

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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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 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.

Regular Columns

- Consult the description at the top of each of the Regular Columns in this issue.
- Length: Up to 1,500 words
- Submit articles to the respective column editors.

Feature Articles

- These articles are longer and/or deal with topics not covered by the Regular Columns.
- Length: Up to 3,000 words
- Submit articles to the editor at lancestilp@gmail.com

DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE: January 15th

From the Coordinator

Dear valued Bilingualism SIG members,

Hope all of you enjoyed the Summer school break and are back to work refreshed and re-energized. I would like to thank all of you for your support and membership of the Bilingualism SIG.

Hope you will all enjoy reading the summer issue of the BSIG newsletter where you can find contributions from Jacqueline Kaga, highlighting a great source of information on “Using Sign Language as a Bridge for Introducing an Infant to Two Languages at Once”, Diane C. Lamb-Obara introducing “Resources for Teaching Preschool-Age Bilinguals within a Mixed-level, Predominantly Non-native English-speaking Local Community”, Mark Paul sharing his “Reflections on raising an American-Japanese daughter in Japan”, and Daniel Andrzejewski on “Unique Bilingual Support from International Churches.”

The 2017 JALT International Conference will be held in Tsukuba from November 17 to 20. The Bilingualism SIG is planning a range of presentations and forum discussions. The JALT conference is our groups' biggest chance to get together, so make sure to attend our

会長便り

拝啓 皆様

バイリンガルSIGの皆様、

皆様におかれましては充実した夏休みを過ごされ、ますますご健勝のこととお慶び申し上げます。バイリンガルSIGの皆様には日頃よりご支援いただきどうもありがとうございます。心より感謝申し上げます。

バイリンガルSIG ニュースレター夏号では4つの記事をお楽しみください。本稿では、まず
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forum or drop by the SIG table and say hello. Please feel free to attend the BSIG Annual General Meeting (AGM) taking place on November 18, 2017 as we all rely on your feedback and support to make the BSIG existence successful.

We are currently looking for a native Japanese speaker who could help us with the Newsletter translation, mainly translating a message from coordinator from English into Japanese four times a year. If you have some spare time and would like to get involved in the BSIG more actively, please do send us an e-mail at alexshaitan@yahoo.com and we will get back with you as soon as possible.

We just wanted to reiterate once again, that without your dedicated membership and active participation in the SIG's events (conferences/publications), the BSIG would not have existed. So hats off to all of you! Enjoy the Autumnal Golden Leaves Season and see you all in Tsukuba.

Kind Regards,

Alexandra Shaitan
JALT Bilingualism SIG Coordinator

Jacqueline Kagaの「幼児への同時的二言語導入における手話使用の補完的役割について」を貴重な情報源として紹介させていただきます。また、Diane C. Lamb-Obaraは「混合的次元そして支配的な英語の非母国語話者の地域コミュニティにおける未就学バイリンガル児童に対する教育のための資源」を紹介しています。Mark Paulは彼自身の「日本でアメリカ-日本人の娘を育てた感想」を、そしてDaniel Andrzejewskiは「国際教会からのユニークなバイリンガル支援」について共有してい

ます。

2017年の全国語学教育学会の国際年次大会は11月の17日から20日まで茨城県つくば市で開催されます。バイリンガルSIGはプレゼンテーション及び公開討論会を計画しております。全国語学教育学会の年次大会は私たちが集まることのできる大変貴重な機会です。討論会へ出席なさるか、SIGのテーブルへお越しいただければ幸甚に存じます。また、お忙しいところ大変恐縮ではございますが、ぜひ11月18日のバイリンガルSIGの定例会にもご参加ください。私たちは皆、SIGの成功ためには皆様のご意見、ご支援が必要であると存じております。何卒よろしくお願ひ申し上げます。

私たちは現在、日本語の母国語話者でニュースレターの翻訳に携わっていただける方を募集しております。主に、年4回コーディネーターの挨拶を英語から日本語に訳していただきます。ご多忙のこととは存じ上げておりますが、もしバイリンガルSIGに積極的に関わっていただけるようであ

れば、alexshaitan@yahoo.com までEメールにてお知らせください。早急に対応させていただきます。

繰り返しにはなってしまうかもしれませんが、皆様の献身的なご支援とSIGのイベント（会議及び出版物）への積極的な参加無くして、バイリンガルSIGは成り立ち得ません。心より感謝申し上げます。皆様、どうぞ紅葉の季節をお楽しみくださいませ。つくば市にて皆様にお会いできることを心待ちにしております。

敬具

アレキサンドラ シャイタン

全国語学教育学会 バイリンガルSIGコーディネーター

JALTバイリンガリズム研究会 会長

Translation by Ryo Mizukura

Join the SIG's email discussion list

The SIG's email list is open to any member who wishes to join. Use it to communicate with other members about your research or ask a question about raising your children bilingually.

List members will also get up-to-date information about SIG activities and be able to have a say in the many of our new initiatives. At present the list has a fairly low number of messages each month, so it will not overflow your inbox. Contact Stephen Ryan at stephen05summer@yahoo.com.



Announcements



Looking for Hāfu in Tokyo

For the next phase of Hāfu2Hāfu, I will be interviewing and photographing hāfu in Tokyo from 12th to 24th October 2017. I am looking for hāfu of all ages and from every possible country in the world combined with Japanese. Don't hesitate to share this page with your friends and family.

Access the website and form here: hafu2hafu.org

Project English (Tokyo-Area)

Project English is a small, independently-owned school that primarily focuses on literacy for bilingual and EFL learners, ages 4-10, through the use of stories, songs, games, art, and multicultural events. In addition, the director, an American mother of three, organizes other English-focused field trips throughout the year. There are plans to start an English-speaking Cub Scout Den in this area in the spring of 2018.

Please contact Diane Obara at dianelamb.ohiojapan@gmail.com to learn more about any of the above.

Thank you!

Resources for Teaching Preschool-Age Bilinguals within a Mixed-level, Predominantly Non-native English-speaking Local Community

by Diane C. Lamb-Obara

In 2014, I started teaching at a well-known private university in Tokyo, renowned for its long-established programs related to English and English education. Quickly into my first semester of teaching, however, I realized that the approach I had crafted after ten years of working at local Japanese universities, in addition to the accompanying materials I had accumulated, were not going to work and would need to be adapted to this new context. In a nutshell, rather than the typical false beginners that I had grown accustomed to, classes consisted of a wide range of students of mixed levels and experiences – a combination of many of whom were exceptional English speakers (even native speakers), yet lacking in other areas such as writing, alongside peers whose strengths and weaknesses were quite the opposite.

So, what does that have to do with teaching preschoolers, bilingualism, and resources?

Pre-Literacy: Mom and Child Classes

Well, around this same time, my oldest son was three, going on four. Thus far, I seemed fairly confident in the foundation I had laid and the strategies I had developed for fostering bilingualism in both Japanese and English. From there, though, I was starting to get nervous about biliteracy and began seeking out advice from various resources. I signed up for one of the groups mentioned on the back cover of this newsletter but was put on a waiting list and told that it might be about a year or so before a spot “might” open up (checked in several times, and to this date, nothing has appeared). In the meantime, I decided to start occasionally teaching local parent-child story and song/art classes out of

my house, still hopeful about the possibility of getting into one of those other cooperative groups, with the mindset that even though all of the other parents and children in my neighborhood were truly EFL, “something was better than nothing” for a head start in regards to pre-literacy. Gradually, though, after two seasonal sessions of that, I eventually came to the conclusion that, while this was fun for us, it was ultimately going to hold my son back. And so, now 4.5 years old, the next step along this path to literacy was to seek out a Saturday school class for his age, which I knew to be a popular option for families like ours.

Saturday School Phonics:

Since many of the international schools around Tokyo offer classes from either 5 years old or first grade, my son M wasn't quite old enough for those yet. There was, however, one international kindergarten that hosted Saturday school classes that actually had phonics as an afternoon option, in addition to art and all of the other “fun” activities. We stuck with that for 20 sessions, two sets of ten tickets, during the spring and fall. Primarily, this school used Jolly Phonics materials, a popular option internationally (mainly British), and the teachers were either full-time staff who picked up the class on the weekends, or part-timers who regularly floated around on these after-school schedules. I can say quite simply that M enjoyed this environment. The staff was so friendly and “genki,” and the school was so colorful and welcoming, with lots of art displayed everywhere and music playing all the time. And finally after his fifth birthday, something did “click” cognitively and psychologically, in that he finally seemed

“ready” for beginning to read. The downside of these lessons was that the teachers were inconsistent for these Saturday classes in particular, or new, which lead to a lack of communication and breakdown in the learning process. Rather than building upon what he had learned in the previous session, they often started over or the material was new to them. In addition to this, when other students were present for the class, even though the focus was on phonics, because the majority of them seemed to be weak at speaking, and the teachers were accustomed to focusing on that, the lessons tended to slow down and gravitate towards improving conversation, something my son did not need help with. Finally, after I discovered that one of the teachers, who I had never seen before, allowed him to nap during the lesson, I ended up complaining. As a result, for the final six sessions of our tickets, the teacher remained the same, he got to know my son’s strengths and weaknesses, the lessons built upon each other, and were scaffolded accordingly. In combination with his “readiness” for reading, we finally began to see dramatic improvements and growth.

Localizing:

By this time, however, I had already somewhat “given up” on this approach, shortly after he turned five years old. What I finally concluded was that unless we were going to commit ourselves to a full-time international school, there was a high probability that these weekend courses for young learners would fall into the same patterns: they were expensive; both the teachers and students frequently changed, causing inconsistency in the curriculum and a lack of growth in the learning; the phonics lessons were taught as isolated units, rather than integrated with other content; they were far away (since we live 30 minutes outside of Tokyo); they lacked a sense of community; and the group classes would be mixed levels (which seemed mainly targeted at improving speaking, for students

who have two native Japanese-speaking parents). Yes – they were fun. And yes – they were creative, but for our needs, they were not exactly a good match.

Thus, leading me right back to where I started: “Home Base” (in other words, my original in-house, parent-child classes). Once again, I reached out to all those parents and kids that I had originally recruited in my community, and began another group. This time, children only. I would focus on literacy, but try to create a truly holistic language-learning environment and approach for a class of mixed levels, in a space that the students would feel ownership over, and where we could organically grow together. Quite simply, I started my own “after-school” program for preschool and kindergarten-age children.

Resources:

Throughout the first six months, from September through February, I experimented with a number of resources: free and paid, pre-made and self-created, traditional and multimedial; each time, reflecting and adjusting. While all seasoned teachers know that it’s never exactly “one thing” that works but rather a combination, the following resources are ones that I’ve found to be most successful within this context of mixed-levels (bilingual and non-native English speakers) and are consistently worked into my lessons:

1) Super Simple Songs and Learning:
<http://supersimplelearning.com/>

Undoubtedly, anyone teaching English to young children has heard of and/or used these materials. In 2003 it was originally founded by three teachers from the “Knock Knock English” School in Tokyo who were looking for easy-to-teach and sing English songs. Over the past fourteen years, since the establishment of their company, they have grown internationally, with their headquarters

currently located in Toronto, and their YouTube channel hitting over 3 billion views. In 2013, they were listed as one of Time magazine's 50 best websites for that year.

Somehow, I feel that these materials work well because they were originally created with Japanese learners in mind, and grew from there (local, yet global). Generally speaking, the songs focus on one concept or grammar point, and one content area. Examples include "I See Something Blue" for colors, "Do You Like Broccoli Ice Cream" for food, and "Let's Go to the Zoo" for animals. In addition, not only do they incorporate popular cultural themes, such as Halloween, Christmas, and Valentine's Day, but they include classic nursery rhymes and traditional songs like BINGO (but with variations of words) as well. This combination of simplicity, culture, and critical thinking (questions, classification, repetition, order, etc.) are what make them easy enough for non-native speakers, yet engaging and challenging enough for bilinguals to learn something new and age-appropriate. I've also recently noticed that the algorithm they have programmed on YouTube has started to predict and suggest songs and lessons I should be teaching, based on previous selections/viewings. What a time-saver for scaffolding lessons and language! It's somewhat scary, but so effective – for both myself and the students' progress!

Most importantly though (at present), for educators, the online materials are free. They have downloadable worksheets and flashcards to accompany the songs and lessons, as well as pedagogical advice about how to introduce and incorporate the materials into the class, which include extension activities and games.

2) Jolly Phonics:

Jolly Phonics, on the other hand, what their website refers to as, "a fun and child-centered approach to teaching literacy through synthetic phonics," is a popular curriculum

used in native-English speaking countries such as the UK. It categorizes the 42 sounds into seven groups, including digraphs, using multi-sensory methods to teach children how to form and write the letters. The program includes blending, segmenting, and "tricky" words.

I like it because it's an authentic and well-established program designed for native speakers that can be adjusted to fit the needs of my mixed-level class. In addition, it's starting to "catch on" in Japan, and there are even teacher training programs for it in Tokyo and Osaka. And while I've heard from a couple of my "mama-tomo" (or non-native English speaking friends) that they think the songs are too difficult for the kids when they try to teach it, I personally have found that it actually works for me. Maybe the children aren't completely learning the lyrics to each song, but they definitely learn the tune and chorus (with the target sound), and know the motions. Do native English speakers even repeat all the lyrics precisely anyway? When I make the motions, the students with non-native speaking parents respond correctly and can say the correct sounds. In conjunction with the support of the writing exercises, worksheets, blending, segmenting, and "readers," the students seem to "get it." While my daughter, who is now 4.5 years and often attends the class, still cannot quite grasp the blending concepts (even though she is highly motivated to do what M does), my son and his NNS friends (5 years old) do. Albeit our lessons can't exactly progress at the same pace as a traditional classroom that meets every day could, with it incorporated consistently into our lessons for about twenty minutes per class, focusing on one or two sounds, it seems to do the trick.

Finally, the majority of the main materials can be found online for free, either on YouTube or its official website (www.jollylearning.co.uk). The readers and workbooks can easily be ordered on Amazon Japan.

3) Brain Quest Workbooks:

These materials, produced by Workman Publishing Company, are “jam-packed with hundreds of curriculum-based activities, exercises, and games on every subject” according to the publisher. Written for all levels from Pre-K through junior high school, they’re aligned to US “standards” and designed to support the learning that’s going on inside the classroom.

I like them because they’re not too much. For the Pre-K and Kindergarten levels, they cover all the basic concepts, such as ABCs, numbers, shapes, colors, beginning sounds, basic sight words, tracing, sorting and matching, categorizing, animals, weather, etc. I primarily use one or two pages as supplementary homework assignments to support the content I’ve taught in the class for that day. In addition, the explanations are easy enough for the NNES parents to understand, which brings them “on board” instead of feeling overwhelmed, and develops interaction with the parents. By getting the parents thinking, solid learning strategies can be established for the children from the beginning. They’re not forced to do the homework either. They only do it if they want to, or have time. But I’ve found that most choose to do it, and for the ones who do, they progress the fastest.

The workbooks are popular in Japan, are well established, and can be easily purchased online or from Nellie’s bookstore in Iidabashi, Tokyo.

4) Scholastic Sight Word Readers:

Now that both the students and I have a handle on the learning and teaching of phonics and other aspects of the curriculum, we’ve started to tackle sight words, and I’ve begun to add reading into the mix of homework. While the Jolly Phonics readers focus on the learned sounds, the Scholastic

readers are more like simple stories based around concepts related to frequent sight words, such as: colors, animals, question words, and actions.

I like them because they’re authentic and not specifically designed for NNES. Plus, they’re easy enough for the parents to handle, and there are loads of free materials online for educators. Scholastic has a wide variety of materials for all ages, many of which I plan on using in the future.

5) “Authentic” Children’s Literature:

Finally, the last staple to add to the list, which might actually be the most valuable in terms of authenticity for incorporating multicultural elements, holidays, and native language, is unquestionably children’s literature. Our lessons are filled with routines, and after the “snack leader” has passed out the treat for the day (Oreos for “O”, chips for “Ch”, chocolate kisses on Valentine’s Day), we always have story time. While we often include classics (that Japanese parents also know well and love), such as Eric Carle’s “Brown Bear, Brown Bear” or anything by Dr. Seuss, other selections the children have received well are: “Hush” - a Thai children’s lullaby about the sounds of animals on a summer’s night; “The Big Green Pocketbook” – about a young girl who collects items from her whole day in her pocketbook, only to leave it on the bus after she returns home; and “Caps for Sale” – written by a Russian author about a peddler, some monkeys, and the comical way in which he eventually gets his caps back. Of course, the children also love anything related to pop culture, such as: Disney, Cars, Peppa Pig, and My Little Pony, but for me, the classics and Caldecott winners seem to be the most effective in regards to teaching specific age-appropriate concepts.

So, once again, “what’s the point?” about how the information in this article and selecting resources for preschoolers connects to my

original anecdote about a class of mixed-level students (native and non-native speakers) at the university-level? Well, the point is that that situation was motivation enough for me to see that my goals could be met locally, rather than waiting around losing precious time waiting for one of the spots in a bilingual group to open up or paying a lot of money for a Saturday school program which has a high probability of focusing on different language goals than we were hoping to achieve. Taking matters into our own hands, we could challenge the myth, and with an informed and consistent approach, we can achieve age-appropriate learning goals, especially in regards to literacy. With a mindful selection of materials that are engaging and interesting for bilingual learners, yet not “too much” for non-native speakers, both bilingual children and NNS can learn together holistically if the course is designed well, without one group suffering or getting more attention than the other.

Bilingual Case-Study

ある家庭におけるバイリンガリズム

In each issue, we present a case-study of a bilingual individual or family. We especially want to encourage our members to write up their own case studies of their bilingual families. The column editors would be happy to offer you assistance in writing your stories. You may also request an outline of suggested items to include. Also, if you know of a family that could be featured in this column, please contact the column editors: Ron Murphy, Ehime University, English Education Center, 3-bunkyo cho, Matsuyama, 790-8577. t: 089-927-9358 email: murphy@iec.ehime-u.ac.jp; or Alec McAulay, GSISS, Yokohama National University, Tokiwadai 79-3, Hodogaya-ku, Yokohama 240-8501 t: 045-339-3553 (w) email: tokyomcaulay@gmail.com

Reflections on raising an American-Japanese daughter in Japan

by Mark Paul

My wife Keiko and I met in the United States as graduate students 28 years ago. She is Japanese and I am an American. After three years in the US, we moved to Japan. We now live in Tokyo. It has been a wonderful journey with many twists and turns along the way. I never imagined this course when I was a high school student answering the counselor’s question of “What do you want to do in life?” Now we have a daughter, Nana, 16;9, in high school and we asked her similar questions.

My son is now 5.11, and at this stage, he and the three other students who have been with us from the start (also all 5 years old), have successfully completed and comprehend the seven Jolly Phonics groups, in addition to starting to work with and being able to read the basic sight word readers, on top of everything else they’ve learned in regards to culture, math, critical thinking, etc.! The parents are “on board,” we’re (myself, my kids, and the school) integrated into the community, and English has become a part of everyone’s environment.

Apparently, it takes about three years for children to be “ready to read,” and I can confidently say that within our community, I now feel like we are right on track.

Although my daughter is asked the same question, her circumstances are far different compared to ours. I did not begin learning a second language until I was twenty years old. My Japanese is all right for daily life, but I would struggle with articulating my ideas on complicated issues such as an economic policy or such. My wife, on the other hand, started learning English early on in elementary school with once a week classes. She has a master’s degree in SLA and teaches English part-time

at several universities. Both of us would be considered additive bilinguals with her English proficiency far higher than my Japanese.

When we ask Nana about her future, she comes from a different background to that of my wife and I. Nana was raised as a simultaneous bilingual. Early on we decided we should use any language we wanted in our daily routines. My wife and I speak in English mainly, but I must admit my knowledge of angry Japanese terms is pretty good. When I took her to school, Nana could observe that I spoke Japanese. One of the mantras we believe in is that we can freely choose the language we speak. If my daughter, wife, or myself want to use Japanese or English, then that is acceptable. We do not want to feign ignorance about our language proficiency. I remember clearly when Nana was at hoikuen and I tried to pretend that I could not understand Japanese to get her to use English. It was a rather disingenuous attempt on my part. Just moments before I was using Japanese with her teacher for about five minutes. Nana looked at me and stated the fact that I could understand her Japanese so why was I pretending? Since then, we have been using the free language policy at home. We predominately use English in the house, but if we are watching a Japanese TV program, we will use Japanese. If we do not know how to say something, we ask each other. After 16 years, for the most part, we feel comfortable using either language with one another. As things get more complicated, I have to switch to English, but my wife is fine in either language. This was not the case when Nana was born.

The day Nana was born brought about new responsibilities for my wife and me. Like all new parents, there was much angst and pressure to give our child the best possible circumstances to succeed in life. Our basic problem, however, was that neither of us had the experience that our daughter was going to

face. My wife and I had talked about raising children prior to getting married. Both of us agreed upon the basic child rearing ideas even though she is Japanese and I am American. For example, I played an active role in raising Nana. I took her to school, made her lunch, and went to PTA meetings. We are both language professionals, but we lacked specific knowledge about raising a bilingual-bicultural child. Most stories focus on the child, but this is our story of addressing some of the issues from our daughter's birth. As we now have 16 years of experience, we would like to share some of our thoughts about our decisions.

Once Keiko became pregnant, both of us started to deal with the practical issues of raising Nana. The first issue most parents face is the child's name. We chose a first name that could be pronounced the same in many different languages, not only English and Japanese. We did not think about the last name until after she was born when we had to register her into two different national systems. For her Japanese passport, her name is under my wife's family name; for her American passport, her name is under my family name. Our decision has had a profound impact on her identity over the years. The simple task of buying an airline ticket has meant making a choice of what name to use and how immigration responds to the process each time. Not every trip abroad has been difficult, but her passport and ticket name is an issue that is highlighted every time we travel abroad.

Nana is now 16, so she is more aware of the issue. I suppose for most teenagers, the identity issue is at its height at this age. She has concerns about what will happen when she becomes 20. We have tried to reassure her that she will not lose either passport. We checked with the US embassy and an administrator assured us that she will be able to keep her US citizenship even though Japan will ask her to give it up by signing a document. For my wife and I, this is an issue

we have never had to think about. It is difficult for us to give her advice other than to say everything will be fine and you will be loved. Japan has been changing over the years in regards to the number of children of multiple nationalities, so we can only hope that her passport and name issue will be accepted in the future.

The second issue we faced was which school system to use. Nana is an only child. Both my wife and I talked to friends in Japan that had a similar situation regarding their choices for their children. There were two ideas that shaped our thinking. The first was that we were not going to switch educational systems in the process. Once Nana started first grade, she would stay in either a Japanese school or an international school throughout her academic career. The more important idea, however, that shaped our thought was that bilingual-bicultural children felt more comfortable with other children like themselves. A common refrain we heard and read was that kids just want to fit into their environment, regardless of their cultural or language background. We chose to go the international school route.

In choosing an international school, there were a lot of considerations before deciding. First, the school's location in relation to our jobs was considered. Second, the cost of the schools was compared. Third, we visited about 10 schools to tour the facilities and meet the staff. Ultimately we chose Santa Maria because it was small, near our house, and had a good reputation. In addition, the school fees were reasonable. The drawback was it was only an elementary school, so getting into junior high school might be difficult. She was accepted into Sacred Heart from middle school and has been there ever since. She was accepted at the American School as well, but the commute was a little cumbersome and we thought a girls' school would be better at developing her leadership skills. Although expensive, Sacred Heart has been great for

Nana and has matched our desires for her schooling.

My wife and I have had to confront several issues from choosing the international school route. Of course, the first issue is language. Since we live in Japan, an international school, we thought, would give her the best opportunity to have high English language skills. Since her surrounding environment was predominately in Japanese, she would also have high Japanese language skills. We are proud to say that she is a native speaker of both languages. Success! We wish it were so simple. Nana's English skills are more advanced than her Japanese language skills, which is not surprising. What is surprising is the responses and questions we get. When we are in the US, family and friends ask about her English skills. Their tone is one of concern even though her language skills are usually higher than theirs. She is always compared to her cousins. That is okay and normal. However, we feel they assume that she lacks English skills because she lives in Japan. Even though she attends an international school, most are surprised that she intends to go to a university in the US. This is even more so when Nana mentions some of the famous universities she might attend. My wife and I are proud of Nana, so we tend to get irritated or defensive in the face of their ignorance.

In Japan, it is a different feeling for us. For the most part Nana's language skills are fine, but as her language skills become different from her Japanese peers, my wife and I become more sensitive to it. Both my wife and I hover around to evaluate her language skills. Even though I am not a Japanese native speaker, I make judgments. It is a strange feeling for me to make judgments. My wife and I talk about this point. Even as professionals in language development, we cannot avoid being parents. There seem to be moments when as a professional we will accept things, but as a parent be wildly judgmental. These are some

of the issues we deal with that are apart from Nana's language issues.

From what I've read, most bilingual children go through stages of "Why do I have to learn this?" I do not think it is any different from monolingual kids questioning taking math. Nana has Japanese classes at her school and also attends juku for math. The learning culture is different for her Japanese classes. Nana struggles to accept the traditional style of Japanese high school learning of kanji, which I gather to be rote memorization. Her teacher is Japanese. During parent-teacher conferences, I have asked questions, but I must admit I was given unsatisfactory answers. My wife tries to bridge the cultural gap, but there is a lot of tension doing Japanese language homework. Even at this small scale, we can see how the educational institutions clash. It is while studying Japanese that we notice Nana claiming to be an American the most and her feeling that learning Japanese is not necessary.

As Nana has gotten older, it has become more difficult for us to get her to join activities we think are valuable. As a child, she had many friends that lived nearby who were not bilingual. She participated in activities outside of school in which she used only Japanese. Now she makes more of her choices by herself instead of us dragging her to the park or some other activity that we think she will enjoy. It is a bit unnerving when your child chooses something not to be with you. Ah, the early days of teenage years. All parents hear about it, but nothing prepares you for the first time. Of course, the neighborhood kids are doing this as well. They attend different schools and have different schedules, so on the whole they do not meet each other as much. Now, the amount of time she spends in English is more than Japanese. We noticed her Japanese proficiency in reading and writing began to lag behind just after entering middle school. Some of it is due to schoolwork, but I think it is more due to her choices. How do you tell

your teenager to be more bilingual and play with the neighborhood kids again? The bottom line is you do not.

As Nana prepares for university, my wife and I have to deal with the final issue: Nana is her own person. Now she faces the questions of: "What do you want to do in life?" "Which university do you want to attend?" "What do you want to study?" We have just started looking at universities. Over the summer we visited about 10 universities in North America. Her high school has a lot of information to help us find the right university for her. Some of the possibilities could be in other English speaking societies such as the UK or Australia, a Japanese university, or even a European university. No decision has been made yet. What I do see is a moment in time that I can reflect on. I can remember when I made my university choice. I am sure my wife remembers hers, too. I do not think either of us foresaw our relationship when we thought about our university choice some 35 years ago. Nana's university choice is important, but it is only another possibility in her life's journey.

I think the biggest issue for us as parents is dealing with our child becoming independent from us. I think it is easy for parents to focus on children's language skills or identity issues, but the happiest and at the same time scariest thing is watching them go out on their own. We worry about how she will deal with certain issues. Both in the US and Japan, Nana has had instances of strangers coming up to her and saying derogatory comments. Interestingly, she did not tell us immediately. She waited for a later moment and asked about it. Wow, kids evaluating and judging parents. Not all of the moments are rude or threatening. In a humorous moment for us, Nana and I were at a hotel front desk in China. The staff repeatedly spoke directly to her to translate for me (I do not look Asian). At first, she was a little confused. She told the staff in English that she did not understand.

After getting our room key, I asked where the elevators were located. Of course the staff looked directly at Nana and explained. Nana laughed, nodded politely, and told me to go to the right (the elevators were behind us). Although we have tried to prepare her the best we can, the thought of her failing to deal with ignorance is harrowing. As parents, the bogeyman is always around the corner. She has two more years left of high school. Will she have the maturity to succeed in life?

In the end, as much as we have thought about her language and identity, we wonder if it matters. Our thoughts and discussion with Nana have centered around what makes a good person. As we have raised a child with experiences so different from our own childhood experiences, we have realized that giving opportunities is only one step in a complicated process. Some of the issues are specific to the environment, while others are specific to the child. Living in Japan has given

her an environment very different from her American cousins. She has had the chance to visit her cousins about once a year in the US. Some live in the city and some in the countryside. Both her and her cousins can share their experiences and see how their lifestyles are different. Nana, as her own person, has her own likes and dislikes. Some opportunities just did not fit her. She tried surfing but did not like it. No real reasons given. And that was okay.

We hope this vignette through a parents' prism will help you understand that all your decisions are not only either good or bad. No matter what choices you make, you will have things to deal with. Make the journey enjoyable for you and your child.

(Pseudonyms were used for this case study).



Bilingual Child-Raising in Japan

日本でバイリンガルの子供をどう育てる

This column welcomes serious and/or humorous articles about incidents, decisions, resources, strategies, and other issues concerning the practical aspects of raising bilingual and bicultural children. If you are interested in contributing contact Christie Provenzano, email: pcprov@mac.com.

Unique Bilingual Support from International Churches

by Daniel Andrzejewski

Providing children with opportunities and environments in which to develop as bilinguals can be a challenge in Japan. Parents are often faced with options that require large investments of time and money or simply feel they lack resources to even attempt to foster bilingual ability in their children. Are there any alternatives that support the flow of family life while providing a supportive community where parents don't have to navigate this challenge alone?

In 2014, I attended a Bilingualism SIG-sponsored seminar in Kobe. It reconfirmed what my wife (a Japanese returnee) and I (an American) had decided: that we wanted our kids to function in English at home (minority language at home) as they would surely gain Japanese proficiency after entering the public school system. The speakers encouraged as much minority language use at home as possible. In doing so, children receive “not only more input of the minority language, but also a subtextual message from the parents that the minority language is expected to be the means of communication in the family” (Yamamoto, 2001, p. 128).

My wife is a homemaker and has her hands full with our two boys (4 and 2) and girl (0). On top of using only English, my wife instructs our kids at home, reading English books and doing crafts related to stories or topics of interest. She is thankful for online resources like Pinterest to get craft ideas and many English activity worksheets, available for free.

In this time before the kids attend public school, my wife and I have looked for resources in our community to support our children and ourselves as parents. My wife tried an international playgroup and an international city association. The playgroup functioned much like a class, with a foreign English teacher paid by membership fees to do activities with young children. Unfortunately, participating mothers and children operated primarily in Japanese, so the only English interaction was with the instructor. The international association provided the opportunity to meet other families of international marriages, but again, all the activities were conducted in Japanese, with little to distinguish them from other community playgroups. While we understand the value of community in bilingual development (Provenzano, 2014), how can we find one when there seems to be no apparent natural gathering of bilinguals in Japan? We have found that an international place of worship such as a synagogue, mosque or church can provide a community supportive of bilingualism. Indeed, one study showed that religious organizations are an influential component of bilingual and heritage language (HL) community education (García, Zakharia, & Otcu, 2012).

I have attended a variety of Protestant churches in three different geographic areas (Tohoku, Kanto and Kansai) in my 17 years in Japan. Most churches in Japan can be categorized into one of three types: Japanese traditional, Multicultural/Bilingual, and English-dominant churches serving

expatriates. While Japanese churches are certainly the majority, multicultural churches are recently emerging, with expat churches tending to be found in larger urban areas. My current church is multicultural, composed of a majority of Japanese and perhaps 30-40% foreigners. Services are completely bilingual, with English and Japanese worship songs as well as side-by-side interpretation for sermons. Sunday school is conducted mainly in Japanese, but there is bilingual support if needed from a variety of volunteer teachers, many of whom have bilingual backgrounds. Taking part in this community on a weekly basis offers our family considerable social, moral, and practical support for our lifestyle as an international family.

Firstly, the church is a rare trans-linguistic space. Members range from Japanese-only speakers to English-only speaking foreigners. In between is a large number of bilingual Japanese and foreigners, returnees, and international couples. Our children have been a part of this community since birth, attending the nursery and pre-school Sunday programs. Since their world at home is primarily in English, church serves as an introduction to Japanese language and culture while accommodating their growing English language skills. My oldest son will attend kindergarten this year and has been able to ease into learning in a Japanese-language classroom thanks to the Japanese exposure he gets at church. My children are able to interact with both Japanese and English speakers in a welcoming environment despite not being able to use Japanese language at a high level at this point.

Secondly, the church offers a diverse community and support network. My wife and I can find international couples like ourselves who are dealing with similar cultural and linguistic challenges. We can get advice on childrearing and share resources. Families with older kids pass on books and learning materials to us. We organize play dates with

other international families to further support linguistic and social growth for our children. Furthermore, our family benefits greatly from the cultural and socioeconomic diversity in our church. Friends from Korea, Brazil, Cameroon, and Ghana are in attendance each week. College students, carpenters, doctors, and homemakers do not typically gather together in Japanese society, but each Sunday such members of our church community interact and we invite each other over to share meals. While maintaining bilingualism is certainly our goal, it is also invaluable to introduce kids to various perspectives at a young age. Our church experience teaches our children the “normality” of diversity in a country where the myth of homogeneity persists (Willis & Murphy-Shigematsu, p. 10, 2008)

As our children grow and enter formal schooling, the church will be an even more important resource for their bilingual development. Our ability to coordinate with other parents wishing to foster English skills in their children could lead to play or study groups. Some language skills can be used in service to the church itself, as we currently have bilingual high school students interpreting for youth group classes. While the types of churches and activities available may vary, “local churches represent an important cluster of resources for the HL program at the level of community associations” (Lynch, p. 327).

My wife and I found our current church through networking with friends, but many members have come just from searching the Internet. We have been lucky - even in heavily-populated areas in Japan, the number of truly international places of worship can be few. In smaller cities, some churches may offer a separate English service or a main service with interpretation. Others may have an English-speaking missionary and attract an English-speaking audience or promote language classes. It is important to note that

participation in these worship services or activities does not necessitate your subscription to their beliefs or membership in a particular church. Most churches offer support as a service to the community, holding to the ideal of welcome and assistance to strangers (Matthew 25:31-46, New International Version.) You may find a keystone for your family's bilingual goals in an international place of worship: diversity, support, and language resources that are just around the corner.

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Children's Resources

子供の教材

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 editor, Diane Lamb <dianelamb.ohiojapan@gmail.com>.

"Baby Signing Time": Using Sign Language as a Bridge for Introducing an Infant to Two Languages at Once

by Jacqueline Kaga

Introducing Baby Sign Language: "Baby Signing Time"

When my daughter was about six months old, I introduced her to "Baby Signing Time," a sign language programme designed for babies and toddlers to facilitate language acquisition. I happened to come across it on YouTube (in between Baby Einstein videos) and I found that it was really engaging and very well made.

"Baby Signing Time" was created by two sisters for their children - the daughter of one of the sisters being deaf. Their aim was to make something similar to Sesame Street that all of their children, including the daughter who was deaf, could enjoy together. As a result, the show was thoughtfully created for personal reasons. With that said, it's also a very inclusive programme, in the sense that it involves children of many different ethnicities, as well as children with disabilities, corresponding to one of Sesame Street's core

philosophies, in that all children are equal and should treat each other as such. The sisters have professional backgrounds in music and TV production, so the quality of the programme is also excellent.

There are four DVDs in the set, each with a different theme, teaching words for everyday things that a baby may come across in his or her daily experiences. Each DVD includes several segments, where they teach four or five words or expressions at a time. Each segment is based around an original song that the babies can also learn, that also helps to engage them to listen. The vocabulary words are clearly demonstrated through video footage of the key terms or actions from everyday life (images of a train going down a track or a kid playing with a toy train, for example), followed by lots of different children doing the sign for the key word and the “teacher” demonstrating how to do the sign correctly. Behind the teacher is a clear image of the word, with the spelling written below it.

Originally, I bought the DVDs on babysigningtime.com for about sixty U.S. dollars, and they were shipped directly to me in Japan. I don't own a DVD player, so the only way I could play the DVDs was on my PC. Shortly after, however, I found that it was more convenient to have the videos downloaded onto my iPhone and iPad, so that we could watch the videos on the move. In order to do that I had to download the Signing Time app and re-purchase the videos digitally. With that said, I'd definitely recommend buying the digital downloads instead of the DVDs.

Our Family Background and Approach

Generally speaking, our family has taken on an inside-outside approach thus far. My daughter is now almost two and a half years old, but very early on, my Japanese husband and I (British) decided that we wanted our

home to be an English-only environment, mainly because we have always spoken to each other in English anyway (and I can't speak Japanese very well at all!). We would like our daughter to go to Japanese public school, the aim being for her to learn Japanese language and culture at school, while her English language and culture will be developed at home, with extracurricular activities and regular visits back to the UK.

With this approach in mind, I was keen to help develop her English language as best as I could before she goes to *youchien*, when I expect her Japanese ability to begin to take over. However, whilst English language acquisition has been my main focus, I haven't completely disregarded engaging with Japanese and fostering its development. So I have always been on the lookout for ways to bridge between the two languages to give her at least a basic knowledge of the Japanese language. Being a stay-at-home mum, one of the biggest challenges I have is being engaged with my daughter 24/7 and keeping her entertained, whilst trying to manage my very long to-do list. I am with her by myself most of the time, so I have to find different ways to encourage her development and creatively use whatever resources are at hand. Thus, “Baby Signing” turned out to be one of the more effective and comprehensive programs I stumbled upon, especially useful during the early development stage before spoken language had begun.

Benefits of Baby Sign Language

According to babysignlanguage.com, introducing sign language to babies has three key benefits, those being: it decreases tantrums (as children are able to more easily express their needs at an earlier age), helps to foster a closer bond between the parent and child, and (through early exposure) assists in developing their language and reasoning skills (which can also help to raise their IQ level).

In regards to the first point, I can't really say if

the sign language has actually affected the amount of tantrums my daughter has had or not. However, I can say that from an early age, she has always been a good communicator, keen to point things out and ask what things are, etc. So much so that friends and family often comment on how complex her communication skills are for such a young age. I can't necessarily attest this to having done sign language with her so early on, but it certainly couldn't have hurt.

In terms of having fostered a stronger bond between us, I feel that it most certainly has. She was about eight or nine months old when she made her first sign. We were just about to get on the train when I noticed she was making the sign for train. It was really a momentous step, and I was incredibly excited about it. In that instant, she went from being a baby to being a person who could communicate. She was able to gain satisfaction from me turning to look at the object she wanted me to look at, and the knowledge that I was interested in what she had to say. In addition to this, it was also very important for me to get that positive feedback for encouragement so that I could know I wasn't wasting my time. I also believe the programme gave us both something to focus on together. I wouldn't have known where to begin, really, if I had only had a book of sign language to teach from. I think the comprehensiveness of the whole programme - seeing footage of other children making the signs, seeing clear images of the key words, and singing along to catchy songs, are really what make it a success. I don't think it would have been nearly as effective with just a book, in my case at least.

Finally, in regards to the last point, as mentioned above, at two and a half, my daughter is an extremely effective communicator and asks lots of questions. She speaks in full sentences and announces very well. I feel that being able to express herself at such a young age could only have helped her

brain development and the transition to spoken language. When she watches episodes of a cartoon such as Peppa Pig, she can concentrate intently, follow the story line, show concern for the characters, and recall the information and specific sentences days later.

I have no idea if this is just completely normal for this age or whether she is exceptional, but I do know that she is bright and interested in engaging with the world around her, and I personally believe that baby sign language assisted in laying the foundation for that.

Using Sign Language as a Bridge between English and Japanese

After she made that first sign at around eight months, she very quickly started using more signs and speaking more words. After a while, I soon realised that sign language was actually also quite a good tool for bridging between English and Japanese.

For example, I would sign for "train" and say the word train. When my daughter was able to say the word train back to me, I then introduced the Japanese word "densha." From then on, I'd sign the word and say "train, densha." I did this as often as possible with everyday vocabulary that we would happen to come across. Now my daughter knows both words and just accepts that there are multiple terms for things.

As for the DVDs, I found that she was interested in them until she was about 18-20 months. After that, she had less need for the sign language because her spoken language was improving, and could just use the words herself. We still use both the Japanese and English words for everyday vocabulary, though, so this method was definitely good for us to set the pattern for introducing the idea and awareness of two different languages (or three, if you include sign language!).

Moving beyond Baby Sign Language and Finding Other Ways to “Bridge”

Now that we had started a pattern for introducing basic everyday words orally in the two languages, this has carried over into introducing basic literacy in the world around us as well. One memorable example that comes to mind was our conversation about fire and water. Since we live quite near a fire station and are so used to seeing (and hearing!) fire engines, my daughter has become very interested in them. Naturally, I taught her the Japanese word for it. As she has become more interested, I have explained more. Now being with a toddler, my perception of the world has changed, as I'm often trying to imagine it from her perspective, noticing details that she pays attention to, or ones that I want to point out and/or elaborate on. One day she asked me about a fire hydrant. I explained to her that the fire-fighters put their hose on it to get the water to put on the fire to make it go away. Since we were talking about water, I pointed to the kanji for water and said “water.” I did this every time we saw a fire hydrant. She very quickly remembered it and would point it out herself.

I continued to teach her the words for lots of simple everyday kanji that we can see regularly around us, such as: car, toilet, woman, man, etc. Since I am not confident in the Japanese language, I just taught her the meaning of the kanji with the English spoken word, as I don't want to mess up her understanding of the different Japanese readings. Primarily, I want her to understand the meaning of the symbol.

My main reason for doing this is purely that I want her to be independent and would like her to be able to read basic signs for herself and understand what they mean. I also believe it is helpful to have some knowledge of kanji, however little, as a kind of basic foundation before she studies properly at school.

Reflection

At the time, I never realised how effective the baby signing programme would be. I honestly just really appreciated having something relatively educational to sit my daughter in front of, so that I didn't have to feel quite so guilty about being such a terrible mother putting her in front of a screen. I would love to say I sat down with her and actually taught her the signs myself, but instead I put the DVDs on in the background as she would crawl around playing with her toys, occasionally looking up at the computer, whilst I got on with the chores.

After that first sign, when we were about to get on the train and I noticed she was making the sign for it, I was incredibly excited. I couldn't believe it! From that point on, I started to make more of an effort with her, actually sitting down with her as she watched the DVDs and helping her to do the signs, while I would say the word to her.

With that, she very quickly learnt many of the signs, and as we walked down the street she'd happily point to little dogs or cars, and would enthusiastically sign. About a month later, when she was around ten months old, I realised that this was finally carrying over into our home life. She was looking at a pink ball, making the sign for it, and saying “ball.” Soon after, lots of other words followed, and now at two and a half, she can speak full, lengthy sentences, such as “Mummy, mummy, look at me. I'm flying like an aeroplane!”

I don't have any theory for how I have been “teaching” my daughter; I just enjoy experimenting and seeing what works with her. Basically, I follow her lead. I find that my daughter likes to be challenged a bit, so I put things in front of her that I know are a bit hard, and if she isn't interested, I'll just change tactic and try something else for a few weeks and try again later. As with the signing,

I try to casually start out with something new, a little bit above her level, and then she'll show me and/or let me know if it is interesting enough to continue with or not.

I'm so happy the signing caught on because I feel like it not only set a pattern for us for language learning but also for the overall approach we have as mother and daughter

towards learning in general. Now, I've found that she develops better when I play a supporting role rather than a teacher. If I give her the tools she needs to work with, she can make the progress that she needs to as and when she is ready. Just as she led me to sign the train and the kanji for water, I'm hoping she will continue to lead the way.



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