



Bilingual Japan

バイリンガル通信

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The Newsletter of the JALT
Special Interest Group on Bilingualism

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Call for volunteers! Vacancies have opened up in the regular column editor position for *Case Studies*. Duties involved liaising with case study contributors, and conducting open peer review/feedback for articles. Volunteers should be JALT members, and ideally B-SIG members.

Interested parties, please contact either the Newsletter Editor, Daniel Pearce, at pearce@shitennoji.ac.jp, or the B-SIG coordinator, Alexandra Shaitan, at alexshaitan@yahoo.com.

Contribute to *Bilingual Japan*

Bilingual Japan is the official newsletter of the Bilingualism Special Interest Group (B-SIG) of the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT). The purpose of this publication is to provide B-SIG members with articles and reports about bilingualism, bilingual research, and bilingual child-raising in Japan. *Bilingual Japan* also provides information about recent B-SIG activities.

The content of this newsletter depends on contributions from its readers. All SIG members and other interested parties are invited to submit articles or reports for inclusion in these pages. Start by writing about your family's experience or something about bilingual parenting that concerns you. Even if you feel that what you have to say is trivial, there is always someone who will be interested. Everyone has a story to tell, and we look forward to hearing yours.

Manuscript Guidelines

Please consult the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 7th edition, as a style guide. Refer to recent issues of the JALT Bilingualism SIG Newsletter for instances of layout and referencing. (Editors and co-editors are here to help with this process – we welcome all voices, so please do not feel intimidated by academic conventions of if you are not used to them.

Bilingual Japan (バイリンガル通信) invites a wide variety of submissions to columns that are not necessarily included in every newsletter. Columns are listed below, and contributors with ideas for submissions should feel free to consult with the editor(s) about proposals – we welcome any and all voices that contribute to the bilingual community.

Regular Columns (generally 1,000~3,000 words):

- **Case Studies**

See a detailed description overpage.

- **Children's Resources (& Young Adult Book Reviews)**

A column about books, magazines, and other resources for bilingual children in Japan, including: reviews and recommendations, information about where to get the resources, offers of resources to exchange, or give free to a good home (no sales, please) and calls for help from B-SIG members interested in producing their own children's resources. Please send submissions to the column editor, Diane Lamb-Obara at dianelamb.ohiojapan@gmail.com

- **Resources Column**

Readers are encouraged to submit book reviews and introductions to materials that have relevance to bilingualism. Word count is not prioritized – submissions should include introductions of resources that could be beneficial to the bilingual (and emergent bilingual) community.

New Columns! (shorter columns, around 1,000 words)

More details on these columns are presented on Page 7's in *Calls for Contributions to New Columns*.

- **Voices**

Readers are encouraged to submit both interviews and first-hand accounts of bilingualism in Japan. *Voices* includes (but is not limited to) experiences of novice researchers, graduate students, educational practitioners, and bilingual professionals. Submissions should have a clear message that should contribute to the community and should be relatively short (around 1,000 words). Frustrations are also voices – articles that reasonably point out the struggles of bilinguals are also welcome!

- **Current Research & Interests**

A venue to keep readers up-to-date with links, news, and/or new research in bilingualism. Submissions should generally be summaries of relatively new trends in bilingualism, preferably kept to under 1,000 words, and accessible to general members. Any relevant topics to bilingualism (with

particular consideration to the Japanese context) will be considered. Please send submissions to the column editor, Shaitan Alexandra at alexshaitan@yahoo.com

Feature Articles:

- These articles are longer and/or deal with topics not covered by the Regular Columns.
- Length: Up to 3,000 words or longer.

Submissions/queries for columns without a specific column editor should be sent to the editor, Daniel Pearce, at pearce@shitennoji.ac.jp

Proposals for submissions that do not necessarily fit into regular columns/feature articles (for instance, works-in-progress, calls for support, open letters etc.) will be considered.

編集者より：日本語による投稿も受け付けます。今後のニュースレターに日本語の執筆ガイドラインの導入を予定していますが、夏のニュースレターの日本語による投稿の相談に応じます。ピアース・ダニエルまで：pearce@shitennoji.ac.jp

DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE: September 15th

While there is a lot of leeway in how each specific columns contributions can be written, our previous Case Study co-editors (many thanks to Alec McAuley and Ron Murphy!) have given a great guide for case studies. Some points may be of use to contributors to other columns.

Guidelines for Case Study Articles

The goal of a case study is to show how the process of teaching* and acquiring a minority language & culture is carried out in individual cases. Writers should clearly explain to the reader the relevant information regarding the main characters of the story, the situation that these characters came from and/or are presently in, and the strategies and methods used to advance toward the stated goal. While a case study is usually written by a parent about that parent's child or children, any contributor who is suitably informed about a particular situation is eligible to submit an article for publication.

Obviously, contributors should keep in mind their audience. Most Bilingualism SIG members (numbering over 200, all of whom receive three online issues annually) have various years of experience in this field. Many joined the SIG when their children were young, hoping to learn how to raise their children to be bilingual, bi-literate, and bicultural. A contributor should strive to contribute to our readers' desire to know and learn, keeping in mind that our members have a wide range of personal backgrounds, current family circumstances, and material and social resources.

* (Terms such as 'teaching', 'teachers', 'learning', etc. are used broadly in these guidelines and can/do include people, practices, and experiences beyond a traditional school environment.)

Submission guidelines:

It is advisable to check with the editors before writing your article. It is best to propose an idea or an abstract and then proceed upon the editors' feedback. Reading past case studies is advisable.

Deadlines are the middle of January, April, and September. Articles should be 1500-3000 words, though exceeding the upper cap, within reason, can usually be accommodated. In certain circumstances, much longer articles are accepted but may be split into two parts, appearing in successive issues. Check with the editors on this.

Editorial guidelines:

Case studies in this newsletter are generally not academic in nature. Rather, they are a focused narrative on the real experiences of people in specific situations. References to research and theory, if used at all, should be used sparingly. While strong claims should be backed by evidence and/or references, many case studies are fine without such references, provided that it is clear that it is the author(s)' perspective or opinion being expressed.

Accessibility to the reader will also be taken into account, and meandering narratives will be rejected or sent back for revision. Articles should convey a clear story that reveals the efforts and outcomes towards teaching and learning of the target language and/or culture, whether successful or not.

Article structure:

- Introduction

This first part of your article should provide the relevant information about the 'teachers' and 'learners' (often, but not always, the parents and children – autoethnographies/autobiographical articles are also welcome) – demographics, past and current residencies, education history, language abilities, teaching strategies and methods, lifestyle and social circumstances, etc. Pseudonyms are acceptable but should be acknowledged. A thesis statement of sorts should be included to alert the reader to the direction and scope of the article.

- Body

This section should clearly deal with the main events of the article. Convey the steps taken to address the problems stated in the (so-called) 'thesis statement' and the results of those steps. This is sometimes the most personal part of an article, and conveying the thoughts, feelings, and behavior of the participants towards successes or failures can be powerful. Be fair, be accurate, and be honest.

Typically, there is a third party involved in a case study -- a teacher, principal, a school, family member, a 'Saturday School' board member' etc. It is beneficial to the reader to explain this party's position and behavior adequately and honestly.

Details matter. Explain the methods you use in enough detail to give the reader a sense of how that method worked in those circumstances. For example, methods might include reading English books at bedtime, Skype sessions with cousins back home, Saturday school projects, daily 'English-only' periods, or home-school routines. Helpful detail would include any 'spin-off' activity *vis a vis* bedtime reading; particulars of Skype sessions, i.e., do the kids just 'wing it' or are talking points set up beforehand? What is the proficiency or 'success' of the exchanges? What excites kids in Saturday Schools to do mid-week English homework in preparation for the Saturday lesson? What are the social benefits of such an arrangement? For periods where 'English-only' is in effect, how does the child respond? Do all siblings, or spouse, participate? To what affect?

- Conclusion

Wrap up your article by briefly summarizing the wins and losses, what you have learned, and the path forward in the long and winding road ahead.

In the end, as a case study contributor, you are a storyteller. As always, good stories have drama, suspense, protagonists who struggle, antagonists who thwart, success, failure, humor, irony, courage, uncertainty, etc. Most importantly, good stories always connect with the reader. Your reader will be much like you -- having much on the line, such as a precious child who they dearly want to succeed in life. Your story will resonate with them. Tell it well.

DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE: September 15th



Coordinator's Message

Dear Bilingualism SIG Members!

Hope this message finds you well despite the busiest time of the academic year of 2022! Firstly, we would like to thank **ALL** our members who have been contributing to Bilingualism SIG's successful activities via long-term membership, presenting and sharing their academic research in relation to bilingualism/multilingualism at the **PanSIG** and **JALT Bilingualism SIG Forums**. We are also thankful to all members who have been contributing to B-SIG publications and/or events related to bi-/multilingualism and bi-/multiculturalism, submitting articles and book reviews to the SIG's **Newsletter** (<https://www.B-SIG.org/newsletter>) and the **JJMM Journal** (<https://www.B-SIG.org/jjmm>).

We would also like to place **a call for the B-SIG Newsletter Column Co-coeditor**. Please get in touch with Alexandra Shaitan at alexshaitan@yahoo.com if you are interested in learning more about this opportunity. We would provide all necessary training and support to all novice members. Please do get in touch at your convenience.

We look forward to seeing you many of you at the **PanSIG 2022 Conference**, which will take place face-to-face from July 8th to 10th, 2022, with fun social events. The venue of the conference is **The University of Nagano** ([長野県立大学](http://www.u-nagano.ac.jp)), Miwa Campus. There will be an opportunity to join the B-SIG Forum *online*, as it is understandable that not all members are able to travel to Nagano this time. Please join us for a friendly talk. If you have got any questions related to the B-SIG Forum, please contact Diane Lamb-Obara at: dianelamb.ohiojapan@gmail.com. Once the decision has been made, we will send you an email with instructions/password to a Zoom link, to ensure a smooth and stress-free, online access to the B-SIG Forum.

On a different note, we would like to thank all the reviewers, contributors and the Newsletter Editor for their time and support, hard work, and dedication in producing this issue. Please enjoy reading all the contributions to the Spring Issue of 2022.

And, it goes without saying, we thank **YOU all** for your support and look forward to hearing from you! Please e-mail Alexandra Shaitan at alexshaitan@yahoo.com if you would like to get involved in any B-SIG activities and if you have any ideas/suggestions.

Best wishes,
Bilingualism SIG Coordinator,
Shaitan Alexandra.

News: Calls for Contributions to New Columns A Message from the New Editor

I trust this edition of the B-SIG Newsletter finds you well, and I look forward to contributing to the community as editor.

As new editor, I would like to announce **two new regular columns** in addition to Case Studies, Feature Articles, and the Resources Column: *Current Research & Interests* and *Voices*.

The first new column, *Current Research & Interests* is intended to keep readers up-to-date with links, news, and/or new research in bilingualism. Submissions should generally be summaries of relatively new trends in bilingualism, preferably kept to under 1,000 words, and accessible to general members. Any relevant topics to bilingualism (with particular consideration to the Japanese context) will be considered.

For the second column, *Voices*, we will accept both interviews and first-hand accounts of bilingualism in Japan. This includes (but is not limited to) experiences of novice researchers, graduate students, educational practitioners, and bilingual professionals. Inspired in part by many beautiful references to the life experiences of bilinguals in Grosjean's introductory volume, *Bilingual: Life and Reality* (2010), *Voices* is intended to be a venue primarily for adults to share their experiences with bilingualism in Japan. Submissions should have a clear message that should contribute to the community and should be relatively short (around 1,000 words). As Grosjean was my inspiration for establishing this column, I borrow his definition for bilingualism:

Bilinguals are those who use two or more languages (or dialects) in their everyday lives.
(Grosjean, 2010, p. 4)

Note that the above definition has no criteria for *proficiency, fluency, or mastery* – if you are *using* two or more languages daily, we want to hear your experiences and perspectives. The gate is wide open, so come on in.

As the new editor, I feel both of these new columns have great potential for our B-SIG community, and I am looking forward to submissions for the Summer newsletter.

And as I final note, we **most definitely** accept submissions that treat bilingualism among languages other than just Japanese-English. As new editor, I intend to move forward in a way that allows for easier submissions of Japanese-language articles, and recognition of the multitude of other languages in Japan.

Best wishes, and happy to be part of the community,
B-SIG Newsletter Editor,
Daniel R. Pearce.

P.S. As an editor's sidenote, for those new to bilingualism (and/or bilingual research), the cited volume by Grosjean is an *excellent* introductory resource written with a general audience in mind. Well worth checking out, even for those well acquainted with bilingualism.

Reference:

Grosjean, F. (2010). *Bilingual: Life and reality*. Harvard University Press.

DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE: September 15th

Feature Article

Readers are encouraged to submit articles related to various topics or issues related to language learning, identity, education, or child raising – anything related to bilingualism. As with all following sections, please contact the editor, Daniel R. Pearce - pearce@shitennoji.ac.jp, for more information.

Three Voices: Children's Perspectives on their Bilingualism

Brett Davies
Meiji University

Probably every parent of a bicultural child wrestles with the myriad choices involved in raising a person in two languages. The pages of this newsletter are testimony to those concerns, as are my own discussions with parents in the same position, in which it seems that nearly everyone thinks that they have not done enough, and that their child's ability – especially in the minority language – is lagging behind that of their peers'. When trying to find ways to better develop our children's linguistic ability, it seems natural to consult the existing research on bilingualism. However, much of the academic literature on the topic tends to take an investigative approach, 'measuring' the subject's language proficiency as if it were a quantifiable commodity. Conversely, case studies are often told from a parent's point of view. Each of these approaches is valid and enlightening, of course, but they can sometimes overlook an important perspective; that of the bilingual child.

This realization led me to begin this research, interviewing bilinguals in Japan and giving them the opportunity to discuss their experiences first-hand. This article will show excerpts of interviews with three children whose parents are taking different approaches to their bilingualism, even though much in their backgrounds is similar: All three are boys who live in Tokyo or its suburbs; they are in the 6th grade of primary/elementary school; and they all attend local state schools (in which the main language is Japanese). They each

have one Japanese parent and one parent from overseas (each of whom regards English as their first language); and the non-Japanese parents all work in education. Furthermore, the children have all known each other (and the interviewer – me!) through occasional informal get-togethers since they were three or four years old. Despite these similarities, each family is taking a different path regarding their child's bilingualism.

The purpose of these interviews is not to establish the 'best' approach, and, of course, it would be impossible to do so with such a small sample. Rather, I hope that the findings here will help parents and educators gain an insight into some children's attitudes regarding their own situation as speakers of two or more languages.

The interviews

All interviews were performed face-to-face with a parent present, and I will use pseudonyms here in order to protect the children's anonymity. The interviews were semi-structured, as I wished to remain broadly consistent in my questions while keeping it a natural and comfortable experience for all participants. This approach also allowed for follow-up questions when appropriate. With the children's and parents' agreement, the interviews were conducted in English, although the participants were free to choose to answer in Japanese if they preferred. For ease of reading, I have

translated Japanese utterances into English, which are underlined. While I strived to present the dialogues accurately, I have deleted extraneous comments and clarifications.

Ryo (11)

Mother: Japanese, nurse; high-intermediate level of English.

Father: American, English conversation school teacher, high-intermediate level of Japanese.

No siblings.

Family approach to bilingualism (according to father): “I try to use English as much as I can, but Ryo usually replies in Japanese. I work late, so it’s hard to spend a lot of time just me and him. His mom usually speaks Japanese with him, but we use both languages when we’re talking as a family. Recently, I feel I’m using Japanese more and more. It just feels easier.”

Which do you use more, Japanese or English? I think I use Japanese more with Mommy... And with Daddy... sometimes Japanese and sometimes English. I like speaking English, but sometimes it’s... tired. Japanese is easier then. But English is interesting. I like English music.

For example? Recently... I listen to Amazon Music. BTS – their English songs; I can’t understand Korean. And Bruno Mars. I can read the words and sing.

Do you read books in English? Daddy gives me some books, but... I don’t read often.

Do you read books in Japanese? Yes. I like some comics. Demon Slayer. And Harry Potter. Harry Potter is cool.

Harry Potter? In Japanese or English? Japanese. Of course!

Do you watch movies or TV in English? Yes, but... Daddy says English, but I want

to watch with Japanese.

Subtitles? Voices. Japanese voices.

Do you use English with Daddy outside the home? At the park, or...? It’s embarrassing. People look at me when Daddy says English. But sometimes.

How about when you go to the US? Do you speak English then? Yes. It’s difficult at first, but I like it. Grandma... she talks to me, and... I become happy. My cousins too. It’s easy to speak English in the US, but... In Japan, it is strange.

Do you think you will use English in the future? Eiken... Junior high school. High school.

Have you taken Eiken? Yes. Level 4. But level 3 is very, very difficult.

What about when you are an adult? Will you use English then? Maybe. Daddy says America is... I like there, it’s good... Maybe, university, but... I’m Japanese, so it’s difficult, maybe. But English is... I want to talk more.

Do you like speaking two languages? Yes. Music is good, and movies. But I’m Japanese, so I like Japanese.

Go (12)

Mother: British, English teacher at a private high school; high-intermediate level of Japanese.

Father: Japanese, junior high school teacher, intermediate level of English.

No siblings.

Family approach to bilingualism (according to mother): “Basically, One Parent, One Language, but we’re flexible. I make sure Go studies English at least an hour a day – reading, writing a diary. I’m pretty strict about it!”

Which do you use more, Japanese or English? I probably speak English more when I'm at home. Mum always talks to me in English, and Dad sometimes. But with my friends it's always Japanese. I can think more in Japanese.

What do you mean? Like... When I think, it's in Japanese... when I'm at school. When I'm home, though, then I think in English more.

Do you read books in English? Mum makes me read every day. Goosebumps books are really easy. They're okay. Recently I'm reading Artemis Fowl. It's pretty good, but sometimes I need to check words. It's kind of... It's hard.

Your mum says that you write a diary too. Yeah.

What do you write about? Sometimes just my day, but recently... Mum, like, asks me questions and I answer. Like... What do you want to change in the world?

Is that interesting? Yeah. But I don't always do it. It's a pain.

Do you read books in Japanese? I prefer reading in Japanese. I don't have to check words as much. When I go to bed, I like reading Japanese books, usually horror.

Do you watch movies or TV in English? Yeah, mostly Netflix or Disney Plus.

What do you like? *Mandalorian*. Or Marvel, *Hawkeye*.

Do you use Japanese subtitles? Sometimes, for Dad. Yeah, usually, but I don't always read them. It's useful if I don't know a word or something.

Do you use English much outside the home? Yeah, with Mum, and when we go to Britain. At my English school, too.

How often do you go there? Two times in a week.

Is it a conversation school? Like cram school. Reading and writing, for Eiken.

Have you taken Eiken? Yeah, a few times.

Which level? I'm studying grade 2 now.

How is it? It's... The listening and reading's okay, but the vocabulary is difficult. The writing.

Do you often go to the UK? Before corona, every year. But...

Do you use English when you go there? Yes. It's easy then. I want to go again, maybe this year. I really like it.

Why do like going there? In Britain, I'm not... People just talk to me, like it's normal.

You mean... Like, I'm not British and Japanese. I'm just... It's hard to explain. If I go and play in the park, I can make a friend. It's easy.

Do you think you will use English in the future? Yeah. In school, of course. I think I... maybe I'll study abroad. In Britain, or... I want to be a scientist when I'm older, so probably I'll go. I'll stay with my grandparents, or my cousins.

Do you like speaking two languages? Yeah. I like it. I can watch Netflix and... Sometimes it's annoying when people say "Speak English".

Your mum? Like, my friends or my teacher. It's embarrassing then. But it's okay. It's, like, good to have two countries, so it's, like... It's good. I like it. My friends say it's cool, so...

Sho (12)

Mother: Japanese, homemaker, advanced level of English.

Father: Australian, English teacher at a private university; low-intermediate level of Japanese.

One brother (9).

Family approach to bilingualism (according to mother): “I was terrible at English when I was a kid, but I got interested at junior high, then I studied in the States for two years. Now, I want Sho and his brother to speak English, so we try to use only English at home. My husband’s Japanese is pretty good, but it’s easier for all of us to use English.”

Which do you use more, Japanese or English? It depends. At home we usually speak English, but my friends, in my class, they don’t speak English, so... then it’s Japanese. Fifty-fifty, I guess.

Do you read books in English? Yeah... sometimes. I don’t like reading much, but... I read Japanese books at school. That’s easier.

Why is it easier? My friends read a book and say it’s good, so then I read it. They’re all Japanese, so it’s Japanese books. In English... it’s more difficult. But I don’t really read many books, Japanese or English!

Do you watch movies or TV in English? Yeah, we have movie night, usually an English movie, American. Recently, I watch Netflix. *Cobra Kai*.

With Japanese subtitles? Yeah. But I don’t read them much. It’s... just to check.

Do you use English much outside the home? With Mum and Dad, yeah. And in Australia.

Have you been there many times? Yeah, about four times, five times.

Do you like going there? Yeah. Last time it was for one month. Before corona started. We went to the beach, and... There was a place where I could see kangaroos. But... I didn’t like the food.

Oh no. Why? I like Japanese rice. I wanted to eat it, but Aussie rice is different.

Do you use English all the time when you’re there? Of course. They can’t speak Japanese, and... sometimes some Japanese with Mum, but she speaks English, so it’s easier.

Have you taken Eiken, or any English test? No. Just at school, homework.

How are your English classes at school? It’s okay, it’s easy. Just writing some words, or games.

Do you think you will use English in the future? Yeah. I like going to Australia, and we speak English here [at home], so...

Do you think you might study or work abroad when you’re older? Yeah, I might. But... Japanese rice. I’ll take it!

Do you like speaking two languages? It’s okay. It’s just... I always do it, so it’s okay. Yeah, it’s good. I like going to Australia. And FaceTime.

With your family in Australia? Yeah, with my aunt and uncle, and... cousins. On Sunday we usually FaceTime. It’s good.

Conclusions

As I mentioned at the beginning, the point of this research is not to suggest that any approach is more effective than any other. While each child has different experiences of growing up with both Japanese and English, and these are reflected in some of their answers, the aspects that I found most interesting were the similarities between the three. Despite spending their entire lives in Japan, each child was able to understand the interview questions in English and, most of the time, communicate their ideas – something that is especially difficult with some of the more abstract ideas that we discussed. Even more revealing was each participant’s attitude to having two

languages. While there were occasional irritations, all three appeared to be broadly positive about their bilingualism. They seemed especially glad to be able to enjoy films, TV or music in English (the minority language in this case), while reading was more difficult for all of them. Furthermore, each child voiced enthusiasm about using English in the future, and seemed to appreciate the opportunities that their bilingualism could present.

It should be acknowledged that the interviews were conducted with a parent present, for obvious ethical reasons. This, of course, may have influenced the answers,

with the children possibly making an effort to please (or possibly rebel against!) their parent. Similarly, by performing the interviews in English, the participants may have felt compelled to speak positively about the interviewer's – my – language. However, the results have motivated me to widen the survey in order to collate more voices of bilingual children and adolescents.

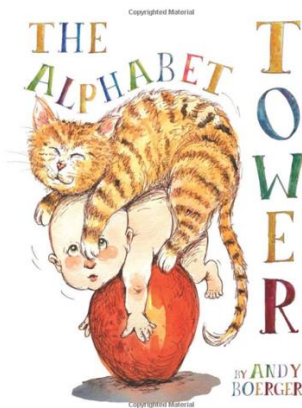
Most encouragingly, these responses certainly suggest that, for all the parents' concerns about how to most successfully develop their children's bilingualism, for the children themselves it is something that they see as beneficial to their lives.

Resource Column

Readers are encouraged to submit book reviews and introductions to materials that have relevance to bilingualism.

**Book Review: *The Alphabet Tower*, by Andy Boerger. Saitama:
Japanime, 67 Pages**

Alexander McAulay
Yokohama National University



The two picture books I default to when giving gifts to friends with toddlers are *Madeline* by Ludwig Bemelmans, and *The Gruffalo* by Julia Donaldson. There is now a third entry on that list; the delightful *The Alphabet Tower* by Tokyo-based writer and illustrator Andy Boerger.

My reason for giving *Madeline* and *The Gruffalo* is simply that my own kids enjoyed those books when they were little, going back to them again and again. It was only when I came across *The Alphabet Tower* that I started to think about why those books work. Doing so, I noticed the common points across all three titles. First of all, the illustrations are joyous. Second, all three books use rhyme. And third, they tell a story utilizing classic three-act structure. They have an opening that sets a dramatic question, usually a variation on “What’s going to happen next?” They have a middle section that complicates the

problem introduced in the first act, and they have a third-act resolution that is both surprising and plausible based on the actions that preceded it.

In *The Alphabet Tower*, we start with A for Apple. On top of that comes B for Baby. Then C for Cat piles on top of apple and baby, followed by D for Dog jumping on apple, baby, and cat - growing the tower. The dramatic question, like all wobbly tower games, is “How high can this go before collapsing?” The answer is, of course, all the way to Z.

However, another intriguing element of *The Alphabet Tower* derives from the rhymes. When you get to “I is for iguana, a colorful critter,” you wonder how Boerger will find a rhyme for “critter” with J on the next page. The fact that he does, and does so splendidly, is part of the satisfaction you get from reading this book.

The pay-off at the end has the twin cathartic elements of all the best Keyser Soze-style pay-offs – it is surprising, but when you think about it, also inevitable.

I came across *The Alphabet Tower* when researching picture books based in Japan. I'm currently writing my own picture book and wanted to see what English-language materials set in Japan were out there. (Andy Boeger is based in Japan, but *The Alphabet Tower* does not have a Japan setting, which adds to its universal appeal). I was immediately charmed by this book and sent it to a friend who has a three-year-old daughter. He confirmed that it was a big hit. One reason I recommend it to the readers of *Bilingual Japan* is because the

alphabet element will help with early reading. Another reason is the simplicity of the language means both the English-speaking parent and the Japanese parent can have fun reading this with their child, and it will help with acquiring basic vocabulary, as elephant, horse, gorilla, racoon, swan and many more animals and other elements pop up. But, of course, the main reason is simply that, like *Madeline* and *The Gruffalo*, this is a great story that kids will want to go back to again and again.

The Alphabet Tower is available on Amazon and at <https://alphabet-tower.com/>

New Column! *Voices*

At the risk of appearing self-promoting, I have penned the inaugural *Voices* column myself. As editor, my intention is for this brief piece to possibly serve as a template for many more bilingual and/or bicultural voices that remain unheard. We at B-SIG eagerly await fresh perspectives of the trials, tribulations, and triumphs – or even just the thoughtful musings – of bilinguals (emerging and otherwise) in Japan. Interview pieces are equally welcome.

No Longer Native? Reflections of a Bilingual/Bicultural Teacher

Daniel R. Pearce
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The winds of time breathe new life into a few words I heard half a lifetime ago; ‘we have to work twice as hard to achieve what everyone thinks is normal.’ I honestly don’t recall who said this, but I do remember the speaker was a non-native English-speaking immigrant in New Zealand, and I remember the *tone*. The words were spoken matter-of-factly. They were not bitter, not resentful, nor a petition for sympathy – simply an assessment of reality. I was still monolingual then. The words must have made some sort of sense to me, to recall them so many years later, even though I couldn’t have fully understood them at the time. I do now.

Last year, I submitted an article to the B-SIG Monograph, through which I used my experiences to criticize *native-speakerism*, doing my best to outline (in as much as possible, an academic way) how the concept can be detrimental even to native speakers in the language teaching profession. As both bilingual and bicultural (I have spent my entire ‘adult’ life in Japan), I felt very uncomfortable with expectations to fall in line with the *native-speaker* role (i.e., ‘you’re a native, you should just speak English’), and gave a scathing review of that ideology: “I was certainly not willing to impose an apartheid on myself into a monolingualized ‘native’ group” (Pearce, 2021, p. 60). This *Voices* piece is not an academic exploration, but it is an update of the voice I previously attempted to share as a bi(pluri)lingual practitioner.

I have since moved on. This year, I took up a new position as a teacher-trainer, and also my first *sennin* (専任) position at a new university. Given prior experiences, I was concerned as to what was expected of me – would I have to continue playing the ‘monolingual native?’

I have been blessed in that the hiring committee didn’t (and my new colleagues don’t) see me as the ‘native speaker’ – I haven’t been pigeonholed, and it is a wonderful experience. But it’s also tough. Never having wanted to play the *gaijin card*¹⁾, I have taken on full responsibility from the outset. My responsibilities involve, somewhat surprisingly, interactions with student’s parents, and less surprisingly, with local schools where students will be doing their teaching practicums soon. Although I had confidence in my Japanese ability, and held the necessary qualifications for the job, I was nevertheless overwhelmed. Swallowing my pride, I reached out to a professor in the department with the following:

...日本語になれていますが、未だ一応情報を処理するのに母語より時間もかかりますので、その分の精神的負担も若干あります。[...I’m used to Japanese, but it still takes me longer to process information than in my mother tongue, so there’s a bit of a mental

burden there.]

Her response put me at ease, for the meantime:

➡ よくわかります！！！！
反対の立場だったら、、たおれ
ています。[I really get it! If I were
in your position... I'd have
already collapsed.]

Her understanding really helped me to feel more comfortable in my new role – my reaching out was a bit of a plea to understand how tough it can be for bilinguals (a plea I hadn't wanted to make, alas!), but her response, while somewhat of a 'hang in there!' also became a validation – I wasn't being expected to play the 'English monolingual.' I was expected to be a full member of the crew. There is no *gaijin card* to be played here, but there is understanding. And with that understanding comes fulfilment – the work is tough, but the value of my bilingualism is recognized, and that alone is worth the extra effort.

So, yes, I understand. In some ways, I have to work twice as hard. But for me, too, this is not a bitter reflection, it is not resentful. If anything, I relish it. This is an experience I can pass on to my learners *as I live it* – at least from my perspective, raised monolingual, and becoming bilingual only once in my 20s, I can share with my students of language, and prospective language teachers, the realities of being bilingual.

Serendipitously, a day after I began to draft this piece, I received a message from a former student, further validating the struggles I had previously experienced. She was asked to write, for a communication class, a short introduction of a 'person who can convey things in an easy-to-understand way across cultural differences.' The following is a verbatim excerpt:

ダニエル先生は、英語の必修授
業でとてもお世話になりました。

なかなか馴染めなかった私も、
ペアワークなどで生徒の輪の中
に入れてくださった優しい先生
です。英語だけではなく、日本語
もペラペラで、明るくて陽気な
性格でしたので、すぐに仲良く
なりました。[...] わからない英
語があっても、日本語で詳しく
教えてくださりとても勉強にな
りました。言語文化の違いがあ
っても、努力でその差を埋めて
いる姿が、素晴らしいと思いま
す。[...] ダニエル先生を見てい
ると、文化の違いを超えてわか
りやすくものを伝えられる人と
は、自分が親しんだ文化以外に
も興味関心を持って、文化の違
いを埋められる人だと感しまし
た。

[Daniel-sensei was a great help to me in my compulsory English class. He was a kind teacher who helped me, even though I had difficulty fitting in, to join in with other students in pair work and other activities. He spoke fluent Japanese as well as English and had a cheerful and upbeat personality, so we quickly got along well [...] When there was English I didn't understand, he explained in detail in Japanese and I learnt a lot. That persona, of putting in effort to bridge the gap between differences in language and culture, is wonderful I think. [...] Considering Daniel-sensei, I felt that a person who can convey things in an easy-to-understand way across cultural differences is someone who has an interest in cultures other than the one he is familiar with, and who can bridge

cultural differences.]

After another long day, I must admit I shed a tear or two at this message. Bilingualism (and really, plurilingualism, as I work now in multiple languages, to which I have varying degrees of middling competence) has been tough. Biculturalism too – I feel equally (if not more) Japanese than I do *kiwi*. My situation raises questions of identity and understanding constantly. But I wouldn't trade that for anything. The interplay between cultures and languages, the questions it forces me to ask about reality, and the ever-growing understandings that I build from those experiences make the world a much richer place for me, and hopefully, for my students.

I titled my original article with the Japanese

question, 「なにネイティブ?」, a question many of my former students have asked me, usually in jest. I think to attempt to answer the question seriously would no longer be meaningful – nativeness/non-nativeness doesn't define me, or my teaching practice – my bilingualism and biculturalism does.

References:

Pearce, D. R. (2021). 「なにネイティブ?」 An Analytic Autoethnography of a Plurilingual Language Teacher in Japan. *JALT Bilingualism SIG Monograph 19*, pp.55–62.

Notes:

1) Gaijin card = getting off the hook for responsibilities for not being Japanese.



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