



Bilingual Japan

バイリンガル通信

Autumn 2021/2022 Volume 30, Number 2
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.

Manuscript Guidelines

Please consult the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 6th edition, as a style guide. Refer to recent issues of the JALT Bilingualism SIG Newsletter for instances of layout and referencing.

Regular Columns

- Consult the description at the top of each of the Regular Columns in this issue.
- Length: 1500 - 3000 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 or longer.
- Submit articles to the editor at e18d1101@soka-u.jp

Guidelines for Case Study Articles for the JALT Bilingualism SIG newsletter

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.

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DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE: January 15th
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Coordinator's Message

Dear Bilingualism SIG Members!

Hope this message finds you well despite the busiest time of the academic year! Firstly, we would like to thank BSIG Officers (<https://www.bsig.org/officers>) along with **ALL** our Special Interest Group members who have been contributing to the Bilingualism SIG successful activities through long-term membership, presenting and sharing their research and lived experiences at the PanSIG and JALT Bilingualism SIG Forums, and SIG events related to bi-/multilingualism and bi-/multiculturalism, submitting articles and book reviews to the SIG's newsletter and the JJMM Journal, and other various contributions.

We look forward to seeing you at the **JALT 47th Annual International Conference** on Language Teaching and Learning & Educational Materials Exhibition under an umbrella theme of: "Reflections and New Perspectives." The event is scheduled to take place online running from **November 12 -November 15, 2021**. This year the BSIG AGM and the Forum have a joint 90-minute slot taking place online on **Sunday, November 14th 14:05 PM - 15:35 PM**. We hope this scheduling would attract many individuals interested in joining both events.

I hope you will enjoy reading the Newsletter issue showcasing contributions from **Adam Beck, Alan Hill** and **Danica N. Young** who have kindly shared their stories and/or teaching resources with us. Thank you very much to all contributors who have expressed an interest in submitting their work to the BSIG Newsletter.

On a different note, we are constantly looking for new members to join our Decision-Making Team (SIG Officers). We would like to place a call for a new BSIG Newsletter Editor as our current Editor, Risa Hiramatsu plans to step down this year after several years of brilliant work and support. Please do send an expression of interest and a short bio if you are interested in the advertised position **to Shaitan Alexandra at alexshaitan@yahoo.com**. Our team strives to provide support and guidance to novice DMT members as much as we can.

We thank you all for your support and look forward to hearing from you!

Best wishes,

Bilingualism SIG Coordinator,
Shaitan Alexandra.

A Request for Your Assistance

For the past 26 years the Bilingualism SIG has produced **the *Japan Journal of Multilingualism and Multiculturalism***, the only academic journal in Japan devoted entirely to issues of bilingualism and multiculturalism. It is published in both print and online forms annually, and features original academic articles on bilingualism in Japanese contexts.

Publication of the journal was originally supported by generous donations from 20 SIG members. Since then, it has been sustained from SIG funds and sales to non-members. However, **printing costs have risen** and there are other demands on our SIG's budget.

That's why we are **asking** for your **assistance** (no, not a donation!), at least those of you who work in universities. Would you mind suggesting to your school library that they subscribe to the journal? This would give students and scholars access to our **cutting-edge papers and book reviews**.

It would also, by the way, help with the finances of the journal. Here's why: It is standard practice for institutional subscribers to an academic journal be charged several times as much as individual subscribers, on the grounds that once it is in the library it can be accessed by multiple users. It is also standard practice in many Japanese university libraries that once a journal subscription has been approved, it continues until somebody asks for it to stop—libraries like to have journal collections that are as complete as possible.

So, if you wouldn't mind, could you ask your librarian or department head how to recommend a new journal subscription? We would really appreciate that.
Here are the details you will need:

『The Japan Journal of Multilingualism and Multiculturalism 多言語・多文化研究』の第26巻の定期購読料について。

6,500円（消費税込み）を下記 JALT バイリンガリズム研究部会の口座にお振り込み下さるようお願い申し上げます。

ご不明な点等ございましたら、下記までご連絡賜りますようお願い申し上げます。

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2021年09月21日

全国語学教育学会 バイリンガリズム研究部会

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下記のとおりお見積りいたします。

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※可能な限り郵便局での振り込みをお願い致します。

Feature Article

Readers are encouraged to submit articles related to various other topics or issues related to language learning, identity, education, or child raising. Please contact the editor Risa Hiramatsu at e18d1101@soka-u.jp for more information.

Bilingual Success and Children with Developmental Differences-by Adam Beck

This story about a bilingual family in Japan is one of the many in-depth accounts featured in the book *Bilingual Success Stories Around the World: Parents Raising Multilingual Kids Share Their Experiences and Encouragement*. The author, Adam Beck, is a longtime resident of Hiroshima and the founder of the blog Bilingual Monkeys and the forum The Bilingual Zoo. His other books include *Maximize Your Child's Bilingual Ability* and *I WANT TO BE BILINGUAL!*.

▶ Eugene Ryan is originally from England and has lived in Japan for 25 years. A university English professor, he is also involved in research concerning bilingualism and children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other developmental issues. He maintains a Facebook group called Bilingual Children with Developmental Differences.

▶ His wife, Hanako, is Japanese and they are each proficient in the other's language.

▶ They have two children: a son, Teeda, 12.5 years old, and a daughter, Ursula,

10.6 years old.

In many ways, the bilingual journey pursued by Eugene and his family is very similar to other families. What makes their journey different from most, however, is the special challenge that emerged when their son, their first child, was still small.

Eugene was born and raised in an Irish family in London. After graduating from university in England, his introduction to Japan "was a completely random thing," he said, explaining that a teaching job materialized and he took it. After three years in Japan, he returned to London and met Hanako there.

"It's significant, I think, that we met in England and that our language of communication was English from the get-go. That's remained the case, and compared to other families, that's been a crucial thing to help our kids keep the language going."

Eugene and Hanako moved back to Japan before they had children. When I asked if they had discussed their bilingual aim in advance, Eugene told me, "When Teeda was on the way, we talked about it

and we agreed that we would speak only English at home—to each other, and also to our son. Outside of our home, we would use whichever language was appropriate.”

Thus, from the very start, Teeda, and then Ursula, received strong exposure to the minority language from both parents. And yet, when Teeda turned 4, the family abruptly came to a crossroads in their continuing use of English.

Diagnosis drives new direction

Eugene explained that some questions had been raised about Teeda’s development during early assessments of his growth. “They were slightly concerned about things like his reaction time and eye contact,” he said. “But his general behavior wasn’t what I would have imagined for someone who was autistic. He was very tactile, very warm and not afraid of people, and didn’t have any sensory issues. He just seemed normal, for want of a better word. We knew that he was a bit quiet, that his expressions were a bit limited, but we thought it was within the possibility of just bilingual delay.”

Compounding the situation was a year in which Eugene had to live apart from the rest of the family because he and Hanako were holding down jobs in two different cities. This period proved to be very upsetting for Teeda. Eugene said,

“We thought that maybe this disruption was also a part of what was going on with him, that he was traumatized by that.”

Then, after another regular assessment, and further testing beyond that, they received the news: their little boy was diagnosed with a mild form of ASD. “By the time it came, it wasn’t like a shock. We had started to think that there was something going on with him. It wasn’t beyond what we’d considered or discussed...but actually, to take that back, it was a shock. It was a real blow. It was just a very intense moment.”

He continued, “At that point, the thing that sticks in my mind was the question of whether or not to keep the English going. Instinctively, I worried that if he was struggling with language altogether, that trying to keep both English and Japanese would place an unreasonable burden on him. This apparently common sense position has tended until recently to be supported by doctors and teachers, not just in Japan but around the world. I felt panicked because I was really afraid of losing that direct connection with my kid. But if that was just about me being selfish, and if it’s not what he needed, then I shouldn’t do that. So I was questioning myself and, at the same time, I was questioning what we should do. The only logical path I could see was to try and find out more, learn more about the whole

thing. And that's what started my research."

Decision guided by science

At the same time, Eugene said, Hanako was concerned about the idea of maintaining both languages. While she didn't insist that English be dropped, she wanted some reassurance that continuing their bilingual aim would be in their son's interest. And so Eugene's efforts to research this question became the basis for reaching a decision at this key juncture of their journey. In fact, it was a decision that would be a defining moment for their family's future, one way or another.

"Yeah, it was a huge moment," he said, "and that moment is the core shareable thing that I've gone through, feeling a full-on fight or flight response, like, 'I must do this. I must do that. I must try harder. I must be a perfect parent.' Then not knowing in which direction to turn your energy and also feeling alone, which isn't true, in a sense, once you reach out. But in the moment you don't know. And the evolution from that state of darkness and panic was on two fronts: increasing my knowledge—looking at the papers relevant to this dilemma—and then, equally important, connecting with other parents in a similar situation."

Eugene was also able to connect
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with a research group that was exploring this very topic—bilingualism in children with developmental differences—and they invited him to join their efforts to shed greater light on the science behind this question. Though the topic was quite new at the time, and the research already available was limited, he said that he couldn't find "a single paper" which suggested that children with a developmental difference who were capable of acquiring one language would not be capable of acquiring multiple languages. "Essentially, you can have levels of autism where any kind of language is not a realistic goal. But if you have a child with a developmental difference—and they've looked at many different conditions, including autism—and the child can handle one language, then being bilingual doesn't impede their development in any meaningful way."

Eugene said that subsequent studies carried out over the years, involving a range of languages and locations in the world, have continuously confirmed this finding. And not only is bilingualism not harmful to the linguistic and cognitive development of autistic children, "There's also a growing body of evidence that the metacognitive abilities that come with bilingualism can be very helpful for kids on the spectrum who struggle with executive function, and this

can, in fact, enable them to perform better at certain tasks than if they were monolingual.”

He added that, conversely, there are case studies of children with autism who were forced to be monolingual in the majority language based on the notion that children with developmental delays can only learn one language at a time. And as a consequence, they often became detached from family members who were minority language speakers and not as proficient in the majority language.

Thus, dropping the minority language not only negates the various advantages that bilingualism can bring, it may create distinct disadvantages for the child and the family. With regard to Teeda, Eugene said, that would have meant “cutting him off from half of his family and his identity.”

Moving forward, with support

In this deliberate way, Eugene and Hanako were able to gain the confidence to continue their bilingual journey as a family. “The first six months or so,” he said, “was the darkest period and then it began to move towards more understanding and more peace, at least regarding that question. Particularly when I met the research group and started to talk to them, and talk with other researchers in

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the field, I got massive reassurance from that. We thought, all right, bilingualism should be okay. We were a bit nervous about it, but having made a decision, everything that came from then on just affirmed what we thought was right. But our general struggle with helping him through his condition, and helping ourselves through his condition, was a longer story.”

While English continued to serve as the family’s main language, they began providing more active support for Teeda’s Japanese side, too. At the same time, Teeda was receiving support for his developmental needs through regular sessions of speech-language therapy and physical therapy. Though most of this therapy was in Japanese, they were also able to access some therapy in English. “He continued all that through kindergarten,” Eugene said, “and then, gradually, he kind of came out of his shell and developed, so the need for it seemed less. Today the main issue is concentration. His head is a very lively and busy place and so, in a classroom environment, concentrating is hard for him. That’s his main academic issue.”

“He’s not as fluent in either language as our daughter is,” he explained, “but it’s not a question of language therapy, really. The kind of therapy he gets now, one evening a week, is for kids with

developmental issues. They're helping him with how to approach his homework and writing and coping with these kinds of things."

Naturally, Teeda is a standout in his English classes at school, but he has more difficulty keeping up with the other subjects because, Eugene said, "his mind is so busy." In primary school, while officially belonging to the special needs class, he was encouraged to try as many mainstream classes as he could manage. In this way he was gradually able to take part in all mainstream classes, except Japanese, an achievement for which he felt proud. "In spite of this," Eugene continued, "we agreed with our son that he would start junior high still based in the special needs class. This is because it allows him to go on trying as many mainstream classes as he's capable of, while still maintaining support for his weaker subjects. If he joined as a regular member of the mainstream program, this support would no longer be accessible."

Efforts benefiting both kids

While Eugene's family has had to address challenges that go beyond what most bilingual families must face, in other ways the bilingual success they're experiencing with both Teeda and Ursula is the result of

the same kinds of efforts pursued by other families.

Since the very start of their journey, Eugene and Hanako have been generating ample exposure to the minority language within their home, especially through speech and through books. "I'm a great lover of books," Eugene said. "And I think that if you can get them to a point where they can pick up and enjoy books by themselves, then it's an awesome engine for growth." He said that his kids can now read well in both languages, but acknowledged that getting them to read in the minority language is becoming harder.

Like many families, as the children get older, they get busier with their lives in the majority language, which limits the time and energy they have for literacy activities in the minority language. He mentioned making use of manga and graphic novels in English in order to help motivate them to read.

In addition to these daily efforts embedded within their lifestyle in Japan, they have prioritized an annual trip to England, where the kids can spend about three weeks immersed in the language and culture. "Thanks to that, they have a strong connection with their family in England. They've got cousins their own age and my aunts and uncles have a strong bond with them, so that's been an important part of their language development. It's like a

living thing where they have family and friends and it's all about English.”

Eugene added that the Irish love of lively storytelling—in the form of his father’s humorous tall tales—has also had a positive impact on his children. Referring to Ursula, Eugene said that these experiences have sparked her own creative spirit, motivating her to write stories and make picture books in English.

Lending support to other families

Eugene’s experience as a parent and researcher of bilingual children with developmental differences has led him to become an active source of support for other families who are facing this same challenge. The Facebook group he initiated, Bilingual Children with Developmental Differences, now has hundreds of members around the world and serves as a community where advice and encouragement are freely shared.

I asked Eugene to offer his best advice for parents who have a child that has been diagnosed with ASD or another developmental issue. He responded by first underscoring the central point he made earlier, saying, “The scientific consensus is that if the child is capable of one language, then there is no detriment to them learning other languages, regardless of whatever issues they have. So, I would encourage

them not to feel intimidated into giving up bilingualism for their child if their instincts tell them it may be beneficial.”

At the same time, Eugene recommends that parents look at the research themselves to make the most informed decisions they can. “Through my experience, I learned how important it is to understand the science,” he said.

He also stressed, “It really helps to reach out to others. I encourage parents to talk about it, to find people who understand their situation. Connect with others to share the load, to share experiences and ideas. Having this kind of connection was a great source of strength for us. The best kind of ally in this situation is someone who has already been there.”

Reflecting on the distance his family has traveled together on their journey, Eugene noted, “Now, I have to kind of remind myself that my son is on the ASD spectrum. To me, he’s just Teeda. When I talk to other parents who are in the situation I was in then, and how frantic they are in thinking how everything is going wrong and it’s all just too much, I want to help them see that once you get through the panic phase, you start to understand that your child is just a kid, like any other kid, and more than you imagine, things will actually be okay.”

Afterword: As Eugene has stressed, children with developmental differences generally have the potential to become bilingual, too, if the same core conditions of exposure and need are adequately met. If the child is capable of learning one language, he or she is capable of learning more than one language, and there can be keen advantages for the child and family in continuing to nurture this process of bilingual development, in pressing on with their larger bilingual journey. At the same time that Eugene's story is an encouraging example for families with children who have developmental differences, his actions over the years, in addressing this challenge within his own family, are also an inspiration in another way. In fact, they demonstrate the idea that not only can our efforts to overcome life's difficulties benefit our own lives for the better, such efforts, when shared with the world, can benefit the lives of others who face a similar challenge. Clearly, that has been the case with Eugene in so generously sharing his experience as a parent, his knowledge as a researcher, and his advice as a leader of this growing worldwide

community of bilingual families that include children who have ASD and other developmental differences.

Contact & Resources for Eugene Ryan

▶ eugeryan@gmail.com

▶ Facebook Group – Bilingual Children with Developmental Differences:
[facebook.com/groups/155717381272532](https://www.facebook.com/groups/155717381272532)

▶ Ryan, E. (2020, May 4). Sharing a Diagnosis of Autism for your Child. Oasis: Bulletin of the Connections Forum, 1(1). Retrieved 2020, June 11, from www.multiculturaljapan.com/oasis-bulletin-volume-1-issue-1.html

▶ Ryan, E. (2020) Navigating Public Education in Japan for a Third-Culture Child with Autism. In Cook, M.L., & Kittaka, L.G. (Eds.), *Intercultural Families and Schooling in Japan: Experience, Issues, and Challenges* (pp. 205~226). Candlin & Mynard ePublishing, Ltd.

Embracing Defeat: Bilingualism and Teenage Resistance- by Alan Hill

In June 2020, when my son Jason was approaching his 17th birthday, I was having a particularly fraught time maintaining his English proficiency, and so made the decision to stop teaching him English. This article covers the reasons for that decision, and how things have developed over the 14 months since. I will offer up a spoiler at this point – the story has an unexpected happy ending.

Background

I am a Scottish male (56), resident in Japan since 1989. I work full-time in a university in Yokohama. My speaking and listening in Japanese are fluent, and I am a competent reader. My wife Kumi (53) has intermediate English skills, but in recent years she rarely uses English and her ability, by her own admission, has atrophied. Our daughter Nina (20) is a balanced bilingual. She majors in English and French at a national university in Tokyo. She is very much the ‘success story’ in terms of bilingual child-rearing, and while that makes her the protagonist hero of her own narrative about journeys in bilingualism, when it comes to Jason’s story, we can cast her in an antagonist villain role. This is partly because Jason having to live up to his sister’s achievements has been an additional pressure only the second child understands.

My attitude toward bilingual child-rearing has been firm from day one. I have met monolingual hafu (see McAulay 2021), many of whom bemoan the fact that their parents did not raise them to be bilingual. Other monolingual hafu regret the fact that their parents did try, but they themselves did not engage. I have told my children many times over the years that if they are unhappy with their English proficiency level when they are adults, it will not be my fault. I am always available to help with their English.

Over the last two decades I have detailed our efforts in *Bilingual Japan*. There are articles on Nina’s story (McAulay & Howe 2016, Hill 2009b, 2009a, 2004, 2003), on Jason’s story (McAulay 2020, Hill 2006), and articles related to both of them (Hill 2012, 2011). The following is a brief summary of key points to June 2020. The reader looking for more details is encouraged to check the above references.

As a second child, Jason was at a certain disadvantage when it came to nurturing his English. With both children, we adopted a one-parent-one-language strategy. Jason’s sister had time alone with me for the first two years of her life,

but he was born into a situation where I had to split my time between him and his sister. When Jason and Nina played alone, it was always in Japanese. By 2011, when Jason was eight years old, he was pretty much a receptive bilingual – I would speak English to him, and he would reply in Japanese.

However, 2011 was a turning point for Jason when we spent a year in the UK because I had a sabbatical from my university. Jason went to primary school in Glasgow, Scotland, from April 2011 to March 2012. Before that, Jason had spent the summer of 2010 in Glasgow when he went to primary school for five weeks. In Japan, I read books to Jason and taught him to read and write using *Jolly Phonics*. We sometimes went to the cinema to see Pixar movies. All these efforts meant Jason had a store of passive English that was operationalized in Scotland. Within a week of going to school in Glasgow, he was happily speaking English, even initiating in English with Kumi, which surprised – and slightly scared – her.

When we returned to Yokohama in March 2012, Jason was confident in his English, and had developed and taken ownership of an identity as ‘Scottish,’ ‘British’ and ‘hafu’ that was much more complex and confident than before. That year laid the foundation for a decent level of English

proficiency that Jason has never lost. However, what he has not really done is power on from that moment and make full use of the potential his circumstances have offered. Why that has happened comes down to his continued resistance to English study.

Resistance and a decision

Since Nina was born, I have met many parents in a similar situation to my own, namely raising hafu with English as the minority language. Like me, many get frustrated with the assumption in many societies, including Japan, that bilingualism happens naturally. We often see ourselves as not only parents, but parent-teachers, and the teaching side of that equation involves blood, sweat, and tears. In Jason’s case, his resistance to English teaching has been mighty.

Jason can be incredibly stubborn. When he was five, my wife took him to a football (soccer) school run by Brits in Yokohama. The football lessons are conducted in English, and I thought it would be an excellent opportunity to combine sports and English input. Most of the children in the school were the offspring of expats, and so everything was in English. For whatever reason, Jason just never took to the place, and he expressed his dissatisfaction by sitting down and not moving. He sat down on the soccer pitch, in the middle of games.

Obviously, his mum was mortified. I took him the next week to see if it would make a difference. He didn't sit down during the game, but he clearly wasn't happy.

This episode is emblematic of a pattern that has been with us ever since – if Jason does not like it, he won't be doing it, and no amount of bribes, cajoling or threats will change things. For speaking, I have tried having Jason narrate picture stories. We have listened to short news stories and I had him give summaries and opinions. For writing, we tried diary exchange. He also had a notebook of essay prompts. In addition, I brought home vocabulary workbooks. Jason's engagement with all these activities has been reluctant. His reaction when asked to work on English has ranged from foot-dragging surliness to shouty anger. The only activities that generated any kind of enthusiasm were, first, watching DVDs of *Doctor Who*, and second, reading the stories of Paul Jennings. Even then, with the reading, it would be a nighttime activity prompted by me, with me reading aloud 85 percent of the time, and Jason listening. Jason rarely picked up a book and read it by himself. This resistance was not only to English, but study in general. Kumi had Jason do the Benesse Challenge course, but he regularly failed to keep up with his workload.

If I had to speculate on the reasons, I

would say there are two main factors. The first is Jason's preference for video games and manga. Jason, like many Japanese boys, will happily spend hours playing video games with his friends. He reads manga, sometimes in print but often on his iPhone. We have tried all the strategies that everyone knows about – setting time limits for screen time, threatening to take away devices, and switching off the Wi-Fi when he refuses to come off his devices. None of them have really been effective, simply because Jason's addiction to screens is too strong.

The second reason is Nina. Nina passed Eiken Level 1 when she was 15. Jason, at the age of 18, recently (May 2021) failed Level 1. Nina's English proficiency has been higher than Jason's at every stage of life, and unfortunately she has not been magnanimous about it. Her put-downs and taunts to Jason when he makes a mistake in English have, over the years, taken their toll. Jason's strategy for dealing with his sister's jibes has been to withdraw from English. More than once, he has described being bilingual as "Nina's thing." Nina is in her third year of university, studying liberal arts. Jason is taking the maths and science route, hoping to get into a faculty of engineering in April 2022. I have no doubt that the path Jason is taking in life is partly a reaction to his sister's

influence. It is an over-statement to say that Jason rejects bilingualism because Nina embraces it, but an element of push-pull has played a part.

When, at the age of 15, Jason entered high school, his resistance to English was as strong as ever. I would ask him to listen to BBC 6 minute English, or a TED Talk, but he often refused. I tried sending him articles to read for vocabulary acquisition and for use as speaking prompts, but he rarely read them. More often than not, his excuse was that he had 'no time.' By the end of his first year in high school, Jason's school study and looming university entrance exams were becoming a factor. In junior high school, Jason had taken entrance exams for three high schools, only passing his safety school. My wife assured me that this school would crack the whip and so he wouldn't have to go to juku [cram school]. However, by the end of his first year of high school, it became obvious that he was not studying enough, and so I had to cough up almost a million yen for juku. Jason attended school regularly, and enjoyed his time there, but this was mostly because of his involvement with the soccer club. He was not diligent in doing his homework. He then started to dodge going to juku. On top of that, he would find excuses to extend his screen time, sometimes just outrightly defying my rule that he be off the games by

midnight. The worst times were when Jason had just finished a test. His justification was that the following days were his time off, and he would spend seven straight hours gaming.

At this point, Jason's school study and English study were conflated. I was having talks with Kumi about the possibility that Jason would not go to university. One of Jason's Japanese cousins had gotten into a low-ranking private university to study German Literature, a subject he had no interest in, and only ended up studying because he got in on a high school recommendation. When that cousin dropped out in his third year, I took it as a cautionary tale – there is no point in wasting time and money sending a child to university who does not want to study. Kumi disagreed, and this became a source of tension in the house.

The story, however, is not one of unrelenting resistance. While 12-year-old Jason couldn't care less about English, 16-year-old Jason was more aware of how the world worked, and of how important it is for a Japanese person to have good English skills for their career. I also told him, and he agreed, that a better-than-average English proficiency would be his asset through life, one that he could fall back on to earn a living if all else failed. Jason is a bright young man,

with a good personality and lots of common sense, so he understands the arguments about how important it is to be able to speak English and to go to university. It was a pleasant surprise in March 2020 when Jason opted to go on a study abroad exchange for a month to a high school in Melbourne, Australia, a sojourn that was unfortunately blighted by the emergence of the corona pandemic (see McAulay 2020). Nevertheless, choosing to go to Melbourne showed Jason understood the importance of English. However, understanding the argument, and knuckling down to do the work it entails, are two different things. And when Jason gets in front of a screen, another darker, less reasonable side to him emerges...

In June 2020, Jason was spending lots of time gaming. He was not engaging with any of the English study activities I suggested. He was often going past the midnight cut off for computer gaming with blithe disregard. He had promised he would work hard at juku if I shelled out the money for it, but was now renegeing and talking of taking the *suisen* ('recommendation') route into a private university, simply because it involved less study. Things came to a head with a heated argument one night in June 2020.

The next day, I took some time to think things over, and decided that the tension

in the house was simply too much of a price to pay. I realized that for a long time I had not told Jason anything new, and that I was only repeating the same things, saying such things as "It is important to go to university and to achieve that you have to knuckle down and study" and "It is important to have good English skills and with me as a parent, you should take advantage and develop your English". He knew these things. He was a young man now, not a child anymore, and could take responsibility for his own actions and decisions. As a result of these thoughts, I told Jason I would not be badgering him about English any longer. If he wanted to do English study with me, he could, but he would have to be the one to initiate. I told my wife that I would not be getting on Jason's back about study, and it was up to her what strategy she wanted to follow.

At the time, I felt this decision would take a lot of the stress out of our lives, and make the house more peaceful. But another part of me felt like it was a defeat. I was giving up. A little voice in my head said I was throwing in the towel. It was hard to switch that voice off.

The aftermath: June 2020 – August 2021

Two things have emerged from that momentous decision in June 2020. The first is that the house is indeed more

peaceful. Jason realizes that it is up to him to make the smart choices – and so far, he has. He is going to juku regularly. He has cut down on video games drastically. He realizes his iPhone is not his friend and locks it away when studying at home.

The second thing is Jason now curates his own menu of English study. We joined Netflix in March 2020 in response to being at home more because of the pandemic. Jason now eats his meals and enjoys break time from study while watching English-language programmes on Netflix (English dialogue, with English subtitles on). If I am there, we watch together, which means I can explain any language he doesn't understand, and the story is a prompt for English discussion between us. Jason likes lighter material, especially comedy. He chooses the shows we watch, and he races through them, often binge watching when I am not there. So far he has gone through every episode of *Stranger Things*, *The Umbrella Academy*, *Community*, *Sherlock*, *Brooklyn Nine Nine*, *Modern Family*, *The Good Place*, *How I Met Your Mother*, and *Schitt's Creek*. He is currently working his way through *Friends*. I can see his viewing is having a positive effect on his vocabulary acquisition and speaking fluency. The other day he used the phrase 'tapping' in relation to fishing rods, which surprised

me, as it is a term he can only have acquired from self-directed exposure to English input. His curiosity about English is more heightened, and he asks questions about vocabulary he has encountered.

As well as Netflix, Spotify has proved to be an asset. Jason has a Spotify account and listens to a lot of English-language music. He discovers things on his own, but I have also introduced him to my generation of music, such as The Police, Queen, Bowie, and Electric Light Orchestra (ELO). Through Spotify he has found some English podcasts. He much prefers English-language comedy to Japanese, and is currently listening to *JaackMaate's Happy Hour* podcast.

At this moment, I feel Jason is capable of maintaining a good level of fluency. In hindsight, I am wondering if my book-based definition of 'literacy' was out of date, and the visual literacy that Jason seems to be nurturing is more appropriate for the digital age. When (if?) he goes to university, the English classes he has there will no doubt be another source of interaction for us, and print-based reading might come back into his life. Even if it doesn't, his engagement with digital visual English content is gratifying.

Conclusion

The decision to stop teaching Jason English felt like giving in to negative

forces at the time. However, it has proved to be something else, a passing of the baton of responsibility for English nurturing from me to my son. Mentoring my children's English is going to be a lifelong pursuit, but it will take place in phases, and there will be seismic shifts along the way. I once wrote (McAulay & Howe 2016) about how I wished someone had told me about the great change junior high school and club activities brings to bilingual development. The decision to stop offering English teaching to Jason, and allow him to take responsibility for his own English development, feels equally weighty. He has surprised me with his continual engagement with, and curiosity about, English. If there is a moral to this story for parents with children showing resistance in their teenage years, it is surely that at some point we have to take off the training wheels, and let our children ride freely.

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Resource Review: Bilingual Children's Books- by Danica N. Young

Background

While I have no children, I was a child once myself with a deep, far-reaching love of literature. As a child, I couldn't wait to learn to read. I remember always asking my mother what some billboard sign or words said were saying. She quickly got tired of me and said, "I cannot wait until you go to school and learn to read." From that moment, I couldn't wait to go to school so I could learn to read and then read as much as I wanted. It turned into an insatiable lifelong love for me. Going to the bookstore or library was tantamount to going to an amusement park for me. Throughout my life, while reading sort of became an ordinary pastime past-time, during the pandemic, my love of reading was reignited. There was suddenly time, in one way or the other, and also so much chaos going on around us to worry and stress about. I found myself longing for a quieter, more wholesome, joyful, and simple world; and I found it, in starting to collect children's books. The beautiful art, and clear but meaningful lessons, allured me and made me start coming back to read them again and again. Along with all of the alone time and limited interaction, I also decided to try once again to improve and practice my waning Japanese skills, since I found

myself in a world of English and becoming a lot less able to communicate in Japanese. I had never especially focused much on reading in my target language and thought this would be a great opportunity to do so! The following are some of the bilingual children's stories I discovered and used for my self-study. For this article, I decided to go back and review them from 5 five different aspects: 1) story, 2) lesson (moral), 3) art/illustration, 4) English language (vocabulary, flow, grammar, and level-appropriateness), and 5) Japanese language (vocabulary, flow, grammar, and level-appropriateness). When it comes to the books, I've looked at several different types: mainstream, published titles, and self-published works. Almost all of them are English to Japanese translations, but one is a Japanese to English translation, and there are several variations (a few books are hiragana-centric, a few use a mix of hiragana and katakana, and one book does use kanji, but with a furigana accompaniment). The topics of each book vary as I tried to have a well-rounded representation of titles. However, they were all ones that piqued my own personal interest. The books chosen are bilingual (meaning both forms of text appear within a single book, and not

books that are offered in several language translations, but only stick to one language within a single book). Finally, all books represented are in English and Japanese and available to purchase on Amazon.co.jp. (which is where I picked them up.) With all of that out of the way, on with the review!

1. The Last Kappa of Japan: A Magical Journey of Two Friends (Bilingual English and Japanese Edition), by Sunny Seki (Tuttle Publishing 1,400 yen/12.95 USD)

Standout aspects of this book:

The author, Sunny Seki, was born in Japan and has a deep understanding of Japanese culture that he wants to share with the world. He has also spent a lot of time being educated and living in the U.S., so unlike a lot of books, this book is not a translation. He wrote both the English and Japanese, and re-told the story himself. He also did his own illustrations, which are indeed very beautiful. This is professionally published and well made, by someone with a deep personal grasp of both the languages and cultures. I think the evidence for this is clearly shown in the more subtle aspects of the book, such as the design for the Kappa, which looks more human than any kappa I have run into in my time in Japan in other media/literature, while still keeping the integrity and spirit of this pinnacle of Japanese mythology.

The story:

A young boy meets a Kappa and they become friends. In their youth, he protects and saves the Kappa from those who would try to capture and exploit it. The Kappa gives the boy a gift that he can use to call him if he ever needs any help. Much later in life, the boy's child goes missing and he uses the Kappa's magic to help find her and bring her home. Each gives precious gifts to the other.

The story is clear, meaningful and wholesome, with some wonderful lessons. The lessons within the story have to do with friendship and loyalty, but there are more subtle lessons about taking care of the earth and water, and giving the children who read it a piece of Japanese culture and a window into what life was like in a different time of history. The illustrations are absolutely beautiful and go so well with the story. Both of the English and Japanese languages flow well and in a balanced way. This is quite possibly because the author himself has a deep understanding and mastery of both languages and cultures. The book does use simple kanji, but the kanji is accompanied by furigana in all cases, so it is a very good transition book for young readers. Another really nice feature of the book is are the cultural notes in the back. These notes have little tidbits for everyone, that are delightfully cute and funny. He goes over some of the

historical points of Japanese society, complete with vocabulary, and how Kappas are the origins of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.

2. Am I Small?

By Phillip Winterberg and Nadia Wichmann (phillipwinterberg.com)
(1,299 yen)

Standout aspects of this book:

This book uses hiragana, romaji, and English, so it's quite good for very young readers and parents of young children in the pre-reading stage. The sentences are very short, contain simple sentence patterns, are in the present tense, and use with very simple grammar. This makes it ideal for reading with and to children, no matter if your primary language is English or Japanese. I also love how each version gets its own text script, which adds adding to the style and design of the book and making makes it even more fun to read. The English is in bold, but it is also the smallest of the three prints on the page. The hiragana is written in standard script, but is slightly smaller than the romaji, which while also not in bold, is written in the largest of the three typefaces.

The story:

The story is a very cute and funny story of a little girl named Tamia. She is constantly comparing herself and being compared to other things by her size. She finds that she is smaller than many things

and much bigger than other things. She asks a barrage of monsters, flowers, and fairy-like creatures how they view her size and each offers a different descriptive word, either smaller or larger than the one before it, helping the reader gauge the scale of words and when it might be used and applied to other contexts.

The story is extremely fun to read aloud, especially because of the word patterns. It teaches, in both languages, so many different vocabulary words for large and small, and the scale differences between them all, while using different creatures. Examples of words the book introduces are: small, teeny-weeny, microscopic, gigantic, huge, large, and so on. The pictures serve as a scale of how small or large something like that might actually look, and use Tamia as a scale of measurement. It can be really fun to read aloud and listen to if each creature is given a different voice. The pictures are bold and engaging with a somewhat muted color palette that isn't so hard on the eyes, which can be great if you are using this as a bedtime story, or trying to use it as a moderate stimulation tool to calm your child down. The story itself is very fun and engaging in its simplicity and lends itself to being read over and over again. The questions and answers are presented in very simple word patterns that can lend itself to be presented in a rhythmic fashion. You

might find yourself learning and remembering the words along with your child. The grammar is simple and straightforward, making it easy to understand and read. Some examples are: “Am I teeny-weeny?” “Teeny-weeny? You? You are mini!” “Am I mini?” “Mini, you? You are tiny!” (pgs. 6-9) Best of all, is the story’s message, which is learning to love and appreciate yourself as you are now.

3. Mio the Beautiful

Written by Kinota Braithwaite and
Translated by Setsuko Miura
English - Japanese translated (1,760 yen)
(*There is no name of the publisher,
illustrator, or copyright information on
the book (self-published)

Standout aspects of the book:

This book is clearly written by educators, and I didn’t just get that from the information on the back. Readers (and experienced teachers like me) can tell by the word choice, situation, and deep meaning in the book, that this book comes from a place of experience and heart, all the while being child-appropriate and covering firsthand aspects and experiences of living in Japanese culture. Despite not indicating any indication of who illustrated it, I am assuming it's the author. The book features very beautiful and well-made watercolor illustrations and overcomes

any prejudices readers might have about self-published books when it comes to quality. This is a high quality book. This book is in no way misleading in a negative sense. It has nice binding, beautiful artwork, and quality content.

The story:

This book was written for and about the author's own daughter, who is African-Canadian and Japanese, and is about the struggles she faced in school as a bi-racial and bi-cultural student living in Japan. The book also gives solutions as to how to deal with and address elementary-aged bullying from very young children (perhaps 1st to 3rd years graders), who may not actually understand that what they are saying is harmful or hurtful. It also speaks to those children who may not understand why it might be nicer not to say certain things, but also don’t have any ill intent. This book works for bicultural children, but I would like to see young children all over Japan read this as time passes, as it is more likely they will increasingly meet other students from different walks of life, cultures, and experiences.

This book does an excellent job of showing the reader how Mio is like them, and yet different from them, and why this isn’t a bad thing. It definitely addresses how our words can hurt others and why we should be careful with them, which is an excellent message. The book starts by introducing Mio preparing for her first

day of school, with the help of her mother. She has a standard Randoseru school backpack and a yellow general school hat. She walks to school with both of her parents on the first day. The book talks about how much she enjoys traditional Japanese arts and even has a cute illustration of her wearing a kimono. It starts by showing her enjoying a typical school day as many students going to school in Japan would recognize. When Mio doesn't want to go to school anymore thanks to the words of other students, the parents talk to the teacher, who addresses the class regarding this issue. The teacher does a great job of showing the students the power of words and how it's nice to celebrate differences. This book is a bit more on the wordy side than other bilingual books for similar age groups, but the words are not at all difficult to understand. The book is thirty pages long. The sheer amount of words that fill each page is usual for the target age group when it comes to picture books, but the vocabulary and grammar in both languages is well in range for the target age group. There is hiragana with very little katakana (which is typically used for the names of things like randoseru for backpack) and the beautiful pictures on each page are a happy compliment to the words. Therefore, I hope readers won't let the volume of words deter them from reading this to their child, or letting them read it for themselves. This The large

number of words is not surprising, as it was written and translated by teachers of the target age group. The author is an elementary school teacher and the translator trains Montessori school teachers (and as well as is an experienced educator in her own right). Therefore, So when thinking of picking this up, don't let the words, or the price be a deterrent. I honestly think it is valuable and the message makes it worth the price. Bi-racial children are a growing group in Japan, but may still be considered a bit too niche for mainstream publishing outlets, if selling the book to such a group one was has even been attempted. (I honestly do not know if it has was or hasn't wasn't.); However, I think the story is very good and the message is extremely valuable and important. I hope that more books like this one will exist in the future. It is definitely worth a read and a publish. Mio the Beautiful really is a beautiful story.

4. "Tea Time" Story and Art

by Mil Sakai, English translation by Naoko Moller and Produced by Shuichiro Sakai.

Publisher: Metcha Books

(www.metchaforasmile.com)

Cost: 500 yen

This book is Volume 8 in a series of books about the character and the world. Why volume 8, you might ask? Because I wasn't paying attention when I ordered it,

and I also really like tea, so I am most interested in reading about that, rather than starting with volume number one. I didn't really realize it was a series of books until after purchasing, though it is quite obvious from the cover.

Standout aspects of the book:

This book is the only Japanese to English translation that I looked at, and the structuring of the book is very different, as is the size and the price. These are notable. It is also extremely cute and colorful in an exciting way that seems to embrace Japanese children's book sensibilities. It has the sort of look you would imagine when looking at other popular character books and merchandise in Japan such as Lisa and Gaspard, Maizie, and Miffy. I can imagine these adorable characters on all sorts of goods or being available in a shop. I would buy it.... I admit I would buy it.... I also tend to enjoy books and goods that have a bit of world-building within them, like the Sylvanian Families (Calico Critters) franchise or the world of Sanrio. This book has a similar feeling to that.

The story:

Metcha the Cat, our hero, is having a tea party for all of his? F friends. (Gendering is not clear from the book and volume that I have. However, after a simple Google search, I did find character-LINE stickers that referred to Metcha cat as Metcha boy, but that could just be a Google translation error or something). I

will call him a boy just to be consistent with it. Metcha's friend, Niro the bird, comes over and isn't very happy. A big difference here is that no one tried to figure out why Niro is unhappy (as I would imagine a book that started in English would). Instead, Metcha and other characters just focus on making Niro happy by pointing out all of the wonderful things happening right now. This book has a surprise message about mindfulness and gratitude within a cute story about tea! The message is also deep and well-told, yet simple and clearly presented. I was deeply impressed. Metcha suggests that they look for something nice, and throughout the tea party, Metcha, Niro, and their friends point out all of the nice things going on around them. By the end, everyone feels good, including the reader. I read this book several times, not because I had to, but because I genuinely enjoyed the story and the message.

Everything except the character names are written in hiragana, and the vocabulary and grammar are simple and age-appropriate in both languages. This book would work well for those in kindergarten to very early elementary school, but some young readers who enjoy these stories may read them well beyond that time frame. Though it the story flows better in Japanese, that is mostly due to the general use of onomatopoeia in Japanese. An example

of this is: “Kacha Kacha Jyun Jyun Kopo Kopo Kuru Kuru Ocha no jikan no takara mono” (p.15). The patterns are so very fun to say. While the patterns are definitely more fun in Japanese, the English is very engaging and fun as well (but just not as much). One example is: “Spoons are rattling, water is boiling, and tea is churning. It’s tea time magic!” (p.16). The entire book is written in simple sentences with heartwarming pictures. Another nice aspect of the book is that at the end, there is a village map and character profiles, all written bilingually, which that introduce the characters, a bit of their personalities, and the world. The book also breaks the fourth wall a bit to try to include the reader in the fun. I did find one small (but very common spelling mistake (at least common with my students) in the book, but it didn’t take away from my enjoyment of the book at all. The word “exciting” was spelled as “exiting”. I found myself wanting to purchase the entire series of the books after reading this one. Some of the other books in the series available include: Picnic, The Letter, The Day I was Born, Nice to Meet You, and so on. It really is a heartwarming and well-done book and I hope they will continue to produce more of them in the future.

Conclusion:

The world of bilingual children’s books is an interesting one. As far as it goes, I have noticed that it is mostly dominated by self-published works, as professionally published books typically opt to publish books in a single language and will later have the books translated into another language available. I really hope there will be more bilingual books like these the ones introduced in this article in the future; books with both languages adorning their pages provide a unique opportunity to interact with both languages at the same time. It is nice to compare and contrast language differences line by line and on the same page.

While there are some exceptions, I found a newfound respect for the self-publishing industry as well. Thanks to self-publishing, more niche topics and subject matter could can be addressed and be made known to people. I don’t know if a book like Mio the Beautiful would exist without it, because it is so niche, and yet so important. A lot of times in the publishing industry things really depend on how well something can sell and sometimes important topics will be put on the backburner. All of the books I have introduced here these books are highly recommended and quite good. While scrolling Amazon.co.jp to look for bilingual books, I didn’t notice that there

were many of them, but I sincerely hope
that will change in the future.

JALT2021: Reflections and New Perspectives

