

***Foreign Fathers* – Native English Speaking Fathers’ Contributions to Bilingual Child-Rearing in Intermarried Families in Japan**

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Introduction

Who are you? What makes you so? These superficially simplistic questions pertain to the question of *identity*. Sociological understanding of this term suggests that our identities are socially constructed; that is, that they are both learned from and negotiated during our interactions with others¹. In view of this, it can be said that the family, initially at least, is the principal cultivator of one’s cultural identity.

Cultural identity is shaped by a range of components – for example, culinary, religious, and musical traditions – and it has been shown that different ethnic and cultural groups afford such elements varying degrees of importance². Nevertheless, language is an integral facet of cultural identity for the vast majority of people³. Language is, after all, the medium through which we socialise our children, and it can tell us a great deal about the cultural values of any given group.

What then, are we to make of families in which the parents do not share a common mother tongue? It is reasonable to assume that such parents who attempt to raise their children bilingually also aspire to expose their children to both cultural heritages. Interestingly, however, bilingual, bicultural child-rearing has, to date, been both construed and portrayed in somewhat didactic terms. On the one hand, the predominant societal expectation is that the raising of bilingual children is the natural, instinctive, even obvious duty of all intermarried parents. On the other hand, it has also been portrayed as problematic and difficult. To be sure, one recent study of intermarried Japanese mothers in the United Kingdom revealed that, while children of intermarried families are often thought to simply ‘pick up’ a second language ‘naturally’, the language work undertaken by the parents – particularly the minority language native speaking mother – is grossly underestimated⁴. In addition, recent studies have shown that simple exposure to two languages does not guarantee active bilingualism, and that parental language practices and attitudes towards bilingualism are critical factors in determining its development⁵.

¹ Leeds-Hurwitz, ‘From Generation to Generation’, p. 1.

² *Ibid* p. 6.

³ Heller, ‘The Role of Language in the Formation of Ethnic Identity’.

⁴ Okita, ‘Invisible Work’.

⁵ See, for example, DeHouwer’s discussion of her Impact Belief Theory in ‘Environmental Factors in Early Bilingual Development’.

The research project detailed in this paper seeks to explore both the diversity and complexity of roles that native English speaking intermarried fathers residing in Japan play in the implementation of bilingual child-rearing strategies. Firstly, a working definition of the term *bilingualism* will be proposed. The study's rationale will then be outlined before a brief discussion of the shortcomings in the current literature. Following this, provisional research questions will be posed. Next, the methodological framework of this research project will precede a discussion of a preliminary case study of one Australian–Japanese intermarried family in Japan. Importantly, it is acknowledged that this is a single case study, that is, limited to one family. Presumably, the father – as a ‘white’, middle class native English speaking professional – experiences the bilingual child-rearing process quite differently from non-Japanese fathers in Japan from other ethnic or social groups. Stated simply, the reader is urged to be mindful of the fact that this is a single preliminary case study that fits into an ongoing broader research project.

Defining Bilingualism

Older definitions of bilingualism inferred the complete mastery of two languages, but more recent interpretations have catered to the subjectivity of the term⁶. Recognising bilingualism as a relative concept, Mackey has shown that bilingual proficiency can vary in terms of degree, function, alternation, and interference; and, as one might expect, bilingualism means different things to different people⁷. Defining the term bilingualism is further complicated in that there are different types of bilinguals. Common terms used to describe such categories include: balanced/dominant bilinguals; early/late bilinguals; and active/passive bilinguals.

For the purpose of this paper, the term bilingualism is employed to denote the knowledge and use of two languages in varying contexts of everyday life. This broad definition highlights the fact that proficiency in both languages varies in terms of key skills and situational contexts, and is consistent with the way in which the term has been used in other recent studies⁸.

Rationale

In the interest of disclosure, it should be noted that I am an intermarried native English speaking Australian. With my Japanese wife, I have been raising our two children in Japan for the last eight years. In this sense, it could be said that I am a quasi-participant observer in this study, because my interest in the subject is manifest in a personal

⁶ Liddicoat, ‘Bilingualism – An Introduction.’

⁷ Mackey, ‘The Description of Bilingualism.’

⁸ See, for example, interpretations of the term in either Shin’s ‘Developing in Two Languages’, or Yamamoto’s ‘Language Use in Interlingual Families.’

curiosity to better understand my own individual circumstances, and those of my family. Through personal experience over the years, particularly from engaging in numerous interactions with other intermarried families in Japan, two contradictory paradigms seem to have emerged. No doubt due to the high social status that English proficiency is afforded in Japan, social attitudes regarding English–Japanese bilingual child-rearing are overtly positive. It is fair to say that children born to a native English speaking parent are considered ‘lucky’ to have access to authentic English, and it seems to be considered *atarimae* (only natural) that such children should become proficient in the language. For instance, a stranger recently asked my daughter in English ‘What’s your name?’ and whether she could speak Japanese. This social expectation, however, runs contrary to the experiences of many intermarried families, and the raising of bilingual, bicultural children in Japan can prove anything but *atarimae*. The language work that must be undertaken is often time consuming and emotionally taxing, and, despite the best intentions of all, some families seem to be far less successful in their efforts than others.

Literature Review

In searching for answers to this complex riddle, I began to adopt a cross-disciplinary approach to the existing literature. By examining prior studies from the areas of family studies, sociolinguistics and bilingualism studies, several deficiencies in the literatures began to shape the future direction of my research project.

Though a comprehensive review of the sociological literature from the rather diverse area of family studies is beyond the parameters of this paper, research pertaining to intermarriage warrants brief discussion. Whilst this body of literature continues to grow, the majority of such studies have adopted the perspective of the mother living as a minority, and have found these women to be both marginalised by culture and subordinated by gender⁹. Conversely, the experience of men in mixed marriage – especially when it comes to the language work of bilingual childrearing – remains largely unclear. It is hoped, therefore, that the research project outlined in this paper – which specifically seeks to develop current understanding of the experiences of intermarried men – will in part contribute to filling this void. Unlike the majority of prior studies of intermarriage – which have tended to paint rather uniform pictures of such couples¹⁰ – this study attempts to account for the variation of circumstances, diversity of experiences, and range of perspectives of its participants.

Language choice and patterns of use are, of course, contextual. From the field of sociolinguistics, Joshua Fishman is credited with conceptualising the notion

⁹ See, for example, Okita’s ‘Invisible Work’, Liamputtong’s ‘Mothers and the Challenge of Immigrant Mothers’, or Imamura’s ‘Strangers in a Strange Land’.

¹⁰ See Cottrell, ‘Cross-National Marriage’ for a detailed discussion of this tendency. A noteworthy exception to this characterisation is Luke & Luke, ‘Interracial Families: Difference Within Difference’.

of language *domains*, which he argues are subject to the controlling factors of group, situation, and topic¹¹. Domains, which Clyne has also described as ‘conceptualised spheres of communication’, include such settings as work, school, church and, of course, the family¹². Although the family is obviously the pivotal domain in cultivating cultural identity through the process of language socialisation, it has not enjoyed the same amount of scholarly attention from sociolinguists as other domains¹³. More specifically, most prior studies that have examined the interlingual family domain have predominantly focused on North American or European contexts¹⁴, and have often been based on the authors’ observations of their own children¹⁵. This study attempts to add objective, new data from the English–Japanese context, thereby furthering current understanding in this field.

From literature in the area of bilingualism studies specifically, three fundamental questions emerge regarding bilingual child-rearing: the family’s language use strategy; the effect of the parents’ second language (hereafter L2) proficiency on the child’s bilingualism; and the extent to which the gender of the minority language speaking parent influences bilingual development.

Various prior studies have advocated the perceived merits of the implementation of a specific language strategy¹⁶. The more well known of these strategies include One-Parent-One-Language (OPOL), Minority Language at Home (ML@H), Time and Place (T&P) and the Mixed Strategy (MS). This research project attempts to add rich context specific data to contribute to current understanding of how the implementations of these strategies are experienced by the families under investigation.

The extent to which the parents’ L2 proficiency influences the child’s bilingual development has been the focus of extensive debate. One perspective is that the language competency of the parents in their respective spouse’s language is indeed an influential factor in the bilingual development of their children¹⁷. It is argued that when children are aware that their native L2 speaking parent is competent in the majority language, their motivation to use the minority language is diminished. On the other hand, other studies have failed to identify a direct correlation in parents’ abilities to speak their respective spouse’s language and the attainment of active bilingualism in their children¹⁸. Because this research project seeks participants with varying degrees of Japanese language proficiency, the effect of L2 language proficiency on bilingual child-rearing in the Japanese–English interlingual family context will be further scrutinised, thus further contributing to current knowledge in the field of bilingualism studies.

¹¹ Fishman, ‘Who Speaks What Language to Whom and When?’

¹² Clyne, ‘Community Languages’, p. 54.

¹³ Boxer, ‘Applying Sociolinguistics’.

¹⁴ Harding & Riley ‘The Bilingual Family’.

¹⁵ See, for example, Cunningham-Andersson & Andersson, ‘Growing Up in Two Languages’.

¹⁶ For a more detailed explanation of commonly used language strategies in interlingual families, refer to Barron-Hauwaert, ‘Language Strategies for Bilingual Families’; Tokuhama-Espinosa, ‘Raising Multilingual Children’; or Romaine, ‘Bilingualism’.

¹⁷ See, for example, Lucacevich, ‘The Influence of the Japanese Parent’s Gender on the Acquisition of Japanese by Children of Japanese–Australian Mixed Marriages’.

¹⁸ See such a counter-argument to the above view in Noguchi, ‘Bilinguality and Bilingual Children in Japan’.

The pervasive view concerning the gender of the minority language speaking parent is that minority language speaking mothers are more likely to successfully raise bilingual children than minority language speaking fathers¹⁹. Mothers, it is argued, tend to spend more time with, and adopt more appropriate speech when speaking to their children²⁰. Several Japan-specific studies adhere to this belief, arguing that the socio-economic expectations placed on fathers in Japan render them often unable to perform the quality and quantity of language work undertaken by native minority language speaking mothers²¹. However, other studies from a variety of language contexts have refuted the claim that there is any significant correlation between a child's bilinguality and the gender of the minority language speaking parent²². Again, this research project attempts to contribute to current understanding of this issue by focusing on the role of fathers in the bilingual child-rearing process in English–Japanese interlingual families residing in Japan.

Provisional Research Questions

The project outlined in this paper revolves around three provisional research questions:

- 1) What variables shape the type and amount of language work undertaken by intermarried native English speaking fathers in Japan?
- 2) What impact does the Japanese language proficiency of the father have on the language work undertaken?
- 3) What does the specific context of this study tell us about language work at the broader level in terms of location of residence, L2 status, and the gendered differences of the parents?

Methodology and Research Instruments

This study focuses on native English speaking intermarried fathers in Japan as cultural and linguistic minorities. The project is an investigation into the 'language work'²³ that these men perform in the bilingual rearing of their children. As such, the project is qualitative in nature. Unlike quantitative research, which is 'deliberately unconcerned with rich descriptions because such detail interrupts the process of developing generalisations', qualitative research seeks detailed pictures pertaining to the unique experiences of individuals.²⁴ As such, the study does not attempt to generate findings from

¹⁹ Clyne, 'Multilingual Australia'.

²⁰ Lyon, 'Becoming Bilingual'.

²¹ See for example Kamada, 'Report on Bilingual Family Case Studies in Japan'.

²² See, for example, Dopke, 'One-Parent-One-Language', or Noguchi, 'Bilinguality and Bilingual Children in Japan'.

²³ This term has been borrowed from Okita's 'Invisible Work'. It is employed in this study to refer to all of the strategies, decisions, and practices undertaken by the fathers in their attempts to raise their children bilingually.

²⁴ Denzin & Lincoln 'Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research', p. 10.

commonalities that can be ‘proven’ in any statistical sense. Rather it attempts to canvas the diversity and complexity of experiences, attitudes and paternal practices of the men under investigation. This study, as Stake would have it, is just as much (if not more so) a study of the particular as it is of the common, because it seeks to elucidate the ‘important atypical features, happenings, relationships, and happenings’ pertinent to each individual participant²⁵.

The research project consists of eight family case studies. All families are comprised of a native English speaking father – Japanese mother intermarried couple. All families have at least two children, one or more of whom currently attend elementary school (age 6–12 years). The three research instruments – which will collect data from both the father and the mother from each family – are explained below.

The first research instrument is the Language Learning History and Use Questionnaire (L.L.H.U.Q.). The English version of this questionnaire targets the fathers, while the Japanese version of the questionnaire is completed by the mothers. The questionnaire consists of four sections: family background; language learning history and proficiency; family language use patterns; and attitudes and perceptions about being bilingual. Some of the questions contained in the L.L.H.U.Q. are originally designed, while others are either replicated or modified from previous studies²⁶.

The second research instrument is the Parental Activity Logbook (P.A.L.). Both mothers and fathers are asked to record their activities over a seven-day period. Participants are asked to record their daily activities with a particular focus on their interaction with their children. The participants are asked to record the language in which they speak to other members of the family, and in what context. By collecting such data, it is hoped that an indication regarding the amount of time the participants spend with their children, the kinds of activities they engage in, as well as the contextual language use patterns, will emerge.

The third, but most important, instrument in the research design is the in-depth interview. These semi-structured interviews are used to construct unique case studies, and are an attempt to canvas the diversity and complexity of the individual circumstances of the families involved in the study. Interviews are conducted in the homes of the participants, a setting that provides an additional opportunity for me to observe the family in its ‘natural’ setting. Parents are interviewed separately; the fathers in English, while the mothers may elect to participate in the interview in either English or Japanese. Participants are then given the opportunity to verify the accuracy of their interview transcript. Data is then coded for analysis, and finally case studies are compiled.

²⁵ Stake, ‘Case Studies’, p. 439.

²⁶ The previous studies that influenced the design of the L.L.H.U.Q are: Barron-Hauwaert’s ‘Language Strategies for Bilingual Families’; Noguchi’s ‘Bilinguality and Bicultural Children in Japan’; and Yamamoto’s ‘Language Use in Interlingual Families’.

Case Study – A Preliminary Discussion

The couple investigated in this case study were assigned the pseudonyms ‘Simon and Sonoko Smith’. Simon is a 37-year-old native English speaking Australian. Sonoko is a 36-year-old Japanese. The Smiths have two daughters, aged eight and five. The family resides in a suburb of a major city in central Japan.

Simon originally came to Japan over 15 years ago to study Japanese. He holds both an undergraduate degree in Japanese language and a M.A. in Japanese Interpreting and Translation. Simon also spent two years in the Japanese tertiary system as a research student. He currently teaches in the university system.

Sonoko is the children’s main caregiver, and she also works part time, both as a lecturer of English at a local university and as an interpreter. She too holds a M.A. in Japanese Interpreting and Translation, as well as a Bachelor’s degree in English.

The Smith family clearly can be described as an interlingual family. Simon is an English dominant active bilingual. He self-reports his speaking, listening and reading skills in Japanese to be at a near native level, and estimates his written Japanese as below the age appropriate native speaker level. Sonoko reports Simon’s Japanese speaking, listening, and reading proficiency to be at native speaker level, and his Japanese writing ability to be at the near native level.

Sonoko is a Japanese dominant active bilingual. She self-reports her speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills in English to be at the near native level. Simon estimates Sonoko’s English speaking, listening and reading skills to be at the near native level, but reports her English writing skills to be below age the appropriate native speaker level.

Both of the Smiths’ daughters can be described as bilingual, but to varying degrees. The elder daughter (eight years) can be described as a Japanese dominant active bilingual with near age appropriate native speaker level speaking and listening skills in English. She is reported as possessing below age appropriate writing and reading skills in English. The younger daughter (five years) can also be described as a Japanese dominant active bilingual, although her age appropriate proficiency in English is comparatively not as strong as her sister’s. The younger daughter is reported to be able to read and write a few words in English, and is said to be able to carry out ‘simple conversations’ in English.

The Smiths’ daughters are currently being educated in a public school and kindergarten respectively. The language of instruction at both of these institutions is Japanese. Simon and Sonoko report that there are few to some opportunities for the children to interact with native English speakers in the area where they reside, and

unsurprisingly state that the children most often play with children who only speak Japanese.

Simon reports that the language strategy the family is attempting to implement is Minority Language at Home (ML@H). However, he acknowledges that the family follows this strategy inconsistently. In the home, he uses roughly 80% English and 20% Japanese, while Sonoko appears to use both English and Japanese with approximately equal frequency. The elder daughter reportedly uses slightly more Japanese than English, while the younger daughter predominantly uses Japanese.

When analysing language use patterns between family members, Simon and Sonoko's self-reporting is slightly inconsistent. Simon and Sonoko both report that they use English and Japanese amongst themselves. However, while Simon claims to use English exclusively with the children, Sonoko reports that Simon interacts with the girls in both English and Japanese. It is reported that the younger daughter tends to speak to Simon in Japanese, while the elder daughter uses both English and Japanese. Unremarkably, both children speak to Sonoko in Japanese. Sonoko reported that she uses a mixture of English and Japanese when speaking to the children. Simon and Sonoko also state that the girls use Japanese amongst themselves, something that, when compared with other studies, is not surprising²⁷. In this sense, it can be said that the Smiths' language strategy is strictly neither ML@H nor OPOL, but something somewhere between.

As a departure point, the L.L.H.U.Q. provides some insight into what motivates the Smiths in their attempt to raise their children bilingually. Sonoko writes that she wants the children to be bilingual in order that, in the future, they may be able to live wherever it is they go. Simon is hopeful that the children will complete their higher education (senior high school and university) in Australia, and this is a major motivating factor in his bilingual child-rearing efforts. Although Sonoko justifies the family's current residency in Japan as indispensable in exposing the children to their Japanese heritage, Simon perceives another, more pessimistic reason to raise the children bilingually. He does not want the children to grow up as Japanese monolinguals, because, as he puts it, 'in the final analysis, I don't think that our kids will be accepted as full members of Japanese society. They'll always be different, and that's not the situation I want to put them in.'

Both Simon and Sonoko acknowledge the gap between a societal expectation that the children should 'naturally' be bilingual, and the realities that the demanding task of bilingual child-rearing entails. Simon explains:

superficially, it [bilingual development] appears like it should be natural, but really, I don't think it is natural at all, because...the kids themselves are trying hard to fit in

²⁷ The proclivity for sibling interactions to be conducted in the L1 is well documented. See Yamamoto, 'Language use in Interlingual Families', p. 34.

with their peer groups here... Unless I really push the issue, it [bilingual development] is not going to happen at all... It costs a lot of money, it takes a lot of effort, and requires a lot of... emotional investment on both of our parts.

Simon's comments attest to the 'invisible work' that Okita propagates; however, unlike the majority of fathers described in her study, it is clear that Simon, despite not being the children's main caregiver, still takes an active role in the language work required for his children's bilingual development.

Specifically, Simon undertakes a variety of tasks that can be considered as 'language work'. His P.A.L. revealed that he interacted with his children in English through such daily activities as getting the children ready for school/kindergarten, playing sports and games in English, exclusively speaking English during meals, watching English movies together and reading to the children in English. He also periodically undertook somewhat more structured language work such as doing 'English practice' with his children. This involves literacy instruction – supervising the completion of English workbooks etc. Simon believes, however, that the most effective type of language work he can perform for his children is to take them on annual trips back to Australia each August. He explains:

I've taken the incentives approach. I say, 'We are going to Australia in six weeks' or whatever, ... 'so you know, you don't want to be stuck in the corner speaking Japanese, because, you know that [cousins' names deleted] don't speak any Japanese, and Grandma doesn't speak Japanese, so lets speak English.' And to be honest, they are probably more keen than me about it.

The Smiths report trying to follow the Minority Language at Home (ML@H) strategy, albeit inconsistently. Of the problems associated with maintaining a strict English environment in the home, Simon states 'I don't want them to dread studying English... I want to, obviously, keep it realistic... also, I'm *not*... their school teacher, I'm their father, and our personal relationship is more important than that'.

The effect of Simon's high level of Japanese proficiency on the children's bilingual development can be viewed in a number of ways. Although the children are aware of the fact that their father is competent in Japanese, consequently making it at times difficult to get them to respond to him in English, this does have its advantages. Simon observes that other non-Japanese intermarried fathers who are not competent in the Japanese language do not appear to receive any degree of respect from their children, who reportedly resent the fact that their fathers have not made the effort to learn 'their language'.

Another issue to emerge from the interviews was the reported differences

in parental styles between Japanese and Australian parents. Of course, it should be acknowledged that not all Japanese (or, for that matter, Australian) parents share identical philosophies on child-rearing. Nevertheless, Sonoko and Simon both felt that Japanese parenting norms were far more liberal than in Australia, and they also both reported incidents where their preferred 'Australian' style of parenting had come under the unfavourable scrutiny of Japanese friends and acquaintances as being overly strict.

Related to these differences in the cultural values of parenting, the issue of gender roles was also raised. Previous studies such as Okita's have tended to assume that because families in both Japanese and 'Western' contexts have traditionally distributed domestic labour along gendered lines, women, who more often than not are the child's primary caregiver, perform the vast majority of the language work in the bilingual child-rearing process. The Smith family highlights the fact that this assumption warrants careful scrutiny. A large number of native English speaking men in Japan work in the field of education. These jobs in particular are often comparatively well paid, have flexible working hours and generous vacation allotments. Put simply, native English speaking fathers may be interacting with their children far more than was previously assumed. Furthermore, they may be engaged in a great deal more of the language work than was formerly supposed.

Conclusion

This paper is based on the assumptions that language plays an integral role in the shaping of one's cultural identity, and that the family is the primary domain in which language socialisation occurs. Bilingual child-rearing, it is argued, is an important priority for many intermarried families, because it is considered the pivotal means in which to expose children from such families to their dual heritages. The paper outlined the ironic gap between, on the one hand, the social expectation that children in intermarried families 'naturally' acquire their second language, and the reality, on the other hand, that the language work undertaken by the parents is anything but effortless and natural.

A brief survey of the literature revealed some striking gaps in current knowledge. From the field of family studies, it was shown that while much is now known about the circumstances of women in mixed marriages, the experience of intermarried men remains largely unclear. Sociolinguistic studies of interlingual families, which have been for the most part limited to European or North American contexts, have tended to assume that mothers perform the vast majority of the language work. Prior studies have inconclusively debated whether or not L2 proficiency affects bilingual development in children. The literature has also argued that the gender of the minority language speaking parent influences bilingual development, whereby minority language speaking mothers are more likely to raise bilingual children than minority language speaking fathers. The data collected for this case study reveals that we may need to reconsider this assumption.

From this single case study, it is impossible to definitively answer the questions raised above. However, for the Smith family, it can be said that neither the gender of the minority language speaking parent (Simon), nor the minority language speaking parent's (high) L2 proficiency appears to have had a significant impact on the bilingual development of the children. For the Smiths, it seems more likely that the quality of interaction between Simon (as the minority language speaker) and the children, his relatively consistent use of English at home, and the provision of annual trips to Australia have proved to be the decisive factors in the children's bilingual development.

It should be emphasised that this paper offers a preliminary discussion of the first case study from a larger research project. It is, therefore, necessary to conduct further case studies to ascertain the variety and complexity of circumstances, perspectives and experiences of other intermarried native English speaking men in Japan.

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