

Shared Identities: Our Interweaving Threads

Japanese-English child-rearing practices in Australia

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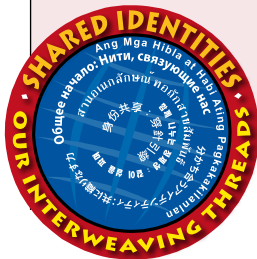
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This study examines experiences of five Japanese-Australian families who are trying to transmit Japanese to their children in Australia. The study addresses a gap between what linguists have found in academic research in family bilingualism and what these families know of transmitting Japanese to their children. The study found that the Japanese parents, the minority language-speaking parents, had high goals for their children's Japanese language development. They were aware of their teaching role and spoke Japanese consistently with their children. Japanese literacy practices were introduced before the children started English-based primary school. However, these parents appeared to have become anxious about the appropriateness of their approach and their children's development in both Japanese and English due to a lack of information and professional advice. It is important for linguists and teachers to be able to reach aspiring families and actively assist them in achieving their goals using research findings.

オーストラリア人と日本人の国際結婚家庭での子供の日本語習得本稿ではオーストラリア在住の5つのオーストラリア人と日本人の国際結婚家庭での、子供の日本語習得についての経験を調査した。バイリンガリズムについて書かれた学術論文と、親の認識と実際に子供の日本語習得のためのストラテジーにはギャップがあるのではないかと疑問を投げかけるものである。オーストラリアに在住する少数派言語の持ち主である日本人の親は子供の日本語習得に非常に高いゴールを持ち、日本語を一貫して話し、日本語リタラシーも子供の就学前から導入していることがわかった。しかし、日本人の親はバイリンガル子育てについて明確な情報を得ていないことが多く、自分たちのストラテジーや、子供の英語と日本語の発達について不安に思っているようである。これからのバイリンガリズムに携わっている言語学者や教師の課題は、研究結果をバイリンガル子育てをしたいという家族に広め、より積極的に援助することである。

Australia is a culturally and linguistically diverse country of immigrants. Since the 1970s, Australia has actively sought and developed a policy of multilingualism and many Australians seem to accept multilingualism as part of their national identity (Clyne, 1991). According to the most recent 2006 Census by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, more than three million people reported they speak a language other than English at home (ABS, 2006).



Migrant parents and parents who come from different language backgrounds (cross-language families) agree that the ability to speak more than one language has a benefit and wish to transmit their native languages to their children. From the nation's point of view, children from migrant families and cross-language families have an enormous potential to understand the perspectives and culture dimensions and to achieve a high proficiency in the minority language (Clyne, 2005).

Studies on family bilingualism suggest that a number of factors crucially influence the outcomes of a child's minority language development. In this study, I have chosen to examine the Japanese language transmission in Australia as case studies. The Japanese language in Australia has a number of aspects which are reported to both positively and negatively influence the maintenance rate among first generation speakers and intergenerational language transmission. Japanese is a language of education and business, and is perceived positively in Australia. Japanese was made one of the four pre-eminent priority languages in 1994 (Lo Bianco, 2000). It was estimated that there were more than 400,000 Japanese learners at Australian schools in 2001 (Clyne, Fernandez, & Grey, 2004).

However, the most striking characteristic of Japanese speakers in Australia is their high rate of exogamy (couples with non-shared ethno-linguistic backgrounds). Exogamy is identified as having a strong correlation with language shift (Clyne, 1991). The 2001 Census shows that 65% of Japanese women had spouses of different ancestries (Khoo, 2004). As their Japanese relatives live in Japan, for Japanese-Australian families who want to transmit Japanese to their

children, Japanese input to the children is limited to the Japanese-speaking parent, usually the mother. Among second generation children from exogamous marriages, 68.9% have shifted to English (Clyne & Kipp, 1997). Given the high rate of exogamous marriage amongst first generation Japanese speakers in Australia and the likelihood that exogamy increases from the first to the second generation and from the second to the third or later generations (Khoo, 2004), and given that the Japanese-speaking parent is usually the only input source for the children, this might suggest that Japanese is unlikely to be transmitted to second generation children and beyond.

Japanese community leaders have already recognised the transmission of Japanese language, culture, and identity to second generation Japanese children in Australia as one of the major problems (Shiobara, 2004). In his study, Shiobara quoted an interview with one of the Japanese community leaders:

Compared with other ethnic groups, Japanese people have only a small population and we do not have solidarity as a group either. That is a big problem. We cannot transmit Japanese language and culture. In the future, third- or fourth-generation Japanese people might only know that their grandparents came from Japan.

There are a number of academic books which give advice to parents who want to raise their children with more than one language in a variety of contexts, using a number of language combinations (e.g., Baker, 1995; Harding & Riley, 1986; Saunders, 1982, 1988). However, it seems that there is a gap between what linguists have found in academic

research in family bilingualism and what many Japanese-Australian families know of transmitting Japanese to their children as shown in the high rate of shift to English in the Census. The discrepancy may be due to the research context which investigated “ideal families” (which the advice is based on), and that of “real life” families (Okita, 2002).

This study addresses the issues of the gap between academic or ideal families who proved to be successful raising children with more than one language and actual families who are trying to do so in Australia. Using five Japanese-Australian families as case studies, the study aims to provide descriptive accounts of these families’ efforts in transmitting Japanese to their children. I will examine their language practice in relation to factors seen in successful cases in the literature. I will also discuss the challenges these families face and explore the support that may benefit them in pursuing their goals.

Methodology

The data of this study came from semi-structured in-depth interviews with five families who were trying to transmit Japanese to their children in Australia. In each family, the Australian parent, the Japanese parent, and the eldest child were interviewed, which consisted of approximately 6 hours in total per family. The interviews covered the following areas:

1. the decision-making process regarding transmitting the Japanese language to the children and information gathering,

2. strategies used by the parents and social support available to achieve their goals,
3. the introduction of Japanese language literacy,
4. the challenges these families have been experiencing, and
5. the child’s own perspective.

Table 1 below summaries the participants’ backgrounds.

Table 1. Participants’ backgrounds

	Name	Occupation	Years in Aus.	Children
A	Sanae (30s) (M)* Jon (40s)	housewife engineer	10 years Australian	Rieko (8;3)-G3** Masako (5) Aiko (2)
B	Yukari (40s) (M) Daniel (40s)	teacher engineer	14 years 37 years	Emma (7;7)-G2 Erika (5)
C	Kazue (30s) (M) Max (30s)	hospitality IT	14 years Australian	Ken (7;0)-G2 Sean (4)
D	Mako (30s) (M) Henry (40s)	housewife building	6 years Australian	Josh (6;10)-Prep Ron (3)
E	Bec (30s) Yuji (40s) (F)	housewife teacher	Australian 14 years	Lily (6;11)-G1 Michael (3)

* Bold letters show Japanese parent in the family. (M) means mother and (F) means father.

** Bold letters show the eldest child being interviewed.

The current language use pattern of children and other family members is shown in Table 2 below. Children's language use is based on the Japanese parent's report, and there was no attempt to measure academic proficiency.

Table 2. Current language use within family

	Name	M ↔ F	J. p ↔ C	C ↔ J. p	A. p ↔ C	siblings
A	Sanae Jon	E	J	J*	E	J/E
B	Yukari Daniel	E	J	J*	E/U**	J/E
C	Kazue Max	E	J	E/J*	E	E
D	Mako Henry	E	J	J*	E	J/E
E	Bec Yuji	E	J	J*	E	E

* Japanese sentences with varying degree of English borrowing

** Ukrainian—the father was born in Poland and migrated to Australia at the age of 10. He sometimes spoke Ukrainian to his children.

Japanese language transmission to the children in these families was still an on-going process as children were of early to middle primary school age. Borland (2006) describes that the results of intergenerational language transmission is a continuum, at one end not a single word of the parent's language is passed on to the child, even receptively, and at the other extreme the child acquires both oral and written proficiency equivalent to a native speaker of the language, with most falling somewhere in between. Japanese parents in

families A, B, D, and E reported that their children actively spoke Japanese with them. The Japanese mother in family C said that her son's English use has increased dramatically in the last 12 months and estimated that her son used more English than Japanese in speaking to her. During the interview, the children seemed to understand the researcher's questions in Japanese and answered in Japanese, although varying degrees of English borrowing were present.

Discussion

Decision making

The decision to raise children bilingually was not a jointly discussed decision in most families in this study; rather it was the Japanese parent's decision and the Australian parent agreed. All families in this study had decided on two things: the Japanese parent's consistent use of Japanese with their child, and to start early. The Australian parents spoke English to their child, as they did not have "good enough" proficiency in Japanese. In the case of family B, the Australian parent switched to Ukrainian when his first child was 10 months old, thus his two children were exposed to Japanese, Ukrainian, and English at the time of the interview. Australian parents were all supportive of their Japanese spouse's plan and encouraged their children to speak Japanese with their Japanese parent at home.

Kazue (family C): I told my husband that I would speak Japanese to our child and he would speak English; it wasn't really a discussion. I told him this is what we will do. He doesn't really understand Japanese.

Start early was the other theme that emerged among all the families. This was based on what they had heard from other cross-language families as well as the parents' own language learning experiences. All Japanese parents admired bilinguals, who could speak English and Japanese fluently in Japan. They felt that they were unable to speak English like a native speaker as they started learning English late (in school year 7) in Japan. Many of them mentioned their poor pronunciation in English. They noted that if they had started learning English earlier, their pronunciation at least would have been comparable to that of native English speakers. Australian parents also commented on their children being fortunate to be able to start learning another language early.

Information gathering

Researchers unanimously agree that planning based on appropriate information is a key to positive outcomes (Lambert, 2008; Takeuchi, 2006b). A wide range of information, such as books, seminars, and Internet sites, are readily available. Parents in this study were motivated to transmit Japanese to their children. Nevertheless, with regard to how to actually transmit Japanese to their children, both Japanese and Australian parents in this study largely relied on "first or second hand" information from similar Japanese-Australian families. They tended to listen to cases of successful and unsuccessful Japanese language transmission and tried to learn what might work in their own case. They did not take advantage of available bilingualism literature, and had not attended a seminar. Some parents (Max in family C and Mako and Henry in family D) did not seek any advice on how to transmit Japanese to their children. Instead,

they trusted their own intuition and started doing what they felt was right.

Motives and goals

Lambert (2008) found that parents who set a high goal tended to be more committed and put more time and effort into helping their children to learn German. Piller (2002) and Takeuchi (2006a) were more cautious, and suggested that parents should have a realistic goal, because if the parents do not see any positive outcomes early, they become frustrated and give up on their initiative.

A child's communication with the Japanese parent and relatives in Japan was an obvious reason for transmitting Japanese to the children in this study. However, the parents in this study related their children's Japanese language development strongly to providing advantages in education and future careers. Not surprisingly, parents in this study had a high goal for their children's Japanese language development. Literacy development was mentioned by all families. Basic Japanese reading and writing was introduced to the child during pre-primary school years in all families. All but one Japanese parent said that VCE (Victorian Certificate of Education) is one of the goals for their children's Japanese development. VCE is an examination which determines a student's university place in the State of Victoria in Australia. Japanese is one of the popular subjects in VCE, and the children from Japanese-Australian families in Victoria are eligible to sit the Japanese examination as a second language. Parents seemed to think that it would give their child an advantage in gaining more points and help them to gain university entry.

Kazue (family C): My children don't seem to like study. But if they keep studying Japanese, they will be able to get a high mark in VCE Japanese. It is their chance.

One Japanese parent, who did not mention VCE Japanese, also had a very high goal for her children.

Mako (family D): I go back to Japan once a year. My son went to primary school the last time we went back. I'm hoping to continue this, so he needs to have a level of Japanese so he can cope with study at Japanese school.

Strategies

In the family domain, the five Japanese parents used a variety of strategies to motivate their children to speak Japanese and promote their children's Japanese language development. In addition to continuing to speak Japanese with their children, the Japanese parents encouraged their children to speak Japanese, had regular Japanese book readings, and showed Japanese videos and DVDs. Japanese writing exercises were routine in most families.

Four families (with the exception of family E) seemed to expand their children's Japanese learning outside the family domain. They actively looked for opportunities for their children to get input in Japanese. *Hoshuu-koo* (the Japanese Ethnic School with classes every Saturday during the school term) was chosen by two families (A and C). The advantage of attending *hoshuu-koo* was not only formal Japanese language learning, but also the opportunity to meet other Japanese-speaking children. These families found

hoshuu-koo beneficial for their children's Japanese learning. Parents (families A and B) formed a weekly Japanese study group for the children with a few other families in the area. They conducted Japanese classes using Japanese textbooks provided by the Japanese Government. The classes had been running for more than 5 years.

One family (D) chose an English-based primary school where the Japanese language was taught as a LOTE (language other than English) subject by a Japanese speaker, hoping that other children would develop interests in the Japanese language and its culture, which could strengthen the child's positive attitudes towards the Japanese language. There were also a few Japanese speaking children in the child's grade at English-based primary school. These children spoke in Japanese and developed a strong friendship, socialising outside school.

All the Japanese parents seemed to understand the importance of fostering their children's interest in Japan and incorporated Japanese cultural practices. Three Japanese parents (families A, B, and D) explicitly said that "they wanted their children to like Japan." They often explained to their children why Japanese is important for them. Going to Japan was very important for their children's Japanese language development and they tried to do so yearly or every 2 years. They all had tried or were planning to send their children to kindergarten or primary school for a few weeks in Japan so that their children would gain an experience of Japanese schooling.

Challenges

The families in this study were committed to transmitting Japanese to their children. However, all Japanese parents said that they had experienced many challenges in the process of transmitting Japanese. One major challenge every Japanese parent mentioned was time management: how much time they should allocate to Japanese studies, as all families were encouraging their children's Japanese literary development.

Sanae (family A): Sometimes I wonder whether I'm pushing my children too much. I know they are trying hard, but I need to make sure they finish their Japanese homework. I don't want to keep saying "you haven't finished Japanese homework," as I hate to see Japanese become their "study" which they have to do. But I hear myself saying this many times. Sometimes I think if I decide English is enough for my children, it would be easier for everyone. This is a dilemma, always coming to the same question. I don't have an answer. I shouldn't have any doubt, because my children will sense it.

All Japanese parents were concerned about their children's increasing use of English borrowings. Japanese parents tended to use strategies to provide Japanese equivalent words when their children used English borrowings. They also explicitly talked about "appropriate and inappropriate language choice" with their children. This is recommended in books on child bilingual language acquisition (Döpke, 1992; Lanza, 1997; Takeuchi, 2006b), and is one of the strategies essential for successful outcomes. Three Japanese

mothers (families B, C, and D) expressed concerns as to whether frequently correcting their children was appropriate. One mother was also uncertain of the appropriate language choice when helping her son with homework. She found it difficult to be consistent with the use of Japanese when she was helping her child with his English homework.

At the same time, all families, with the exception of family E, were concerned about their children's development in English alongside the transmission of Japanese when their children started English-based primary school. This was particularly evident in the families where the Japanese parent was determined to teach her children Japanese and tried to create an environment which was highly geared towards Japanese and therefore would promote her children's Japanese language development. There were clearly defined parental roles, with the Australian parent helping the children with English studies and the Japanese parent helping children with Japanese studies. However, the Japanese parents became increasingly aware of the necessity for their children to acquire an age-appropriate level of English and tended to compare their children with monolingual English-speaking children. One family (C) received reports at the end of Grade Prep, which they interpreted as implying that their son's slow development in English may have been caused by being a Japanese-English bilingual.

Kazue (family C): I was very concerned about my son's English reports from primary school. I heard that children who were exposed to two languages may develop languages slowly compared with monolingual children, but my son received bad reports. So my husband and I decided to give him

KUMON English exercises every night. It's been about one year. I'm worried if he stops KUMON his English will go backward. But now he has started to speak more and more English to me. I'm not sure what I can do to change this pattern.

Children's perspectives

All five children developed interests in Japan and warm relationships with their Japanese relatives, particularly similar-aged cousins. They enjoyed trips to Japan and talked about their most recent one fondly. The children clearly understood the language contract in their individual families. However, there were differences in the children's attitudes in terms of language choice. Four children (in families A, B, D, and E) said that they liked when their Japanese parents spoke to them in Japanese and they would always speak to their Japanese parents in Japanese unless they did not know the word in Japanese. They all said that they were proud of their ability to speak Japanese.

In contrast, Ken (family C) preferred English for communication with his Japanese parent. He said that he was able to speak Japanese and did not have any problems reading Grade 2 textbooks from hoshuu-koo. He was willing to answer all the questions in Japanese during the interview, with a moderate degree of English borrowings. Ken's Japanese mother (in family C) expressed her concerns about her son's refusal to speak Japanese to her and said that she was thinking about giving up on bilingual child-rearing.

Conclusion

In this study, I tried to provide descriptive accounts of five families who were trying to transmit Japanese to their children in Australia. Parents who participated in this study viewed the development of Japanese as beneficial for their children from a broad perspective. Japanese parents actively sought information from other Japanese-Australian families and chose strategies which suited their goals. However, the families expressed concerns with their child's development in Japanese and English. They also appeared to become anxious about the appropriateness of their approach.

Ongoing support from cross-language family networks, as well as professional advice to continue native language transmission, seems necessary to reduce concerns for these parents. It is important for them to know that two monolinguals cannot be taken as the points of reference for judging the language ability of bilinguals (Clyne, 2005). As Borland (2006) suggests, on the bilingual continuum relatively few children from migrant and cross-language families would be able to achieve native-like proficiency in both oral and writing proficiencies. At the same time, it is important that parents are reassured that the child's minority language learning will not have a negative effect on the majority language learning and instead it will benefit the child.

Parents need to be prepared to reassess the child's progress and modify and expand their strategies when the child's preference to use English increases. Practical advice on how to do this, in terms of appropriate techniques and approaches, such as from books and seminars, will be beneficial for the parents. Lambert (2008) argues that children do make

decisions about language choice. They need to find it useful to continue to use the language, and findings in Lambert's study provide strong evidence that it can be done.

In reality, all family situations are unique and each family will have different goals for their children's bilingual language development. Studies on family bilingualism have identified factors which correlate with a child's language development outcomes. It is important for us now, as linguists and teachers, to be able to reach aspiring families and actively assist them in achieving their goals using research findings.

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