

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ズレター
The Newsletter of the JALT
Special Interest Group on Bilingualism



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2025 年度夏季・秋季通信 34 卷 2 号
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Special Interest Group on Bilingualism

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JALT Bilingualism SIG Website: <https://www.bsig.org/>

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS TO THE NEXT ISSUE: February 15th

次号の投稿期限：2月15日

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Call for volunteers! Vacancies are always open for editor positions - duties involve 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 President, 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ると思っ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 is *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、毎回出版するものではなく、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, Daniel Pearce at pearce@shitennoji.ac.jp.

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) やおすすり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 Daniel Pearce (pearce@shitennoji.ac.jp) 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 (経験談など) 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・苦勞等のお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/短報/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: February 15th

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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 and 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.

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):

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DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE: February 15th

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President's Message • 会長挨拶

Dear **Bilingualism** Special Interest Group Members!

We hope this message finds you well.

Firstly, we would like to thank the BSIG Officers (<https://www.bsig.org/officers>), along with **all** our Special Interest Group members, who have been contributing to the success of the Bilingualism SIG through long-term membership; by presenting and sharing their research and lived experiences at the PanSIG and JALT Bilingualism SIG Forums and at SIG events related to bi-/multilingualism and bi-/multiculturalism; by submitting articles and book reviews to the SIG's newsletter and the *JJMM Journal*; and through various other contributions.

We would like to thank **Niko Schultz**, our Programme Chair, for organising the BSIG Forum at the **JALT 2025 Conference**, which was well attended and generated great discussion among presenters and audience members.

We would also like to welcome **Miki Tanaka** to the DMT as our newly elected Membership Chair and thank **Blake Turnbull** for his support over the past eight years. Thank you, Blake, and a warm welcome to Miki.

Time flies, and we hope you are all excited about the upcoming **PanSIG 2026 Conference**, which will take place at **Chukyo University in Nagoya** on **May 23–24, 2026**.

Call for presentations: *December 15, 2025 – January 18, 2026*. We hope to see many of you presenting your research and sharing your teaching and learning experiences pertaining to the theme of **Bi-/Multilingualism and Bi-/Multiculturalism**.

We look forward to making next year's election and nomination process more transparent so that all members can nominate themselves or others for the positions of SIG Officer or other roles. At the same time, we thank you all for your support and look forward to hearing from you. Please email **Alexandra Shaitan** at alexshaitan@yahoo.com if you would like to join the DMT and become more actively involved in the SIG's activities.

We welcome all members' thoughts and proposals related to the SIG's activities and events. Please feel free to send us an email, and we will be happy to respond as soon as possible.

Happy winter holidays to you and your loved ones. Stay healthy and safe, and enjoy the festive season.

Best wishes,

Bilingualism SIG President,
Shaitan Alexandra.

Feature Articles ・ 論文/短報/記事

Feature Article submissions should be directed to pearce@shitennoji.ac.jp

「論文/短報/記事」の投稿は上記のメールアドレスまで。

Bilingualism in Children: Distinguishing Facts and Fictions and Real-Life Hurdles of Raising a Bilingual Child

Josh Norman, Shokei University

Abstract

The idea of raising bilingual children is both appealing and achievable for an increasing number of families these days. Growing up bilingually certainly has its advantages in today's global village. However, attitudes toward each language expressed by both the children themselves and those around them can greatly affect the development of one or both of the languages. After briefly explaining the two types of childhood bilingualism and Taeschner's bilingual development model, several myths regarding bilingual acquisition will be discussed and challenged. These will include possible confusion from learning multiple languages at once, considering code-switching as a sign of deficient language ability, insisting there is one best time to start learning multiple languages, and believing the One Parent, One Language (OPOL) policy is one and only path to follow. This will be followed by the author sharing the real-life hurdles he has encountered thus far while raising his 14-year-old son to become bilingual in Japanese and English, as well as some helpful ways to encourage bilingualism in young children.

要旨

子供をバイリンガルに育てるとことは、ますます多くの家族にとって魅力的かつ現実的なものとなっている。グローバル化している今日の世界には、バイリンガリズム(2言語併用)は確かに有利である。しかしながら、バイリンガルに育つ本人や、周囲の人たちの言語や習得する過程に対する意見と態度が、言語の発達に大

きな影響を与えかねない。本記事では、幼児の二言語習得の異なる2分類を明示してから、Taeschnerのバイリンガル言語習得モデルを概観する。これらの理論背景に基づいて、バイリンガル能力の習得をめぐる根拠のない社会通念を取り上げ、是正する試みを行う。取り上げる通説の中に、「複数言語を同時に学習することによって混乱が生じる」、「コードスイッチングは言語能力の欠如である」、「複数言語学習には最適な時期がある」、や「バイリンガル子育てには一人の親に一つの言語を原則とする One Parent, One Language (OPOL) 方針が一番効果的である」が含まれる。最後に筆者が14歳の息子を日本語と英語のバイリンガルに育てる中で直面した実生活での課題と、子供のやる気を引き出しバイリンガルにするための有効な方法についても紹介する。

Keywords: bilingualism, children, language acquisition, parenting strategies

キーワード: バイリンガリズム、子ども、言語習得、子育て

The idea of raising bilingual children is both appealing and achievable for an increasing number of families these days, and growing up with more than one language certainly has its advantages in today's global village (Rosenberg, 1996). In the United States, for example, according to the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 21% of

school-age children between ages 5-17 in the U.S. spoke a language other than English at home as of 2023. In addition, there are as many bilingual children as there are monolingual children worldwide (Paradis, Genessee & Crago, 2011). However, attitudes toward each language expressed by the parents, other family members, the school, the community, and especially the children themselves can greatly affect the development of one or both of the languages being learned (Rosenberg, 1996). With this in mind, it is important to be able to question common concerns and deflate outright myths about bilingualism that are commonly expressed by those around children in bilingual environments, as well as sometimes by even the parents themselves when considering whether or not to raise their children to become bilingual.

This article will first briefly explain the two types of childhood bilingualism and Taeschner's bilingual development model. Then, several myths regarding bilingual acquisition will be discussed and challenged. These include possible confusion from learning multiple languages at once, considering code-switching as a sign of deficient language ability, insisting there is one best time to start learning multiple languages, and believing the One Parent, One Language (OPOL) policy is one and only path to follow. This will then be followed by the author sharing the real-life hurdles he has encountered thus far while raising his 14-year-old son to become bilingual in Japanese and English, as well as some helpful ways to encourage bilingualism in young children.

Two Types of Childhood Bilingualism

Although human beings are able to learn a second language at any time in their lives, it is well known that children tend to develop more native-like pronunciation when learning a

second language before the period of adolescence. This learning of a second language can be done either simultaneously with the first language or sequentially (i.e., successively) with the second language being learnt after the first language has already been established. The age of three is usually seen as the border between simultaneous and sequential language learning – if the second language is acquired after three, it is generally considered sequential (Rosenberg, 1996).

The key points of simultaneous bilingualism are that both languages are learned naturally through interaction (primarily with family members) and not formal instruction, the child can differentiate their languages very early in their development by taking cues from who speaks which language, sound patterns, and context, and that the child's code-switching mid-sentence or between sentences is typical and not a sign of confusion. On the other hand, sequential bilingualism, often referred to as second-language acquisition (SLA), involves the first language (L1) serving as the foundation for the second language (L2) to be learned on top of it. Key features of sequential bilingualism can include the child speaking the L2 very little when first exposed to it (but instead focusing on understanding before making utterances), as well as a large amount of observing and listening. Knowledge from their L1 heavily influences the child's development of their L2 in such areas as grammar patterns, pronunciation, and vocabulary acquisition. This can either be helpful in the learning process or harmful (e.g., the issue of false cognates¹).

With simultaneous bilingualism, there are four main influential factors. The first is the parents' ability in one or more of the languages their child is trying to learn. Sometimes one or both of the parents can only speak the language of the home and not of the

¹ False cognates refer to words that look or sound similar in different languages but in reality differ significantly in meaning, which can lead to misunderstandings. Many false cognates stem

from loanwords; for example, マンション (*manshon*) means apartment building or condominium in Japanese, but the English word mansion mean a large, luxury house in English.

community, which can cause trouble if the child tries to use the school/community language inside the home with that particular parent.

The second factor is the parents' actual use of language with the child. Even if one or both parents can speak both languages that their child is trying to learn, each parent decides which language(s) to speak with their child and in what situations. Although one very common approach in families is OPOL (One Parent, One Language²), there are many others, including MLAH (Minority Language at Home³), T&P (Time and Place⁴), and mixed language or free language use. There is no universal best method, and the success of any given method depends on several factors, including the amount and quality of input, community involvement/support, and how consistent exposure to each language is.

Another important factor is the language(s) that other family members, especially siblings and grandparents, speak with the child. Even if one particular language has been decided as the "home" language by the parents, siblings can often be found conversing in the school/community language because that is what they are used to speaking/hearing most of the day.

The final factor is the language(s) that the child uses in the community – not necessarily the same language as that used in either the home or at school. Children who want to build bonds with other local community members, especially children their age, have a strong intrinsic motivation to make sure they know the language of that community in order to feel like they fit in.

The second type of bilingualism, also known as sequential bilingualism, usually involves learning a second language formally through school or language classes. This type of bilingualism occurs not just in young children but is the quintessential way young adults and older adults become proficient in a second language. Successfully learning an L2 depends on many different factors, some of which include the age of L2 exposure (regarding phonetic aspects of learning), the quality and quantity of input of L2, support and maintenance of the L1, and motivation and attitude of the learner.

Taeschner's Bilingual Development Model

Many researchers have attempted to develop a model to explain the processes involved during the simultaneous acquisition of two languages during childhood. However, one of the most influential is considered to be the model proposed by Taeschner in 1983 (Taeschner, 1983). Taeschner's model consists of three phases, with each phase including certain characteristics and varying ages of children.

In the first phase, the child has one lexical system that represents both languages, and the two languages are not yet separated. In other words, even if the child knows the same word for something in two different languages, the child has not made the distinction at that point in their learning. The child treats the two input languages as one fused linguistic system and draws vocabulary from both languages interchangeably. The typical age range for this phase is between 0-2 years old.

During phase two, the child slowly begins to separate the vocabulary for each language and use the appropriate language in the

² OPOL involves each parent consistently using a different language when interacting with their child(ren). For example, parent A always speaks English and parent B always speaks Japanese.

³ MLAH refers to a strategy in which the minority (or non-societal) language is used consistently within the home. An example of this would be two

Canadian parents living in Japan using exclusively English at home.

⁴ T&P is a flexible strategy where different languages are used according to specific times, activities, or settings, rather than by who is speaking. An example of this could be using only English at bedtime while reading, but only Japanese during meals.

appropriate situation. For example, if each parent speaks their own native language to the child, usually a child in phase two will respond back using the same language. However, the child's language still usually reflects one grammar system, so several grammatical mistakes can often be heard. The typical age for this phase is approximately 2-3 years old.

In the final phase of language development, the child has achieved almost complete separation of the two languages and will usually speak to others (not just the parents) in the appropriate language. The vocabulary and syntax of each language align with the proper context. Any code-switching that occurs becomes intentional and not a result of systematic confusion. This process can sometimes take several or more years depending on the child. A typical child in this phase will be three years old or older.

Facts and Fictions Regarding Bilingualism in Children

When deciding whether to raise one's child to become bilingual, there are, of course, many factors to consider. Although the advantages of bilingualism, such as access to two (or more) cultures, better thinking skills, being able to converse with a wider variety of people, job opportunities, etc. have been widely documented (Harding-Esch & Riley, 2003) and seem to easily outweigh the perceived negatives, such as possible language confusion, time/cost commitment, etc., there are many outright myths that are being clung to even in today's information society. Many parents worry that bilingualism may have a negative effect on their children's development and questions about the 'side effects' of bilingualism are often raised (Arnberg, 1987; Cunningham, 2011). The following are some of the most common concerns (i.e., fictions) that one will often hear regarding bilingualism and counterarguments (i.e., facts) for each.

First, several misconceptions about bilingual and multilingual development remain widespread, despite extensive research

demonstrating their inaccuracy. One common belief is that exposure to more than one language will confuse children; however, neuroscientific evidence shows that young learners possess sufficient neural capacity to acquire multiple languages concurrently (Bosemark, 2014). Contemporary research in cognitive neuroscience further indicates that infants' brains are exceptionally adept at detecting patterns, mapping sounds to meaning, and managing multiple linguistic systems long before they produce their first words (Thiessen & Saffron, 2003). In fact, dual language exposure aligns naturally with the infant brain's proclivity to separate languages based on cues such as rhythm, phonology, and speaker identity.

A related assumption to this suggests that learning two languages may be acceptable, but that exposure to more than two languages overwhelms a child's cognitive resources. This view reflects a long-standing but incorrect belief that the human brain has limited linguistic 'space' and that multilingualism competes with other developmental tasks. Yet infants already navigate an enormous volume of learning during their early years, and acquiring an additional language naturally does not impose a significant added burden (Kuhl, 2015). Rather, exposure to multiple languages can even enhance attentional control, cognitive flexibility, and metalinguistic awareness, suggesting that the cognitive system is not only capable of supporting multilingual development but may also be strengthened by it.

Another prevalent fiction holds that children will inevitably 'mix' their languages and therefore should not begin learning a second language until the first is securely established. This misconception often stems from observing young bilinguals who alternate between languages within a single sentence or conversation. While such code mixing is indeed common in early bilingual development, it is a natural, harmless, and temporary phenomenon rather than a sign of confusion or linguistic delay (Yow, Tan, & Flynn, 2017). In fact, code mixing reflects

children’s developing awareness of the communicative resources available to them and their ability to draw flexibly from both languages to express themselves.

A further misconception is that literacy becomes overly complicated when acquired in more than one language, particularly because many children struggle with reading and writing even in a single language. This belief assumes that adding a second language will overwhelm children’s cognitive resources. In fact, a large body of research shows that multilingual exposure enhances children’s metalinguistic awareness – their ability to reflect on and manipulate linguistic structure – which in turn supports, rather than hinders, the development of strong literacy skills (McCabe, Tamis-LaMonda et al., 2013). Children who learn to read and write in multiple languages often become more attentive to grammatical patterns and the general principles of how written language works. These strengths can transfer across languages, enabling them to approach literacy tasks with greater flexibility and insight than monolingual peers.

Relatedly, some believe that only very young children are capable of becoming bilingual, implying that it is ‘too late’ to learn another language once early childhood has passed. This notion oversimplifies how language acquisition unfolds and underestimates the human capacity for learning throughout life. Contrary to this view, individuals can acquire new languages across the lifespan; adolescents and adults often bring cognitive, social, and strategic advantages – such as explicit learning strategies, broader vocabulary knowledge, and greater motivation – that support successful language learning. Early childhood may offer certain benefits, particularly in pronunciation and implicit learning, which are sometimes explained through the critical period hypothesis (Singleton & Lengyel, 1995). However, these early advantages do not preclude effective learning later on, nor do they diminish the value of sustained, meaningful exposure at any age.

Another misconception is that multilingualism is rare, when in fact it is the global norm. Although monolingualism is often viewed as standard in some (primarily) Western contexts, worldwide language-use patterns tell a very different story: estimates suggest that 43% of the world’s population is bilingual and an additional 13% is multilingual (Jayanath, 2020). In many regions, navigating multiple languages is an everyday necessity shaped by historical, cultural, and economic factors. Children may grow up using one language at home, another in school, and still another in the broader community, forming a natural and unremarkable part of daily communication. Thus, the perception that multilingualism is unusual reflects local linguistic norms rather than global realities.

Misunderstandings also extend to recommended family language strategies. Although the one-parent-one-language (OPOL) approach is widely used in mixed-nationality or multilingual households, some parents mistakenly believe that it is the *only* acceptable method for raising bilingual or multilingual children. In reality, research shows no evidence that OPOL is inherently superior to other approaches; what matters most is that language use within the family feels natural, comfortable, and sustainable over time (De Houwer, 2007). As explained previously, families can successfully foster bilingualism using a variety of patterns – such as using one language at home and another in the community, designating certain times or activities for specific languages, or simply allowing language preferences to emerge organically. Consistency and emotional quality of language interactions are far more influential than adherence to any rigid formula.

Concerns about language delay also persist, with some assuming that bilingualism inherently slows children’s linguistic development or places an extra cognitive “burden” on young learners. This misconception often arises when caregivers notice that bilingual children produce their

first words slightly later or appear to know fewer words in each individual language than monolingual peers. However, research consistently shows that while bilingual children may indeed have smaller vocabularies in each separate language, their *total* or *conceptual* vocabulary—counting words across both languages—matches or exceeds that of monolingual children (Grosjean, 2013).

Likewise, the belief that ‘true’ bilingualism requires equal proficiency in each language is unfounded. Many parents worry that unless their child can speak, read, and comprehend both languages at identical levels, they cannot be considered ‘real’ bilinguals. In practice, such balanced bilingualism is relatively rare, as most bilingual speakers naturally develop a dominant language depending on social context, frequency of use, school expectations, and community norms (Shishkin & Ecke, 2018). Proficiency often shifts over time as children’s environments and needs evolve, making bilingualism a dynamic and flexible – not static – ability.

Finally, some argue that families should stop speaking their home language in order to prioritize the acquisition of the majority or school language. This advice, often given with good intentions, overlooks decades of research demonstrating that maintaining a strong foundation in the home language actually *supports* rather than hinders development in the second language. According to Cummins’s* Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis (Cummins, 1979), skills developed in the first language – such as vocabulary knowledge, narrative ability, and literacy strategies – transfer and contribute to success in the second. When families abandon their home language, children may lose an important cognitive and emotional resource, weakening both family relationships and long-term academic outcomes.

Real-Life Hurdles Raising Bilingual Children

At the beginning of the previous section, many of the most commonly touted benefits of being bilingual were briefly touched upon. There are, however, many real-life challenges to raising bilingual children that need to be carefully considered before anyone should make the final decision to embark on the path to raising their child bilingually. I have encountered four big hurdles thus far in raising my 14-year-old son to become bilingual in both English and Japanese.

First, both my parents and my wife’s parents have expressed concerns with my son’s acquisition of each respective native language. Since my family currently lives in Japan, my parents back in the U.S. seem especially worried that my son will not be able to ‘fit in’ to American society if he ever decides to live in the U.S. in the future. Although I myself, as a researcher of bilingualism, have tried to assuage concerns on both sides, non-bilinguals often have trouble realizing that a child can easily learn two languages at the same time as long as there is sufficient input in both languages. Regarding English, my son has received a large amount of language and cultural input from not only me but also through watching videos and movies online and on television. This generation of young people has many more chances at their fingertips to interact with others around the world than I ever did as a child.

Second, although my wife and I made the decision to put our son into an international school for his pre-school/kindergarten years, we live in an area where there are very few foreigners, and thus the overwhelming number of children have both a Japanese mother and father. This resulted in many of the children speaking in Japanese at the international school, although the curriculum is English-based. At the time my son attended this international school, there was a native speaker who led each class of children, so there was a good amount of English input for him each day. My wife and I appreciated our son being able to be exposed to English in this type of environment, but this was one hurdle

that was frustrating and tough to overcome as parents of a bilingual child.

Third, it has been tough at times being able to provide enough input in the minority language, that being English in my son's case, since my family lives in Japan. Although I myself do not have long working hours, I often find that I have a lack of energy when it comes to reading books and doing other activities late at night before bedtime. I have somewhat overcome this hurdle by reminding myself that I am one of the main sources of genuine English input for my son and that my son's future English ability will likely rely heavily on my own daily efforts to interact with him. I was able to read books with my son before his bedtime almost on a daily basis until he was about 13 years old, which I feel was a good accomplishment.

Finally, although I always speak to my son (and he to me) in English, my wife sometimes used to code-switch between Japanese and English in the middle of utterances when my son was a young child, which I believed could be confusing and not at all helpful to my son's development of either English or Japanese. My wife's ability in English is limited, and because of this, she often used her limited English vocabulary to try to communicate with my son by mixing English words with Japanese grammar. One such example of this was: "Get up *suru no?*" ("Are you going to get up?") In this example, although my son can understand my wife perfectly well, my concern was that he would end up imitating my wife word for word, and such utterances normally cannot be understood by either native speakers of Japanese or English. Although code-switching is a natural phenomenon for bilinguals, as mentioned in previous sections, I believed that non-bilingual parents (in this case, my wife) should be careful when doing it, as it can lead to input full of systemic errors and less natural vocabulary exposure in the native language of that parent. Code-switching can indeed be a natural, harmless, and temporary thing. However, at the time I was concerned about the hurdle of providing sufficient

(monolingual) input for my son in Japanese since he was attending an international school, and I also felt that it was important for him to be able to eventually adopt a 'monolingual mode.' So, I had feared that my wife's continual code-switching was not allowing my son to get proper language input that comes from the language role model speaking in one language at a time.

In summary, although I have faced each of these four issues in varying degrees over the past 14 years since my son was born, I found that the most difficult one for me to cope with was my wife's code-switching because language use is a very personal thing and a very difficult, if not impossible, thing to regulate or control. I discussed my feelings on the issue with my wife several times during that period in my son's early years, but there was not much change in her behavior. Fortunately, this issue regarding my wife's code-switching was short-lived and naturally died out around the time my son started elementary school due to his ability in Japanese becoming better over the years as well as her fears of not being able to communicate with him exclusively in Japanese dissipating over time. I have been glad to discover that code-switching does not appear to have had any detrimental impact on his acquisition of either Japanese or English.

Helpful Ways to Encourage Bilingualism in Young Children

Human beings learn languages in a variety of ways. Monolingual children can easily pick up their first language through the input of their parents and by playing/learning with other children. However, for young children to become bilingual is a much bigger challenge, particularly in highly monolingual contexts, because there is the matter of how much quality input the child is getting in each language. Having a native speaker of one or both of the languages in their immediate environment is certainly helpful, but not necessary, to grow up bilingual.

Bosemark (2004) outlines several ways to

help parents who want to raise their child bilingually but are unsure of how to go about doing it. A large emphasis is placed on the importance of language exposure that is rich, engaging, and meaningful. Interaction with one's peers is considered particularly significant, as children can learn quite naturally through everyday play activities and communication with other children, especially those close to their own age. Having a variety of contexts to learn both languages can be considered very beneficial for language learners. Literacy activities, especially reading books and/or having book read to them, provide myriad opportunities to expand vocabulary and be exposed to diverse language patterns and structures. Musical activities, such as singing and dancing, can further support language development by fostering skills in intonation and rhythm, as well as being very fun and interactive for the child involved.

In addition, a lot of language input can be gained through cultural immersion visits to one or both of the parent's home countries, as well as regular communication with family members who live overseas through such methods as phone calls and/or online chat apps. Both of these can help strengthen cultural identity while offering authentic linguistic input. Although my wife and I were able to take my son back to the States for visits with my parents at least once a year for the first ten years of his life, the COVID-19 outbreak as well as recent busyness with school sports has not allowed us maintain that pace of travel. A similar thing could be said about video phone calls; once a month or so was standard while he was very young, but the frequency of calls has been hard to maintain as he has grown up.

Bosemark also encourages parents to integrate the minority language into activities that align with the child's personal interests, as well as make use of videos, television programs, and games that offer accessible and age-appropriate input without replacing direct interaction. Additional strategies mentioned include storytelling and imaginative play,

which expose children to creative and contextually rich language use. Finally, parental enthusiasm and positive reinforcement are quite essential when trying to raise one's child to become a bilingual. Maintaining a supportive, enjoyable learning environment is just as crucial as the quantity of input in keeping children's motivation level and engagement with both languages at a high level. Although my wife and I have both been very supportive and adamant about raising our son to become both bilingual in both Japanese and English, sometimes we have had slight disagreements over the best way to go about doing it, such as whether we should adhere to a strict OPOL policy or not. In addition, as my son has gone to public schools in Japan since elementary school, we have continued to insist that our son do extra English study on his own using online resources so that he can maintain his English ability at a high level. This, as could be expected, has often been met with resistance from him, but my wife and I both believe this is one of the best ways we can support him in his journey to becoming bilingual.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to challenge several common myths that detractors of bilingualism often cite during discussions regarding whether bilingualism is truly beneficial for young children. As mentioned, these detractors are often close family members, but can also be such people as counselors, medical professionals, or even school educators, all of whom are individuals whose authority can often unintentionally amplify such misconceptions. It can be difficult and stressful for parents raising their children bilingually to have others call into question what they are trying to accomplish, especially when there are already many other issues they are facing as parents during the early child-raising stage. The persistence of these myths underscores the need for continued dissemination of research-based understandings of bilingual development, as well as for broader societal recognition that

bilingualism is not a liability but a complex and dynamic asset.

Although the road to bilingualism can often seem to be a long and arduous one full of hurdles that must be overcome, such as self-doubt, inconsistent progress, or obstacles in the child's immediate environment, the resulting benefits to the child can often make such struggles seem trivial in the end. My own experiences illustrate this tension between challenge and reward: I find myself still in the middle innings of the journey to support my son's bilingual development, pursuing an opportunity I was never afforded in my own childhood. Yet it is precisely this contrast that fuels my commitment. By remaining positive, consistent, and purposeful in my approach, I believe my son will be equipped with linguistic and cultural resources that will open doors for him both personally and professionally. These are opportunities that, even now, I can only imagine. In this respect, fostering bilingualism is more than a linguistic endeavor; it lays the foundation for a child's wider intellectual, cultural, and developmental growth.

Author Biography

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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。

From Scratch: Learning to Speak and Cook in Rwanda

Lisa Yanagida

Abstract

This article seeks to connect how language and cooking culture can intrinsically motivate language learners. It explores the dual perspective of a learner of Kinyarwanda also tasked with being an English teacher preparing to teach Rwandan students English.

Context

American Peace Corps Education Volunteers in Rwanda were required to undergo a 3-month training program while staying with a Rwandan host family in Rwamagana. After preservice training, volunteers were assigned to a school where they taught English for two years. This case study describes the experience of a woman in her twenties with no prior knowledge of Kinyarwanda, how her joy for cooking motivated her to communicate in Kinyarwanda with her community, and how she eventually developed a cooking class in English for her students to better motivate them in their English language acquisition.

Beginning from Scratch

*There was a hole in my metal pot. I had burnt a fist-sized hole in my metal pot.
How did that happen?*

My host family was nowhere to be found, and it was my last night before I was shipped off to live on my own as a Peace Corps Volunteer¹⁾ teaching English in Eastern Rwanda. I wanted to bake my mother's fudge brownie recipe as a final thank you for letting me stay with them for three months

during preservice training. Instead, I had a hole... in a metal pot... with half-cooked brownie batter.

I was good at cooking – especially baking! Nothing award-winning, but I was a solid baker... and yet, here I felt like a contestant on the TV show *Nailed it!*²⁾

I had routinely made cakes, cookies, and other baked goods for my friends in high school and college. I had taught cooking lessons at the *Boys and Girls Club of America* with varying degrees of success...

How had a simple brownie defeated me?

The Challenge

Millions of Rwandans cook every day, but for a newly arrived Midwest-raised American, cooking was a challenge. Dropped into another food culture with no language skills, I had dreams of uniting my food nostalgia with my current reality. I felt like an astronaut in some ways – unable to communicate with a craving for real food.

Beyond no language skills, there were no ovens, no refrigerators, no running water, power outages galore, and none of the modern amenities that I was used to back home in Indiana. I felt the closest to being Amish³⁾ than I ever had before. Rwandans cooked without complaint, so I would have to learn to adjust.

There is a huge wealth gap in Rwanda, and there are absolutely affluent people with access to refrigerators, ovens, running water,

etc. I, however, did not have such luxuries, living as an American Peace Corps Volunteer on \$200 a month – a livable middle-class wage in my village of Kabarondo. My job was to teach English at a local high school (Ecole Secondaire Cyinzovu), which meant adjusting to daily life in my town.

The Kinyarwanda language was hugely important in adapting and buying everyday essentials. The Peace Corps Pre-Service training period lasted for three months, and every weekday consisted of language classes while we stayed with host families in an immersive environment. We were urged to greet community members and introduce ourselves, despite feeling like fish out of water.

For two years, we would be expected to live like Rwandan nationals and that meant adapting to a different language environment. Although Kinyarwanda, Kiswahili, English, and French are Rwanda's national languages, languages and dialects differed in locales throughout the nation; for instance, the south had more speakers of Kirundi because of the border with Burundi. My coworker and friend, Bubaka, was from the Congo and also spoke Lingala as well as Kinyarwanda, English, and French. I needed to learn fast to adapt to this new world.

Thankfully, I had a hot plate and a plan.

Learning

In our 3-month crash course in Kinyarwanda, we learned the basics: self-introduction, greetings, numbers, colors, question words, action verbs, conjugations, and how to do infixes in words.

My first Kinyarwanda teacher, Theophile, was all-smiles as he introduced us to basic pronunciation with cultural tidbits to make the lessons more interesting.

My second teacher, Eric, would answer my exhaustive list of questions and helped

me develop a speech I would perform for the Host Family Thank You Ceremony and the Peace Corps Volunteer Swearing-in Ceremony at the American ambassador's house.

My third teacher, Vincent, worked with me to develop my debate skills in Kinyarwanda. Peace Corps staff trained the Kinyarwanda teachers, but because Rwanda had a storytelling and oral tradition, there were not many written resources to study.

Without a Kinyarwandan textbook, I had to learn like speakers in the past. I had to actively engage with community members, listen for new vocabulary, and be direct in my conversations.

My local farmers' market in Kabarondo was on Thursdays and Saturdays at the main square next to the bus station. When I say farmers' market, I don't mean gentrified food stands or food trucks with handheld food. Instead, families would bring their yield of vegetables and fruit to market. Other vendors popped up as well with popcorn, clothes, shoes, wax print cloth (*igitenge*), and various household sundries. Depending on the good, there may be haggling, especially in regard to specialty items. My language teachers, Theophile and Eric, drilled numbers with my Kinyarwanda group for this specific purpose. Role playing as vendors and customers better prepared me to interact in the market. The crowd could be very intimidating with the busy people trying to get your attention and sell their goods, but after gaining experience, I was confident to go alone and get the ingredients I needed.

My host mother, Yvonne, was patient and kind, and, despite the language barrier, I learned how to be resourceful in the kitchen, cut a whole pineapple (*inanasi* in Kinyarwanda), start a fire in the woodburning stove, and cut and peel plantains with oil on my hands (to avoid the sticky residue that would stay on one's hands for days despite vigorous handwashing). We

would often prepare a Rwandan dinner in the outside kitchen area. Through immersive family experience, simple instructions, demonstration, and item identification (i.e. vocabulary building), Yvonne helped build a foundation for my Kinyarwanda. Yvonne did not demand my help preparing food, but I wanted to contribute to the family in a similar way to how I grew up helping my mother in the kitchen.

Trial Runs

I was eager to connect with my Rwandan neighbors, host family, and students. With each interaction, I would explain the food and ingredients in stilted Kinyarwanda and try to connect with them over a meal. My sixteen-year-old neighbor, Fancy, politely tried my spicy Indian curry, but it was much too hot for her taste. Butare, my neighbor who worked as a sewist, tried a chocolate cake and seemed very happy. Natasha, a seven-year-old girl who loved *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle, enthusiastically ate the pancakes I gave her. I was never the traditional Rwandan hostess, but I was slowly adapting to the language while becoming a better chef with accessible ingredients.

My good friend and fellow English teacher, Stephanie, was a tried-and-true baker with the aforementioned DIY oven (known as the ‘Peace Corps oven’). She had a devoted space for her oven and she taught our Rwandan friend, Marcianne, and me how to make pizza calzones. Traditional Rwandan cooking used a charcoal or wood burning stove (*imbabura*), and in order to make a DIY oven, we incorporated the stove and added other creative elements: Two big pots stacked on top of each other with a pocket of space in the middle were placed on the charcoal stove; a smaller pot with the food would be on a raised level inside the two big pots. The raised level was needed to distribute the heat and allow for air to circumvent around the smaller pot of food and cook it. My trial run at my host family’s house had used a brick that heated and

melted a hole in the bottom big pot (the Kaboga family thought the hole was hilarious).

As the months went by, Stephanie and I both had success with Christmas-themed cookies (jam filled shortbread with heart cutouts and one big Snickerdoodle cookie), but we found the most success with quick breads like banana bread. Eventually, we devised a program to share how to make banana bread with our Rwandan students.

Sharing the Recipe

As we prepared for the cooking lesson, Stephanie and I developed our program and navigated buying ingredients in Kinyarwanda while sticking to our budget.

For the actual lesson plan in English, we explained the DIY oven and how to set it up. Female students from local schools (ages 15-19 with beginner/intermediate English skills) were then challenged to build their own oven using the pots and coal stove and prepare the ingredients using English instructions and the banana bread recipe. Due to a low resource environment, the recipe and instructions for the banana bread were written on large unused rice sacks as makeshift blackboards. Students were directed to use English with each other and ask questions if there was a problem. They would then have to clean up and serve the banana bread to their peers at a group meal.

Finally, it was time to taste the banana bread for themselves. Success! There was excitement in the air as the girls enjoyed the banana bread. Because of its similarity to Rwandan *amandazi*, the students were eager to eat it. Many students excitedly wrote down the recipe (in English!) to try again at a later date.

Conclusion

Learning to cook and speak Kinyarwanda in Rwanda was worthwhile because it made me break down recipes and concepts to basics.

For me, Kinyarwanda functioned as a practical language – I didn't learn much abstract vocabulary, but focused instead on what was tangible and how I could communicate basic wants and needs with other Kinyarwandan speakers. Adapting to the linguistic, cultural, culinary, and low resource environment challenged me as I grew to understand Rwandan life. My motivation to learn Kinyarwanda stemmed from my passion for cooking and my need to build a community in Rwanda. By sharing the recipe and making an English cooking class, I hoped to inspire my students and motivate them to learn English.

Key takeaways

- Intrinsic motivation (i.e. passion for cooking) promotes language acquisition
- Interactions and relationship-building in a community makes language more worthwhile
- Bonding over a shared meal provides opportunities for relaxed conversations

Resources

Cox, Betty Ellen, Myra Adamson and

Muriel Teusink. Dictionary Kinyarwanda-English/English-Kinyarwanda

<https://www.scribd.com/document/458395742/English-Kinyarwanda-Dictionary-pdf>

Peace Corps Rwanda Handbook for New Volunteers

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GOVPUB-PE1-PURL->

[gpo67040/pdf/GOVPUB-PE1-PURL-gpo67040.pdf](https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GOVPUB-PE1-PURL-gpo67040/pdf/GOVPUB-PE1-PURL-gpo67040.pdf)

Peace Corps Trainee Kinyarwanda Book Rwanda

https://files.peacecorps.gov/multimedia/audio/languagelessons/rwanda/RW_Kinyarwanda_Language_Lessons.pdf

Notes

- 1) Peace Corps Volunteer: see Peace Corps Rwanda Handbook for New Volunteers for more details.
- 2) A competition baking show with earnest and slightly delusional amateur bakers with dreams of grandeur and very questionable results.
- 3) Amish - The Amish community live separately from modern life and eschew modern technology due to religious beliefs. They live primarily in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Indiana, and Wisconsin. The Amish speak English and Pennsylvania Dutch.

Upcoming Events: JALT PanSIG 2026

As our president mention in her message, the annual JALT PanSIG conference will be held at Chukyo University in Nagoya on May 23 and 24, 2026.

The theme for this year is [Building Language Competencies Through Community](#) – an excellent theme for B-SIG members, as this SIG has, and continues to, thrive on community. The call for presentations is open until January 18, 2026, so contributors and readers, please give it consideration!



PanSIG website: <https://pansig.org/ja/node/184>

