Some psychosocial factors in bilingual education

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This paper attempts to shed light on three psychosocial factors that are seen as hindering the promotion of bilingual education. These factors were identified during interviews with and observation of eight individuals involved in interlingual marriages. They are classified here as the bilingual paradox, conflict and indifference. It is contended that while the method of "one parent-one language" may well be an effective strategy, in cases of separation or divorce it often creates conflicts. As a result, different strategies may need to be developed, and there may even be very good grounds for reassessing the value of raising children bilingually.

本稿では、バイリンガル教育の普及を妨げると考えられる３つの心理社会的要因について考える。この３つの要因は、国際結婚をした８人とのインタビューや日常生活の観察の中から抽出されたもので、バイリンガルゆえのパラドックス、葛藤、そして、無関心と分類された。１人１言語の原則が有効な方法として広く認められつつある一方で、別居や離婚を迎えた家族では、この原則を実行することが難しく、子供をバイリンガルに育てることと、それにまつわる心理的葛藤との間で混乱する親も見られるようになった。バイリンガルに育てることの意義とそのための有効な方法について、見直しを迫られる時期に来ているとも言えよう。

In cases of families where two languages are involved, it seems to be widely believed that becoming bilingual is desirable and that the strategy of one parent-one language is effective in achieving this goal. Many of the previous studies in the field of bilingual education seem to focus on the dynamics of bilingual development and on analyzing the factors and practices that contribute to successful bilingual development. Such studies are reviewed extensively by Yamamoto (2001). Among them are Döpke (1992a, 1998), Hoffmann (1985), Harding-Esch and Riley (1986), and Lyon (1996). Yamamoto (2001) also finds, based on her study of interlingual families in Japan, that the principle of "maximum engagement with the minority language" is useful for the development of the minority language. More recently, Nakajima (2002) reports on the development of bilingual education in Canada, America and Japan and identifies factors that lead to success in it. Takeuchi (2006) identifies the daily patterns of contact between Japanese mothers and their children as key elements in promoting successful bilingual development. The findings of such studies have been of benefit to many parents, providing them with encouragement in bringing up their children bilingually. But this trend means that researchers in this field have tended to ignore the fact that there are families who struggle in their efforts to raise their children bilingually and who sometimes give up the attempt. The reasons for this vary from one family to another, but it is still worth asking whether there are any reasons that are common to all such families, or if there are some that are restricted to particular kinds of families. This paper is an attempt to provide some preliminary answers to these questions, and forms part of a broader ongoing study of intercultural marriages by the author.

As the focus here is mostly on two languages rather than two cultures in the families studied, the terms *interlingual marriages* and *interlingual families* are employed to denote marriages or families in which two or more languages are involved. This usage follows that of Yamamoto (2001). In interlingual families each parent has his/her own dominant language (L1), which in most cases is the parent's native language. The term *bilingual* in this context simply refers to two languages; thus bilingual person means an individual who uses two languages and a bilingual situation is one where two languages are available and in use.

An attempt is also made to distinguish between *bilinguality* and *bilingualism.* Nakajima (2002) and Taura (2005) both adopt the definitions by Hammers and Blanc (1989, p. 6) who state that "bilinguality is the psychological state of an individual who has access to more than one linguistic code as a means of social communication while the concept of bilingualism includes that of bilinguality but refers equally to the state of a linguistic community in which two languages are in contact". Although it is not always easy to separate an individual's state from that of the surrounding community, bilinguality is also used in this paper to denote an individual's ability to use two languages and bilingualism to denote a community situation involving two languages. This distinction parallels that between individuality and individualism.

A further distinction is made between *bilinguality* and *biliteracy*. Bilinguality is typically an individual's ability to understand and speak in bilingual oral communication, while biliteracy broadly involves reading and writing in two languages. In this paper the focus is on bilinguality alone; biliteracy is not under discussion here.

Methods

The author gathered data for this study by conducting a number of interview sessions with parents in families where two or more languages were used as means of communication. The details of these parents can be found in Appendix 1. The interview sessions took place in Kanagawa, Chiba, and Osaka between November 2007 and August 2008. The number of sessions with each interviewee ranged between one and three, while the length of each session varied from 30 minutes to 5 hours according to the particular circumstances of each interviewee. Having elicited demographic information on matters such as the age and sex of the children and the language used for mutual communication, the questions focused on the level of the parents' interest in raising their children bilingually and on the methods they used. The parents were also asked to assess the degree of their children's bilinguality and to describe the factors they thought contributed to the success or failure of their children's bilingual development. Observations of daily interactions between the interviewee and their children were made in 5 out of the 8 cases reported here. The author was invited into the residences of the parent(s) as a friend and no information about the research was given to any children.

Results

The author first sought to create an original framework into which to classify the parents in interlingual families. As shown in Table 1, the interviewed parents were divided into four groups (G1-G4) according to the level of their interest in the bilingual education of their children, and the amount of effort they made to pursue it. The nature of the groups was decided on after a review of various interlingual families, some of which the author came in contact with in Japan and others which are described in reports such as those in *Bilingual Japan*, a publication by JALT Bilingualism SIG, Harding-Esch and Riley (2003) and Yamamoto (2001). Table 1 also records the reasons the parents gave for pursuing or not pursuing bilingual education, the methods they utilized, and the costs to the children and the families incurred in the process and as a result of bilingual education. In the table, L2 denotes the second and weaker language in a family and C2 the weaker culture, as distinct from the dominant language L1 and the dominant culture C1.

Highlighted in Table 1 are three psychosocial factors that the author wishes to put forward as significant in bilingual education. They were identified in the interviews that the author conducted and have not previously been discussed elsewhere. These factors are termed the bilingual paradox, conflict and indifference.

As the focus of this paper is on bilingual children, the issue of bicultural education is excluded. For clarity and simplicity, the discussion is also restricted mainly to the cases of bringing up bilingual children in Japan. It is recognized that the applicability of the conclusions drawn here is potentially limited.

The first group of parents (G1) in the table comprises those who strongly desire and work hard to achieve the goal of raising bilingual children. Many successful cases of children raised by parents in this group have been extensively reported and the stories of some of the children themselves can be found, for example, in Ryan (1998). The second group (G2) includes those who desire and try hard to raise their children bilingually, but find this rather difficult for a number of reasons. Here the key factor of the bilingual paradox needs to be emphasized as one of the possible causes of such problems. Next comes a group (G3) made up of parents who want their children to become bilingual but who, for a variety of reasons, have mixed feelings about actually pursuing this goal. Here the concept of conflict needs to be considered. The final group (G4) consists of parents who are neither interested in nor attempting to provide any bilingual education for their children. The key factor here is indifference.

Table 1. Parents grouped according to the level of their interest in, and the amount of effort put into, raising bilingual children

Groups	Reasons for interest and effort	Methods used	Costs
G1 Interested and making an effort in bilingual education	Benefit of becoming globally-minded Ability to communicate with both families Ability to maintain cultural heritage Greater number of career paths	One parent-one language International schools Distance education Trips and visits DVDs, CDs, tapes, books Internet	Sense of loss Identity confusion Fatigue or lack of energy
G2 Interested but effort made in bilingual education is limited	Same as G1 Lack of schools Lack of resources Financial strain Bilingual paradox	Same as G1	Same as G1
G3 Interested but not pursuing bilingual education	Lack of schools Lack of resources Financial strain Bullying Conflict		Communication difficulty in L2 Weakening or loss of cultural heritage in C2
G4 Not interested and not pursuing bilingual education	Excessive psychological price Low language status Non-appreciation of benefits described in G1 Indifference		Communication problems in L2 Loss of cultural heritage in C2

It needs to be stressed that these groupings are far from static. Nor should the labels attached to them be viewed in any way as indicating value judgments. No group is considered to be better or worse than any of the others.

Group 1, description

The method of one parent-one language has proven to be helpful in many cases (examples can readily be found in *Bilingual Japan*, *Monographs on Bilingualism*, and Harding-Esch & Riley, 2003). No matter how useful this method may be, it still requires a lot of thinking, preparation, and hard work once parents have decided to put it into practice. Of the groups in Table 1, only parents in the first (G1), who shared an appreciation of the value of bilingual education and were willing to put in the necessary hard work together, actually managed to produce results they felt happy with. Their reasons for pursuing bilinguality included the benefits to their children of becoming globally minded, of being able to work globally and to communicate with grandparents and relatives on both sides of the family. A longer term benefit involved being able to maintain both of their cultural heritages. These benefits have already been discussed in Yamamoto (2001) and Harding-Esch and Riley (2003). As also noted by Yamamoto (2001), Harding-Esch and Riley (2003) and Kittaka, Gee, and Lawrenz (Beck, 2002), the price some children may have to pay to obtain these benefits includes a sense of loss and identity confusion, coming from an added language and cultural heritage.

Group 2, description and the "bilingual paradox" factor

With the G2 group, the strategy of one parent-one language may well have been tried, but with less success. The paradox here is that a parent who is bilingual, as opposed to monolingual, experiences added difficulties in bringing up bilingual children in the weaker of their two languages (L2). Stated simply, when a child sees that one of his/her parents is bilingual and can communicate in his/her stronger language (L1), the child tends to rely on L1, and is less willing and sometimes even resistant to using L2 (Döpke 1992a, as reviewed in Yamamoto 2001). A monolingual parent escapes this dilemma, as the situation is unambiguous for the child: "My dad/mum cannot understand Japanese, so I have to speak in English with him/her." So, paradoxically, a parent's own bilingual ability gets in the way of raising another bilingually competent person. This echoes what Lanza (1997, as reviewed in Yamamoto 2001) suggests: that success and failure in raising bilingual children is related to the degree to which parents of L2 manage to keep a L2 monolingual context with their children.

The bilingual paradox tends to produce worse effects when the bilingual parent tries to communicate in L2 in an L1 dominant community. For example, a British husband reported that his bilingual wife found it harder to sustain communication with their children in Japanese while in England than when communicating in Japanese in Japan. When in an English community, their children spoke in English as their daily activities were conducted in that language, and it was easier for them to explain what was happening at school in English. They responded to their mother mostly in English when she spoke to them in Japanese. On the other hand, there was no need and no possibility of their mixing languages when talking with their English monolingual parent in England. Putting this in more general terms, a monolingual parent, compared to a bilingual parent, can enjoy an easier role as far as a child's bilingual education is concerned, although there is some risk that a monolingual parent may lose some of children's respect when they become bilingual and the parent does not. Examples of similar cases are provided in Haskell (1998) and Fujiu (2004).

It needs to be stressed here that the difficulties caused by the bilingual paradox can be and have been overcome. A number of parents have reported that they managed to do this by laying down clear rules and enforcing them strictly (but not too strictly) with their children from an early age, coupled with engaging in fun games, story reading, L2 playgroups and Internet learning (see, for example, Chikamatsu 2001). Discussing the cases of a number of Japanese mothers in Australia, Takeuchi (2006) reports that one mother's consistent effort to preserve a Japanese monolingual context resulted in her daughter's bilingual development.

Group 3, description and the "conflict" factor

There are various reasons why parents in the third group (G3) do not fully pursue the path of educating their children bilingually. The necessary facilities may simply not be accessible; there may be no international schools within a reasonable distance or within their financial means; there may be no play groups or other children to communicate in the language concerned, and so on. Since such reasons have already been reported elsewhere (see, for example, Beck 2002), this group is discussed here only in terms of the conflict that separated or divorced parents experienced.

By definition, the one parent-one language method requires two language inputs by two parents. When one language input disappears, there is normally some loss of language capacity. Such cases of attrition are reported in Yukawa (1999) and Bingham (2007). Seeing the deterioration in a child's L2 ability creates some conflict in a parent who can logically see the value of bilingual education but who wants to limit the second language input. Two cases involving different types of such internal conflicts are now described.

Conflict 1

This type of conflict may be limited to certain geographical areas of Japan. There certainly seems to be a great deal of social pressure that makes some parents feel uneasy when, by displaying signs of being bilingual, their children make themselves stand out in the eyes of monolingual Japanese people. It is not uncommon for some parents and children to want to suppress the bilingual ability in order to avoid any negative consequences such as bullying (Beck 2002; Greer 2005). One British father recounted how his Japanese wife, from whom he is separated, told him, "I don't want my daughter to stand out by speaking with you in English in the school grounds. She stands out enough already because she looks different." In this case the child was already conspicuous enough in her monolingual school because of her non-Japanese features as a *haafu*. In seeking not to make the situation worse for her daughter, the mother tried to limit the time that the non-Japanese father could spend with her and restricted the non-Japanese activities they could engage in together. The conflict the mother suffered is that, although she could see the value of her daughter becoming bilingual, in daily life she could not but cut off many of the opportunities that would aid this development.

It should be noted that in this case there was an additional source of stress for the mother stemming from her negative feelings towards her separated husband. Such conflicts seem to grow stronger once parents get divorced and the ill feeling that exists between them becomes more obvious, as is shown in the following case.

Conflict 2

One Canadian ex-husband explained how the attrition of his son's English began and grew worse. His contact with his son had already been limited by his ex-wife even while he was still living in Japan. It was reduced to only a few occasions when he moved back to Canada. This was not just because of the geographical distance, but also because his ex-wife's feelings of anxiety developed to such an extent that she did not want the son to be alone with his father. The father experienced frustration at being unable to help his child with his English.

The conflict in this case revolved around the wife's internal struggle: She was caught between the wish to maintain her son's bilingual ability and the emotional need to keep her ex-husband away from her son. This created a situation that was counterproductive both for the son's bilingual development and for the development of healthy attitudes toward his father. Since the mother's conflict involved strong ill feelings and a great deal of anxiety, the effect on her son was naturally much more severe than that in the cases of Conflict 1. Cases like Conflict 2 may be exceptional, but with the increase in the number of failing marriages between Japanese and non-Japanese, this type of disruption to the cause of bilingualism is likely to increase. According to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (2007), in the period 1992-2007 the total number of divorces in Japan reached a peak in 2002 and subsequently declined. However, the number of divorces in marriages where one spouse was non-Japanese kept increasing throughout the period; it was 7,716 in 1992 and had grown to 18,220 by 2007.

Group 4, description and the "factor of indifference"

Group 4 includes parents who, for various reasons, are uninterested in bilingual education and decide not to pursue the goal of bilinguality for their children. The reasons include the belief that the psychological strain would be too great and the benefits of becoming bilingual could not justify it. As a result, parents in this group may face communication difficulties with their children in L2 and the heritage of the weaker culture C2 may be lost.

Analysis of the interview data led to the identification of the factor of indifference. One case here involved a Japanese wife who regretted that her son had not become bilingual in Chinese and Japanese, and that he almost looked down upon his father's country. The parents were both bilingual, but each was much stronger in his or her native language than in that of the partner. Thus the mother decided not to speak to her son in Chinese, and asked her husband to take on the role of developing the son's Chinese. The father did not respond positively to this request because he thought it would be impossible to raise their son bilingually in Japan. He thought his son's exposure to Chinese would be very limited compared with that to Japanese. His Japanese wife warned him that if he did not try, in future he and his son might have difficulty communicating with each other. He remained unwilling to make an effort. As of the present, the boy does not speak Chinese and does not think highly of his father's ability to communicate in Japanese. His low opinion of his father's Japanese language ability seems to be related to the low assessment of his father and his father's home country in general.

According to his wife, the Chinese father's indifference and lack of effort in raising his son bilingually had something to do with the status of the Chinese language in Japan. She cited the experience of other families who faced similar problems even where both parents were Chinese. In those families the children were passive bilinguals: They could understand what was said in Chinese but would reply in Japanese. This Japanese mother commented, based on the observations she made during her family's one-year stay in the U.S., that had they brought up their son there, the situation would have been different. The status of Chinese in a multilingual and multicultural society like the U.S. would not have been such an issue compared to the situation in Japan. Her husband's indifference to developing bilinguality in his son, therefore, should be considered as culture/society-specific, being related to the status of the language and its social desirability in Japan. Another example of a language status factor is noted by Harding-Esch and Riley (2003) in their discussion of Welsh-English parents.

Conclusion

In summary, this paper has attempted to find out (1) if there are some common reasons why parents in interlingual families do not raise their children bilingually, and (2) if there are particular reasons for this that are unique to specific kinds of families. Three psychosocial factors have been identified. The presence of the bilingual paradox was noted in cases when a bilingual parent tried to communicate with a child in L2. As the child was aware that the parent could understand L1, unless persistent efforts were made to strictly adhere to the one parent-one language practice, the child struggled to become bilingual. Also identified were conflicts unique to separated and divorced families. A parent could become caught between his/her negative feelings towards a separated or divorced spouse and a wish for their children to become bilingual. Indifference in some parents was also discussed in relation to the status of one of the languages in their community.

Needless to say, one must be very cautious about drawing any firm conclusions from such an analysis, since the number of individuals interviewed and observed to date is limited. Nonetheless, one point that emerges clearly and which deserves to be stressed is that educating children bilingually is a huge task requiring lots of effort, determination and financial resources, and one that can also impose great psychological burden on both parents and children. It is therefore understandable that there are some parents who do not choose and who do not manage to raise their children to be bilingual. This is not a matter of making value judgments; rather, such cases have much of importance to the development of bilingual education.

Yukawa (2004) has already pointed out that if the field of bilingual education is to be fully explored and understood, it needs more varied types of case reports than those which concern themselves with successful outcomes only. This point can be expanded further by acknowledging that the field needs case reports that may attract the professional attention of psychologists and sometimes even psychiatrists. It should not be so difficult to see that as Japanese society changes as rapidly as other societies, the social factors affecting bilingual education may also change and that these new circumstances need to be accommodated if bilingual education is to be promoted more widely and effectively in society.

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Appendix 1

Parents interviewed

ID	Nationality	Spouse's nationality	Age	Marital status	Sex	Child's age	Language used in communicating with child
F	British	Japanese	40s	separated	m	9	English
G	Canadian	Japanese	40s	divorced	m	7	English
Y	Japanese	British	40s	separated	f	9	Japanese
A	Japanese	Chinese	40s	married	f	18	Japanese
K	Chinese	Japanese	50s	married	m	18	Japanese
R	British	Japanese	50s	married	m	18	English
D	Polish	Japanese	40s	married	f	7, 1	Japanese, Polish
S	Japanese	Brazilian	40s	married	m	16, 8	Japanese