



Bilingual Japan

バイリンガル通信

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The Newsletter of the JALT

Special Interest Group on Bilingualism

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Contribute to *Bilingual Japan*

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

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

Regular Columns

- Consult the description at the top of each of the Regular Columns in this issue.
- Length: 1,500 - 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

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

Dear Bilingualism SIG members!

First of all, we, the Decision-Making Team (DMT) <https://www.bsig.org/officers> would like to thank each and all of you for your support throughout years. The SIG would not have existed without your membership. We all truly appreciate it and look forward to welcoming all our members to join us at the JALT 2019 International Conference at the WINC AICHI, Nagoya City, Aichi, Japan on **Friday, November 1, to Monday, November 4, 2019**. Please consider attending two BISG events at the conference which are Annual General Meeting and the BSIG Forum.

We are happy to welcome Risa Hiramatsu as a new BSIG Newsletter editor and would also like to thank Lance Stilp who has been supporting BSIG for many years as the Newsletter Editor and is currently a website editor of the Bilingualism SIG website.

We would like to thank Midori Ikeda, Aiko Minematsu, and Christie Provenzano for sharing their invaluable experiences with us. I hope you will enjoy reading the contributions by our valuable members

We are constantly looking for new members to join our Decision-Making Team (SIG Officers). Please send your suggestions, questions and proposals related to the BSIG events and activities at alexshaitan@yahoo.com to Shaitan Alexandra. Our team provides support and guidance to new members along with the JALT executive officers. **We are currently looking for an individual who would like to be involved in 'shadowing' our SIG Coordinator to ensure a smooth transition once the current coordinator's term has finished.** We thank you all for your support and look forward to hearing from you.

Wishing you all a wonderful academic year of 2019-2020!

Best wishes,

Bilingualism SIG Coordinator: Shaitan Alexandra

Newsletter Editor's Message

Dear Bilingualism SIG Members!

I hope all of you were able to enjoy the spring vacation and I am certain that you have been busy since the new semester has begun. My name is Risa Hiramatsu and I will oversee editing the newsletter from now on. Nice to meet you all. I am presently a doctoral student at Soka University. I am interested in how to aid students in overcoming reluctance to study English. I hope to be able to contribute to JALT by combining forces with other members of BSIG. Since I'm still not accustomed to what to do, I would appreciate it if I could check with you when needed. I will endeavor to facilitate the publishing of newsletter. I am looking forward to seeing many of you at JALT conferences as much as possible.

Regards,

Risa Hiramatsu, Newsletter Editor

Bilingual Case-Study

ある家庭におけるバイリンガリズム

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

Raising a Bilingual Boy in Singapore, the U.S. and Japan

by Midori Ikeda

This article is about my experience raising my son, Nao (9;0), in Japan, Singapore, and the U.S. My family consists of my husband, my son, and me. We are all Japanese. I was born and raised in Japan. My father spent his younger days in Africa and the U.S. He brought many foreign friends to my house during my childhood, so naturally I have had an interest in other countries and cultures since I was a child. My husband is an engineer and also grew up in Japan. But he had a dream to work overseas someday – a dream which eventually came true, as his company transferred him, with our son and I, to Singapore for three years (2014-2017, during Nao's ages 3;11 to 7;1), and then to San Jose, California, where we are now in our second year.

Although my family is all Japanese, I hoped to raise my child to be a bilingual. This might be because of my own childhood experience learning English. Both of my parents could speak good English, and I wanted to as well. I think my background in learning English led to my decision to raise Nao to be bilingual and bicultural. I tried to expose him to an English environment as much as possible. I read English story books to him, showed him English TV, invited over foreign friends, and organized an English play

group. I collected information about bilingual education from blogs, books, and friends. At the play group, I enjoyed sharing and learning information with my friends who had the same interest. At home, we talk in Japanese but when he watches English cartoons, I talk with him in English. Nao entered the local Japanese kindergarten at age 3;2. He spoke only Japanese there and his friends were all Japanese. But he started to speak Japanese a little later than his monolingual classmates. I think it was because he was listening to two languages at the same time. When he was three years old, he could understand some English words and sentences and speak some simple sentences in English.

Before it became a reality, I didn't imagine we would move to another country. He was nearly four years-old (3;11) when my husband was transferred to Singapore because of his job. Nao and I moved there with him, in January 2014.

Days in Singapore

When we moved to Singapore, Nao already could converse in simple sentences in English. Singapore is a very international country, so we had many options for Nao's schooling – the local

school, an International school, and a Japanese school. I looked around at several schools and decided to enroll him in a local Montessori kindergarten. Although it was a local school, his classmates were very international. More than half of the students were foreigners. Nao mingled in several cultures and had opportunities to hear many languages. The school taught Chinese and Japanese twice a week and the rest of the time the curriculum was held in English.

On the first day of school, he looked nervous and cried a little bit, but on the second day he looked more comfortable. He was still four years-old, so the language barrier seemed not a big problem for him. He had already been exposed to an English environment, and he picked English up very quickly at the school. After a few months in Singapore, he spoke English fluently. He even spoke English at home. Even though my husband and I talked to him in Japanese, his answer sometimes came back in English. We were happy that his transition to our new life was so smooth.

On the other hand, we were concerned about his Japanese. In order not to lose his Japanese, we brought many Japanese books from Japan. I read them every night before he went to sleep. I invited over Japanese friends for play dates. I tried to let him talk with his grandparents by Skype as much as possible. He joined a Japanese soccer club on Saturdays, so he could talk in Japanese with his Japanese friends there. Despite these efforts, his English was dominant and his Japanese didn't improve as I expected. He was talking in English even with his Japanese friends. When he spoke Japanese, he couldn't speak like kids his age and sometimes it was very difficult for me to understand what he was trying to say. His Japanese grammar was like English translated into Japanese. It didn't sound like his native language. So when it was difficult to communicate, I used English with him. But now I regret that. I

should have consistently used Japanese even though it took time to communicate. My husband and I discussed it and we eventually decided to talk only Japanese at home, and not to mix English and Japanese in one sentence. Even though we did this, Nao replied in English.

Learning Chinese Increased Nao's Stress Level

Learning three languages at one time seemed to overwhelm Nao. While his mother-tongue was not established well, he had to learn Chinese and English in kindergarten. That was too much for him. When he was learning Chinese with songs and play, he looked like he was enjoying it. He spoke some Chinese words like colors, numbers, and greetings. We were amazed by his ability to pick up three languages at one time. But gradually the Chinese class was getting hard for him. He started to learn how to write Chinese characters when he was five years old and that was the most difficult part for him. His grip was not strong enough and he felt stress when writing Chinese characters with many strokes. I also took Chinese class for myself and to understand him. But there were not many things that I could do for him to help him learn Chinese.

One day I talked with the Chinese teacher and she told me that Nao was very hard-working but that writing Chinese is very challenging. Sometimes he cried at school because he couldn't do it. I thought that was too much for him. I didn't want him to feel stress at kindergarten. He was still young and kindergarten should be a fun place for him. I didn't want him to hate learning languages. So I asked the Chinese teacher not to push him too much because we are Japanese and we don't expect him to learn Chinese to the level of a Chinese expatriate child. I just wanted him to enjoy. So, we decided to focus on only English and Japanese.

Nao's Native Tongue Improves at Japanese Elementary School

Nao spent two years at the local kindergarten. He made many friends from different countries and thanks to him, I also made friends from several countries. It was a good experience for him and my family. But soon we had to choose which elementary school he should go to. Again we had many options – the local school, International school, or Japanese school. The International school's curriculum was very attractive but we thought it was important to build his mother tongue at an early stage. So we enrolled him in Japanese school at age 6;2. That turned out to be the best decision. His Japanese developed dramatically and he could think deeper than before. He made many Japanese friends there and was exposed to the Japanese language. I remember one day he told me, "Recently I'm forgetting how to talk in English. I have to think when I talk. English words don't come out like before." I could tell his speaking fluency in English was receding but I felt his reading ability was improving. He was maturing mentally, and his ability to comprehend and think in his native tongue had grown, and I think that helped his ability to process written English as well.

His daily homework from school included *ondoku*, which is reading a Japanese textbook aloud. That was the most effective way to develop his reading and speaking ability. At school, he had chances to go to the library once a week and was encouraged to read Japanese books. His favorite book was the Kaiketsu Zorori series. It was still difficult to read by himself, so we read them together. He improved his writing in Hiragana, Katakana and Kanji.

At home, I helped him with his Japanese homework, and in order to maintain his English he took English class twice a week as an after-school activity. It

was focused on reading and writing. And he had a conversation for 20 minutes in English by Skype every day. At first, he was shy to take on-line lessons because he doesn't feel comfortable to speak with a teacher he has never met. But he gradually got used to speaking with several teachers living in several different countries. He could choose a different teacher every day but tried to book his favorite teacher. Most of them are Filipino. We were excited when he talked with teachers who live very far away, such as South Africa or Serbia. Every time he talked with a teacher from a country he didn't know, we checked the map together where the teacher lives. That was the fun part and I think it motivated him to talk in English. He had many play dates and sleepovers with English-speaking friends. So he still had chances to speak in English. It seemed to be working well -- keeping both languages. Then, nearly a year after Nao entered elementary school, my husband was relocated to the U.S.

A New Life in San Jose, California

This was another challenge for our family. Before we went to the U.S., we had to go back to Japan to apply for a visa. We spent two weeks in Japan waiting for a U.S. visa approval. Those were very precious days for us. We spent time with my friends and Nao experienced much authentic Japanese culture. He tried *shodo* (Japanese calligraphy), *ikebana* (flower arrangement), and learnt what was then popular among Japanese children. He had to skip his formal Singapore school while we were waiting in Japan, but we had quality time as a family.

After our visa was approved, we went back to Singapore and then moved to the U.S. in April 2017 (Nao was 7;2.) Initially, we were too busy getting settled in our new life and I could not spend much time helping Nao's study. We checked the school's rating and parents' reviews on the Internet for his new school. Then we chose

an apartment which was close to my husband's office. Nao's school was automatically decided because of the school district system. He started to go to the local school.

On the first day, he looked very nervous and shy, but when I picked him up, he was smiling and looked very happy. He talked about his classmates and teacher. I was very happy that he settled in so smoothly. He didn't have any problem with language. Education in Singapore is quite advanced. So he felt very easy and relaxed in the U.S. Because of this, we could spend more time for Japanese study at home. Kanji was getting hard and *sakubun* (writing an essay in Japanese) was very challenging for him. As for English, he reads two English books every day and does the homework given from school.

Nao's Achievement in English

Now he goes to local school from Monday to Friday and Japanese school on Saturday. In March of 2019, he will be mid-3rd grade at the local school and will finish 3rd grade in his Saturday Japanese school. According to his teacher's comments, his reading level in English is a little below the standard for 3rd grade. But he is making good, steady progress considering he has only been in the U.S since 1st grade. His reading skill is progressing but he still struggles with the comprehension aspect. He possesses a lot of great information to share and good ideas, but sometimes struggles to organize his thoughts on paper. I can see the same problems in Japanese. He consistently demonstrates understanding for listening and speaking, math, social studies, and science, but is having difficulty with writing and describing his opinion. He enjoys reading books in English. He likes the series of Captain Underpants, Diary of a Wimpy Kid, and he just started Harry Potter. A reading app called Raz Kidz is a really good method to increase vocabulary

and get knowledge. By reading books he is learning by himself. So I think he is doing well in English and happy about his achievement at the local school.

Pace of Japanese School Instruction Quickens

On the other hand, Japanese study is now getting very challenging for him. His listening and speaking is not too bad but writing and reading is a little behind. The school covers Japanese curriculum using same text book as in Japan. But it's only once a week. That means the teaching speed is very fast and parents are expected to help students at home. School gives him a lot of homework like *ondoku*, *sakubun*, Kanji practice, and workbook assignments. Kanji and *sakubun* are the most challenging for him. So every morning he practices Kanji before he goes to local school and he keeps journals in Japanese every night to improve his writing skill. Before he goes to bed, I read him a Japanese book and he reads me English books. It's become our daily ritual. We enjoy teaching each other. He prefers reading English books to reading in Japanese because his vocabulary and Kanji is limited. Therefore, he has to ask me many times how to read Kanji and what the word means. He needs *furigana* (phonetic reading of Kanji characters) when reading Japanese books. His reading level is behind for his age. He is now in Japanese 3rd grade but 3rd grade story books are difficult. He enjoys reading 1st to 2nd grade books. His favorites are still *Kaiketsu Zorori* series and *Doraemon* comics.

On Sunday night my family watches a *Taiga* drama (a Samurai drama) together. It is good not only for listening to Japanese but also for knowing about old Japanese culture. Nao is very interested in Samurai and Japanese castles, so when we went back to Japan we visited Matsuyama Castle and he was very excited to see a real castle. Even though he has been raised

abroad most of his life, he admires and is proud of Japanese culture. He loves Japanese food. And he is hoping to go back to Japan one day.

Conclusion

Nao has been exposed and immersed in different cultures and languages since he was four years old. Thanks to these experiences, he naturally developed a respect for other languages and cultures. His friends are now all over the world and that is going to be a big motivation to study English. Even after he goes back to Japan, I'm sure he will keep studying English in order to keep friendships with his friends abroad.

Postscript – Suddenly Moving Back to Japan

After submitting this article in early 2019, we received an offer from my husband's company to relocate back to Japan. So my family will go back to Ibaraki, Japan, in March. It's the same place we lived before our move to Singapore. Nao will be in the 4th grade in the Japanese local primary school. I actually wish to see his progress in English here in the U.S. a little bit more. The first few months might be difficult in Japan to settle in. But I believe his Japanese will catch up soon and maintaining his English will be our next challenge.

Bilingualism through the Years: Resources of a Successful Bilingual Adult

by Aiko Minematsu

The Beginning: 1988

I still recall my first year of living in Chicago. I was seven years old then, but I have a very clear memory of my experiences from that time. These memories are particularly strong about the first few months of living there, probably because I had to navigate by myself at school without any knowledge of the English language or American culture, and as a result, I was on a high alert of what was going on around me at all times. I remember that feeling of utter confusion and being at a loss and how exhausting it was at first, and it still brings back a really dark feeling inside me when I look back on it. However, I also remember the times when I started to make sense of the English language and how that helped me to grasp the world around me. I remember small things starting to click. The following are some of the resources that have helped to make such connections in my mind throughout my childhood, and then also ones that have continued to help me to not only maintain the language, but also grow as an adult.

Elementary School

1) Disney's storytelling picture books series with audio (at home)

Since I was a small child, I have loved reading books. I started to “pretend to read” around three years old, and I started reading books in *hiragana* on my own from around the age of four. My parents would also read to me every night before I went to bed. Yet, even though my mother was a high school English teacher before we moved to the U.S., I don't remember her reading to me in English. Instead, I remember that soon after we moved to Chicago, when I was around seven years old, she bought me a set of Disney picture books that each came with a “story-telling” audio. Each cassette tape (It was in the late 80s then!) had a recording of a “story teller” reading aloud the picture book, and there was a magical sound (or at least it sounded magical to me at seven years old) at the end of each page, so I could understand when to turn the page even if I couldn't read the text. I had a few dozen of the books and audio, and I loved them so much that I would listen to the audio and “read” the books over and over again. The more I listened to them, the more I could begin to make sense of how to read the text and how the sounds in the

English language worked. I remember noticing features of the language and thinking things such as “So the ‘k’ in the word ‘know’ is silent,” or “The stories usually start with ‘Once upon a time.’”

Looking back, the series was a very effective source of language input for me because it gave me phonetic and orthographic input with ample visual aid to understand the content of the story. Some of the stories were classics, such as “The Three Little Pigs” or “Little Red Riding Hood,” so I could make sense of the stories using my background knowledge. I also think this helped me build confidence and gain self-efficacy as an English learner (or reader) as this let me pretend to read, although I was actually just turning the pages by using the sound as a hint. I think this feeling that I could actually become a reader in English helped to construct my identity as an English user, especially because I had already loved reading in Japanese and being able to read on my own was a major part of who I was. When I think about both language acquisition processes, I learned reading Japanese in the same way that I learned reading in English. I pretended to read picture books and then went on to read children's novels. I had a collection of novels and I

remember devouring them all at around age 5 or 6.

After consulting my mother, she says that I started to “pretend to read” around age three, and started reading books in hiragana on my own from the age of four.

2) ESL materials (at school)

The school district I belonged to had a well-established ESL program. I remember I had ESL lessons twice a day for the first six months; one lesson was with two Korean girls whose English was a little better than mine, and the other one was a one-on-one lesson with only the teacher. I remember doing a lot of vocabulary-building activities with my ESL teacher, such as word search puzzles, crossword puzzles, or vocabulary-coloring worksheets.

I remember that I did not especially like going to ESL lessons with the other students because the girls tended to show off their superior English skills and told me they didn’t want to talk to me because I was Japanese. (I understood their message even if I didn’t understand the language completely). In addition, because I was pulled out of the classroom, I always felt like I was being reminded that I was not good enough to join the regular class with my classmates. I do, however, think that the activities helped to increase my knowledge of basic vocabulary. I think those were helpful because I was able to learn the vocabulary systematically in units and categories or by theme. We didn’t use any particular textbook, but I do remember binding the vocabulary worksheets after each theme or unit, so that I could take them home. For example, one theme would be “transportation” and my teacher would show me cards with pictures and words such as *school bus*, *cargo train*, *motorcycle*, etc., and then we would go over the collocations of the words, such as *go on*, *ride*, *take*, etc. I think learning the collocations with the vocabulary was very effective and helpful for me because it not only helped me to

use the newly learned words, but also because it made me aware of how the English collocations were very different from how they worked in Japanese (for example, *noru* would be used for mostly any type of transportation in Japanese). And, contrary to my previous comment, I now wonder if learning with the two Korean girls actually helped me gain accuracy in not only learning collocations, but also other grammar points. I still remember whenever they made fun of my English or pointed out my mistakes, it made me more determined to learn them.

In addition to this, I also think the ESL activities worked well for awareness-raising, because I remember that I would start noticing the language points that my ESL teacher taught me in people’s daily conversations, in the regular classroom, or in reading. I remember that I would often compare English and Japanese in my mind as I noticed the similarities and differences, and being fascinated with how the two languages were different, but at the same time, also similar. For instance, I remember noticing English words that sounded like Japanese words, such as “people,” which to me sounded like the Japanese onomatopoeia for the sound of the ambulance siren. Whenever my teacher asked the class, “How many people...?” – as she raised her hand, I had to keep myself from smiling. It was like a bilingual joke that only I could understand, and I remember enjoying those small moments in my mind.

3) Reading Rainbow videos (both at school and home)

The TV program *Reading Rainbow* was one of my most favorite children’s TV programs then, probably because I loved to read. The program is a short book-reading show for kids and it introduces one children’s book in each show, with the narrator reading aloud the book as the pictures from the book come up on the screen. I remember we sometimes watched this at school, but my mom found them on

VHS (still in the late 80s!) at the local public library. My mother is the type of person who is always determined to find any resources available in a given situation, so I think she made sure to actively seek out any materials that would help me. And since she was an English teacher in Japan, I think she was (and still is) genuinely interested in how my sister and I learned English. Thus, it seems natural that she often took us to the public library and we spent time there.

Now that I look back, the Reading Rainbow program is strikingly similar to how the Disney storytelling picture books were structured, and I think it was effective in the same way that the Disney books were. They were similar in that they both had a story-telling narrator who read aloud picture books, and in the TV program, the way the pictures from the book were displayed on screen looked as if the viewer was reading it, instead of using animation. So, the viewer could feel like they were actually reading the physical copy of the book. I think this element of “pretend reading” or “imaginary reading” was a big factor in how I learned to read, or to become an autonomous reader. Also, the program had kids comment on the theme of the story each time. I remember seeing kids with Asian facial features in the program and feeling a sense of familiarity to them. Looking back, this probably also helped me to build my identity as an English user or speaker, as I remember thinking, “There’s an Asian-looking girl like me speaking in English on TV!”

4) Other Media

Finally, some other media I feel helped me with my English throughout my elementary school years include books by Roald Dahl and *The Babysitter’s Club* series and TV shows such as *Full House* and *The Cosby Show*.

Junior High School and Beyond: Back to Japan

During my time in Chicago, there were two main strategies for learning Japanese that my parents applied. These included having an “Only Japanese” policy at home, as well as attending a Japanese school on Saturdays to catch up with my studies. The Saturday school that I went to in Chicago was a “Ministry-accredited overseas school,” which means that the school follows the curriculum guidelines set by the Ministry of Education, Sports and Technology (MEXT) in Japan. This also means that the curriculum was not designed to cater the needs of children who are living overseas, but more “packaged” so that whoever came from a Japanese school could continue learning the same material. The Saturday school, which was specifically for children who went to local schools on weekdays, is like a concentrated version of the regular curriculum. We had two subjects, Japanese and Math, and we used the same MEXT textbooks that a public school in Japan would use. I remember we had three hours of Japanese classes and two hours of Math classes. We were given loads of homework to make up for the materials that couldn't be covered in class. I don't think the school really helped me in maintaining literacy but it helped me to keep in touch with the Japanese school culture. For example, we had school events like Sports Day (*undokai*) or Tanabata Festival. In addition, I also went to a Japanese cram school to prepare for the junior high school entrance exam during my last year there.

Even still, by the time my family returned to Japan, I felt completely comfortable using English, but I had no confidence in using Japanese. As a result, coming back to Japan and starting junior high school felt extremely challenging. I enrolled in a private junior high school for girls where one-third of the student body were “returnee” students like me, so the bright side was that I did not feel much struggle adjusting to school life. However, I did feel like my friends who grew up in Japan talked really fast, and since they had

passed high level entrance exams in Japanese subjects (language arts, math, science and social studies), I felt their knowledge in Japanese was totally beyond mine. None the less, I did try my best to catch up with them and the following resources helped me.

1) “Kanji contest” at school

The junior high school I went to had a kanji test called “the kanji contest” six times during the school year. Students were given a kanji workbook to study from and it was completely for self-study. The kanji in this book were at a high-school to university level, so I would classify it as being advanced. We were expected to study about two hundred kanji for each contest and the test had fifty questions. This consisted of twenty-five questions where you had to write the actual kanji and another twenty five where you had to answer how to read them. Since there were twelve hundred kanji in the book, we would go through the entire book in one school year. Thus, by the time you were in your last year of junior high school, you would be in your third round of the same kanji book.

During the time I was in Chicago, I had to study kanji at my Japanese school, but I hated studying it because I was not invested in it at all. I did not see the purpose of learning so many kanji, nor did I know how to learn them. It seemed endless, not to mention tedious and extremely unenjoyable. Thus, the kanji contests were my worst enemy in my first year of junior high and I dreaded having to take the tests. My “returnee” friends were basically in the same boat as me, so we always complained and found consolation in each other because we all tended to only get 30 to 40 percent correct at best. However, because my non-returnee classmates had studied kanji for their entrance exams, they were easily getting 90 or 100 on the same tests. I remember being shocked at my friend’s comment

after asking her how she studied for the kanji test; she told me that she didn’t really need to study and she took a quick look at the book before the test because she had learned most of them already. Talking to my friends made me realize that I wasn’t getting low scores because of the lack of my Japanese competency, but rather because I had just never really studied kanji diligently before. Thus, from my second year of junior high, I spent a lot of time studying for the kanji contest, and I started getting 90 to 100 each time. This helped me tremendously with my subject studies because kanji is the basis of Japanese academic skills. I could feel myself thriving more and more in all my classes since then, and to this day, I feel the kanji that I learned through “the kanji contest” helps me get by in Japan. Most of the “returnee” friends I still keep in touch with agree that the “kanji contest” helped to boost their literacy and confidence.

2) Study guides (sankousho/ 参考書)

After a year of being back in Japan, I had gotten used to speaking in Japanese with my friends and teachers, and I had gotten a grasp of how to learn kanji, but what I struggled with the most was the Japanese that was being used in my classes at school. I felt like the teachers changed how they spoke when they were teaching (to change the tone or the register) and I felt like I could never completely understand what was going on in class. Because I had “returnee” friends at school, we always shared how we studied the subjects in Japanese, and one friend told me about study guides that are available for each subject, corresponding to whatever textbook we were using in class. There are many different kinds depending on the textbook and subject. The main ones that still exist are called *Kyokasho Gaido* (教科書ガイド), literally meaning “Textbook Guide.”

My parents let me buy the study guides from a bookstore, so I read them before and after the classes, then reviewed and

memorized most of the material before exams. The study guides explained key concepts of each textbook unit in detail, so I could understand what the teacher was talking about in class. After I began using the study guides, I realized that I was having trouble understanding the teacher in class because they were usually using formal register when teaching and spoke in a different way than they normally would in a conversation. In Japanese secondary schools, teachers are usually trained to use honorific language (*keigo*) in class. Most of the teachers in my junior high taught with a teacher-fronted lecture style, and there was no chance to ask questions during class, as asking questions in class would indicate questioning the authority of the teacher. This teaching style as well as the formal register, such as the honorific language or simply the way the teacher talked in class, was something that was very unfamiliar and strange to me.

Being able to read the content helped tremendously in comprehending it despite these anomalies and I could focus better in class, and I could digest the major ideas of the class at my own pace through reading. Also, if there were any words or kanji I did not know, I could ask my parents or look it up in the dictionary. Since note-taking is a major part of studying in a Japanese secondary school, this helped me in my note-taking as well. I also discovered that some teachers probably used the same study guide to prepare their lessons and just read out the study guide (which raises a whole other issue about education – but for another story!).

3) English

Coming back to Japan and adjusting to secondary school life was challenging, but what was even more challenging was maintaining and improving my English skills. I remember feeling terrified with the thought of losing my English ability. This was partly because English was the sole medium of communication with my friends in Chicago, and also because I had

invested so much time and effort in achieving proficiency in English. Because I had had the experience of “losing” my Japanese language ability in the U.S., I knew from experience that I would easily lose my English ability if I didn’t use it. Thankfully, my parents enrolled me in a private junior high school with a “returnee” program, so almost half of my classmates had spent time in an English-medium elementary school outside of Japan. Most of the “returnee” students I was close to wanted to use English, so we kept a group journal in which we would take turns writing our thoughts in English (and occasionally in Japanese). We also used to converse a lot in English, but I think we gradually spoke more in Japanese because we didn’t want to exclude other “non-returnee” classmates.

Although the “returnee” and “non-returnee” students were separated into different classes for English lessons at my secondary school, the English lessons were not very challenging for me and I remember being even more determined to keep improving my English skills on my own. Because I loved to read, I tried to read as many English books as I could. It was still in the 90s, so it was hard to get hold of books in English, but I consider myself very lucky because my school had an extensive collection of English books in the school library. There wasn’t much guidance on how to choose good books, but through trial and error, I managed to find books that were at the appropriate level and of interest to me, and this was how I got hooked on reading books by Agatha Christie. I had always loved reading mysteries, but I remember finding her style of writing in British English and the cultural aspect of the stories fascinating. They were in English, but it was as if I was unearthing a whole new world.

After reading a good number of books by Agatha Christie at age 15 (grade 9), I set a goal for myself to read all of her books

before I finished high school. I shared this goal with one of my English teachers who was British, and he helped me achieve this goal by adding more Agatha Christie books to his class library. I found out later that he had actually asked a used bookstore in the U.K. to stock any Agatha Christie books, and paid for them and carried them back to Japan himself every time he went back to the U.K. He also confessed to me that he couldn't get reimbursed for the books because they were secondhand, so he had paid out of his own pocket. He must have carried and paid for at least a hundred books to Japan for me, which I am forever grateful.

With the help and support from not only my teacher but also my friends in Chicago, who sent me books they were reading for school, and my parents, who let me buy whatever English books I could find at Kinokuniya in Shinjuku, I was able to constantly read in English. I remember reading whenever and wherever I had the chance to, mostly during my hour-long train commute and in class (mostly English classes). Looking back, I think it was mostly the fear of losing and forgetting English that drove me to read so ferociously, but it definitely helped me improve my vocabulary. I remember utilizing the vocabulary learning strategies I had learned in my elementary school in Chicago to learn new vocabulary through reading. I also gradually developed my own strategies for learning new words, which I later realized was a mixture of incidental learning, inferencing, paraphrasing, and spaced repetition.

I also wrote to my friends in Chicago often. We would send each other letters and pictures, and it was always exciting to find out what high school life was like back in the U.S. and to explain to my friends what my life in Tokyo was like. I also remember longing to “go back” to what felt like my other home in Chicago, and again I was very lucky to be able to visit my friends for two weeks during the summer in my first year of high school. I

remember going to summer school with them and seeing all of my old friends and even getting to know new ones, and also feeling relieved that I could still keep up with their conversations and studies. I even remember helping my friends with their summer school homework and experiencing a type of culture shock in how the school subjects were taught in a totally different way from my school in Japan.

Resources Now

It's been thirty years since I first moved to Chicago with my family and was initially submersed in another language and culture. It still feels as though I am juggling two very different worlds within myself and constantly trying to maintain balance between English and Japanese. It gets exhausting at times, particularly when I compare myself to monolingual “native speakers” because I feel I can never meet their standards, in neither English nor Japanese. However, I am finally learning to find a comfortable balance for myself and at the same time, strive to be more proficient and eloquent in both languages. The following are some of the resources that help me now as an adult.

1) Reading novels, articles, web pages, etc. (both in English and in Japanese)

Since I've always loved reading, this is still my most helpful resource for maintaining both English and Japanese. I constantly have two or three books to read, either as a paperback in my bag, digitally in my phone, or on my Kindle tablet. I read for pleasure, I read for research, I read online news sources, etc. I try to keep a balance of both languages, whether I am reading for pleasure, for research, or for getting information. I think it is most helpful when I am doing research, as Japanese and English have very different materials available. It helps me to gain different perspectives and ideas for my work.

2) Texting with friends (both English and Japanese)

In addition to texting in Japanese, I also text with my friends in the U.S. almost every day. When we were younger, after I left Chicago, we used to write each other as pen pals and send air mail at a monthly pace. Thanks to the digital age and the Internet, however, now we can use SNS and various other means to talk about our respective lives in Japan and the U.S. regarding miscellaneous topics ranging from the weather and politics, to education and daily life in general. I also find texting a good resource for being exposed to “real-life” vocabulary. In addition, it’s usually short, so it’s easy to pick up one new expression or phrase, and I can refer to it later. I also text a lot with my Japanese friends as well, and I still come across unfamiliar kanji that my friends use, so it is a good resource for me to also learn even more kanji!

3) Netflix (in English)

Although I don’t necessarily see this as a language resource, I do watch a lot of TV shows and movies in English for pleasure. I rarely watch Japanese TV (maybe only the morning news), and now that I am reflecting on this, I realized that I probably pick up new slang or content/context-specific vocabulary from the different TV series that I watch on Netflix. For example, I remember I learned a lot of legal terms while watching *Suits* or medical terms while watching *Grey’s Anatomy*!

Final Comments: (People and Place?)

In addition to reflecting on the resources that have helped me to grow as a bilingual person, I can say that there were a few other key factors that have been essential in this process, and may in fact be considered resources.

Firstly, my parents have always been positive and engaged and active in my learning throughout my life. I would not

say that they are “Tiger parents,” or overbearing, or put pressure on me; but rather that they have helped to direct me in a way in which I could positively grow, based on my learning style. Through writing this reflection, I have realized how lucky I have been to have parents who are open-minded and are adult bilinguals themselves. The ways in which they acquired English are different from me, yet I feel they understand the struggles and frustrations that come with being bilingual. Also, my mother, who is an English teacher as well as a researcher in Applied Linguistics, has a deep understanding of the complex processes of second language acquisition. I realize now how we have worked as a kind of team in order to understand this process of my becoming a bilingual/bicultural individual. She would often ask me how I was processing English or Japanese in my mind and explain to me in simple terms what I might have been experiencing. I think this gave me a meta-awareness of how I was learning the languages and the ability to track my own learning at my own pace.

Secondly, as I’ve mentioned throughout, I have maintained relationships with my childhood friends and still communicate with them regularly. This is true for the various other groups of friends that I have had throughout my education as well, from my returnee classmates in junior high school, to my college friends and those in graduate school. This maintenance of friendships and continued communication has helped even now with my language development. As I move around to different positions at work and in various international contexts, I am comfortable and flexible with communication across different domains. To me, language learning has never been solely about the language, but about the people I can have access to through the language and the relationships I can build with them. Without these relationships, I am certain I would never have been able to invest so much time and effort in acquiring,

maintaining, and improving both my English and Japanese.

Finally, I've been fortunate enough to have been placed in educational settings that are internationally-minded and supportive of bilingual/bicultural students. When I look back on the teachers I have had throughout my life, I can only feel a sense of deep gratitude. My ESL teachers at my first year in Chicago never gave up on me even though I didn't speak a word of English for the first six months or so. The regular classroom teachers evaluated my abilities beyond my English skills and praised me for my efforts, telling me that I was a "bright" student. From the teachers back in Japan who showed understanding of the lack in my Japanese skills to my English teacher who always made sure I had enough English books to read, I could never thank them enough. I think this

sense of gratitude also motivates me to keep using both English and Japanese in various ways in my adult life, because I see it as a way to give back for the support my teachers have given me by paying it forward to those who may be in need.

My journey of living in between two different languages and worlds began unexpectedly thirty years ago, and there has no doubt been many ups and downs. Through my reflection, I have realized once again that the insecurity, frustration, and turmoil that came with becoming bilingual are all intertwined in the joy of it all, and they are all woven together to create this rich and colorful in-between world which I live in. I am deeply thankful for my family, friends, and teachers who have supported me in this journey.

***Bukatsu* vs. Bilingualism?**

by Christie Provenzano

For many families in Japan “to *bukatsu* or not to *bukatsu*” is NOT a question. It is generally assumed that children will choose a school club (*kurabu katsudo* or, shortened, *bukatsu*) as they enter junior high school, and it is expected that they will stick with it through the thick and thin of their entire tenure in secondary school.

A custom with deep roots, club activities are variously thought to help students bond with each other as they work towards common goals, to prepare students for the rigors of adult working life in Japan, and to provide a place for students to blow off steam and relax – a counter-weight of sorts to the heavy burden of academics (Cave, 2004). *Bukatsu* are also valued as a way to keep children busy with wholesome activities so they stay out of trouble. These are solid ideals, but, as many students, teachers, and families will agree, there are downsides as well. Clubs demand a huge amount of time from students and the teachers who supervise them, are infamous for bullying incidents, and can limit students from exploring other interests (Kittaka, 2014, 2018).

All families must weigh those pros and cons, but families who aim to develop bilingualism and biliteracy have another factor to consider – time for language learning. Here is a little background on my own situation: while my husband and I are both Canadian, our two daughters were born in Japan and have lived here all their lives. We have been grateful for the opportunity they have had to develop native Japanese skills through their education in the Japanese school system, but we have also prioritized developing balanced skills in English. In our English-speaking home, oral English skills have come naturally, but the quest for literacy in English required us to supplement the Japanese public school curriculum with English homeschooling after school and an English literacy learning circle on weekends, with the requisite (substantial) time commitment. Therefore, we weighed

very carefully the decision to join school clubs or not.

As our eldest approached junior high school, we began to poll families in our neighborhood to find out about the time commitment and pressures involved with *bukatsu* in junior high because we had come to understand that school clubs in Japan worked very differently to the various clubs and teams we had been part of in our own Canadian school days. We learned that the *bukatsu* at our public junior high school with the most flexible schedules were culture-based clubs like art or the *housou-bu* (announcement club), which had fewer weekend and summer meetings. On the other hand, most sports clubs and the brass band club generally met both before and after school, all day on Saturday, and often for half days on Sunday. They also had rigorous summer schedules.

Like other foreign parents in Japan (Kittaka, 2014), the demanding time schedule alone concerned us. First and foremost, we were already finding it difficult to find time for English homeschooling and the learning circle’s Saturday meetings as the demands of school homework increased. Furthermore, on a family level, we had always prioritized evening meals together and greatly valued the leisure time we spent outdoors, camping, and hiking on weekends and holidays. We worried that our precious family time – rare enough as it was with both of us working and the children busy with schoolwork – would be obliterated.

Furthermore, our family has always spent every summer in Canada. Although some might view that habit as a non-essential luxury, we have always felt that it has been of great importance in helping our children know their roots – their family, language and culture – especially when they are continually labeled *gaijin* (foreigner, or literally “outsider”) in the land of their birth. In talking with neighborhood families about missing summer *bukatsu* practices, however, I was warned that doing so would leave our children “benched” for important *bukatsu* events – apparently, students who miss summer practices for sports or brass band *bukatsu* are generally not allowed to participate in sports games/music recitals as regular members. I imagined that it would be very painful for our daughters to be excluded in that way, but as a family we were not willing to forego the summer visits to Canada.

On the other hand, we were concerned that our children would be marginalized socially if they did not join *bukatsu*. To learn more about this, we reached out to some older students in our neighborhood to find out what the social atmosphere was like for students who did not join *bukatsu*. We learned that it was relatively common for students at our children’s school not to join. Some children were from families who simply wanted their children to have more free time; others devoted a great deal of after-school time to *juku* (cram school); still others were involved with private after-school activities not offered at school, such as ballet, piano or soccer. I mentioned to our “consultants” that our older daughter was a swimmer, and they said that students involved in sports not offered as *bukatsu* at our school (swimming, for example) could still represent the school at meets. Reassured that the girls would not be terribly ostracized, and that they would still have an opportunity to take part in extra-curricular activities, in the end we decided

together as a family that they would not join *bukatsu*.

And so, their junior high school years passed, *bukatsu*-less. We enjoyed our daily family dinners at a reasonable hour. We spent summers in Canada. We continued our Saturday learning circle and after-school English literacy activities. The children made friends at school, some of whom joined us on our treasured camping trips and other outings. In my view, things went very well. However, it has been interesting to listen to hear the girls’ reflections on living through junior high with no *bukatsu*.

Now, several years later, they look back on those days from very different perspectives. They both decided to leave the Japanese school system after junior high because they both had their sights set on attending university in Canada – our elder daughter is now finishing up her first year at university there, in fact. With that goal in mind, it made sense to spend their high school years at an international school, where they could get used to more rigorous academic work in English than our homegrown English learning circle could demand. Now well on their way down that path, I asked them to reflect on our decision not to join *bukatsu* in junior high school.

On the one hand, they feel that the decision to prioritize our work at home on English literacy helped them to make a smooth transition to the international school in terms of academics. They both agreed that if we had not made time for English literacy, the transition would have been much more difficult, if not impossible. They have also both expressed appreciation for the activities they experienced in their junior high school years during times when they might otherwise have been involved in *bukatsu*. Those include: outdoor activities on weekends; gaining Red Cross lifeguarding

and first aid qualifications; attending, later volunteering at, and finally working at a beloved summer camp in Canada; and doing volunteer work and going on exchange trips to foreign countries with a local NPO. They have both remarked that those experiences helped to give them practical and leadership skills, a wider worldview, and an ability to think more critically.

On the other hand, they both have said that while they were in the thick of things at junior high school, they envied the close friendships of groups of students who were spending so much time together during club activities. They occasionally felt at loose ends with free time on the weekends when none of their friends were free to spend time with them. Although our older girl was able to become close friends with an informal group of students who swam on behalf of the school at district and city meets, our younger daughter had to rely on classmates rather than clubmates for her friend group. Furthermore, she loved to play volleyball in gym class at junior high school and even now wishes it had been possible for her to join the volleyball *bukatsu*. After moving to the international school, she joined the volleyball team (it has a more western-style practice schedule) and has enjoyed it so much that she regrets not having had the chance to develop her basic skills more fully in junior high school.

In addition to hearing my daughters' own reflections, I have heard from other parents (both Japanese and non-Japanese), as well as from my own university students in their written journals or class discussions, about the happy, important experiences enjoyed by children in secondary school *bukatsu*. Their stories have helped me understand better why a student and his or her family might decide to devote so very much time to a school club. At the same time, however, I frequently hear that some families have had to make a choice

between *bukatsu* and the pursuit of bilingualism. For many (but certainly not all) families, there simply isn't time to do both. I conclude that it comes down to priorities, and they are different for each student and each family. An Australian fellow in our neighborhood has sons who share their father's love of rugby. Some years ago he spoke to me with regret that their English skills had made little progress, but it was clear that they were passionate about rugby and were exceptionally talented at it. It is natural that pursuing that passion was their priority, and they both were deeply involved in the rugby *bukatsu* throughout secondary school, going on to play at a high university level. Taking that path opened many doors for those boys. In our case, we prioritized family time, English literacy, and diverse experiences, which was the right choice for us, leading to different sorts of open doors for our daughters.

If some changes to the *bukatsu* system could be made, I think there would be room for a happy medium. The benefits of teamwork, camaraderie, and learning the mentorship skills important in Japanese society could surely still be gleaned even if clubs met less frequently, say, three or four times a week rather than six or seven? Furthermore, a reduced meeting schedule could lighten the load and stress levels of supervising teachers, many of whom are currently required to work many hours of unpaid overtime at the risk of their own health and personal relationships (Osaki, 2016). A freer schedule could allow families to pursue other interests with their children. For the readers of this column, that might mean time for English literacy learning or cultural activities, while for other families it could mean time for a different sport or cultural experience. So far, however, it seems that proposed changes aim to provide more help for overburdened teachers rather than an

overall reduction in student hours spent in club activities (Tsuboya-Newell, 2018).

Families who want to prioritize the development of bilingualism and biliteracy may choose the same path we did, or they may find another combination that works for them. Ultimately, however, each family must make a decision that suits the family's values and priorities as well the desires of each family member, as far as that is possible.

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Bankole, Abidemi T. - Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University

Hofmeyr, Ana Sofia - Kansai University

Wang, Hui Ling - Morioka University

The following is a summary of some of the responses from the 2018 JALT National annual BSIG forum. If you are interested in becoming involved either as a panellist, writer, or audience member, contact Mandy Klein at mklein@jcmu.org.

-Lance Stilp, Editor

Presentation Title and Summary

How is it that highly proficient multilinguals came to be so? Whether they began learning a second language in youth or adulthood, some have achieved extraordinary levels of proficiency in their second languages. However we conceive of language learning, bilingualism or multilingualism is the ultimate aim of second language learning and teaching. This forum aspires to showcase the personal narratives behind the theories.

Self-Introduction

Ana: I was born in Portugal, from Portuguese parents, the oldest of three children, and raised completely in Portuguese. When I was in fifth grade, I started taking English lessons, which I continued through the end of high school. In Portugal, most children are encouraged to learn at least two foreign languages at school and the classes are taught in that foreign language, so I also studied French. Even though both my parents worked as English teachers, we never spoke English to each other at home. However, as I was growing up, my family hosted an exchange student from the U.S. and my dad travelled abroad occasionally, so I became very interested in different cultures. I had the opportunity to spend a few weeks abroad when I was 14½ at my cousins' house in the UK, and to go on a host family programme to the US for a year when I was 17. The combination of all these experiences really helped me to engage actively with English from a young age. After I graduated from

university, I went on to complete a Master's Degree in Scotland, where I met my husband, who is from South Africa. From then on, my life was increasingly led in English, even after we moved to Japan in 2010. I did not know any Japanese at that point, but I felt motivated to learn and I feel fairly comfortable with it these days. We now have a daughter who is 3 years old and with whom we use English, Portuguese and Japanese at home.

Hui Ling: Hi everyone and thank you very much for coming to listen to our panel forum. First, please let me introduce myself. My name is Hui Ling Wang, and I am from Singapore. I am Chinese Singaporean. I first came to Japan, to Iwate Prefecture, as a JET ALT in 2007. I was an ALT for five years. After the JET Programme, I taught part-time in various places before joining Morioka University full-time as an Assistant Professor in September 2016, where I am now. My husband is Japanese and we have three children. My native language is English, because English is the

main language used in Singapore. But Mandarin Chinese is also my native language, because as an ethnic Chinese I can speak Mandarin.

At this point, I have to explain a little about the language situation in Singapore. There are three main ethnic races in Singapore, namely the Chinese, Malays, and Tamils. English is the first language in Singapore and the language medium in schools and businesses. The mother tongues of each of the three races are known as the second languages, which is a subject that students take in school, much like the role English has in Japanese schools. As such, most Singaporeans are bilingual or multilingual. A Chinese Singaporean would likely be bilingual in English and Mandarin Chinese, a Malay Singaporean would likely be bilingual in English and Malay, and an Indian Singaporean would likely be bilingual in English and Tamil. On top of the two languages, some Chinese Singaporeans might also speak a Chinese dialect. Hokkien and Cantonese are the most commonly spoken Chinese dialects in Singapore. Of course, there might also be Chinese Singaporeans who are not fluent in Mandarin Chinese, or Malay Singaporeans who are not fluent in Malay, and so on. The current situation is that English is taking over all the other languages, so students are getting weaker in their mother tongues, and are even using English to learn their mother tongues, like Japanese students using Japanese to learn English. There are also Malay or Indian Singaporeans, for example, who can speak Mandarin Chinese, especially if they studied Mandarin Chinese in school instead of their mother tongue, because it is possible to choose the mother tongue you want as a subject.

My third language is Japanese. I studied it as a hobby for one year while working in Singapore. After I came to Japan, I continued to self-study it and took the JLPT as a motivation to study Japanese.

All these three languages are very much present in my current life. I use English in my job and with my foreign friends, and family and friends from home. I use Mandarin Chinese, too, with friends and family from home, and also with friends from China who are living in Iwate Prefecture. I speak to my husband in Japanese, and use it in my daily life in Japan, but with my kids, I speak to them in English only. I have also taught Chinese using Japanese, for two years in a high school. So I used my third language to teach my second language.

Abidemi: As a child, I acquired both Yoruba and English. French and Japanese came later in life, from studying at school and on my own. For some years, I taught in French at a middle school, and I was able to improve my Japanese skills to be at roughly the N2 level of the old JLPT test while working as an ALT in Japanese public schools. Reading and language immersion are two elements that have proven invaluable to me in learning languages.

My linguistic journey began in Nigeria, where I was born. Nigeria has four official languages: Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, and English. I'm from the Yoruba speaking region, and so I learned it as a child at home and from those in my surroundings. Since education in Nigeria mainly takes place in English, which is also the lingua franca due to the plenitude of ethnic groups and languages, I was schooled in English from kindergarten. In

addition, English is the language of business; it's important for professional and even social success. Therefore, at one point my parents tried to enforce an English-only rule at home so that us children would learn it better. However, and to their consternation, this rule did not stick. But this actually turned out to be a blessing in disguise once we moved to Canada.

Just as I neared the end of my time in primary school, my family immigrated to Canada. Canada has two official languages, French and English. Since we moved to an English-speaking province, our linguistic surroundings were completely transformed overnight into English. Consequently, the only source of Yoruba input was my parents. So, it became evident that it was an advantage that we had not gotten into the habit of speaking only English at home, or we would have lost Yoruba. Therefore, I was able to maintain my Yoruba language skills by practicing with family, and watching movies and listening to music in Yoruba. Unfortunately, not all of my siblings have been able to retain this language. There is a significant decrease in ability going from the oldest to the youngest, as those who spent less time spent in Nigeria speak it a lot less than those that lived there longer. I'm the oldest, so I have been able to maintain by using it with family members, and by being immersed in the language again during my almost yearly visits to Nigeria. However, I am not as fluent in it as say, my parents, or cousins who grew up in Nigeria. For example, Yoruba has a lot of proverbs and idioms that I'm not familiar with because I'm not often exposed to them.

As Canada has two official languages, I was required to study French as a second language at school, even though I lived in an English-speaking province. This was quite difficult for me at the beginning because I lacked foundational skills which peers had gained at the beginning of elementary school. Consequently, I lagged behind in French throughout elementary and high school. It was not until university that I would catch up, and not because of the French classes in which I enrolled. The improvement was a result of two governmental immersion programs that allowed me to study for short periods of time in Quebec, the French part of Canada. Additionally, after graduating from university, I went to work and study French in Montreal for one year. These immersion experiences boosted my ability in French tremendously, and helped fill the [lacuna → gap? I don't think most readers will understand the word "lacuna"; I myself didn't know it.] in my skills. As a result, I became fluent enough to work in French, and for two years I taught in French at a middle school in northern Quebec. Moreover, the experience of studying French in school and on my own really helped me discover the best approaches of learning languages for me. I realized that regularly reading in the target language, and having ample opportunities for immersion, were the best means for me to learn. These two ways also made the process of learning Japanese smoother.

Sometimes I joke with friends that an effect of learning Japanese is that as the language entered into one ear, it pushed French out the other! For it seems that as my knowledge of Japanese has gradually increased, my knowledge of French has gone in the opposite direction. This is due

to the fact that I have very limited exposure to French in Japan, and that I stopped keeping up with it. On the other hand, I studied Japanese almost on a daily basis in my first few years in Japan, and I was constantly exposed to it. Knowing the benefits that reading and immersion could bring from my experiences learning French, I employed these two approaches/modes extensively to improve in Japanese. While working as an Assistant Language Teacher (ALT), I had adequate time to devote to reading and studying the plethora of school newsletters and reports which landed on my desk in the staff room. During breaks from classes, I would look up vocabulary and kanji that I didn't understand, and was able to gradually build up my knowledge of kanji and vocabulary that way. I also studied grammar textbooks, and tried to practice grammar in conversations with the Japanese people around me. Participating in homestays allowed me to be fully immersed in Japanese for short periods of time, and helped me develop listening and speaking skills. Homestays also helped me to quickly learn the norms of Japanese family life, and deepen my knowledge of the culture.

Right now, I'm not actively studying any languages. But I've managed to retain the ones I speak to different degrees. Although my French is rusty, I occasionally use it when I meet tourists from France. To my surprise and delight, they often compliment my accent and pronunciation. Japanese is a bit easier to keep up with because I'm still living in Japan, and I'm surrounded by the language. But I'm best at listening, when compared with speaking, reading, and writing. I use Yoruba at home with my

family, or when I travel to Nigeria to visit. I sometimes watch Yoruba movies, or listen to music in the language, to stay current with it and the culture. However, my main language is English. I use it daily, at work with students, colleagues, friends, and sometimes even with family.

Q1 When did you first consider yourself to be bilingual?

Ana: Oddly enough, for me the notion of being bilingual came through legitimisation by an outside party shortly after I moved to Japan in 2010. I had been speaking English, studying in English, and leading my life in English several years before I moved to Japan, but I had never thought of myself as bilingual. Also, while my boyfriend at the time (now husband) had been offered an English teaching position, I did not have a job and I did not feel that I was good enough to become an English teacher. Searching for an English teaching job in Japan, when I had just moved here, was a difficult time for me – there were plenty of opportunities, of course, but all of the job ads asked for “native speakers”, so I honestly thought I would not qualify and I would not apply. After nearly a month and a lot of encouragement by my husband, I finally decided to give it a try despite the odds. I got an interview almost immediately, was interviewed by an American teacher, and was soon after offered the job. That was the turning point for me – I thought, here is this American teacher who thinks that I am good enough and that my English is good enough, so I guess it must be. And that is when I thought I was probably bilingual.

Hui Ling: This year I published a paper on the definitions of bilingualism which says that various linguists have offered different

definitions. So, bilingual proficiency appears to occur on a spectrum, or a range. At the lowest point, you could say you are a bilingual if you can say 'Hello' in two languages, or you could only be considered a bilingual if you are of native level in two languages. But there is also the problem that it is hard to judge who is the so-called native speaker or what is considered the native level. So, in my conclusion in the paper, you are a bilingual if you think that you are, because it takes confidence to claim so, and the person with that confidence should be given the benefit of the doubt. Therefore, my personal view of what bilingualism is the personal definition of the self-proclaimed bilingual.

I think I'm bilingual from maybe the first year of primary school in Singapore. I remembered that I realised that 'English and Chinese are different languages, and I know both'. Also, I realised at that time that there was a thing called beauty of both the languages used in literature and that I also understood the nuances and cultural differences of both languages.

Abidemi: For me, bilingualism is not only about language. It's also about one's identity, self-perception, way of thinking, and understanding of different cultures. For instance, how well is an individual able to navigate between different (language and cultural) identities? How comfortable are they in different linguistic and cultural groups? Can they move fluidly between different communities? For example, although I'm not as fluent in Yoruba as my cousins, I still feel very much Nigerian and Yoruba. I feel comfortable in that culture, and have a sense of belonging – certainly because I'm ethnically Yoruba. Furthermore, I'm able to distinguish

between Yoruba cultural norms, and Japanese, French, and English Canadian ones. Even though I don't have linguistic mastery in all these languages, I feel comfortable in each culture, and can navigate among the different people groups.

I considered myself bilingual sometime after moving to Canada, and noticed that I was thinking and dreaming in both languages without consciously trying to switch. Oftentimes, I would not even remember which language a thought had occurred in, because I had the linguistic capacity to express myself in both.

Q2 What did you feel contributed to your language learning the most?

Ana: When I was growing up, both my parents were English teachers and they used to use English as a secret language at home when they did not want me to understand what they were saying. That was my biggest motivation to learn the language from a young age! I started looking at picture dictionaries, learning English at school and eventually moved on to watching movies and reading longer stories in English (all the while pretending I did not speak or understand much, although I was eventually caught). I also enjoyed simple video games, so I somehow ended up playing a lot of games that built up my vocabulary throughout the years. When I finished junior high school, I spent a couple of weeks in England with some British cousins, and when I graduated from high school, I spent a year in the U.S. with a host family. These experiences, along with the year I spent in the UK during graduate school, really contributed to my language learning. However, I think that without that initial strong motivation and random

vocabulary building, I could not have made use of that time abroad as we well as I did.

Hui Ling: I cannot take any credit for this. I think I have to give credit to the Singapore education system and the bilingual environment and society. The history and racial makeup of the society, and the brilliance and efforts of the political leaders then, when Singapore had just become independent, made Singapore a highly proficient bilingual society. Besides the fact that both languages are taught in school, they are also used in daily life everywhere in Singapore. Singaporeans do code-switching a lot, and it is rather uniquely Singaporean (which is why there is the development of the colloquial English called Singlish). I believe that the difference between language study in Japan and in Singapore is that in Singapore, you get to practice the languages you learnt in school in everyday life, with family and friends. Because almost everyone is bilingual or better, you get to practice both languages. Informally in society you can use the colloquial forms of both languages, but in school you learn the formal and correct grammatical usage of the languages. So it is a great country that truly embraces bilingualism and multilingualism.

Besides this, I also have to give credit to the way my parents brought me up. My father had a relatively well-off family when he was younger, so he was sent to English-based schools where the medium of instruction was in English. My mother went to Chinese-based schools. (At that time, Singapore was not yet independent, and there were both English and Chinese-based schools. A few years after independence, the government decided to do away with the Chinese-based schools, which further strengthened the role of

English as the first language in Singapore.) Therefore, my parents decided to raise us using the one-parent-one-language style. My mother spoke to us in Mandarin Chinese only, and my father spoke to us in English only. After some point, in primary school maybe, this was so instilled into me that it would feel weird if I were to speak to my parents in languages other than the ones they assigned. Up until today, my brothers and I still speak to our mother in Mandarin Chinese and our father in English. Our parents are the ones that tried to change their languages instead! My mother sometimes tries to speak to us in English because it is after all the main language used by the younger generation, but we would always reply in Mandarin. My father would sometimes try to speak to us in Chinese because he wanted to join in conversations we have with our mother, but we would always reply in English!

I strongly believed that this helped me a lot in becoming good in both languages. My grades for both languages in schools were often better than many peers. Also, because I felt very fortunate to have been raised this way, and see the tremendous benefits, I am also using this method of raising kids with my Japanese husband.

A third contribution to my language acquisition, I have to say, is an awareness of my skills and the power of being bilingual or multilingual. In Singapore I don't stand out for being bilingual, but when Singaporeans get out of the country, we do realise how lucky we are. For example, in the JET Programme, I meet JETs from English-speaking countries and also JETs from China. People around are often amazed that I can converse and connect so well with both groups of people. With learning Japanese, it is a realisation of

the need for survival, because I like to be very independent, like not even relying on my husband to bring me to pregnancy medical check-ups, or not relying on the JTE to explain grammar in Japanese. I also want a variety of entertainment in my life, so there is motivation to learn Japanese to understand movies, dramas, etc.

Abidemi: As I mentioned in the sections above, reading and language immersion have really helped in my path of language acquisition. An important component I can add is to use one's interests. That is, doing the things you find interesting to learn another language. For instance, I chose to read in French and Japanese because I already enjoyed doing so in English. So I chose books, magazines, and websites that were interesting to me in the languages I wanted to learn. In the same vein, participating in language immersions allowed me to travel and meet people from different cultures – things which I normally enjoy – while developing my skills in the target languages. Finally, online language apps have also played a big part in keeping me from getting bored, and keeping me motivated.

Q3 How do languages shape your identity? What do you answer when people ask you “Where are you from?” or “Who are you”?

Ana: After spending so many years abroad and living in seven different countries, this is actually a very difficult question. My identity definitely changes, at least partially, depending on the language I am speaking, who I am with, and where I am. When I am in Japan, people see me as Portuguese although that is probably my weakest

“identity” while I am here, since I speak English most of the time and Japanese otherwise. When I am in Portugal, I also do not feel completely Portuguese, because I notice the cultural gaps that have grown between myself and my family, but I certainly behave in a more Portuguese way. If you ask my family, on the other hand, they will tell you that I have become Japanese. So, if people ask me where I am from, I'll tell them I am from Portugal but I also emphasise the fact that I have lived abroad for nearly half of my life now and that for that reason they cannot think of me as typically anything. I suppose I have found some space to integrate into my identity bits of culture that I have assimilated from the places I have lived in and from the cultures I have been exposed to in-depth. My daughter has recently turned 3 years old. She is officially Portuguese-South African, but she was born and raised in Japan. Japanese is her mother tongue and, culturally, she is already a combination of many different identities. I believe the question “where are you from” will be even more complex for her than it is for me, but that does not mean we do not know who we are. It just means that inside of us there is a multitude of complex identities that take a bit more explaining.

Hui Ling: Because Singapore is multilingual, I think the culture is halfway between a westernised modern culture and a traditional Asian culture. Speaking English makes you feel open-minded and relevant and speaking Mandarin makes you feel rooted to your racial identity and connected to your personal history. Although times change, especially with China rising in terms of the popularity of

Chinese pop culture, speaking in these languages might evoke different feelings over time. However, for Singaporeans, the blend of both languages, which is Singlish, is the language that might make us feel truly Singaporean.

To give an example, at a huge JET national seminar, talking to JETs from English-speaking countries make me feel like I am a part of the English-teaching JET group, but I can also break away from the group and join the Chinese JET group, who welcome a breath of fresh air.

With the incorporation of the Japanese language, I developed new identities as a foreigner in Japan, or even more specifically, as a Singaporean in Japan, and later, as a foreign wife in Japan, and after that as a foreign mother in Japan. I embrace these different identities easily and wholeheartedly, just like anyone has to embrace their social roles as a woman, a sister, an employee of a company, and so on.

Another anecdote is about a party I hosted with Chinese and American friends and their Japanese spouses and children. One Japanese friend was observing in amazement as I switched among three languages with different friends. The more different I am, the more special I feel, and I love that. It makes me more confident and prouder of my individual identity.

One more thing I should add here is about the identity of Singaporeans as NSs of English. I wrote about this topic in my master's thesis, and while Singaporeans are not always recognised as NSs of English, most would be considered so according to many research definitions of the definition of NS, and the identity crisis of whether I am considered a NS or not sometimes pops up. English-speaking ALTs wonder whether I teach English or Chinese and Chinese ALTs praise my Mandarin-

speaking abilities. At a PLL3 Conference I attended last year, one plenary speaker said that being multilingual is sometimes seen as a disadvantage, which is exactly what I feel, that being bilingual before coming to Japan is sometimes seen as being jack-of-all-trades, but master of none, which shouldn't be what a bilingual should feel.

Abidemi: I think the process of learning different languages has helped me develop into a more confident person. My identity is more multifaceted because it's informed by different cultures. In terms of identity, I believe I am Yoruba and Canadian – English speaking. But on top of these two parts are traits that come from being a French and Japanese speaker. Having access to these languages gives me greater appreciation for these and all cultures. I'm able to understand others better and see things from various perspectives. My life's been enriched through the experiences I've had with people from all over the world.

Audience Question #1: How do you plan to approach your own children's education?

Ana: It's a trial-and-error process, really. At first, we were quite flexible with language use, often using English, Portuguese, and even Japanese, as our daughter saw fit. She was quite small and we felt that it would not work to enforce strict rules. A few months ago, Japanese clearly became her predominant language. This, in itself, is not a problem, but we felt that the only reason she was not using English was because she knew we could understand her either way. So we started using English almost exclusively and took a break from Portuguese. In the last few weeks, her

English developed very quickly, so I am slowly starting to introduce some Portuguese again. This balancing approach is working for now, but I guess we will only really know the results in a few years. The most important thing, however, is that she feels that she can communicate with us, so we try not to restrict her to one language. We do not want her to feel that there is a barrier, resenting or even rejecting any of the languages we are exposing her to.

Hui Ling: So my three daughters are aged six, four and two. From their births, I have been using the one-parent-one-language method. My husband can understand some English but doesn't speak it much. I speak to him in Japanese and my children in English only. My children see and hear on a daily basis that I speak Japanese to my husband but I make sure they find it difficult to have communicative access to me if they attempt to speak to me in Japanese. I throw in Mandarin phrases now and then, but I have quickly decided that it is too difficult to manage two languages on my own with the kids. I am also influenced by my parents who, although they spoke to their parents and siblings in their respective Chinese dialects Hainanese and Hokkien, decided not to speak to my brothers and I in any Chinese dialects, for fear of confusing us. (My parents were also influenced by the government policy then not to allow Chinese dialects in schools or the media so as to consolidate the languages of the Chinese race into one language, Mandarin.)

Thus, because of my parents' style of language upbringing, I believe that I should not be too ambitious with the children's language acquisition. Also, my husband is also worried that the kids would confuse Japanese kanji with Chinese

characters. (Regardless, I sigh everyday knowing that it is a waste that my children are not learning Mandarin, one of the most difficult languages in the world to speak.)

I have bought and brought over many English books and English learning materials from Singapore, and will probably continue to do so, although many English learning materials available in Japanese are excellent as well. I also have Chinese books and materials also from Singapore, and will still try to incorporate them whenever I can. One thing good about language learning materials from Singapore is that some are bilingual in English and Chinese, so they're perfect for my children.

My eldest daughter is rather fluent in English, and other Singaporeans comment that she has a Singaporean accent! My second daughter is still struggling with speaking to me in English, and she often tries to get away with speaking to me in Japanese as much as she can. I do recasting a lot, because I know that it's not because they don't want to speak in English, but because they can't. My eldest daughter sometimes speaks to me in Japanese as a joke, and this is exactly what I want to achieve, which is for them to feel that it is weird if they speak to me in Japanese. When my eldest was born, I gave her a ton of input in the form of books, CDs, and me singing and talking to them. I got much less motivated and less energetic with the other two daughters, which I think explains why their level of English is lower than their eldest sister when she was at their ages. My youngest daughter is just starting to speak, but I hear only audible Japanese words for now.

For as much as possible, I hope to pace my daughters' English learning journey with their peers in Singapore, but it is proving more and more an uphill task. I

think the Eiken Test is a good goal for elementary school children here, but I will take things slowly as my kids get to that age.

Audience Question #2: How high do you consider your Japanese ability? Are you at the level where you can implicitly understand without having any issues?

Ana: I feel that my Japanese language ability is now good enough that I can have my life here without feeling nervous every time there is a more complicated issue to sort out. When I came to Japan, however, I could not speak or read at all. At that time, because I was so dependent on visual cues, I think I acquired a general sense of what people meant or implied without necessarily understanding what they were saying, and that ability has stayed with me until today. In my case, though, I really think this was a skill that developed somewhat independently to my Japanese language acquisition process.

Hui Ling: I passed the N2 level of the Japanese Language Proficiency test after three tries (failed 2-kyuu twice), and failed the N1 level in 2010. After that I stopped taking it because I was busy with my master degree studies. I consider my Japanese ability to be of an advanced level, where I can write work documents in Japanese, set English exam questions in Japanese, teach Mandarin in Japanese, explain English grammar in Japanese, listen to and contribute to group discussions in Japanese seminars, review a Japanese research paper, and, have conversations with the doctor in the clinic and with my husband! However, despite all this, I would say that I'm a trilingual, but still learning Japanese. Although I can do all of the above tasks, my Japanese would still have plenty of

mistakes, and I expect other Japanese speakers to cut me some slack because I am after all a non-Japanese, but I would not think that I'm any less of a trilingual.

