend a Japanese school
- Returnees: Children leaving English medium schools upon their return to Japan
- Children in English medium schools on the neighbouring American base who are finding it difficult to keep up with their English Language Arts classes because it is their second language

In this chapter, I will write about the process of founding a programme in an area of Japan where bilinguality is not a norm despite the presence of the American bases. The program had three main objectives. The first was to assist literacy maintenance. This purpose was most relevant to returnees. The second was to develop the children's English literacy levels. Some families were content to have their children learn at their own pace. In contrast, others were hoping for literacy development on par with benchmarks set in their own English-speaking countries. The third reason was building the children's confidence by providing a community space where 'being bilingual/multilingual' was both normal and valued. Here, I will outline not only the benefits of such a programme but also identify some key challenges in establishing such a programme.

Why Bother Setting Up a Literacy Programme?

Why bother establishing a community literacy programme? While it is less common for families living in Japan to set up community programmes, it is, by contrast, very common among Japanese-speaking families living overseas to do so. Overseas, Japanese families typically make considerable efforts to ensure their children can read and write Japanese by sending them to local Japanese Saturday schools or a full-time Japanese school in their respective area. A key motivation for these families is a smooth re-entry into the Japanese school system upon their return from living abroad. Many of these schools receive financial support from Japanese companies and community organisations in their respective areas, and nearly all also receive staffing and educational material support from the Japanese government.

Within Japan, however, barring perhaps the Korean and some Brazilian communities, most families tend to 'go it alone' in their efforts to teach their children how to read and write the home or heritage language. As a result, many children only read or write in 'that language' within the four walls of their home. Numerous literacy development websites (e.g., Starfall, Sunshine Online, Reading Eggs, etc) and tablet applications (e.g., iWrite, My Story Book Creator, Scribble Press, etc.) can assist with literacy development. Some homeschooling programs also enable children to communicate with other children online and provide means to trav-

erse those walls. Even so, for many children in Japan, the experience of learning how to read and write in another language will remain a solitary experience.

What is Literacy Exactly?

Before we go any further, let's explore what literacy is. Literacy can be thought about in numerous ways. Most people think of literacy as a set of skills that people carry around in their heads that enable them to read, write, and do arithmetic; also known as the 3Rs. This is a very functional understanding of literacy, and people who understand it in these terms usually see learning as being neutral or independent of social context. This is a more singular notion of literacy where reading and writing is an autonomous skill or a competency. People who see literacy in this way often believe that teaching a child how to read and write at home alone or with a sibling as being more than adequate; in the same way a child learns to play a musical instrument with a tutor.

In another sense, literacy can be understood as a social practice; a product of a broad-based learning process. With roots deep in educational theory (see the works of Dewey, Piaget, Montessori, Freire, Vygotsky, etc.), worldly experience is considered a central component of learning. And, an important part of that experience is interacting and collaborating with others about what they experience in the world, such as literature, art, music, and nature. These interactions can serve to reflect and project differing perspectives of how one sees the world. Thus, this is a more pluralistic notion of literacy that can be likened to the learning experience of playing a musical instrument in a band or orchestra.

The above is a rather simplistic dichotomy of how language literacy can be understood. However, it is the latter understanding – the pluralistic notion of literacy – that provides the rationale for providing a community-based literacy programme. A community literacy programme is a venue that enables children to learn from and with others – be it other children or adults – thereby deepening and enriching their sense of language and literacy as it is used in the real world. Once the target language becomes an integral part of the child's social framework and cognitive development, literacy learning then becomes more meaningful to the children.

Finding and Setting up a Space

Homes in Japan are notoriously small, and so it is not always easy to hold a community programme at home. Finding a place to rent, however, is relatively easy in Japan as there are a lot of community halls that cater to the needs of zero-profit and non-profit groups. They have reasonable

rates too. One common restriction, however, is that a certain number of the members must be registered as residents of that community area.

The size of the furniture at the facility is an important consideration for programmes with younger children. For this reason, it is advisable to find places that have tatami flooring with low Japanese tables rather than small tables and chairs. Choosing a place that has easy access to clean toilets with baby changing units also makes life much easier for families with small children. Also, choosing a place with an outdoor play space is advantageous because it enables children to let off steam and bond with each other. Last of all, a key consideration is whether the program will establish a library. Books take up room, and they are not light. Where possible, it is most advisable to find a place that can provide and allow storage.

In addition to community halls or community centers, rooms and storage facilities can be found at local churches, shrines, temples, and so forth. However, there is a caveat. In our case, we had to move the literacy programme due to a sudden increase in the number of children enrolled in it. Even though members voted to move to a location that would allow the use of the grounds, hall, kindergarten classrooms, creche, and storage facilities of a church, some begrudged the fact that it was a religious site. This caused problems between the parents later on down the line.

Lastly, there is the matter of insurance because ‘accidents happen’. Again, there are numerous organisations that provide insurance to non-profit and volunteer groups. Insurance is often inexpensive, and it will provide cover lest a child falls over someone’s leg in the tatami room and bangs a head on a table corner or other such accidents. Some community centers provide coverage, so it is best to check with them first.

Establishing the Ground Rules: Language Use

A very important decision to make for a community program is the use of language(s). Most immersion schools worldwide use some form of time and area zoning to ensure program efficacy for the pupils. For example, Toronto School Board schools provide 100% French immersion for children who do not speak French at home until the end of third grade. Then, pupils receive half-day English instruction from Grades 6–8. Within the designated time zones, pupils must use the target language at the school. At Katoh Gakuen, the longest standing English-Japanese immersion school in Japan, pupils not only have to use designated languages in designated time frames but also in designated spaces.

One challenge confronting a community programme is the fact families use different methods to cultivate bilingualism at home based on their situation and language ability. Some families use a One Parent One Language (OPOL) approach where each parent speaks to their children in the language that they are most fluent or at ease in at home. Others ad-

here to the Minority Language at Home (MLAH) approach where parents purposefully do not use Japanese at home in order to increase communication in the home or heritage language. Some families use the Time and Context method, switching from language to language depending on where they are and who they are with. Finally, some families have no method in place and freely mix languages as they please.

Our programme convened two or three Saturdays a month. As a result, we used time and area zoning in order to maximise the children's exposure to English during the three hours that they attended. Children and adults had to use English in the classrooms during the learning sessions. Language choice was free during break times and in any other areas of the community center. OPOL families, however, found this arrangement problematic, arguing it effectively excluded the parent using Japanese from learning activities. If OPOL families begrudge this fact, then problems are likely to arise further on. As a result, it might be a good idea to get families to sign some sort of an agreement from the outset. This agreement could also cover points such as: language use rules, membership fees, facility use, library use, insurance, etc.

Who Should Do What?

There are a few ways to approach the teaching of children in a community programme. One choice is to bring in a teacher. Another option is to have community members share the teaching responsibilities. Both approaches have advantages and disadvantages, and programmes will have to weigh each of them in the light of their given circumstances.

Employing a teacher is probably the easiest route. The problem is that there are very few English teachers in Japan who are appropriately credentialed as primary school or Language Arts teachers. Most are English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers, and, as a result, they will typically teach in a manner that is not well suited to literacy development when the language is the first or second language of the child. This is a very important point that must not be overlooked. That said, some people are just 'born teachers' and hold no qualifications in the field of education.

In either case, a trial term is always advisable as not everyone has the knowledge, flair, or skill needed to teach literacy development well. In our case, at one point in the life of the programme, we were able to hire a newly qualified American elementary school teacher. This, however, proved an unwise decision since her willingness to prepare and ability to teach in an engaging manner was insufficient. In this regard, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's (MEXT) is doing a great service for supplementary Japanese Saturday school worldwide. Details of how teachers are screened, selected, prepared, and dispatched

for two-year placements are outlined on the Children Living Abroad and Returnee Internet (CLARINET) page on MEXT's website.

The other option is the 'village raises a child' model where the parents share the responsibility of teaching the children. Some children find that their parent(s) have little time for them on a daily basis, and so they positively bloom in the light of their and other people's attention to the programme. Some parents, on the other hand, often become frustrated by the process of overseeing their child's learning. Similarly, many children are inclined to resist their parent's efforts by rattling and fraying the nerves of everyone around. What is important to note is that the shared teaching model changes the social dynamics quite radically because children are not only taught by their parents but also other children and adults in the community. In this type of social setting, everybody – both children and adults – tends to keep themselves in check, and children tend to be more responsive. Furthermore, both children and adults can benefit from being exposed to the teaching, learning and social experiences.

Again, it must be accepted from the outset that some individuals possess a natural talent for guiding or teaching children whereas others do not. Furthermore, teaching someone how to read and write is a difficult enterprise for those who were not schooled in the target language or still lack confidence with their ability to write. Such types naturally shy away from teaching responsibilities, therefore it can be advantageous to establish various volunteer roles in a programme so all can participate in one way or another: such as librarians; library catalog keeper; accountant; child minder; PR advertising; greeter; etc. In addition, there is the Pareto Principle to take into account. This is a 20/80 rule that applies to most areas of economic and social activity. In other words, you will probably find that approximately 20% of the members will do the work to keep the programme afloat whereas 80% will tend to operate on the periphery. This may invariably happen, and it can become a point of contention.

There are, of course, different approaches to balance the running of a literacy programme. The first way is simply accepting the Pareto Principle, and hoping you will get the right people. This can be achieved by only accepting members based on personal recommendation, interviewing applicants, and/or setting out terms of agreement to join the programme in advance. The second is to establish some kind of system, such as rotational or elected terms, to share responsibilities more evenly. Yet another option is to give members the choice to support the programme with time or money (e.g. those who do not volunteer must pay X amount for that month).

How to share responsibility for running a programme is closely related to the matter of decision-making for the programme. Is decision-making undertaken democratically? It is often an easy enough process to manage when the membership is small. It can, however, become more unwieldy

as the membership grows. Also, there is a good chance that those who do not actively participate will be more than ready to voice their views as to how the programme should be run. If this prospect does not sound appealing, then an agreement needs to be reached at the outset as to who makes decisions in the organisation and for how long.

What Type of Educational Curriculum or Programme?

Parents venturing out on the 'teach your child how to read and write at home' path are often bewildered by the vast array of educational materials on the market. If the child's spoken level in the target language is limited and comparable to other Japanese children, then foreign language materials may be more suitable. In Japan, there are a lot of educational companies selling EFL materials. However, many of these materials tend to be repetitive; reflecting the Japanese approach to pedagogy. To locate EFL materials that utilize innovative pedagogical approaches to language and literacy learning you may want to look at what is available in other markets. In the European market, for instance, Muzzy by Early Advantage is an engaging online language learning series that was developed from a neurolinguistic theory of bilingualism. Another series, Join In by Gunter Gerngross and Herbert Puchta is based on the theory of 'Multiple Intelligences' (for more on this, see the work of Howard Gardner), and the characters in the books grow with the child.

For children who understand and speak the target language proficiently, it is advisable to gather learning materials from school systems that use that language. In regard to the teaching and learning of English, it will benefit parents to learn a little about the 'reading war' that found momentum after World War II, as it will help them to make sense of the conflicting messages found in educational material advertising. In brief, in one camp, we have a more holistic approach to reading where children are encouraged from the outset to 'read for meaning'. This is sometimes called the 'Whole Language' approach in the USA or the 'Real Books' approach in the UK. The approach is lexical in the sense that children are taught to recognise 'sight words' from the beginning without paying much or any attention to the parts that make up the word. This approach also emphasises various reading strategies that enable children to learn how meaning is made from how the words function in relation to each other, and also how the text relates to the illustrations. In the other camp, a more systematised approach to letter and word recognition can be found in the form of 'phonics'. Teachers using this approach believe that reading should be simplified for young children. To accomplish this, words are segmented into letters or letter combinations that are then 'decoded' by the child. In recent years, this approach has also advanced the importance of reading fluency in terms of how many words can be read per minute.

In many school systems, experienced elementary school teachers tend to blend both methods. They will use phonics instruction to reinforce reading skills but at the same time use a rich variety of literature to contextualise the meaning of the stories. They blend both approaches knowing all too well that children respond in different ways. Some children respond very well to phonics, and others do not. Some quickly learn to use contextual clues to establish meaning in a text, and others do not. What is most important is that children are exposed to a literacy rich environment where they can combine speaking, listening, reading, and writing in multiple genres.

If you elect the blended approach, there are three choices. You can either buy a balanced educational curriculum; create your own curriculum and materials from scratch that incorporate both approaches; or you can decide to blend the best of both worlds. In the case of our programme, we decided to blend the best of both worlds. We felt it was important not to only follow the textbook but also to take advantage of the group's social dynamics. For instance, we held shared reading circles where a group of children and an adult or two would read a book out loud in turns. We discussed the story as we went along, revealing which parts we liked and guessing what would happen next. For this activity, easy reading mysteries like *Nate the Great* and the *No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency* children's book series, which is set in Botswana, worked very well. We also held writing workshops, reading theatre events, 'My Favourite Book' presentations, Halloween scary story and poem events, special guest days where a guest talked about their experiences of reading and writing as a child, and a rota for reading out loud picture books to the younger kids. We also published an 'I Wrote It' magazine, which served to boost kids' confidence and pride in writing.

As a set curriculum, we brought in a Kindergarten–6th Grade reading and writing program from the company Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. We felt this particular programme was most suitable as it was used at that time in several parts of the US such as California, where schools have a large number of bilingual pupils, and the textbooks were also used widely in international schools in Japan. One of the benefits of the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Language Art series was the fact that the textbooks included real stories, and many of them had won Caldecott and Kate Greenaway awards. Indeed, one of the first things the children would typically do is whizz through the book, reading all the stories. These textbooks also provided post-reading activities that reinforced comprehension or scaffolded learning (e.g., drawing a map of the journey that took place in the story; making a TV news report of what happened in the story; making a 'Wanted' poster for the villain in the story; turning the story into a play or puppet show; checking out provided links to related websites; outlines for doing further research; etc).

Schools in the US often dispose of many textbooks each year. This worked to our advantage as new books would have been too expensive to purchase. We placed bulk orders for textbooks and practice books through Amazon.com and had them shipped via various shipping methods to Japan. Given our efforts to purchase and ship the textbooks in the first place, we only lent out the textbooks through our community library. Program members also had to make special deposits in order to borrow the materials for extended periods of time. The practice books, on the other hand, were purchased by members.

These accompanying practice books provided a great deal of choice when it came to vocabulary, grammar, comprehension, and writing practice that acted as pre-reading and post-reading tasks. Some disapprove of using practice books; especially those who did not grow up using English textbooks at school. In our experience, however, parents equipped with practice materials were able to discover what is typically taught and learnt at a particular grade level. More importantly, the practice materials enabled parents and children to carry on learning at home. Indeed, in one case, despite the mother's perceived unwillingness to make time to help her son, he was able to make considerable progress on his own. In time, having built his confidence greatly in reading and writing, he asked to go to her country – his heritage country – to visit extended family. This was a major breakthrough for a boy who had refused to be seen with his mother in public in Japan because he was ashamed of her 'foreign-ness'. This anecdote may well be rare, but it is for this reason that I cannot stress enough the importance of having at hand both interesting and well-scaffolded materials that enable independent learning.

The real challenge, however, is finding materials for older children entering the programme whose English literacy levels are in rudimentary stages of development. For example, a fifth or sixth grader seldom appreciates imagery and content that is targeted to first graders. They often feel embarrassed or frustrated with their literacy level, especially when they see children of a younger age reading and writing proficiently. There are a few publishers on the market that address this issue. Orca Book Publishers and High Noon Books both publish high quality and award-winning books and audio books for older reluctant and struggling readers. These books, sometimes referred to as Hi-Low readers, typically require a second-grade reading level or higher. Wherever possible, texts that directly serve the interests of these learners should be selected. A remarkable experience for me was meeting an American junior high school girl who lived on an American Base in Japan, had no Japanese relatives, and attended an American junior high school. Despite never learning Japanese in a formal capacity, her zeal to read original Japanese manga led to her becoming quite proficient in reading katakana, hiragana, and kanji. As the saying goes: Where there is a will, there is a way.

Assessing the Children's Literacy Level

Whatever your educational approach or the size of your programme, the literacy level of the incoming children will need to be assessed. In our case, this requirement also greatly affected our textbook programme choice. Accompanying the textbook series that we chose was an extensively field-tested, literacy assessment tool-kit. To carry out the assessment, we used a twenty-word reading list to gauge which of the reading tests was the most appropriate assessment for the child. Sometimes, this took quite a few attempts. The child first reads the story silently and then out loud, and the 'assessor' marks off each correctly 'read' or 'repaired' word on an accompanying script within a given time frame. Following the reading, the assessor asks the provided comprehension questions. Finally, the assessor gives the child a writing prompt. This was important as we quickly found out that many of the children's reading skills seldom correlated well with their writing skills or age. Using the 'outcome reading score', the child's literacy level could be established (e.g. 2nd grade reading level and 'below benchmark level' for that age').

In my experience, one of the difficult aspects of assessing a child's literacy level when they enter the programme is that the assessment outcome seldom matches the parents' evaluation of the child. In many cases, parents assumed their children's English literacy level was much higher than it actually was. Fewer parents thought their child's level was lower. Wishful thinking or criticisms aside, the greatest difficulty lies in the fact that parents living in Japan tend to use Eiken (an established English proficiency test in Japan) as a tool with which to measure their own child's literacy level. This test, however, is for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) speakers in Japan, and it is not a good choice for those who speak English as their first language or even English as a Second/Additional Language. Indeed, many parents are astounded to hear that Eiken 2nd level is roughly equivalent to the reading level of a second grader at the end of the school year or third grader in the US. Some tact and diplomacy are needed from time to time as it can be a cold wakeup call; especially for families aiming to return to an English-speaking country. By far, the easiest means to illustrate the reading level that is typical within a curriculum in an English-speaking county was to show the family one of the stories in a second or third year textbook.

Community Library

One of the key issues confronting many families is access to suitable reading materials. Typically, bookstores in Japan carry more books about preparing for language tests than they do actual books to read. Japanese libraries also tend to restrict themselves to either translations of Japanese

picture books or a limited collection of non-fiction picture books that are more appropriate for very young children. Some university libraries house books in a variety of languages that are suitable for older children. In recent years, online stores and applications have greatly increased access to physical and digital texts in other languages – especially English. Digital texts are a perfect solution for homes with little or no space to spare. Even so, the expense of buying reading material remains prohibitive for many families. A community library provides an excellent solution.

There are a number of factors to be considered when building a community library. Firstly, children in the first or second grade of elementary school will typically read and/or look at about five to ten books a day in a school year that is roughly about 200 days long. Therefore, it is of little surprise that first grade classrooms will typically stock about a thousand fiction and non-fiction books at the very least. This number decreases as the books lengthen. By third grade, reading proficiency levels tend to diversify greatly. Some children will be struggling with their reading. Others will be beginning to read chapter books. The bookworms will be reading longer texts, like those in the Harry Potter series, that are above their grade level.

To stock a library, the first thing parents usually do is to try and recall what they read at home as a child (e.g. *The Faraway Tree*) or what was read in school (books such as C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Louis Sachar's *Holes*, etc). This is fine, but it is also very important to research and purchase more recently published books. The key is a good variety of fiction and non-fiction at varied reading levels. In making your selections, be sure to remember that it is interest that draws a child into reading. It is also important to consider cultural representation in the literature that you purchase, especially when the programme membership is diverse. To this end, seek out authors from all continents and provide children with all manner of characters with whom they can relate.

Sometimes, finding engaging English books can be quite a challenge in order to draw children away from only wanting to read in Japanese. In that, the Japanese hiragana writing system enables children to easily read stories with complex story lines, such as Zorori and Rantaro, which are filled to the brim with adventure and humour. By contrast, due to the irregular spelling system of the English language, many emerging level readers are too simple, dry, and boring by comparison. The challenge is to find books that demonstrate that reading in English is fun too! One antidote is stocking the library with good books to read aloud for all ages (the antics of Horrid Henry always made both the younger and older kids titter). I also recommend reading materials that are fun to look at because of the illustrations, and make the reader desperate to read them. For this reason, our library also included comic book annuals (e.g. *The Beano*) and graphic novels (e.g. *Bone*). The sight of a gaggle of kids pointing and

giggling at one book was a fine one indeed. Other than comics, popular 'look at' books included an African version of Cinderella, a book showing how dinosaurs would look in today's world, a historical book showing children at work, and a big fat book about Greek myths.

One of the great benefits of having a community program and library is creating opportunities for children to read aloud to younger children or talk about what they have been reading to others. This can be a casual affair, or it can be an arranged activity. Activities could include creating a rota for older kids to take it in turns each time to read to younger emergent readers, or it could be a shared-reading activity where children all read and discuss a book together. Mystery stories like the Nate the Great series or Precious Ramotswe Mysteries for Younger Readers are relatively short, and they stimulate a lot of genuine discussion as they try to solve a 'whodunnit'. These activities are beneficial for five reasons. Firstly, it supports and builds the reader's confidence. Secondly, it greatly broadens both their vocabulary knowledge and its use in various contexts. Thirdly, it improves children's attention spans. Fourthly, kids get to hear about, and be influenced by, their peers' reading habits and recommendations. Fifthly, everyone gets to discover more great reads.

When building a library, it is also necessary to keep track of what you have. In days past, newly purchased books had to be painstakingly logged into a book or an Excel sheet. Today, technology has come to the rescue. For a minimal cost, even smartphone applications like iBookshelf can scan and log book ISBN codes, provide information about the book, and lends itself well to tracking the current location or guardian of each book. It is also an idea to colour code entry level books making it easier for young children to find books at their reading level. Last of all, it is advisable to have a library deposit. In our case, the library required a deposit of 3,000 yen per child to replace any damaged or lost books – this included the weighty textbooks too.

Programme Promotion

There are different ways to promote a programme. Word soon gets about as families tell other families. Other ways to promote your program are to create a Facebook page, which is free. Your programme can be added to a web directory of community language and literacy programmes at www.languagetree.org. Websites can be created fairly easily using various web tools like Wordpress. Also, advertisements can be placed, often for free, in the local newspapers. Promoting a programme effectively can help in the long run to sustain it.

Conclusions

You may be thinking, having read this chapter, that a community literacy programme may be difficult to establish. In truth, it is certainly not easy. It can take up a lot of time, depending on how you do it, but it can also be very gratifying. Heritage language literacy development is wholly dependent on parental support. Unfortunately, increasingly busy work and school schedules make it all the more difficult for families to teach their children at home, let alone consider participation in a community literacy programme. Furthermore, many families feel compelled to promote their children's assimilation into Japanese society. As a result, many parents will decide not to bother teaching their children to read and write their heritage language, hoping that their children will, perhaps, pick it up themselves someday. Of those that decide to commit themselves to the task of literacy development, most will think doing it at home alone is enough; especially those who are living in more isolated areas where the prospect of a commute to a literacy program will be more daunting.

Nevertheless, I cannot stress enough the benefits that come from enabling children and adults to come together on a regular basis to learn to how to read and write. Literacy is at heart a social enterprise, and literacy is a mass of jostling communication forms and cultural understandings. For this reason, learning how to read and write should not take place in a vacuum. It is not only necessary for each child to decode the words on the page but also know their peers, their different interests, the way they understand a text, the way they express themselves, and how they would approach a problem. As they communicate with other children and adults about different texts, they engage in a dynamic process that is cyclical, recursive, critical, and formative. Through each other, they discover connections between what they live and what they have learned together. They come to understand how these 'static marks' on a page are in fact 'words' that have relevance – be it tenuously or strongly – in the real world: in their culture; in their community; in their families; and in their thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and acts. Thus, a good literacy programme will show the children how meaningful it is to read and write in their heritage language, and this realisation will contribute tremendously to positive self-image development, which will benefit them well into adulthood. Lastly, heritage language literacy programmes also promote awareness within Japanese society that it is, in fact, a multilingual and multicultural society.

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A Tale of Three Minority Moms

Maiko Ogasawara

Introduction

When Japanese people hear the word 'bilingual', most automatically understand it to mean being able to speak Japanese and English. Similarly, the word *gaikokujin*, or 'foreigner' often makes us picture an English-speaking white foreigner. The word *haafu* (half), which is a Japanese expression meaning someone that has a Japanese parent and a foreign parent is most commonly meant for people who have a Japanese parent and an English-speaking white parent.

In a rural area like Shikoku, such stereotypical ideas are still deep-rooted, however, at the same time, in daily life it is not unusual to meet foreigners of various backgrounds other than English-speaking Caucasian English instructors. Some residents in our area go to Filipino pubs for a drink and karaoke, and others love to eat out at Indian restaurants. I see a group of young Chinese girls, perhaps trainees biking to work every morning and I teach international students from Southeast Asia. I have two children who attend a local public elementary school. They have friends whose parents are from Thailand, Korea, and China. Even in rural areas in Japan, people either directly or indirectly have opportunities to realize that many different foreign residents live around them.

Some of those foreign residents have families here in Japan, just like my Canadian husband. We have been raising our children bilingually and I strongly believe that both parents' involvement is essential in childrearing. In reality, however, no matter what an individual parent believes, or each couple decides, we are influenced by traditional gender roles or social expectations of Japanese culture to a certain extent. In Japanese

society, it is obvious that fathers are not, or often cannot be, as actively involved in child-raising because of work and cultural restraints. Though the number of 'stay at home' mothers is declining, there are still far more women who work part-time than men. While a new law ensuring male employee child-care leave was enacted some time ago, hardly any fathers take advantage of it, either partially or to its full extent. In my observation, even around nursery school and daycare facilities which are used only by families where both parents work, mothers tend to take on much more responsibility for childrearing than fathers.

These societal expectations generate unseen social pressure for mothers to be the primary caregiver, even in cases where the father plays an equal role in child-raising. Every Mom is expected to be a 'super-Mom', but a Dad gets praise heaped upon him, just by taking his kids to the park on a Sunday afternoon. In such a context, I can imagine how much more complicated and difficult child-raising is for mothers who are not Japanese. Some may have difficulty communicating in Japanese and many are not familiar with Japanese school culture. To see what it is like to raise children in Japan for non-Japanese mothers, I interviewed three women, Ziyi from China, Hoa from Vietnam and Ya, also from China. I was particularly interested in the experience of Asian women since there is often so much emphasis on western English-speaking foreigners in media and society.

Interviewer's Background

I am a part-time English teacher at two universities. My Canadian husband is also a university teacher. We live in Shikoku and have two children. My son is in grade three and my daughter is in grade one. Our children have always attended local public schools, so they use Japanese outside the home, while English is our family language. When I was a graduate student, I conducted field research focusing on language minority students in the public school system. Through this research, I learned of the many difficulties which non-Japanese speaking parents face living in Japan. For example, as the children progress through school and their Japanese becomes more advanced than their family language, parents experience increasing trouble communicating with their children. Parents also do not have enough resources to give their children appropriate advice for their future, not being familiar with the Japanese education system. This field research developed a firm sense of mission to help out non-Japanese-speaking parents who may be struggling in dealing with language issues such as bilingualism.

A couple of years ago, I noticed Ziyi at my daughter's nursery school. I often saw her listening to her son's teacher very carefully and nodding, leaning her thin body toward the teacher. This shouldn't be surprising, be-

cause there is a long detailed 'to-do' list for parents; we have to check our child's temperature every morning, pack diapers, spare clothing, lunch, and so on. Soon, I found out that Ziyi came from China. Since then every time I saw her, I wondered how I could help. Then, I saw her at my son's elementary school watching her older son playing soccer. Sports teams require a lot of parental support and dedication. Though we hadn't even met, I had already anticipated a list of problems, along with my sure-fire solutions. When we realized that our daughters were the same age and entering elementary school together we finally introduced ourselves. Ziyi, a mother of three children from Shanghai, China, is the first interviewee. Always smiling and very approachable, she came to my house for the interview, bringing apples.

Ziyi

Ziyi and her husband have three children. Her son, Yuto, is in Grade 5, her daughter, Anri is in Grade 1, and Seiya, her youngest son is five years old. Her Japanese husband is an engineer and had lived in Shanghai for work, which is where they met. Ziyi was always a big fan of Japan, influenced by a Japanese TV drama that she saw as a child. Her favorite character was a Japanese housewife. She said that ever since that time, she dreamed of becoming a good wife in Japan. This may sound a bit strange since foreign-brokered brides do exist in Japan. But I did not get the impression that she fit into that category when she told me about her situation and thought she must have just genuinely become interested in Japan. When she was 22 years old, she took Japanese lessons at a language school in Shanghai. That's how she was able to speak basic Japanese when she first met her husband. Her husband speaks very minimal Chinese and they have always spoken Japanese together. I conducted the interview in Japanese and it went smoothly. I would say she possesses a high enough Japanese ability to understand language spoken at near-natural speed in everyday conversations.

Ziyi and her husband got married and moved to Japan in 2004 and they live in a mid-sized city on Shikoku. He was born and raised close to this city. His mother passed away and his father lives in a care facility for the elderly, so the couple received very little help and Ziyi is the primary caregiver for their three children. The kids were all born in Japan. Yuto was born in 2006, Anri in 2009, and then Seiya, in 2011. She has been working part-time most of the time when she hasn't been pregnant. After we talked about her family, I asked if she had a family language rule. Her answer was a resounding 'No'. She said raising her children bilingually had never crossed her mind but she explained that recently she often felt regretful for not having made an effort to do so, only because some of her Japanese friends who do business in China told her how much of an

advantage being able to speak Chinese would be for her children in the future. She said that she should probably start to teach her kids some Chinese.

Then, she told me that Yuto had been speaking Chinese for a short period of time. When she was pregnant with the second child, she was back in China with Yuto for three months. Yuto was two years old and absorbed the Chinese language well during his stay. When she was pregnant with the third child, she also went home with two children and spent six months there. That was when Yuto was six years old. Ziyi was very impressed with how quickly he acquired Chinese. He maintained the ability for a while even after he came back to Japan. Ziyi was using Chinese with Yuto at home at first but soon he started replying to her in Japanese. Ziyi persisted with Chinese for a little while, but she gradually became uncertain that he could understand. She began to repeat herself in Japanese, translating what she had just said in Chinese, until finally, she stopped using Chinese altogether. Following that trip, they were not able to go back to China for two years. Over the last three years, they have visited their Chinese family once every year. Though the children cannot fully communicate with the family, they have a great time there and always look forward to visiting their grandparents and other relatives.

I asked if Ziyi has any difficulties raising children in Japan. She smiled and said, 'I am such an impudent person and I always depend on anyone who is willing to help, so I'm OK'. I politely disagreed and said that her charming personality makes everyone want to help. She said she can always ask other mothers for help when she has trouble. Actually, one of my daughter's classmates lives in the same condominium as Ziyi and his mother said Ziyi is a hard-working great mother. She could never imagine herself being like Ziyi in a foreign country and really admires her. I was so pleased to meet someone who understands how hard it is to raise children in a foreign culture. Ziyi also said that her children's teachers have been very kind. Particularly when Yuto was in kindergarten, which was the first experience with Japanese schools for both mother and child, the teachers were very supportive. When a small group of boys were a little rough on Yuto, she didn't have the confidence to deal with them in her limited Japanese. I would assess her Japanese proficiency as sufficient to function in any situation in daily life, but I totally understand about her expressed lack of confidence. I feel the same when I have to talk to kids in Canada. Will they understand my accent? Will they laugh at my poor English? She said that she has never directly intervened between her children and their friends. When her children had problems with their friends, she asked the teachers to mediate.

Aside from isolated anxiety in dealing with her children's friends in Japanese, she has very positive opinions about Japanese schools. The school system and culture are very different in China, as she explained.

Students do not have classes like physical education, art, or music and they are always under pressure to get high test marks in the five core subjects. She really appreciates that her children have an opportunity to learn non-academic skills like playing a musical instrument or cooking in the Japanese school system. She is also impressed with various after school activities, both volunteer-run programs like soccer or baseball which are free, and paid classes such as piano lessons. Yuto joined the school soccer team so that he could make friends and become more active. Ziyi happily supports Yuto and his team and she said that all of the mothers cooperate for the benefit of the team. Her other children, Anri and Seiya take lessons according to their interests. To my surprise, Ziyi, who did not seem to pay much attention to her children's bilingualism, encouraged Yuto to take an English lesson. She emphasized that high English proficiency can be an asset for his future. Anri, her daughter, is a confident active girl and she takes dance lessons. Ziyi said she loves watching Anri dance. Seiya is showing prominent ability in math at the early age of five. Ziyi is looking for a way for him to develop his ability, such as by sending him to a prestigious elementary school.

Though I actually did not get much information regarding bilingual child-raising in the interview, I was simply grateful to get to know her and become friends with such a positive, caring mother. It was clear that she did not require any extra support in terms of integration into Japanese society, and she expressed confidence that the language learning environment in Japan was adequate for her children. I first thought it is such a waste that Ziyi had never tried to raise her children to be Japanese-Chinese bilinguals, but after having learned that she is content raising children in Japan and her children enjoy their annual visit to China, I'm sure they are certainly bicultural and they have potential to be bilingual in the future.

Hoa

Next, I interviewed Hoa, my friend from Vietnam. She speaks English as a second language, so the interview was conducted in English. I first met Hoa's husband and got to know her through him. They have a son, Yoshiki, who is in the second grade. We have been friends for the past ten years, but since we live an hour drive away, we only get together once or twice a year. The interview was conducted at a restaurant in a shopping center near her house. A couple of years ago, as Yoshiki was starting elementary school, I had a lunch appointment with Hoa. I suggested that she bring all of the paperwork and letters regarding preparation for his elementary school. My son had entered elementary school a year before Yoshiki and I was really bewildered by the great deal of detailed requests and long shopping list sent by his elementary school. I could easily imagine

that Hoa's limited Japanese literacy and cultural knowledge would make it extremely demanding for her to do the preparation by herself. We sat at a restaurant and she unloaded a bunch of letters onto the table. Hoa had so many questions and she looked relieved when we sorted things out. Before the interview, I knew Yoshiki was generally doing just fine at elementary school, but I was curious to know how much Vietnamese he speaks and if Hao's language and cultural barrier ever affect his school life.

Hoa came from Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam and she has a bachelor's degree from an American university. While studying there, she met her Japanese husband who lived in the US for about three years. Hoa lived in the US for 8 years and has some family members still there. She is Vietnamese but I would say that she has been influenced by American culture as well.

Hoa moved to Japan in 2007 from the US and got pregnant the following year. She took Japanese lessons for 6 months at a local international office while she was pregnant. Not having had any previous experience studying Japanese, her language skills are limited. Her husband is from the Kanto area, so they have no family living close to them. She is Yoshiki's primary caregiver.

She speaks English to her husband and Vietnamese to Yoshiki. Her husband speaks Japanese to their son. When the three of them are together, the parents speak English and Yoshiki speaks Japanese. Since Yoshiki was born, Hoa has tried to see her Vietnamese family once a year. Some years, she went back to Vietnam with Yoshiki. Other years, her mother visited Japan and stayed for a month or so. Thus, aside from his mother's input, Yoshiki has had only limited exposure to Vietnamese.

Yoshiki's first language is definitely Japanese because he started nursery school when he was eleven months old and was exposed to Japanese. His parents speak English to each other and also when Yoshiki is involved in the conversation. Hoa also read English books and played English nursery rhymes because English materials are easier to get in Japan. Yoshiki understands English but he usually replies to his parents in Japanese. When only Hoa and Yoshiki are together, however, they speak Vietnamese. She described his Vietnamese level as not age appropriate and he switches to Japanese when he has difficulty expressing himself in Vietnamese. However, I was surprised that Yoshiki was able to speak Vietnamese at all since I have never heard him using the language around me. Actually, I noticed Hoa using some Japanese words such as 'dame' ('No!'). I suppose she had to use Japanese to make sure her message was delivered for disciplinary purposes.

Yoshiki is in the second grade of elementary school. Overall, he has been doing fine at school, but Hoa said that he never enjoys learning kanji, Chinese characters. His first-grade teacher suggested that Yoshiki have extra lessons focusing on his weak areas and he still receives extra support for his school work. Hoa is frustrated that she cannot do as much to

improve Yoshiki's kanji ability as she would like. She has always been concerned about Yoshiki doing as well as his peers, just like any other mother and she expressed her frustration at being unable to support him with Japanese at times. She and her husband do their best to support their son. For example, they hired a tutor to teach him hiragana, one of the Japanese alphabet systems before he entered elementary school. Since then, Hoa has checked his math homework assignments every day and her husband goes over them again since some parts include reading. He has also been checking his Japanese homework. Yoshiki also takes piano and karate lessons and they both support him with these activities.

It is obvious that Hoa has some challenges with raising her child in Japan because of her lack of Japanese proficiency. I asked her if she has any difficulty stemming from cultural differences. She said that Japanese group-oriented mentality is one of the few things she thought negatively of. One example involved an incident with Yoshiki and his classmate. Yoshiki was teased after a low mark on a quiz, which totally discouraged him from studying. Hoa explained that since Yoshiki belongs to a group, a class, she had to speak to the leader of the group, who was in this case the homeroom teacher. Her request to meet the boy and his parents was firmly turned down. Instead, the homeroom teacher dealt with the student who was also a member of the same group. I asked her what she would do if it had happened in Vietnam, or in the US. She said she would not have done anything in Vietnam because she could not imagine there would be any solution by taking action. In the US, she would simply go talk to the boy and his parents on her own. This incident clearly indicates that Hoa tries to handle problems according to Japanese culture.

As Hoa doesn't have a good command of Japanese, she had to go speak to Yoshiki's teacher with her husband, but the decision she made when her child had a problem with his friend was the same as Ziyi, who has a good command of Japanese and can directly ask for advice. They both respect Japanese culture and highly evaluate teachers and their support. Hoa, just like Ziyi, thinks very positively of Japanese schools and education. She is impressed with classes like music and art, like Ziyi, and she especially admires that Japanese people include traditional entertainment such as tea ceremony as a school activity. She also praised Japanese education for instilling a sense of independence by requiring students to organize school materials themselves and walk to school, following the traffic rules.

I was very relieved that Yoshiki can communicate with Hoa in Vietnamese because otherwise, Hoa might feel really isolated in the family and society. Also, I was happy to hear that Hoa's husband is involved in raising Yoshiki more than before. On the weekend, he often takes Yoshiki to a science center or invites Yoshiki's friends to their house. I remember him being kind of at a loss when Yoshiki was little. He had to take care of his young child as well as Hoa, who was a new mother in a new country.

They seem to have overcome many difficulties and share roles and responsibilities as parents in the best way for their son.

I know a child whose mother is from Southeast Asia and has very limited Japanese ability. The family lives with the husband's parents and the boy's grandmother was actively involved in child-raising. Unfortunately, the grandmother told me that she was worried that she may have helped too much and infringed on the mother's role. She said her daughter-in-law came to be isolated from the rest of the family and spent more and more time on the Internet by herself. Hoa has neither high Japanese proficiency nor any family members or friends that can help her. Although her situation does not seem to be ideal, the unique set of circumstances may have worked in the family's favor. For one, her husband is actively involved in child raising, which may be hard for men who tend to be overworked in Japan. Secondly, Hoa said Yoshiki's classmates' parents and her neighbors were extremely helpful. Hoa has managed to communicate using either Japanese or English out of necessity and she has proven herself to be a successful communicator, despite her limitations. I think she provides a fine example for Yoshiki regarding bilingualism and multilingualism. This kind of pragmatic use of languages also sends a great message to Yoshiki's friends that a foreign language is not something to just study in the classroom; it is a very useful tool to acquire in order to communicate with other people.

Ya

Ya is the only one among the three interviewees that I did not know much about. She is a full-time teacher at a university where I teach part-time. She used to teach chemistry as a part-time teacher before, so I saw her around in the teacher's room. She was teaching when she was pregnant with her second child and she once told us that her husband was Chinese and teaching at a university, too. Ya was also the only one who doesn't have a Japanese spouse. I emailed her and asked if I could interview her about her language use while raising her children. She gave me her willing agreement and let me use her office for the interview. I was really excited to see how she has been raising her children bilingually.

Ya came to Japan in 2002 from Dalian, China and did her PhD at a university in the Kansai area. She met her husband, who was also doing his PhD at the university. He came to Japan in 1998 and obtained his MA and PhD. He got a job at a university and moved to a mid-sized city on Shikoku. Ya joined him in 2007 and the couple now has two daughters, both born in Japan. Their eldest, Mei is now in the second grade and Rei is five years old. They go home to China irregularly and have never been able to stay for more than two weeks.

I asked Ya to tell me about their family language rules and she said

firmly that they never had any rules, nor had they ever explicitly discussed their language use with their daughters. They speak both Japanese and Chinese at their convenience. It sounds like they mix the two languages and codeswitch all the time. She studied Japanese at university in an elective language program and had attained a high level of proficiency in Japanese by the time she first arrived in Japan. Her husband had a similar experience studying Japanese in China prior to his arrival in Japan. Since they met at university as students, they have always spoken Japanese and Chinese, and switching back and forth is only natural for them. Their language use never changed around their daughters. Both Mei and Rei started nursery school when they were one and a half years old, which means they have been exposed to much more Japanese than Chinese from an early age. Their first language is definitely Japanese and they speak Japanese much more comfortably than Chinese. Mei speaks some Chinese and tries to communicate with her grandparents in Chinese on Skype but Rei is only a passive bilingual. She understands, but her spoken Chinese is not as good as Mei's. Ya recently noticed that Rei speaks Chinese with a Japanese accent. She felt that this was surprising and strange and tries to fix her incorrect pronunciation. Mei is motivated to speak Chinese when she visits her family in China and Rei tries hard to copy her older sister. They love to go to China and spend time with their Chinese family. They notice some cultural differences, which Ya said seemed to excite them.

I asked why Ya never intended to raise her daughters to be Chinese-Japanese bilinguals. She explained that she, herself studied Japanese from her own will at university, and so did her husband. In fact, his parents, the girls' grandparents had also lived in Japan when they were university students and they speak Japanese, too. When the grandparents visit them in Japan, they all use both Chinese and Japanese together and shift languages freely. Ya believes that language can be learned later in life from one's own will, so there is no need to have unnatural restrictions regarding language use for either the parents or the children. As mentioned earlier, Ya wants to work on Rei's Chinese pronunciation and she also says that Mei sometimes notices the difference between kanji and Chinese characters used in China, and she is willing to teach literacy skills, but basically, everything should come from the children's curiosity.

On one level, I completely agree with her and feel envious of her confident attitude toward child-raising. In my case, I consciously try to raise my own children bilingually and really hope that they become bilingual in the future. When my children were little, our life was simple and it was easy to use English with them. These days, however, Japanese is becoming their dominant language, even around the house where only English is supposed to be used and it has become really tiring and stressful for me to keep speaking English. English is not my native language and as the kids get older, I have to deal with more complex detailed topics. I sometimes

find myself frustrated. I grab the remote control and press the bilingual button when they are watching an English program dubbed in Japanese. If the program is originally made in English, such as Disney movies or BBC documentaries broadcast on NHK, my children have to watch it in English, the original language. Talking with Ya gave me a chance to think about my way of raising children. Which children are happier? Bilingual children raised by a frustrated angry mother, or children who have a positive self-image and the potential to become bilingual in the future, raised by an easy-going, calm mother?

I asked Ya about cultural aspects of her life such as cooking. She said she cooks both Chinese food and Japanese food and she and her family like both equally. There are some cultural differences between Chinese schools and Japanese schools, but she prefers Japanese ways. She is very satisfied with Japanese education. Just like the first interviewee, Ziyi from China, Ya appreciates non-academic classes such as art and music. She too, was critical of the excessive emphasis on the five core subjects in China. Students are under a lot of pressure from a young age, she explains. The parents do their best to secure their children's time, energy and focus, which Ya thinks spoils children. They drive their children to school, for example, or sometimes the parents or even grandparents walk children to school carrying their bags so that the kids won't be too tired to concentrate on studying at school. In Japan, Ya's daughters were taught to take care of themselves at nursery school from an early age, by doing small things like getting changed and folding their clothes. Their independent behavior really surprised her relatives in China because, in their culture, adults do everything for children. The second interviewee, Hoa from Vietnam pointed out the same thing. Hoa said that Vietnamese parents do everything for their children and she did the same for Yoshiki. She remembers being told by his teacher that he was often too dependent on the teachers at nursery school. Hoa said this was her fault because she didn't realize this cultural difference for a long time. Ya, just like Hoa, likes the fact that teachers train children to be independent. Lastly, I asked if she has any worries or concerns about her daughters' school or social lives. She said that bullying is really foreign and worrisome for her. She has never heard of bullying in China, at least when she was a child. Her daughters have both been happy at elementary school and nursery school, and she hopes that nothing changes.

Ya is very liberal and laidback about raising children. Her parents and in-laws are a little concerned that she should be more focused on her daughters' education. Her father-in-law plays several musical instruments and really wanted his granddaughters to take up an instrument. He begged and begged, so Ya finally agreed to have Mei take music lessons a couple of years ago. Both Mei and Rei take calligraphy lessons once a week. One of Mei's friend's mothers is a calligraphy teacher and they

showed interest in taking classes with her. Ya thinks that her children are comfortably busy and she has no intention of making them busier with more lessons. Ya's husband seems to have the same opinion about the girls' education and he values family ties very highly. He tries to come home by dinner time so that they can eat together every day.

Conclusions

My experience interviewing three mothers who come from different cultures has been full of surprises and I would have to say that it was a little condescending to think that they need my help. They are much more independent, confident, and brave than I had thought, and as it turned out, it was I who had much to learn from them. I was so happy to hear that their children had not experienced any serious problems and they all attend school happily. I have heard of some Japanese-Caucasian mixed children having a hard time fitting into Japanese schools. The families I interviewed are in one sense lucky that their children are not visibly different.

Each interviewee has a different family situation, language ability, and of course they are all different individuals, though society often puts them in the same category. In the case of half-Caucasian children, people ask questions like, 'Are you a foreigner?', 'Do you speak English?', and 'Where were you born?' In worse cases, some children tease mixed kids who are visibly different. I feel like this kind of experience makes mixed children believe that they are different, before they even become conscious of their own mixed heritage or language background. On the other hand, the children of the interviewees do not look different from Japanese kids and they do not draw attention from day one at school. I think this makes their life much easier and helps them to fit in at Japanese schools.

It is interesting to see how mixed-race children deal with the fact that they have unique backgrounds. For example, Caucasian mixed children who draw attention because of their differences in their physical appearance seem to try to keep a low profile especially when they are younger. My children were often reluctant to participate in big children's events around the age of four to six because they felt really uncomfortable being stared at. The situation of mixed-race children with Asian backgrounds is a little different. They seem to realize the uniqueness of their families a bit later. It was when my Korean friends' son was in the third grade that his classmates started asking him questions such as, 'Why does your last name sound different?' Around the same time, he came home with questions of his own such as 'What is North Korea?' and 'Do I have anything to do with them?' My friends did not know exactly where those questions came from, or how they should explain the issue to their son. Japanese children's attitude to a certain race or country could have a big influence

on how mixed-race children deal with their identity. My daughter is a friend with Ziyi's daughter, Anri. She told me that Anri sometimes talks about her visit to Shanghai and teaches her classmates some Chinese. My daughter obviously values Anri's knowledge of China. However, another incident makes me feel concerned. A friend of mine told me that her grade three daughter asked her, 'What is *wrong* with China?' Her innocent question really shows that kids around her speak negatively about China. This kind of atmosphere is extremely unfavorable for children who have Chinese backgrounds. I really hope that parents are aware that there are children with various backgrounds at Japanese schools other than visibly different Caucasian-mixed children. They should realize that small comments they make about a certain race or country sometimes give their children a strong impression and could cause biases against certain groups. Those biases could create an unfavorable atmosphere at schools where children with unique backgrounds attend.

Society is also slowly changing, placing increasing emphasis on bilingualism and diversity. I hope that the children of the interviewees grow up to have a strong, positive self-image and respect for their parents' language and culture. As I mentioned earlier, Ziyi's Japanese friend expressed how Chinese ability will be an asset in the growing global market and tried to persuade her to teach her children Chinese. I believe that children who are raised in multilingual and multicultural environments are lucky and all have potential to be 'superstars'. They are all assets for Japan's future because of their language abilities and cultural knowledge of foreign countries.