

Bilingual Japan

バイリンガル通信

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JALTバイリンガリズム分科会ニュースレター
The Newsletter of the JALT
Special Interest Group on Bilingualism



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Call for volunteers! Vacancies are always open for editor positions - 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 R. Pearce, at pearce@shitennoji.ac.jp, or the B-SIG coordinator, Alexandra Shaitan, at alexshaitan@yahoo.com.

ボランティア募集中! 編集委員を常に募集しています。特に和文投稿のフィードバック・投稿募集ができる方は大歓迎です。B-SIG 会員であることは望ましいが、バイリンガル通信に貢献できたらニュースレター編集者のピアース・ダニエル (pearce@shitennoji.ac.jp) あるいは、分科会コーディネーターAlex Shaitan (alexshaitan@yahoo.com) まで連絡をください。

Contribute to *Bilingual Japan* ・バイリンガル通信への投稿募集

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 life and/or child-raising in Japan. *Bilingual Japan* also provides information about recent B-SIG activities. While submissions are only currently accepted in either English or Japanese, the content of submissions are *not* limited to Japanese-English bilingualism – **all topics related to bilingualism in Japan, regardless of the specified language, are more than welcome.**

「バイリンガル通信」は、全国語学教育学科（JALT）バイリンガリズム分科会（B-SIG）の公式ニュースレターです。本誌は、日本におけるバイリンガル研究およびバイリンガルの生活または育児に関する記事やレポートを、B-SIG 会員に提供することを目的としています。また、B-SIG の最近の活動についても紹介しています。投稿言語については、現時点では日本語と英語による投稿しか受け付けていませんが、**内容に関しては日英以外のバイリンガリズムに関する投稿は歓迎です。**

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.

「バイリンガル通信」は、読者の皆様からの投稿に支えられています。どんな立場であろうと、読者から寄稿を常に募集しております。学術雑誌ではないので、ご自身やご家族の体験、バイリンガル育児や教育について、関心のあることや疑問を持つことがあれば、とりあえず書いてみて、気軽に投稿してください！些細なことでも、興味を持ってくれる人は必ずいます。寄稿をお待ちしています。

Manuscript Guidelines ・原稿要領

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).

和文投稿に関して、決まった様式がありません。投稿の問い合わせは、編集者のピアース・ダニエル (pearce@shitennoji.ac.jp) まで。

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.

投稿コラムについては、毎回出版するわけではなく、投稿がある際に、筆者と編集者の相談の上に乗せています。コラム内容については以下をご参照ください。

Regular Columns ・ レギュラーコラム

(1,000~3,000 words または 1500 字~5000 字程度)

• Case Studies ・ 事例 (ケーススタディ)

See a detailed description on page 5. (和文詳細が準備中ですが、和文寄稿は歓迎します)。

• Children's Resources (& Young Adult Book Reviews) ・ 児童 (またはヤングアダルト) 向けリソース紹介/書評等

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.

日本のバイリンガル児童 (またはヤングアダルト) 向けの本や雑誌、その他のリソースについて、レビュー (書評) やおすすすめ情報を紹介するためのコラムです (ただし、販売はご遠慮ください)。また、リソース制作企画等の協力募集も受け付けます。投稿当は、コラム編集者の Diane Lamb-Obara (dianelamb.ohiojapan@gmail.com) までお送りください。

• Resources Column ・ 一般リソース/書評等

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.

バイリンガリズムに関連する書評や資料の紹介の寄稿をも歓迎します。特に投稿基準は設けていませんが、バイリンガルコミュニティにとって有益な資料の紹介の投稿を期待しています。

• Voices ・ バイリンガルの聲

Readers are encouraged to submit both interviews and first-hand accounts of bilingualism in Japan. *Voices* includes (but is not limited to) experiences of individual bilinguals in Japan, 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! Voices surrounding **Japanese+language-other-than-English are welcome**. Submissions to Daniel R. Pearce: pearce@shitennoji.ac.jp.

日本におけるバイリンガリズムについて、インタビューや生の声をお寄せください。「バイリンガルの聲」には、一般人のバイリンガル体験、大学院生、教育実践者、バイリンガル専門家のつぶやきなどの、幅広い投稿を募集しています。投稿は、バイリンガルコミュニティに貢献する目標の、比較的短いもの (1500~2000 字程度) を想定しています。バイリンガル (あるいはバイリンガル関係者) の葛藤・苦勞等つぶやきも受け付けます。日英だけでなく、日+英語以外の言語の投稿は大歓迎です。投稿は、ピアース・ダニエル (pearce@shitennoji.ac.jp) まで。

• 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

バイリンガルに関するリンク、ニュース、研究などの最新情報を読者に提供するためのコラムです。投稿は、バイリンガリズムに関する比較的新しい動向の要約や紹介を、2,000字以内とし、一般会員がアクセスできるものとします。投稿は、コラム編集者のシャイタン・アレキサンドラ (alexshaitan@yahoo.com) までお送りください。

Feature Articles ・ 論文記事

These articles are longer and/or deal with topics not covered by the Regular Columns. No specific word limit, but submissions should adhere to a semi-academic standard. Questions regarding submissions should be directed to the newsletter editor.

レギュラーコラムに該当しない準学術論文的な記事の投稿です。字数制限は設けませんが、寄稿に関してはニュースレター編集者まで問い合わせください。

DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE: April 15th

次号の投稿期限：4月15日

Guidelines for Case Study Articles・事例（ケーススタディ）の投稿要領

(以下が英文論文の要領。和文投稿に関しては、編集者のピアース・ダニエルが問い合わせを常時受けつけております。和文要領は、今後のニュースレターに詳述を記載する予定)。

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. Many case studies are fine without such references. However, 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 the parents and children) – 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.

Contacts:

Case study editor:

Ian Downer - downerian@gmail.com

Newsletter editor (ニュースレター編集者：和文投稿は以下のアドレスまで):

Daniel R. Pearce (ピアース・ダニエル) – pearce@shitennoji.ac.jp

DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE: April 15th

次号の投稿期限：4月15日

Coordinator's Message • コーディネーターより

Dear Bilingualism SIG Members!

Hope this message finds you well! We would like to take this opportunity and thank Bilingualism **SIG Officers** (<https://www.bsig.org/officers>), the ongoing work of Decision-making Team (DMT), along with **ALL** Bilingualism SIG members, who have been contributing to the SIG's successful activities via a long-term membership, and presenting and sharing their academic research and personal lived experiences related to bilingualism/multilingualism at the **PanSIG** and **JALT Bilingualism SIG Forums**. We also thank all members who have been contributing to BSIG publications and/or events related to bi-/multilingualism and bi-/multiculturalism, and submitting articles and book reviews to the SIG's **Newsletter** (<https://www.bsig.org/newsletter>) and the **JJMM Journal** (<https://www.bsig.org/jjmm>).

Our Publications Director, Stephen Ryan would like to announce that the Japan Journal of Multilingualism and Multiculturalism, Volume 28, is now available to members on our website. **The Call for Papers (and reviews) for volume 29** is now open and will remain open until **the end of May**. See our website for details: <https://www.bsig.org/callforpapers>

On a different note, we are happy to announce a call for a **Resource Column Editor** for our Newsletter. Interested individuals are welcome to send a letter of interest with a short bio. Our current Column Editor would be happy to provide assistance and support during the transition period. Please send an email to Alexandra Shaitan at: alexshaitan@yahoo.com.

We look forward to seeing you at the **PanSIG 2023 Conference** (<https://pansig.org/>), which will be held **May 12-14, 2023** at **Kyoto Sangyo University** (京都産業大学).

Please join us for the **BSIG Forum**, organized and chaired by our Programme Chair, Diane Lamb-Obara. Further details about the event will be sent to you closer to the date of the Forum. It is a great opportunity to meet other Bilingualism SIG members with similar research interests and get involved in the SIG activities by joining the Decision-making Team (DMT). We look forward to meeting as many members as possible, and discuss any questions that you may have.

We 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 contributions to this Spring Issue.

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 join the DMT and get involved in the SIG's activities more actively.

Best wishes,
Bilingualism SIG Coordinator,
Shaitan Alexandra.

Case Studies・事例（ケーススタディ）

Case Study submissions should be directed to downerian@gmail.com

「事例（研究）」の投稿は上記のメールアドレスまで。

A Parent's Struggle: Exposure to a Minority Language

Niall Walsh

Aichi Prefectural University

‘*Soto de matte kudasai,*’ or ‘You have to wait outside,’ were the words in Japanese the nurse told me as my wife was being prepped for the birth of our first child. As an expectant father, the nurse’s command frustrated me for several reasons. First, I wanted to be there to support my wife. Second, I wanted to greet my new baby as he entered the world, and third, and of course, less importantly, I had decided that my child would be reared bilingually from his first breath.

At the time of our first child’s birth, I was working as a public-school ALT then, and my Japanese wife was employed part-time at a Japanese company. Unfortunately, our income didn’t make the possibility of international schooling feasible, so we had to consider cheaper avenues of language development and exposure for our child. To that end, my wife and I adopted a one-parent, one-language policy for our child for several reasons. First, we realized very early that it was difficult to depend on Japanese society to aid in developing his English language acquisition. Second, we had friends in a similar situation who successfully raised bilingual children by implementing this policy. Finally, we were concerned we didn’t have adequate fluency in our own second languages to use either English or Japanese only at home to model it correctly for our child. However, we both felt that this language policy was not enough as our son was destined to study at a Japanese public nursery and elementary school where his

Japanese language ability would naturally outpace his English. Therefore, we began proactively seeking and creating opportunities for language exposure to allow our son to develop his English language proficiency.

I was under no illusions that his English language development would keep pace with his Japanese, but I was determined to give it my best effort. After careful consideration, I devised a plan that focused on four areas of English exposure I could influence and would allow both input and output. These were providing him with as much input as I could in our interactions, teaching him English, allowing him to watch English language TV and YouTube videos, and joining bilingual groups.

Providing Input

Right from the beginning, to compensate for the lack of alternative English language input, I felt compelled to provide extensive examples of language when together to compensate for a perceived lack of input. I would tell him stories and read him books when he was an infant. As he became more aware, I would read to him and use my finger to have him follow the words. When he began to speak, I tried to extend our conversations and include a lot of input. During our conversations, I worked on his English accuracy and pronunciation by correcting any incorrect sentences or mispronounced words. I would encourage him to say words or

sentences after me. I used a similar approach when we were reading books where I had him repeat words and eventually whole sentences after my example. This method may seem very mechanical, but it was always done in a non-threatening way and allowed him to practice pronunciation and to use new vocabulary. After a while, it became a habit for both of us, and I found myself repeating many words and sentences for him to copy.

I also learned the importance of patience in developing language skills. There were many occasions when he struggled to find the correct words, and I knew what he was trying to say. However, as I wanted him to realize that he had the ability to express himself in English, I never interfered if I thought that it required language that he had come across before. In most cases, he would eventually be able to communicate to me what he wanted, either by using the correct language or saying it in a different way. I believe this has worked well, as he doesn't switch to Japanese even now if he cannot articulate himself in English to me.

Maximizing speaking time was and continues to be hard work and requires much effort on both our parts. It was tiresome for me because, as an English teacher, I would prefer to switch off after I returned home in the evenings and often lacked the motivation to teach him. Additionally, while I could have my son's attention when he was younger, as he has gotten older, he prefers watching TV or playing a video game to chatting with me. My son also had a hard time for the same reasons, and he essentially became a 24-hour student as he could not leave his studies at school. Hence, full exposure to all the vocabulary and linguistic features of a language through one parent's communication can be exhausting and

unrealistic for one parent to provide and a child to receive. Therefore, the second part of my plan was to use a textbook to teach him English.

English Lessons

I began to formally teach my son English using a textbook when he turned seven, as I believed he was mature enough to sit down and focus for an extended length of time. Fortunately, I had a job that allowed me to be home every evening and weekend, and I tried to schedule three one-hour classes weekly. However, there were weeks when this was not achieved. The primary aim of these classes was to develop his reading and literacy skills, focusing on reading, writing, vocabulary building, and spelling. To develop his reading skill, I used an English book from Folens Reading Zone aimed at 5-6-year-old Irish kids one to two years younger than my child studying at primary school in Ireland. I also used the same publisher's literacy, spelling, and writing books, again, designed for 5-6-year-old Irish primary school children. Despite just the two of us being there, my son enjoyed these classes as I tried to make them enjoyable. Vocabulary cards found in most ¥100 shops played a massive part during these classes, as I used hundreds of them to record new words. With these cards, we could do things such as *karuta* and matching games, use paper clips and a magnet on a chopstick to go fishing for a card and try to build the longest sentence with the words we 'fished out.' My son liked the competitive nature of some games and the challenge they presented. Over a short time, I noticed a significant improvement in his vocabulary awareness, spelling, and reading ability as he began to read and recognize words independently.

TV and YouTube

The next part of my plan was to ensure that

English language TV and YouTube exposed my son to a natural array of language production and use. Until he was 11, I made sure he watched English TV programs for at least one hour most days since his birth. However, as soon as he figured out how to operate the remote control, there was some resistance to English language programming, and he was more inclined to switch to Japanese shows. I believed it was also important for him to watch this content, as I didn't want him to be left out of playground conversations about TV or view the languages as competing with each other. Therefore, I allowed him to watch Japanese content as long as he watched some English ones, too. Most of the English he watched was American English, with SpongeBob and The Penguins of Madagascar being among his favorites. It was obvious that he was acquiring vocabulary from watching these programs as he began to use language, especially American English, that I would not have used in my daily conversations. Additionally, as I am an avid podcast and radio listener, he had passive exposure to Irish-English language shows most days. As he got older, and to my surprise, there were many instances where he would ask me about something the podcast presenter was talking about, especially if he heard any words connected to Japan.

While the elements of my plan thus far have allowed my son to be exposed to and practice English, I was conscious that he also needed an outlet other than me. To that end, I also searched for family-friendly bilingual groups once he was born.

Bilingual Groups

The final exposure avenue I wanted for my son was to join a family-friendly bilingual group. Initially, I couldn't locate many bilingual groups in my area that suited my

schedule. Of the available ones, they often met during the week and usually involved the mother and preschool child. As a result, I decided to start one that catered to English-speaking fathers and their bilingual children. The purpose of these gatherings was for children to play and communicate in English and for the fathers to share their experiences rearing bilingual children. Among the parents in the group were Scottish, English, Canadian, American, Australian, and New Zealand nationals, and most had a Japanese spouse. As founding members, we were very active and held events such as Christmas parties, Easter egg hunts, and Halloween parties. We also tried to meet once a month for other activities, such as soccer practice and trips to local attractions. In my son's earlier years, this proved a successful way to allow input of a vast array of other children's and fathers' vocabulary and phonological features, and it also allowed him to share his with them. I was very surprised that my son could recognize the nationality of some new group members by comparing their accents with that of existing members.

While initially this group set out to increase the opportunities for the children to improve their English level, it morphed into something more significant than that. On many occasions, the children would use English with the other parents but Japanese with each other. I was not too concerned by this as I felt they got something more from this group than language ability; they got a sense of camaraderie and belonging. Additionally, as a parent, it was rewarding to see my son and the other kids switch between languages and not feel conscious of doing so, which typically happened when we were with his school friends. As he got older, these social gatherings decreased as he gravitated more towards his

mainstream Japanese life and its school club activities and cram school.

Conclusion

As my son proceeds through adolescence, I am often reminded of the day of his birth when I had trouble getting into the delivery room. His English language journey has had many ups and downs and has been exhausting at times for both of us. There was frustration when he couldn't understand a word, but joy when he passed the Eiken level 2 test. I do not regret all the effort to get him to this point, and I am sure he doesn't either. I am very proud of him for sticking with it as I feel that he has matured into a bilingual adolescent, as he can readily converse with English speakers and, more importantly, in Japan, ace his English exams in school. Of all the sources of exposure, I believe one of the biggest drivers of his language acquisition

was the bilingual group, as it showed him that English is not just something Daddy speaks, but is also useful outside the home and thus has a purpose.

My wife and I still adhere to a one-parent one language policy at home, but I believe that as our kids transition through adolescence, parents of bilinguals face a dilemma. Namely, where is the boundary between being a language provider and being a parent? I have been reflecting on and asking myself this question recently. Does it matter what language he expresses his thoughts in as long as he does? I have concluded that as he navigates this sensitive time in his life, he probably needs a parent more than a language teacher. Therefore, I try to assess each situation and respond in whatever language is appropriate.

The Pandemic Years: Affective Factors Related to Family Time, Socializing, Emotions, and Local Culture

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This case study builds upon the previous case studies I have written for the BSIG newsletter (Lamb-Obara, 2015, 2016; Obara, 2019). Case study contributions for this newsletter are typically submitted every 3-5 years. Since former articles for our family have mainly focused on the language acquisition process of the older two children (as they were so close in age), and there was a five-year gap between the second and third child, the focus of this article remains on the older two siblings. In addition, since our youngest child was diagnosed with a rare genetic disorder at birth, there have been many uncertainties and unknowns relative to “typical” child development. One point that many of the international physicians we have met with over the past five years have agreed on is that if there is a possibility of talking, it would not be until after he is walking (if that was also to occur). Thus, we hopefully waited for that development before beginning to include his bilingual story in these articles.

Introduction

The New Year has just arrived. We have now crossed over into 2023. With the pandemic years mostly behind us, it's time to reflect again on my family's bilingual journey. What changed? What stayed the same? These years have been a critical and unique period in many families' lives, whether they're learning two languages or not, and this is no different for ours. For those who have been following my family's bilingual language acquisition process with our children (1st son, M (11;7); daughter, R

(10;3)), they will remember that as a foreign mother who is native-English-speaking, we have more or less had a clear methodology that we have maintained, which involves using the minority language (English) at home (except for academic purposes), and assigning one day of the week (Saturdays) to be our “English family day,” which we'd set aside to drive into Tokyo. In the city, the kids would participate in authentic English activities (British football academy, ballet), which were directed and managed by fellow internationals in Japan. It goes without saying that the pandemic shook up this pattern – the most dramatic of all being the requests to lockdown, where people were asked to stay in their houses, and also cities or prefectures, in isolation, to prevent spreading the virus. It was not only the physical restrictions and change of environment that affected the language learning process, but also the side effects that came along with that - including family time (FT), social (S), emotional (E), and cultural (C) developments.

The Initial Shift: Physical/Environment (Online and Local School)

Let's start with the physical shift first, since that was the most dramatic, and a factor we had no control over. Like many families, we spent the initial months of the pandemic exploring and entertaining options that we hadn't tried before, such as watching full series of shows on Netflix (something we'd rarely had time for before), finally purchased a

Nintendo Switch for the kids (which was later taken away because it became addictive and interfered with studying/caused arguments), and sampled a few online lessons from *OutSchool*¹⁾ (coding, reading, STEAM²⁾). But when the virus continued to spread, and restrictions keep coming, two of the most notable changes for language learning for us revolved around our physical environment - the “English Saturday/Family Day” and our local elementary school.

Firstly, we couldn’t go to Tokyo anymore. We waited until the summer of 2020 to see if we’d be able to get back into the city, but when the activities didn’t open back up, we decided we needed to bite the bullet for our playful, sports-loving child and find something for him to do (S). He was already in 3rd grade, and these were the last few critical years of elementary school to have time be able to join this kind of activity before heading off to junior high. Our family historically has had a long love of baseball, and Japanese baseball is iconic, so now was the chance to join a local school team (E). M had played soccer in English for a long time in Tokyo, but since one of the fathers with a son on the local school team was a coworker of mine, I didn’t want to get too close personally with work and family mixed in a neighborhood group for professional reasons. Quite honestly, these local extracurriculars are major time commitments, and I feared problems popping up. We needed to try and maintain a kind of harmony relative to our context (S/E). Also, we knew one large family from our years at the *houikuen* who was active in a leadership position on the baseball team, and M was close with them, so this felt like a safe choice socially. As with other activities

during this pandemic period, there were all of the standard impositions such as limited hours, temperature checks, sanitizing, social distancing, etc.; but from the summer of 2020, baseball was consistent on the weekends. Different from other sports, since baseball is played outside, with a naturally large amount of social distancing, it had less risk (E). Quite quickly, practices and games were back on their regular 9-5 Saturday/Sunday schedule. When the world seemed to be still so unstable, with Japanese baseball...it felt like there was little change (S/E/C).

From a Japanese language perspective this was beneficial. M picked up on so many formulaic structures and routines that he had been missing in Japanese, such as greeting and thanking the baseball field at the beginning and end of each game, following directions during the morning stretches, and listening to “long talks” from the Coach at the end of each game reflecting on their day. Other positive language developments were that baseball play involves communication and cheering from teammates, and even though much of it is repetitive, children still develop the skill of having to communicate in order to make good plays. Casually speaking, on the lunch breaks, all of the kids from the older and younger teams sit down and eat at the same time (if they are at the same field), so even though talking was limited because of the pandemic, lots of jokes and casual chatter were made about popular video games, music, and sports. Since we don’t have Japanese broadcasting on a TV in our house, playing baseball helped keep M in the loop for popular topics from the public in his age group, rather than his self-directed searches on YouTube. As a parent, I’m not personally a fan of the

rude jokes and inappropriate behavior that shows such as *Crayon Shin-chan* model for kids, but it's popular culture - that's a fact (C). There were also long car rides all over the city and the wider local area to various baseball fields. During the first year, I volunteered a lot as an *otoban* [roughly, 'person on duty'], and I was involved much more than my husband, as I had mainly been in charge of the activities when they had been done in English. Driving to the baseball fields was fun. We could listen to music and watch Japanese TV and movies. It was another time for casual conversation, which was important for our family, since we couldn't socialize with locals very much at other times and were not integrated the same way as everyone else on the team. Thus, during the morning meeting at the school when we would load up the cars with equipment for the day, a critical factor for language development relied on who was assigned to each car for the ride (S). Finally, the fathers helped out a lot with the practices, and since Dad was also isolated because of the pandemic, this was a time when he could be actively involved (FT).

As for R, our daughter who was in 2nd grade during that time, we weren't sure what to do with her. Baseball was a full commitment, so we initially brought her along to those practices. I think we were still hopeful that the international English activities would open up again, because that had been a nice English-speaking community for us. The baseball team also strongly tried to recruit her, because most families typically have all of their children participate, since this type of local baseball takes up so much time. With several children, it's more efficient in terms of time management. However, we wanted M to be able to enjoy this on his own, and it also seemed

too aggressive for us for R (FT/S).

As a result, R spent much of her time in 2020 online - watching entire series of shows like *Gilmore Girls*, *Friends*, *Grey's Anatomy*, and *Stranger Things* later on (not necessarily age-appropriate, but I was working/teaching online in the home and couldn't monitor everything!). In those first six months of the pandemic, there was also a lot of time spent gaming (in English) - *Animal Farm* and *Roblox*. Finally, we experimented with several *Outschool* classes for short stints (C).

Out of the four main *Outschool* classes that she tried (coding, reading (2), and STEAM), there were various reasons for interest and/or disinterest. The coding class had a teacher who had gone to MIT and worked with programming and children, so his lessons on Scratch, Jr. were well planned. However, this work was mainly done independently and not done with the group, so she lost interest quickly - since we were already isolated in the home, and she wanted to talk to people. The group reading lessons with the teacher from New York were great, although much less structured. Because these coordinated well with Japanese standard time, there were also many Chinese students in them. The classes felt a lot like ESL. The teacher was funny and energetic, and connected really well with all the kids, so they were enjoyable. Everyone was always laughing and joking around, while staying on task. However, the teacher was really popular, so her classes filled up fast, and she also cancelled lessons frequently, so R only tried it about six or seven times. Another reading class we experimented with focused on Disney princesses around the world. With this, R also tried about six lessons. The teacher was a full-time kindergarten teacher from Florida who

did *Outschool* on the side part-time. Each lesson focused on a different Disney princess – a related country and its culture. There was even some foreign language learning thrown in once in a while depending on what nation the featured Princess was connected to (France, Germany, Norway, Columbia, etc.). What we liked the most about her lessons was that because she was working full time with that age group for her day job, it seemed that the lessons were especially targeted around an appropriate age level, and she was knowledgeable of standards. All of her lessons were done through *Nearpod*³), so it was fun to experiment with that software - and take “trips” around the world. Finally, the lessons that made the biggest impact and were most memorable were the Disney STEAM ones. This was another full-time teacher from Florida, based in Orlando, and these lessons were done asynchronously. Once a student signed up for the lessons, the teacher would time-release her video and the accompanying task. She’d then ask students to make a video recording the finished project or task and upload it to her *Outschool* page within the week, before the next assignment was sent out. All of the lessons were connected to some type of engineering at Disney, and since we live in Chiba and Tokyo Disneyland is near our house, this seemed relevant to our lives. Some might say it was “killing the magic” for a kid, but for a girl who loves “figuring things out” - it felt more like “getting the inside scoop” and learning how to “make the magic.” As a parent, it was sometimes troublesome to collect all of the materials, but the end result was always worth it. Her favorite was the iPhone hologram lesson related to *The Haunted Mansion* attraction (C).

We had so much fun with these latter lessons that when M & R’s public school finally got iPads in February of 2021, I jumped on the chance to try and teach a demo lesson with her teacher (S). She’s had a positive experience with all of her teachers at this public school over the past four years, but this one in particular was younger and open to experimenting with the technology, and willing to engage with the principal to get permission. It was the right person and the right time. The iPads were new for them at the school, so there were other logistics they were concerned about, such as charging, security issues, technical difficulties, and internet load. In the end, we met a couple of times to discuss the contents and plan, so she could explain it to the other teachers and the principal. We decided on a 2-part QR code Scavenger Hunt lesson modeled after one of the Disney STEAM lessons but adapted to our local Chiba context. It was mostly done in English, but my PowerPoint slides had about 30% Japanese built in to keep the lesson moving along smoothly. Also, R’s teacher could translate and direct as needed since we had talked about the content several times. Again, since our family is not exactly integrated into society in a similar way that other locals are for various reasons, these windows of opportunities that I can find to be included into their public lives as a mother and circumnavigate the “system” are invaluable, and they show the other children and families that we are engaged and active members of the community, even if we cannot operate as efficiently as having two native-Japanese-speaking parents (NJS) (FT/S/E/C).

As for M and R’s basic daily lives at school, the beauty of being in Japan

during this pandemic period in our town in Chiba was that school life was minimally disrupted. When the pandemic started in 2020, without the existing technological infrastructure already at the schools, the easier option for our local schools was to have students return face-to-face as usual. Thus, except for the fact that students needed to bring their own chopsticks for lunch, wear masks and take temperatures, not talk during lunch and breaks, and some other after-school activities being cancelled, the fundamentals of studying and the basic hours of the school day were generally followed as usual after a couple of months. Fast forward two years to the present time, where my oldest is attending school in the U.S. for the year, and we can see how this consistency of study habits, daily routine, and not having had a longer period of social isolation has helped him adapt to that school context quite easily, compared to the stories we have heard from local families and teachers there about the rocky return for some who remained online for much of that time, or others who have opted not to return to the public system and are now homeschooling because they discovered they could teach their children more effectively that way (S/E/C).

Exploring Various Extracurricular Activities Locally

After about six months, we really needed to get R back into something social and limit her online activity. With the pandemic still limiting activities further afield, it needed to be something around town. Typically, many of the other local children in our neighborhood had started activities, such as ballet or swimming, at the beginning of elementary school, if not younger, so R didn't want to jump into those classes with her friends from

school and not be in the same level, nor in the same class. One option that popped up was the school music club. We had heard from other families that from 3rd grade students can join the music club at our local elementary school. The timing on this seemed like it might work. M & R had both taken piano lessons for fun for a couple of years, but were not as motivated competitively and independently with that for various reasons, so the music club seemed like it might be a nice transition to build on that knowledge in a more structured and social setting. We also knew one older girl in the club, and a couple of other friends who were planning to join. The club met four days a week in the morning before school and also on Saturdays. She participated in this for half of the 2021 year, but unfortunately did not end up continuing it for long after the summer (S). There were two main factors that affected this. Firstly was the manner in which the instruments were chosen. R was especially interested in playing the drums. Our family was friends with an older girl already in the club who was playing the drums, and so this would have been a nice opportunity to learn together with her, since R looks up to her and feels comfortable around her. However, after all of the students tried out instruments for a few weeks, R was told by the older girls that she would play the flute. She ended up being okay with this because she would rather follow directions and not make waves if that's what they thought was best for her and how the club operated/what they needed (rather than choosing an instrument based solely on what the student is interested in).

However, come summer, another issue popped up. Borders had opened up for permanent residents and citizens, and we

needed to return back to the States to see my mother, who was recovering from cancer treatments. For those familiar with any kind of team or club in Japan, it's quite common to have major performances and competitions during the summer and spring breaks. This was no different for the music club. I had read this before in previous case studies of BSIG families, but because she had just started it this first year and we were still in elementary school, I imagined it wouldn't be such a big deal. In fact, the teachers were okay with it, as they told her to just practice as if she was participating. It wasn't until we got back from the States in September and returned to the club practices that she started to be treated differently from the other members because she had taken a break from the group to visit her grandparents and had missed the summer concert (S). Cultural differences aside, from a teaching perspective, I've continuously found it bewildering over the years when both teachers and parents don't step in and have preventative conversations with students about why this type of ostracizing socialization and verbalization might be inappropriate, and the long-lasting harmful effects that it could potentially have on children. Fortunately, for our family, we have those kinds of conversations among ourselves, but from my experience locally, it always seems like most teachers and also parents do their best to not create any conflict, and so they avoid confrontation and these kinds of direct conversations at all costs. Something as simple as reading a story with characters that face this same kind of situation, such as *Yoko's Paper Cranes*, and posing questions to the class. Or, having a sit down with the children and asking them to imagine 'if you could only meet your grandparents this time of the year, and

had to go far away to do it, what decision would you make? How would you feel about it? Would you like others to be understanding?' Anyway, she quit. (S) This is a shame, since our family enjoys music so much. It also could have been something to enjoy in Japanese for pleasure, not only study. In addition, since my Japanese ability is limited as a mother, it seemed easier that the activity was integrated into the local school, since I am familiar with that context and culture, and there is less room for error linguistically speaking. Oh well. I give her credit for deciding not to put up with it and being confident and independent enough to do her own thing at such a young age rather than endure the culture just to belong and go with the flow, even if it makes her feel bad (S/E/C).

So once again, we were back to the drawing board. There is a set schedule that goes along with belonging to these clubs, and in order to participate, we needed to follow those rules precisely. (C) Thus, we needed to find something more that adhered to a less strict schedule and had a more international feeling. I spent some time searching (in Japanese), and finally stumbled across a cheer program in a neighboring town that follows an American curriculum. They have branches all over the Tokyo area, and since we're close enough to the outskirts of Tokyo there just happened to be a class within fifteen minutes driving from our house at the local sports center. R started in September of 2021 and has continued it for more than one year now. While the practices are conducted entirely in Japanese, many of the coaches have been to the U.S. for competitions and done training there. There also seems to be conscious effort to stay positive. Finally, one of the biggest differences is the way that the parents

socialize. Because the team only meets once a week for 90 minutes, there is less interaction, and thus less attention to the fact that we are international. Even when R's Dad is out of town, he can still respond on the SNS group chats and then relay the message to me. And, for the times that I need to interact in Japanese, it's not as frequent, so there is less room for error and drawing attention to our family. In addition, several of the other girls on the team attend private elementary schools, so they have a slightly more outside-facing attitude and openness compared to everyone from our local school who has known us for such a long time and over the years has gradually expected us to conform to being more and more Japanese as we've stayed in the public system, rather than continue to be accepting of our international differences, as they did when we were younger and the scheduling for extracurriculars was less strict (FT/S/E/C).

Balance: Education for Academic Purposes during the Pandemic

The final component that shifted during this time period involving the two languages relates to their use for academic purposes. There are two key factors that played into this. Firstly, up until this point, we had basically been taking care of most of the English for Academic Purposes and biliteracy by ourselves (at the small community school I ran and also by dropping the kids in a local public American school when we would return to the States during long spring and summer breaks). However, at this point in time, neither of those were options anymore. As for Japanese, we relied solely on the public-school education for that. Now that the children were in 3rd and 4th grade, and we are hoping for them to apply to junior

high schools with strong English programs, we finally decided to enroll them in an after-school English program for returning students. Again, this is another organization/company that has several branches around Tokyo, and since we just happen to live near to the border in Chiba, there is a location near our station. Even though it's expensive, this school has proved to be invaluable. It also gives me more time to focus on my "day job." The students who attend have all studied overseas for at least a year, many for more. The teachers are all international. And most importantly, it's one place where I can communicate as a mother with the administration in English face-to-face. Even though the majority of written materials are done in Japanese, the staff at the front desk can all communicate bilingually, so as long as I can basically follow the schedule and notice any important information that comes in, and my husband is also doing the same, I can check in with the staff and teachers in English face-to-face to confirm, the same way that I do at the university where I work. It's very comfortable. Since my husband is out of town a lot, the more comfort and ease that we have with the administration of any activities has an immediate trickle-down effect on the children and the well-being of our family and their stress levels – especially for my daughter, who doesn't want to stick out and likes to do her work well. (FT/S/E). One final point is that most of the students regularly take the *Eiken* test, so there is motivation to do that. (S/C) Midway through 5th grade, M passed level 2, and will be ready to take Pre-1 when he returns from the U.S. R will also try for level 2 within the next six months, since she'll be in 5th grade.

As for Japanese for academic purposes, we had yet to do any other "extra" after

school study for this, but the need for that had now come about. The main reason for that was because we had heard from senior families in the BSIG and read on various social networking sites that, generally speaking, most bilingual children have no problem waiting until after 3rd grade to jump into this. Waiting until after 3rd grade gives them a couple of years to get settled into the Japanese public school system and routine. By 3rd grade, children have typically reached grade level. For M & R, I can say that this was mainly the case. However, a couple of main differences that I think played a factor were that they don't have a Japanese-speaking mother, nor have Japanese TV on in the background in the house, so input may have been lower than other bilingual families with these. Also, many of their monolingual peers were, in fact, attending these study rooms, such as *Kumon*, after school. At the parent-teacher conferences at the end of both terms, the teachers were always commenting that the main skill and content area M & R needed to work on was *kokugo* (Japanese).

We'd planned on sending them both to *juku* (supplementary test-prep classes) anyway, since we knew that both *kokugo* and *sansu* (math) would be important for junior high school entrance exams. M started first, in February of 2021. Our train station is a major transit center in our area, with six different lines coming in, so there are many choices for after-school activities. From our house, it only takes fifteen minutes to walk down to those places, so M & R can easily do it by themselves and ride their bikes. We ended up putting M in a program that was three days during the week and four subjects (math, Japanese, social studies, and science), not only math and Japanese, like many bilingual families do for test

prep. He really enjoys social studies and creative thinking in science, too, and he retains so much of the vocabulary through those true stories and experimental processes, so we thought it was better to follow his interests at a basic level, rather than pushing the two main subjects for the tests. We never put any pressure on him to get into the advanced section. Our only directions were to do all the homework, go to class, and try to review for the tests. After only a couple of months of attending *juku*, his teacher immediately told me that she noticed a dramatic difference his *kokugo* skills. As a result, the schoolwork during the day became so much easier, and he was often bringing home one hundred percent on his 4th grade tests. It was time consuming, but it really gave him a lot of confidence during the day. Not to mention the fact that, once again, my Japanese level of skills as a mother/parent could in no way support him at this level without the native support at the *juku* (S/E/C).

The same went for R. We also waited for her to start *juku* until 4th grade. In the meantime, during 3rd grade, when I returned back to work physically part of the time in Tokyo and was not in the house every day, she did some light after-school activities, such as *soroban* (abacus) and *shuji*. We needed for her to have something to do after school other than hanging around at the local parks, unsupervised with no adults around... being instigated into trouble by some of the other local children (which has happened to my kids before) (S/E) since we had stopped the *Gaku-Do* (after-school room). Once that year passed, since her learning style is more independent and she tries hard to figure things out on her own before asking, my husband chose a *juku* that had more of a

flipped teaching approach. The schedule is very strict, as the students cannot leave to go home until they finish all of their work for the day, but she only attends twice a week. Their approach is to give the students the work for the day and let them work on it by themselves first. Whatever they cannot figure out, they ask questions about, and the tutors help them. This approach works well for her, and she can apply it to other aspects of her life. The other funny thing is that the senior 'drummer friend' from the public-school music club coincidentally happens to study at this same *juku*. Birds of a feather flock together (S).

Family Dynamics during the Pandemic

Now that our lives had become more localized and confined to Chiba with more activities and study in Japanese, it goes without saying that our family dynamic shifted too, since we were now operating much more in Japanese. Instead of me (mom) handling all of the activities in English as I had previously done, other parents asked my husband to join the LINE and other SNS groups for communication and typically communicated through him first since he is the NJS. With baseball, since families are required to volunteer and help out much of time, I was always volunteering to drive and do other *otoban* duties. However, gradually over time, as the kids got older and advanced to the upper team and the play got more serious, it became easier and more efficient for my husband to participate in that with the other fathers, and I slowly became phased out. The other mothers enjoyed managing the team, communicating with the coaches, and scheduling the games and practices. It goes without saying that this changed the way we communicated with each other as parents (FT/S/C).

I predicted this would happen, so the one group that I refused to let go of was the American Cub Scouts (in English). At least through elementary school, it was important for our family and my kids to know that family comes first. This was also an activity that managed to keep going during the pandemic, and one where we could engage with other international families. Typically, we met once a month at an available location. In addition to the Scouts working independently on requirements from their guidebooks (in English), we also tried to meet once a month for some outdoor activity, such as a hike or birdwatching at the park, or camping. I eventually took on the role of Treasurer and then Committee Chair, handling membership and the rechartering. Now entering 2023, this pack has grown to ten international families, and I can say it was one of the stable forces that carried our family through the pandemic and positively guided our family with the activities and discussions facilitated in its program. Because baseball was such a huge time commitment that demanded so much attention, it was nice to have something where our entire family of five could play together in a language that we are all fluent. Scouts balanced that out (FT/S/E/C).

Conclusion

Looking back on this time and the shift in our activities, I can say that even though it changed our communication patterns and lessened the amount of integrated family time, in terms of language and culture, the children have made dramatic advancements as a result of the afterschool studying, the new athletic groups they joined, and the English program they started. We've had to make adjustments along the way, but

during this middle period of elementary school, we have tried our best to find groups to accommodate our international family's needs, not only academically, but also socially and emotionally, in our local culture. The final year of public elementary school will be the big push in preparation before taking entrance exams for junior high school, so that will be the next story coming.

Afterword

One final point to add, which I briefly mentioned in the introduction, is that we also have a third child, E (5; 7). He was born with a rare genetic disorder, having a duplication on band 37.3 of his 2nd chromosome. Like the two older children, he's been at the same *houikuen* where M & R both went until 1st grade. He's now five years old. He's grown and developed enough that he can generally socialize with the other kids and follow the same daily activities, such as eating and nap time and outdoor play, although his fine and gross motor skills are considerably different. Thus, there is an extra teacher provided in the room for support (although not a trained professional in special education). E knows some baby signs, can follow a few simple directions, understands different emotions, and can watch TV shows and films for long periods of time (laughing and reacting at appropriate parts). The highlight of the pandemic for E was that on one of those long eight-hour days hanging around the school field with Dad at baseball practice, on

April 23rd, 2022, he started to walk. As I mentioned at the start, now that he's made that leap, we can work more on language development and include him in our bilingual story... one step at a time.

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Notes

- 1) Headquartered in San Francisco, CA; *Outschool* is an American online marketplace of virtual classes for children that fosters "curiosity, independent thinking, and builds confidence through progress."
- 2) STEAM is an integrative approach to education that expands upon integrative STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) teaching, through the integration of Arts (fine arts, liberal arts, motor and physical arts, etc.) for a more holistic learning approach.
- 3) Nearpod is a website and app-based digital tool that lets teachers create interactive and gamified slide-based learning resources.

Let Me Talk

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This Voices column is a (very slightly) edited version of a speech given at the middle-school students' English speech contest, Beppu City, March 2022 and Culture Festival, Higashiyama Middle School, November 2022.

When I was small, I went to a supermarket with my younger brother because my mum asked us "Can you get some milk and bread?" So my younger brother and I went there. When we were standing in line at the checkout, and having a chat in Japanese, a kindly-looking elderly couple in front of us spoke to us and said, "Oh, you guys speak very good Japanese." My brother and I looked at each other and with a smile on our faces, we just said politely in Japanese, "Thank you," but our hearts were aching. Can you think why our hearts were aching when we were praised?

I am sure you are wondering why I look like this and speak English like this, so let me introduce myself a little bit. I am now a third-year student at Higashiyama Junior High School. I am Japanese, and like many of you here, my first language is Japanese. I was born to a British father and a Japanese mother, but I grew up in Japan and have been educated in Japan since I was born.

I heard from my teacher that, unfortunately, even if I gave a good speech, I would not be able to apply for the next higher level of the speech contest due to the rules, because one of my parents is a native English speaker. Why can't I compete in the next-level speech contest? Is it just because one parent is a native English speaker? You may have thought I can speak English very well because my

father is British, as many people believe. But do you really think that I naturally acquired my English language skills without any effort?

There is something I want you all to understand. That is, there are many children growing up in Japan who do not become fluent in English even though their parents are native English speakers. If you consider the time spent at home, children usually go to school from early in the morning until late in the evening, and most children have club activities and after-school hours, so they only have very little time to physically be at home, apart from sleeping time. Therefore, no one naturally develops English language skills at home just because they are mixed-heritage children. Like many of you, I have spent a lot of time and effort learning English.

If the aim of the speech contest is "for young people who will take the lead in Japan as members of the international community in the future to become proficient in English as an international language, to make efforts to promote it, and thereby contribute to the development of world culture and international goodwill," I hope you will change these current rules.

What makes me different from other students who have been trained in English

from a young age? A child who goes to cram school and studies mathematics may be able to go to the Mathematical Olympiad. A child who learns how to run and is fast on his feet may be able to enter competitions and win awards. A child whose parent coaches baseball might be able to go to *Koshien*. What is the difference between them and me?

I know many *sempai* who have English-speaking parents but did not have the opportunity to make a speech, so I am very

幼いころ、母に「牛乳とパンを買ってきてくれる？」と言われ、弟と一緒におつかいに行きました。レジに並び弟とおしゃべりをしていると、近くにいた大変優しそうな老夫婦から「あなたたち、日本語がとてもお上手ね」と突然声をかけられました。弟と私はしばらく顔を見合わせて、そして日本語で「ありがとうございます」と丁寧に笑顔でお礼を言いました。でも、実は私も弟もこのとき心に痛みを感じていました。皆さんは、なぜ褒められたのに、私と弟の心が痛かったのかわかりますか。

おそらく皆さんは、なぜ私がこのような顔立ちで、このような英語の話し方をするのか不思議に思われているでしょう。ここで少し私の自己紹介をさせてください。私は別府市立東山中学校の3年生です。日本人です。そして、ここにいる多くの皆さんと同じで、私の第一言語は日本語です。私は英国人の父と、日本人の母との間に生まれました。日本で生まれ、日本で育ち、日本で教育を受けてきました。

今回、学校の先生から私がどれだけ優れたスピーチを大会で行っても、ルー

grateful for this opportunity to speak here today.

Everyone, please give children like me the opportunity to speak in front of people. We are Japanese, but we cannot participate in speech contests as international students, and we cannot participate in many English speech contests because one or both of our parents is not Japanese.

Thank you for allowing me to speak today.

ル上、上のレベルの大会には出場することができないのだというお話がありました。理由は、私の親の一人が英語圏出身者であるからだとのことでした。なぜ、私は次のレベルのスピーチ大会に出ることができないのですか。それは、ただ単に私の親の一人が英語圏出身者だからですか。私がこのように流暢な英語を話せるのは、父親が英国人であるからだと多くの方は信じているかもしれません。しかし、皆さんは本当に私が英語のスキルを何の努力もなしに自然に身につけたのだと思われませんか。

皆さんにぜひ知っておいていただきたいことがあります。それは、たとえ親の一人が英語話者であっても、流暢な英語を話すことができない子どもたちが日本にはたくさんいるということです。子どもたちが家庭で過ごす時間を考えてみてください。多くの子どもたちは通常、学校の授業だけでなく放課後も部活動などをしており、早朝から夕方遅くまで1日の多くの時間を学校で過ごしています。ですから、睡眠時間などを差し引くと、物理的に限られた僅かな時間しか家庭で過ごすことができません。したがって、多

言語環境に育つ子どもだからといって、だれも自然に英語力を身につけることはできないのです。私もたくさんの皆さんと同じように、多くの時間と努力を重ねてこれまで英語を学んできたのです。

もし、このスピーチ大会の目的が、「将来国際社会の一員として日本を背負う若い人に、国際語である英語を熟達させると共に、広くその普及を図り、世界文化の発展ならびに国際親善に寄与する」ということであるのなら、現行のルールは変更すべきではないかと私は思います。

幼いころから英語の訓練をしてきた他の生徒たちと、私との間にどんな違いがあるのですか。塾に行って数学を勉強してきた子どもは、数学オリンピックに出場することができるかもしれません。小さいころから走り方を学んだ子どもは、色々な大会に出て賞を取ることができるかもしれません。野球コーチの親を持つ子どもは、甲子園

に出場することができるかもしれません。彼らと私はいったい何が違うのですか。

私と同様に親の一方が英語話者であるということだけで、多くの先輩が英語弁論大会に出場する機会さえも失ってきたということを私は知っています。ですから、私は今回こうして出場の機会を与えてくださり、皆さんの前でお話させていただけたことだけでも、大変有難く光栄に思っています。

どうか皆さん、私のような子どもたちにも皆さんの前でお話する機会を与えてください。私たちは日本人ですから、国際学生の大会に出場することができません。また、親のどちらかまたは両方が日本人でないという理由で、英語の大会にも出場することができません。

今日はお話する機会をいただきありがとうございました。

Editor's note: Thank you, Kai, for your excellent speech, and for the initiative to submit it to this newsletter. As the BSIG Newsletter editor, and also having supported several students in speech contests over the years, Kai's speech resonated with me, and addresses an important issue.

Many speech contests continue to be judged on criteria of content, delivery, and English. Content can be as low as 50% of the evaluation criteria, and English (meaning pronunciation, rhythm, etc.) can be weighted very highly. Given the high weighting of this criteria, it can appear (on the surface) to be reasonable to exclude children of native-speaking parents, as this could give them an unfair 'leg-up.'

However, in addition to Kai's excellent argument that having a native-speaking parent does *not* mean easy acquisition of a second language, there are two other points that I feel are worth raising. First, while speeches are presented orally, they are *written* in advance – and there is no such thing as a 'native speaker' in writing. Secondly, particularly in consideration of the diversity in English-speakers globally, the need for evaluating 'English' in speech contests is dubious – this could be amalgamated into 'delivery,'

eliminating any possible ‘advantage’ that some students might have.

Kai expertly quotes the speech contests aims, “for young people who will take the lead in Japan as members of the international community in the future to become proficient in English as an *international language*, to make efforts to promote it, and thereby *contribute to the development of world culture and international goodwill*.” Surely, then, it is the *content* of the speeches that matter far more than any surface-level aspects.

Kai’s speech is expertly argued, and he raises important points. I hope that his *voice* will be heard beyond this newsletter, and that we may see changes in speech contests moving forward.

Benefits of Screens for Bilingual Families

Alison Koga
Sojo University

Before my son was born, my husband and I discussed our hopes and concerns about raising our son as bilingual in Japan. I am from the United States and my husband is Japanese. We both felt that not only was it important for him to know English for his future, but it was also equally as important that he be able to communicate with both sets of grandparents and family. My husband and I are both bilingual. My bachelor's degree is in Japanese, and my husband studied abroad in Australia for the entirety of his university career. We decided it would be best that, since we live in Japan, our home would be an English environment, while outside of the house would be reserved for Japanese. The first year of his life, I was able to stay home with my son and spoke to him in English, while I also made sure to provide time for reading English books. We do not scorn the use of Japanese in the house – my husband and I sometimes revert to it, or we watch Japanese news on TV – but 98% of the time the environment is English. My son is exposed to English outside of our immediate family only through video chatting my father in America about once a week and the occasional get-togethers with English-speaking friends.

Although screen time is often frowned upon in society and many parenting guides are strict in their recommendations of no screens before the age of two, I felt that it could be used as an extremely valuable tool for language acquisition. Since the time I was a student, I have learned an incredible amount of Japanese from watching dramas and animation. As a language teacher, I have witnessed students excel in English class because in

their free time they are busy becoming engrossed in American TV shows. While my husband and I used 98% English at home and I would read English books to my son, I also allowed him, from a very young age, to watch TV in English. Shows like the beloved Sesame Street, Thomas the Tank Engine, and Daniel Tiger were regulars in our home. These shows exposed my son to much more language than I and my husband could alone. As my son grew, so did his interests, and therefore his favorite TV shows evolved as well. He began watching shows based around animals and he would often spit out animal facts that even I did not know. “Mommy, did you know chameleons use camouflage because they are prey?” How could he have learned the words “camouflage” and “prey” if not for these television shows?

When my son began kindergarten at two-and-a-half years old, he did admittedly struggle at first. Two-and-a-half is a difficult age for any child, but suddenly being thrust into a Japanese-only environment was very stressful for him. I had faith that through immersion he would eventually be able to get along just fine and thankfully that was indeed the case. It was quite surprising how quickly he learned Japanese and that now he can speak it perfectly with a Kyushu dialect (something I'm still struggling with myself!).

I do feel there are some things with which my son, as a bilingual, is slightly behind. For example, many of his classmates can already read hiragana (he is currently 5 years old), but my son is not really

interested in learning to read Japanese yet. He recognizes his own name and his classmates' but cannot read words yet. A side note – his kindergarten is Montessori style, so they do not force the students to learn anything that they are not showing interest in learning. He was able to recognize the alphabet since he could speak – age 1.5 to 2. Most of that is thanks to YouTube videos and of course Sesame Street! Currently he can sound out beginner reader words and with help, can read “Step Into Reading” series books (e.g., Liberts, 2015).

My son also uses many colloquial and slang phrases like, “That’s mega cool!” or “We’ve gotta get out of here or we’ll be toast!” or “You’ve gotta be kidding me!” or “Aw, man, I blew it!” all of which are phrases that I never use myself. The only source is screens! When I hear my son use these phrases or words that I know I’ve never uttered in his presence, I cannot help but truly believe that screens, media, and TV are amazing, helpful, and useful tools for language acquisition.

My son will move on to elementary school this spring and I have concerns about his language skills and the impacts that a Japanese school system will have on his bilingualism. Will the fact that none of his friends are bilingual have a negative influence on his English use? Only time will tell. For now, I truly believe that we have been so lucky to raise our son during a time when access to English materials and media is so easy. I can’t imagine trying to raise a bilingual child here twenty or even ten years ago. It was close to impossible to find movies or cartoons that had not been dubbed in Japanese. The difference in access is truly astounding. It’s as simple as turning on Netflix or Disney+ to find endless catalogs of English media. In the future, I will continue to allow my son his screen time and hope that he maintains, or even improves, his bilingualism.

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The Other Side of the Bilingual Coin: Tokyo Reflections, 2022

Nicholas Zain Moriarty
Avondale College, Auckland, New Zealand

Japan and the Japanese language have been huge influences on my life. Born and raised in Aotearoa New Zealand, I have studied Japanese for half my life. I fell in love with the language in high school, lured in by its fascinating script, intriguing culture, and simply the way it was so different to everything I knew. This would eventually lead me to study Japanese in university and then complete my master's in Tokyo, Japan. Until somewhat recently, I had been living in Japan for almost a decade when, due to family obligations mixed with a spoonful of unfortunate timing, I found myself again bunkering down in New Zealand when the pandemic hit. Consequently, I found myself separated from Japan for over three years. During that time, however, I was lucky enough to meet my current partner, a Japanese woman living in New Zealand, and so, despite being physically separated from Japan, I found myself again intimately connected with Japanese culture and language. There was an interesting twist in this relationship, however, in that my partner was (and is) the mother of two young daughters (L and R, now six and eight) who have been raised in New Zealand since birth.

When I joined their family, English was the primary language used in the home. While perhaps not my business, I could not help but stick my neck out and suggest that setting up their home as predominantly Japanese speaking might lead to the daughters becoming naturally fluent in Japanese. I explained that this would not hinder their English¹⁾ but would potentially remove the need for them to go through the arduous task of learning

Japanese as a foreign language later in life (or even worse, missing out on acquiring the language altogether). Fortunately, my partner was on board with the idea, and together we made the conscious effort to speak only Japanese around the children.

Our conversational efforts, combined with a healthy dose of Japanese media (*Doraemon*, *Mukashibanashi* (folk stories), Ghibli movies, etc.), dramatically increased their exposure to Japanese, and consequently the children have since made massive strides in the language. The eldest girl has evolved from being only able to express simple utterances to being able to command a wide range of vocabulary and relate lengthy and detailed stories, events, and desires, while the youngest has gone from barely being able to muster *itadakimasu* at the dinner table to being able to fully comprehend Japanese spoken to and around her, as well as being able to express her own thoughts and desires (albeit with slight difficulty at times, such as finding herself halfway through a thought she hasn't quite the linguistic repertoire to finish yet). But for all intents and purposes, both are now bona fide speakers of Japanese.

Interestingly, however, being with them over this period, it was not immediately obvious to me what effect our efforts in language exposure were having or whether the linguistic development we were aiming for was indeed occurring. This would change, however, on our first trip back to Japan last December (2022), shortly after the borders reopened to tourism. Ending a three-year hiatus away from Japan, it was here that the children's

progress in Japanese would become visible in all its glory.

Our eclectic travel group was composed of the two daughters, their mother, myself, as well as my young sister, A (13), who had begun learning Japanese one year prior. My sister, while knowing some basic vocabulary and phrases, was, however, still very much in need of language assistance in undertaking most interactions, with which initially I would assist her; for instance, when ordering things, asking for directions, etc. But one day an interesting development occurred: Of their own desire to be of assistance, L and R began to stick to my sister like glue, and whenever they noticed her struggling to understand a situation, they would relate to her what was going on.

L: “Today we are going to the aquarium A!”

R: “The lady is telling us to line up on the left A!”

Watching them selflessly attend to my sister was heartwarming in itself. But when I gave further thought to the complexity of the task they were carrying out and the seemingly effortless manner in which they were achieving it, a wave of realisation as to how far they had come washed over me: the same girl (R) that we had painstakingly taught the individual syllables of “i-ta-da-ki-ma-su” (apparently quite a mouthful to learn from scratch) was now completely capable of processing nearly all linguistic information around her in a real-life Japanese environment. Indeed, we used Japanese to deliver many instructions to the children over the last two years while stuck in New Zealand, but we rarely used *keigo* or any of the complex language employed by Japanese hospitality and railway staff, etc. And yet somehow, somewhere, both her and her elder sister

had become highly adept at comprehending not just simple but complex language for themselves, and they also had developed the capacity to extend their awareness to my sister and her comprehension level of any given situation, and, as necessary, voluntarily assume the role of her personal interpreter.

Equally amazing was their communication with their grandmother. The last time the youngest had met her was more than three years prior when she could barely speak English, let alone Japanese. The eldest had some experience and memories of talking with her grandmother, but her total time spent with her over her life would number in the mere months. And yet within seconds of walking in the door they were chattering away in Japanese like they had been using it together their whole lives. Seeing this unimpeded communication between a grandmother and her grandchildren alone made our efforts all worthwhile.

L: ばーば、ゼリー食べてもいい？
(Grandma, can I have this jelly?)

R: こたつの中で靴下脱いでいるとブッチ (犬) が足をなめてくる！ (If you have your socks off under the *kotatsu*, Bucchi (the dog) will lick your feet!)

Not only did they not skip a beat reacquainting with the family home, but they also then proceeded to inform my sister about traditional Japanese cultural practices, such as the art of getting toasty in the *kotatsu* with *mochi* while watching *Doraemon*.

While this scene again was equally touching, I could not help but marvel at their growth as bilingual communicators. Indeed, their mother and I had done what we could to expose them to as much Japanese as possible, but what we were

able to provide still made up a mere fraction of their daily New Zealand lives: battling against six hours of English schooling, nine hours sleep, and Thursday to Sunday at their father's did not leave us with much remaining time. And yet somehow, through the magic of a child's growing mind, the daughters had managed to learn far more than the sum of the total inputted parts.

I was left here in a state of wonder at the language learning ability of a child, feeling it to be akin to no less than that of a superpower. Of course, many of us know this in theory; anyone remotely interested in language acquisition will have read of and pondered on the wonders of a child's ability to somehow parse meaning from what must initially seem like arbitrary noise occurring in their surrounding environment (not to mention the ability to discern between multiple languages). But for me this was the first time properly observing the process in the flesh and the mind-boggling speed and precision with which it occurs. Immaculate pronunciation, the skill to seamlessly navigate between syntactic systems and social norms, and on top of this, the capacity to then voluntarily take on the role of intercultural communicator—it was indeed a sight to behold. I felt strong affirmation in our decision to teach the girls Japanese, as well as in my own life spent largely devoted to the study of language. Simultaneously, I was reminded of and excited by how little I have yet to understand. In a day and age where language learning seems to be being pushed to the wayside more and more in favor of subjects with more tangible career opportunities and measurable outcomes, this experience also reminded me of the myriad bounties that the gift of language provides us—most importantly its role in connecting people who would otherwise

find it that much harder to connect—and was reassured in my belief that language is indeed a cause worthy of devoting a life to.

And so it was that our small day-to-day efforts, while rarely having obvious effects in the moment (even at times creating tension and frustration when communication could easily be made in English if we let it), did indeed lead to the daughters acquiring enough Japanese that they now have enough ability to lead their own language development through participation in conversation, consumption of media, literature, etc. And so I say to any families in a similar position who may be wondering whether to proactively encourage another language in the home: your efforts will indeed be rewarded, and the fruits of your labour will be great.

Going back in my mind to when I was sitting in the Japanese living room observing the girls at this stage of their linguistic journey, I remember a pang of jealousy coming over me as I thought to myself, “What fun they must be having!” This was soon replaced, however, by admiration as the girls again took it upon themselves to relate their grandmother's speech to my sister:

L: “Ba-ba said we're going to have Japanese curry for dinner! You're definitely going to love it!”

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Notes:

- 1) A persistent myth surrounding childhood bilingualism is that the addition of a language can disrupt the learning of another, possibly leading to

‘semilingualism,’ or an insufficient grasp of either language. Bilingualism research has thoroughly debunked this

myth, although it remains unfortunately persistent (see Grosjean, 2010).



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