

Minority Language Ability and Perceived Ethnic Identity of Mixed-Ethnic Youths in Japan

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This study examines the minority language (ML) ability and perceived ethnic identity of 31 youths of various mixed-ethnicities in Japan. More than half of the youths surveyed speak the ML of their non-Japanese parents. Those who have lived abroad or whose ML is English tend to have ML abilities. Many participants feel close to their *haafu* (mixed-ethnic) identity, regardless of their ML ability. However, youths who do not speak the ML tend to base their *haafu* identity on more extrinsic factors, i.e., visible markers of their “otherness” such as their physical appearances. In contrast, many ML-speaking youths consider more intrinsic factors such as their ML ability, values, and identity hybridity as reasons for feeling close to their *haafu* identity. Some participants also consider themselves to be Japanese because of their inability to speak the ML. These findings suggest that ML ability affects how mixed-ethnic youths construct their *haafu* identities and the development of their identity.

本研究は、日本における親の一方が少数派言語を使用する 31 名の若者の少数派言語能力と民族アイデンティティへの意識をアンケートにより調査した。その結果、調査対象者の半数以上が少数派言語を話すことができる。特に、海外在住経験者や英語が少数派言語である被験者が、少数派言語能力をもつ傾向があった。また、多くの被験者は、少数派言語能力と関係なく、ハーフのアイデンティティ意識が強く、少数派言語が話せない被験者は、外見などの外因性要因により自身のハーフのアイデンティティを構築する傾向があった。それに対し、少数派言語が話せる被験者のハーフアイデンティティ構築は、少数派言語能力、価値観、ハイブリッド性のあるアイデンティティなどの本質的な要因に基づいていることが明らかとなった。また、一部の被験者は、日本語しか話せないため、日本人のアイデンティティが強いと感じていた。本調査結果からは、少数派言語能力はハーフのアイデンティティ構造と発達に影響を与えることが示唆された。

In Japan, the existence of mixed-ethnic children can be traced back to early

historical records between the fifth and the eighth centuries (Okamura, 2017). The influx of European and Chinese traders into Japan from the mid-16th century also led to mixed-ethnic births. Mixed-ethnic children were first known as *ainoko* (betweeners) in the late 1800s and later as *konketsuji* (mixed-blood children). The latter term is closely associated with the offspring of U.S. military men and Japanese women in post-war Japan (Fish, 2008). The term *haafu* (from the English word *half*) emerged in the late 1960s to describe a person of half-Japanese and half-foreign parentage (Okamura, 2017). An extension from this term is *kuootaa* (from the English term *quarter*), which describes a person who has one non-Japanese grandparent. The more positive-sounding *daburu* (from the English word *double*) was later introduced, but *haafu* remains the most common label. Despite the negative connotation of its original meaning, *haafu* has been redefined positively. It is widely known and adopted by mixed-ethnic individuals because it gives them a recognizable identity (Murphy-Shigematsu, 2006).

Mixed-ethnic children are an increasingly recognizable group in Japan due to the uptrend in international marriages in the past two decades. The compilation of statistics from 1995 to 2018 by the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare (2020) indicates that nearly one in 50 babies born annually in Japan was a mixed-ethnic baby. Those born between the late-1990s and mid-2000s, when international marriages were most frequent, have already reached adolescence or adulthood. Mixed-ethnic individuals potentially play important roles in Japan's diversification, specifically in challenging the prevalent ideologies of linguistic and cultural homogeneity. However, to what extent are mixed-ethnic children brought up with their dual heritages? As teenagers and young adults, do they speak the minority language (ML) and identify with their mixed-ethnicity? This study surveys mixed-ethnic youths to determine their ML ability and perception of their ethnic identity.

Minority Language Ability of Mixed-Ethnic Children and Youths in Japan

Parents' ML use has far-reaching implications for a child's language development and psychological well-being. As the native language, the ML benefits language development more than the societal language, which is the non-native language of the minority parent (Hoff et al., 2020). Parents' use of the ML leads to their children's greater ML use and proficiency in adulthood and the feeling of belonging to the minority community (Dewaele et al., 2020). When minority children speak the ML, they have close and cohesive relationships with their parents (Tannenbaum & Howie, 2002; Tseng & Fuligni, 2000). ML fluency also affects the degree to which children respect

their parents, arguably because the ML fosters greater understanding and respect for the minority culture (Boutakidis et al., 2011).

However, despite the benefits of ML use, not all parents choose to speak the language to their children. In Japan, whether a mixed-ethnic child acquires her non-Japanese parent's language seems to depend on the ML concerned. The socio-economic benefits of having high-level English skills probably encourage English-Japanese bilingualism. Nakamura (2019) shows how the perceived advantages of high-level English literacy for getting into better schools and studying abroad motivate English-speaking parents to foster their children's English-Japanese bilingualism and biliteracy. Even non-Japanese parents from non-English-speaking countries, e.g., Thailand and Iran, may prioritize their children's English learning over that of the ML (Nakamura, 2016, 2020).

Bilingualism involving MLs of lower prestige is more challenging. ML acquisition may not be supported in families where the non-Japanese parent is from an Asian country. While Japanese mothers-in-law may put some effort into learning their Western daughters-in-law's language and culture, they probably expect Asian daughters-in-law to learn Japanese and assimilate into Japanese family life (Ishii, 2010). This problem is exacerbated when non-Japanese women must raise their children in an extended household with Japanese in-laws who disapprove of their exogamous marriage to their Japanese sons (Nakamura, 2020). Such social barriers are not unique to Japan. Southeast Asian mothers in South Korea face similar challenges in speaking the ML at home (Park, 2017).

Non-Japanese parents also tend to negatively evaluate their ML. In Nakamura (2016), a Thai mother expressed her fear of using Thai in front of her parents-in-law and her children's teacher even though she was never reproached for doing so. A Thai-Japanese mixed-ethnic youth in Nakamura (2020) relayed how her mother never taught her Thai because it was perceived to be useless in Japan. Studies by Ishii (2010) and Jabar (2013) also report that the ML was never taught to Japanese-Filipino and Japanese-Thai children. Non-Japanese parents' negative evaluations of their ML may even lead them to speak only Japanese to their children from birth (Nakamura, 2015). Even when parents initially speak the ML, they may gradually switch to Japanese, particularly when in the presence of Japanese speakers. In Nakamura (2016), Thai mothers spoke Thai only privately at home because of the pressure to assimilate into what they perceive as a linguistically homogenous society. Such a practice may make assimilation into mainstream society easier, but it reduces the children's ML exposure and does little to promote a positive image of the language. Given these parental attitudes, it is no surprise that only 20.2% of children in Japanese-non-English

exogamous families speak the ML, as compared to 39.2% in Japanese-English exogamous families (Yamamoto, 2002). Other studies indicate that most mixed-ethnic children whose ML is not English are monolingual Japanese speakers (Ishii, 2010; Jabar, 2013).

When mixed-ethnic children cannot speak or understand the ML, and their non-Japanese parents lack Japanese ability, it can become difficult for them to have deep discussions with each other, which potentially impacts the quality of their relationship (Kuramoto et al., 2007). Ironically, when non-Japanese parents speak only Japanese, their children may complain of their parents' lack of Japanese competency, which possibly makes their parents feel guilty and inadequate (Ishii, 2010; Kuramoto et al., 2007). A lack of ML ability also prevents mixed-ethnic children from communicating with ML-speaking family members in the non-Japanese parent's home country. Consequently, they may be treated as "Japanese" children by their relatives (Ishii, 2010). In adulthood, mixed-ethnic children may regret not learning the ML. Many mixed-ethnic youths interviewed by Nakamura (2020) described their lost opportunity to acquire the ML as *kenyashii* (regretful). In adulthood, some of them requested that their non-Japanese parent teach them the ML or enrolled themselves in ML classes to claim their linguistic heritage. Conversely, mixed-ethnic children who have a good command of their ML are likely to appreciate their bilingualism. The English-Japanese bilingual adolescents in Kamada (2010) were highly aware that their English skills could be advantageous for their future. One participant even implied that it would be a shame if mixed-ethnic children grew up without knowing an additional language.

The Identity of Mixed-Ethnic Children and Youths in Japan

A developmental approach is useful for understanding ethnic identity construction in mixed-ethnic individuals, given that their experiences in childhood and adolescence are likely to shape their ethnic identity. Jean Phinney's Ethnic Identity Theory is an often-cited model for studying ethnic identity development in adolescents, which may help examine identity development in mixed-ethnic youths. According to Phinney's (1989) three-stage model, ethnic identity development begins with an unexamined identity, which is characterized by an acceptance of the mainstream culture's values and attitudes. Following this initial stage is a stage of identity exploration, which usually involves discovering more about the minority culture. The optimum outcome of an identity search is an achieved identity. In this final stage, there is a clear, secure understanding and acceptance of one's identity.

Previous studies in Japan suggest that many mixed-ethnic children are at the first

stage, i.e., they have yet to examine their identity. The 30 Japanese-Filipino children (ages 8 to 16) in Almonte-Acosta (2008) saw themselves as “Japanese” and their mothers as “Filipino” because Japan was their country of birth and the Philippines that of their mothers. They also regarded themselves as Japanese because of their Japanese-like appearances and native Japanese ability. Being ashamed of their Filipino mothers’ “un-Japanese” appearances and lack of Japanese ability, they were reluctant to reveal their mothers’ identity to their teachers and peers. The eight Japanese-Filipino children (ages 10 to 12) in Jabar (2013) also saw themselves as “Japanese.” The fact that some of their Filipino mothers, Japanese fathers, and even teachers regarded them as “Japanese” based on their Japanese-like facial features and mastery of the Japanese language strengthened their Japanese identity. While they acknowledged their half-Filipino parentage, their lack of Tagalog ability and knowledge of Filipino culture indicated their detachment from a Japanese-Filipino mixed-ethnic identity. Likewise, Ishii (2010) observed that Japanese-Thai mixed-ethnic children (ages 8 to 21) who were exposed to neither Thai language nor culture considered themselves “Japanese.” Some of them concealed their mixed-ethnic identity or even rejected it.

The 13 youths (ages 15 to 25) of various mixed-ethnicities in Oikawa and Yoshida (2007) also initially perceived themselves as Japanese. They typically reacted in one of three ways. “Unique Me” individuals did not see their mixed-ethnicity as central to their identity and wanted to be accepted as individuals. “Model Biethnic” individuals enjoyed being associated with positive stereotypes of mixed-ethnic people, such as being better-looking than monoethnic people. Youths in the “Just Let Me Be Japanese” category wanted to be treated like everyone else and did not see themselves as different. However, society’s imposition of stereotypes and expectations later compelled them to rethink their identity. Social reflection, or “the way in which the individual is recognized and labelled by others,” is a powerful element that influences identity choice (Murphy-Shigematsu, 1997, p.24), so a growing awareness of the difference between self-perception and others’ perceptions may initiate a search for one’s identity.

Oikawa and Yoshida (2007) identified three factors that play a role in mixed-ethnic identity development: type of ethnicity, family structure, and living environment. Those who could pass as Japanese may not reveal their mixed-ethnicity. Divorce alters the family structure, so mixed-ethnic children who grew up with the Japanese parent tend to associate themselves with a wholly Japanese identity. Lastly, the kind of community the family lives in and the type of school the children attend also influence their identity. Those who live or attend school in a cosmopolitan area where many other mixed-ethnic children are present may be more accepting of their mixed-ethnicity than those who do not (Yoshida & Oikawa, 2012).

However, children's ML ability probably plays a critical role in identity development. Language is the most basic cultural skill that allows individuals to assert their membership in a group (Murphy-Shigematsu, 1997). Also, as Dewaele et al. (2020, p. 14) point out, "speaking a minority language is distinctive; speaking the majority language is not." Mixed-ethnic children who can speak the ML are arguably more aware of their differences from their Japanese-speaking peers (Yoshida & Oikawa, 2012). The ML helped Japanese-Western mixed-ethnic adolescents in Kamada (2010) to acquire a better understanding of their mixed-ethnic identity. They saw themselves as advantaged and privileged because of their English proficiency, which they knew was useful not only for passing English examinations, but also for gaining intercultural access to information, knowledge, and literature that their Japanese peers did not have. Additionally, they felt that their mixed-ethnicity allowed them to forge close mixed-ethnic friendships and have more choices and employment opportunities. The way the Japanese-Western mixed-ethnic adolescents valued their mixed-ethnicity in Kamada (2010) contrasts with how Japanese-Filipino mixed-ethnic children and adolescents surveyed by Almonte-Acosta (2008) and Jabar (2013) considered themselves to be "Japanese" because they looked "Japanese" and spoke the Japanese language well. The difference between their states of identity perception seemed to depend heavily on their ML ability. The status of the ML is another important factor, but as Kamada (2010) argues, even marginally placed mixed-ethnic children benefit from knowing an additional language and using it to forge relationships with friends and family in the home country and access cultural knowledge not available to their Japanese peers. Therefore, regardless of the status of the language, the ability to use the ML would provide valuable linguistic and social capital for identity development.

The Scope of This Study

It can be worrying when mixed-ethnic children do speak the ML and do not acknowledge the minority part of their ethnic identity. ML ability is crucial for parent-child communication, and a clear idea about one's identity can contribute to a positive self-image and higher self-esteem (Abu-Rayya, 2006; Phinney, 1989). The issues of ML and identity of mixed-ethnic children are still underexplored in the Japanese context, particularly for those with Japanese-African mixed ethnicity. In this paper, we examine the extent to which youths of different mixed-ethnicities speak the language of their non-Japanese parent. We also seek to understand how they perceive their ethnic identity and the factors that affect their ethnic identity perception.

Method

The second author, a mixed-ethnic individual, used her social network to recruit participants with one Japanese and one non-Japanese parent. Mixed-ethnic children may include *kuootaa* or those born between a Japanese national and a Japanese resident of Korean or Chinese descent who has lived in Japan for generations, but they will not be the focus of our research. In total, 31 mixed-ethnic youths living in Tokyo and Kanagawa participated in this study. Consent from the participants was obtained for their participation in this study. Their details are shown in Table 1. Real names are not used to protect the participants' privacy. Instead, they are assigned code names based on whether they are non-ML-speaking (M) or ML-speaking (B), feel closer to their Japanese (J), *haafu* (H), or non-Japanese identities (N) (i.e., their non-Japanese parents' identity), and have lived abroad (A) or only in Japan (J). For example, MHJ-5 is a non-ML-speaking (M) participant who feels close to his *haafu* (H) identity and has only lived in Japan (J). Out of the 31 participants, 11 (35.9%) of their non-Japanese parents are from Asian countries, nine (29.0%) are from African countries, five (16.1%) from North America, three (9.7%) from Europe, two (6.4%) from South America, and one (3.2%) from Australia. The composition of nationalities reflects the different possible mixed-ethnicities in Japan. Fifteen participants are male (48.4%), and 16 (51.6%) are female. The majority of them have a Japanese mother and a non-Japanese father ($n = 24$, 77.4%). Seven participants (22.6%) have non-Japanese mothers. The higher proportion of participants with non-Japanese fathers does not represent the demographic trend in Japan of more non-Japanese women marrying Japanese men than the other way around. However, our purpose is to survey youths of different mixed-ethnicities, so a focus on mixed-ethnic youths with non-Japanese mothers would result in the study of a limited group, e.g., Japanese-Filipino mixed-ethnicity. Therefore, the bias towards the Japanese mother and non-Japanese father family constellation in the data is difficult to avoid. Many of the participants are college students ($n = 20$, 64.5%). Eight are high school students (25.8%), and three (9.7%) are working adults. Their ages are between 17 and 25 (average age 19.1 years). Most participants have attended Japanese schools in Japan. Those who are in college study at different universities and major in different fields. Four participants have lived abroad and attended elementary or junior high school there. There is also a participant, BHJ-6, who has never lived abroad but has attended a Chinese elementary school in Japan.

A semi-structured questionnaire in the Japanese language was used as the data collection tool because it was the language which all of the participants understood (see Appendix for an English translation of the questionnaire). The questionnaire was prepared on Google Forms and the URL was sent to the participants via email. A paper

Table 1*Details of the Participants*

Participant	Age	Status	Gender	Mother	Father	Education
MHJ-1	17	HSS	Male	Japanese	Iranian	Japan
MHJ-2	17	HSS	Female	Japanese	Ghanaian	Japan
MHJ-3	18	HSS	Male	Japanese	Senegalese	Japan
MHJ-4	18	HSS	Male	Japanese	Senegalese	Japan
MHJ-5	18	HSS	Male	Japanese	Ghanaian	Japan
MHJ-6	19	CS	Female	Japanese	Kenyan	Japan
MHJ-7	19	CS	Male	Japanese	German	Japan
MHJ-8	19	CS	Male	Japanese	British	Japan
MHJ-9	25	WA	Female	Filipino	Japanese	Japan
MHA-1	21	CS	Female	Japanese	Kenyan	Japan
MJJ-1	19	CS	Female	Japanese	Turkish	Japan
MJJ-2	19	CS	Female	Filipino	Japanese	Japan
MJJ-3	20	CS	Female	Japanese	Ghanaian	Japan
MJJ-4	24	WA	Female	Filipino	Japanese	Japan
BHJ-1	17	HSS	Female	Thai	Japanese	Japan
BHJ-2	18	HSS	Male	Japanese	American	Japan
BHJ-3	19	CS	Male	Japanese	American	Japan
BHJ-4	19	CS	Male	Japanese	American	Japan
BHJ-5	21	CS	Female	Japanese	Nigerian	Japan
BHJ-6	21	CS	Female	Japanese	Chinese	Chinese ELE (Japan)
BHJ-7	22	WA	Male	Japanese	Brazilian	Japan
BHJ-8	22	CS	Female	Japanese	Peruvian	Japan
BJJ-1	18	CS	Male	Filipino	Japanese	Japan
BHA-1	17	HSS	Female	Japanese	Iranian	Japan
BHA-2	19	CS	Male	Filipino	Japanese	Japan
BHA-3	20	CS	Male	Japanese	Australian	ELE & JHS (Australia)
BHA-4	20	CS	Female	Japanese	Taiwanese	ELE & JHS (Taiwan)
BHA-5	21	CS	Male	Japanese	American	ELE (US), IHS (Japan)
BHA-6	22	CS	Female	Japanese	American	Japan
BNA-1	22	CS	Male	Japanese	Ghanaian	Japan
BJA-1	21	CS	Female	Korean	Japanese	ELE (Korea)

Note. Abbreviations: high school student (HSS), college student (CS), working adult (WA), elementary school (ELE), junior high school (JHS), high school (HS), international high school (IHS)

version was also prepared, but only one participant completed it. Thirty participants answered the electronic version of the questionnaire. In the first part of the questionnaire, we asked for background information, e.g., the participants' age and their non-Japanese parents' nationality. Next, we asked the participants to rate their abilities to speak, understand, read, and write the ML as beginner, intermediate, advanced, or native. In the third part of the questionnaire, we asked about their education and their length of stay abroad (if any).

Finally, we asked about their perception of their ethnic identity. To the question *anata wa dochira ni chikai desuka?* (Which [identity] do you feel close to?), respondents answered "Japanese," "*haafu*," or their non-Japanese parent's nationality. The term *haafu* was used because it is the most widely known Japanese term for mixed-ethnicity. We acknowledge that a mixed-ethnic individual's identity is fluid, dependent on context and interlocutor, and co-constructed with the people with whom one comes in contact (Greer, 2001). However, self-categorization is the most basic element of group identity (Ashmore et al., 2004), i.e., to take pride in being *haafu*, a mixed-ethnic adolescent must first place herself in this category. Self-categorization is also necessary for studying differences across groups (Phinney & Ong, 2007). By asking the participants the question in an online questionnaire, we can determine the identity they feel closest to in a neutral and context-free situation and use their responses to study the relationship between ML and ethnic identity. The choice of one identity in this question does not imply the rejection of another. Moreover, we asked the participants to provide reasons for their choice. This open-ended question helps us understand how the participants see themselves as members of the group. Participants also answered open-ended questions about whether they had ever concealed their mixed-ethnic identity, whether their parents had ever talked to them about their identity, the time when they first became aware of their mixed-ethnic identity, and whether they were ever asked about it. We also asked how the participants perceived their ethnic identity in junior high, high school, and college. The participants' responses were summarized and analyzed on an Excel spreadsheet. Responses to the open-ended questions on identity were thematically coded. These themes were subsequently organized in terms of frequency to determine the common factors which influenced the participants' perception of their identity.

Results

Language Ability of Non-ML-Speaking Mixed-Ethnic Youths

Out of the 31 participants, 14 assessed themselves as being unable to speak the ML. However, as shown in Table 2, 11 of the 14 non-ML-speaking participants

(78.6%) have either beginner or intermediate listening ability. Only three participants do not comprehend the ML. Therefore, many of them have receptive ability to varying degrees and probably received some exposure to the ML at home. However, fewer participants have ML literacy skills. Eight participants can read the ML, and six can write it.

MHJ-9 has intermediate listening, reading, and writing abilities in Tagalog because she learned to read and write it as did her Japanese father. Japanese-Ghanaian MHJ-2, MHJ-5, and MJJ-3 and Japanese-British MHJ-8 can read and write either at a beginner, intermediate or advanced level because their ML, English, is taught at school. These results show that, if the ML is a foreign language school subject, mixed-ethnic youths can acquire literacy skills even if they do not speak it at home.

Ten non-ML-speaking participants feel close to their *haafu* identity, and four feel attached to their Japanese identity. Interestingly, the latter group has minimal ML abilities, except for Japanese-Ghanaian MJJ-3's beginner level English listening, reading, and writing skills and Japanese-Filipino MJJ-4's beginner level Tagalog listening skills.

Table 2

ML Abilities of Non-ML-Speaking Youths

Participant	Language	Speaking ability	Listening ability	Reading ability	Writing ability	Closest identity
MHJ-1	Farsi	None	Beginner	None	None	Haafu
MHJ-2	English*	None	Beginner	Beginner	Beginner	Haafu
MHJ-3	French/Wolof	None	Beginner	Beginner	Beginner	Haafu
MHJ-4	French/Wolof	None	Beginner	Beginner	None	Haafu
MHJ-5	English*	None	Intermediate	Intermediate	Intermediate	Haafu
MHJ-6	Swahili	None	None	None	None	Haafu
MHJ-7	German	None	Intermediate	Beginner	None	Haafu
MHJ-8	English	None	Intermediate	Advanced	Intermediate	Haafu
MHJ-9	Tagalog	None	Intermediate	Intermediate	Intermediate	Haafu
MHA-1	Swahili	None	Intermediate	None	None	Haafu
MJJ-1	Turkish	None	None	None	None	Japanese
MJJ-2	Tagalog	None	None	None	None	Japanese
MJJ-3	English*	None	Beginner	Beginner	Beginner	Japanese
MJJ-4	Tagalog	None	Beginner	None	None	Japanese

* Other than English, the Ghanaian parents of MHJ-2, MHJ-5, and MJJ-3 also speak an African language as their minority language, e.g. Twi, but it was not acquired by the participants.

Language Ability of ML-Speaking Mixed-Ethnic Youths

We will now examine the language abilities of the 17 ML-speaking participants. We divided them into those who have lived only in Japan and those who have spent time abroad. The latter presumably received more exposure to the minority culture and language, which potentially helped them develop their mixed-ethnic identity. Let us first look at the nine ML-speaking youths who have lived only in Japan. As shown in Table 3, their ML skills are generally higher-level than those of the non-ML-speaking group. Many participants rate their speaking and listening ability as intermediate or advanced. BJJ-1 rates his Tagalog to be native-level. Only BHJ-8 considers his Spanish speaking and listening skills to be at the beginner level.

Many participants in this group possess ML literacy skills. Four participants have intermediate reading and writing skills because their ML, English, was taught as a foreign language school subject. BHJ-6 attended a Chinese elementary school in Japan and assessed her Chinese reading and writing ability as advanced. BHJ-7 attributed his advanced Portuguese abilities to his mother, who taught him the language at home. However, participants whose ML is Thai or Tagalog did not acquire the ability to read or write in it. These results suggest that it is hard for mixed-ethnic children to acquire ML literacy skills unless they receive explicit instruction in school or have parents devoted to teaching them how to read and write the ML at home.

Table 3

Language Abilities of ML-Speaking Participants Who Have Lived Only in Japan

Participant	Language	Speaking ability	Listening ability	Reading ability	Writing ability	Closest identity
BHJ-1	Thai	Intermediate	Intermediate	None	None	Haafu
BHJ-2	English	Intermediate	Intermediate	Intermediate	Intermediate	Haafu
BHJ-3	English	Intermediate	Intermediate	Intermediate	Intermediate	Haafu
BHJ-4	English	Intermediate	Intermediate	Intermediate	Intermediate	Haafu
BHJ-5	English*	Intermediate	Intermediate	Intermediate	Intermediate	Haafu
BHJ-6	Mandarin	Advanced	Advanced	Advanced	Advanced	Haafu
BHJ-7	Portuguese	Advanced	Advanced	Advanced	Advanced	Haafu
BHJ-8	Spanish	Beginner	Beginner	Beginner	Beginner	Haafu
BJJ-1	Tagalog	Native	Native	None	None	Japanese

* Other than English, the Nigerian parent of BHJ-5 also has an African ML but it was not acquired by BHJ-5.

Almost all of the participants in this group feel close to their *haafu* identity. However, BJJ-1 feels more attached to his Japanese identity, even though he has native level speaking and listening skills in Tagalog and uses it regularly with his mother. According to him, *haafus* are fluent English speakers. He was often asked if he could speak English. However, when he answered that he could not speak English, he was described as “*zannen na haafu*” (“unfortunate” *haafu*). BJJ-1 probably did not like the fact that his lack of English ability was perceived negatively and so distanced himself from his *haafu* identity.

Let us now look at the eight ML-speaking youths who have lived outside Japan. They had varying lengths of residency abroad at different ages. Most participants spent time in their non-Japanese parents’ country, but some have sojourned in a different country. Four participants attended elementary or junior high school abroad and moved to Japan only in their teens (see Table 1). As Table 4 shows, their ML abilities are higher-level than those who have lived only in Japan. Five participants have native level speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills because of formal literacy instruction.

Table 4

Language Abilities of Bilingual Participants Who Have Lived Abroad

Participant	Minority language	Speaking ability	Listening ability	Reading ability	Writing ability	Closest identity
BHA-1	Farsi	Beginner	Beginner	None	None	Haafu
BHA-2	Tagalog	Native	Native	Native	Native	Haafu
BHA-3	English	Native	Native	Native	Native	Haafu
BHA-4	Mandarin	Native	Native	Native	Native	Haafu
BHA-5	English	Native	Native	Native	Native	Haafu
BHA-6	English	Intermediate	Advanced	Advanced	Intermediate	Haafu
BNA-1	English*	Intermediate	Intermediate	Beginner	Beginner	Ghanaian
BJA-1	Korean	Native	Native	Native	Native	Japanese

* Ga is the other ML used by the Ghanaian parent of BNA-1, but it was not acquired by BNA-1.

Six out of the eight participants feel close to their *haafu* identity. However, BJA-1 is closely attached to her Japanese identity. She spent the first 12 years of her life in Korea and has native-level Korean abilities but feels close to her Japanese identity because she looks Japanese and is currently living in Japan. BJA-1 concealed her mixed-ethnic identity both in Japan and Korea because she experienced ethnic-based discrimination and bullying. Conversely, BNA-1 feels close to his Ghanaian father’s identity, even though he speaks some English, but not Ga (the other ML of his

Ghanaian father). He considers himself more African than Japanese because he was often singled out as a *kokujin* (black person) in elementary school. His attachment to his father's ethnicity is probably unrelated to his one-year stay abroad because he sojourned in the US and not Ghana. Even though BJA-1 and BNA-1 experienced some discrimination due to their mixed-ethnicity, their responses were quite different and inversely related to their age and time spent abroad. Despite spending her childhood in Korea, BJA-1 hides her mixed-ethnicity in Japan to cope with discrimination, whereas BNA-1 fully embraces his "otherness" despite his one-year stay abroad when he was 18 years old. This finding suggests that their identity is not necessarily related to their length of time abroad or the age at which they spent time overseas. For these two participants, their identity seemed closely related to their outward appearances and ethnic-based discrimination.

Factors Affecting Mixed-Ethnic Youths' Perception of Their Ethnic Identity

We will now discuss how the youths perceive their identity. Except for Ghanaian-Japanese BNA-1, all of the participants feel attached to their *haafu* or Japanese identities. Ten out of the 14 non-ML-speaking participants (71.4%) and 14 out of the 17 ML-speaking participants (82.4%) feel close to their *haafu* identity. These results indicate that most participants are partial to their *haafu* identity regardless of their ML ability. Table 5 summarizes the reasons the participants gave for their identity perception. Some participants listed more than one reason in their responses. A total of 15 reasons emerged from the survey data. As shown in the far-right column, language ability is the most frequently occurring reason ($n = 11$). Seven ML-speaking participants consider their ML abilities to be the reason for their attachment to their *haafu* identity. Also, three non-ML-speaking participants feel close to their Japanese identity due to their inability to speak the ML. This finding suggests that ML abilities play a critical role in the identity perception of mixed-ethnic youths. Having an "un-Japanese" appearance is the second most important factor ($n = 9$), followed by values ($n = 6$), and the place where they were raised ($n = 6$).

Different factors led the non-ML-speaking and ML-speaking mixed-ethnic youths to feel close to their *haafu* identity. As seen from the second column of Table 5, the ten non-ML-speaking mixed-ethnic youths think that their appearances ($n = 5$), parentage ($n = 2$), dual-nationality ($n = 2$), and *katakana* names ($n = 2$) define their *haafu* identity. In Japan, only foreign names are written in the *katakana* syllabary, so a *katakana* name stands out from Japanese names, which are typically written in *kanji* characters. The non-ML speakers' responses show that visible markers of "otherness" influenced their identity perception. Particularly, their physical attributes made them

Table 5*Reasons Affecting Mixed-Ethnic Youths' Perceptions of Their Identity*

	<i>Haafu</i> identity		Japanese identity		Total
	Non-ML-speaking	ML-speaking	Non-ML-speaking	ML-speaking	
Language ability		7	3	1	11
Appearance	5	3		1	9
Values		5		1	6
Place one was raised		2	4		6
Identity hybridity	2	3			5
Parentage	2	1			3
Nationality	2		1		3
Cultural practices		2	1		3
Identity ambiguity	2	1			3
<i>Katakana</i> name	2				2
Family/friends		1	1		2
Place of birth			2		2
Current residence				1	1
Visits to home country	1				1
Parent's divorce/death			1		1

stand out from their Japanese peers. The darker complexion and different hair texture of four African-Japanese mixed-ethnic participants, MHJ-3, MHJ-4, MHJ-6, and MHA-1, made them more attached to their *haafu* identity. Having a different physical appearance also made Japanese-British mixed-ethnic MHJ-8 more aware of his mixed-ethnicity. As highlighted in Excerpt 1, people's reactions to his facial features evoked feelings of identity ambiguity.

Excerpt 1

MHJ-8: どちらかといえば顔はイギリス人寄りだと思う。日本にいたらまず外国人に間違えられる。でも英語圏（イギリス、アメリカ、オーストラリア）に行った時にやっぱり顔が違って自分は日本人でもイギリス人でもないのだなと痛感した。

I think my face is more British (than Japanese). In Japan, I am often mistaken as a foreigner. However, when I went to English-speaking countries (UK, US, or Australia), I looked different, too, so I became painfully aware that I was neither Japanese nor British.

In contrast to the non-ML speakers, the ability to speak the ML is the main reason why ML speakers feel close to their *haafu* identity. In Excerpt 2, Japanese-Chinese BHJ-6 explains how the everyday use of two languages at home made her feel close to her mixed-ethnic identity. The ML speakers' two other main reasons were their values ($n = 5$) and the perceived hybridity of their identity ($n = 3$), i.e., thinking and feeling like a Japanese person and a person from their non-Japanese parent's country. In Excerpt 3, Japanese-American BHA-5 explains how living in Japan and the US cultivated his biculturality and instilled a hybrid identity.

Excerpt 2

BHJ-6: お父さんとは中国語で会話して、お母さんとは日本語で会話する。日本人の友達が多いから日本語を話す機会が断然に多いけどお父さんとは中国で話すから自分はどっちもの血が入っているんだなと実感する。

I converse with my father in Chinese and with my mother in Japanese. I have a lot of Japanese friends, so I definitely have more opportunities to speak Japanese, but speaking Chinese to my father makes me feel that I am part of both (Japanese and Chinese).

Excerpt 3

BHA-5: どちらの国にも住んだことがあり、両者の良いと思ったところを見て、それを自分に取り入れてきた。

I have lived in both countries, and having seen the good parts of both (cultures), I try to adopt them as my own.

Non-ML-speaking participants who feel close to their Japanese identity cited the place in which they were raised ($n = 4$), their inability to speak the ML ($n = 3$), and their place of the birth ($n = 2$). Comments by Japanese-Filipino MJJ-2 in Excerpt 4 show that she considers herself Japanese because of her Japanese environment and monolingualism. The lack of ML ability possibly prevented her from accessing Filipino culture, so she drew only from her typically Japanese life in Japan to assert her Japanese identity.

Excerpt 4

MJJ-2: 日本に生まれ、日本で育ち、普通の日本人と変わらない生活を送っているから。特に英語やそのほかの外国語を喋る訳でもないから。

I was born in Japan and grew up in Japan, and my life is no different from the average Japanese person. I also cannot speak English or any other foreign language.

Our results also revealed that 24 of the participants (77.4%) have never concealed their identity. This finding contrasts with earlier studies which showed that Asian mixed-ethnic children tend to identify themselves as Japanese and conceal their non-Japanese parent's ethnicity (Almonte-Acosta, 2008; Ishii, 2010). Many of our participants are proud of their mixed-ethnicity and see no reason to hide it. In Excerpt 5, Japanese-Brazilian BHJ-7 shares how his mixed-ethnicity is a source of envy. Perhaps, as Maher (2005) suggests, the minority culture may be considered "cool" among segments of Japanese youth, so BHJ-7's mixed-ethnicity is positively evaluated by his peers. Even Japanese-Taiwanese BHA-4, who has Asian physical features, is not embarrassed by her mixed-ethnicity and has never concealed it.

Excerpt 5

MJJ-2: ハーフって言うとむしろ羨ましがられるし誇りに思っているから。

People envy me when I say that I am *haafu*, so I am proud of it.

Only seven participants (22.5% of the total sample) admitted to hiding their mixed-ethnicity at some point in time. As shown in Table 6, both non-ML-speaking (MJJ-1 and MJJ-4) and ML-speaking participants (BHJ-1, BHJ-5, BHJ-8, BHA-6, and BJA-1) have hidden their mixed-ethnicity from other people in the past, indicating that ML ability was not a determining factor. Neither was identity concealment limited to a particular type of mixed-ethnicity, i.e., Asian mixed-ethnic youths who have "Japanese" appearances. Only three out of the seven participants who have concealed their identity have Asian mixed-ethnicity, i.e. MJJ-4, BHJ-1, and BJA-1. Even Japanese-Nigerian BHJ-5 has tried to conceal her mixed-ethnicity.

These findings demonstrate that identity concealment is not related to appearances alone. Also, it does not seem to be related to the mixed-ethnic youths' current perceived identity as *haafu* or Japanese. They have concealed their identity because they wanted to blend in with their peers and avoid being bullied. They also did not want to be mistaken as a foreigner or a fluent English speaker (see Excerpt 6). This finding suggests that the participants who concealed their identity faced some pressure to assimilate with their Japanese peers or were stereotyped.

Table 6*Participants Who Have Concealed Their Mixed-Ethnicity*

Participant	Non-Japanese parent's nationality	Closest identity	Reasons
MJJ-1	Turkish (F)	Japanese	To blend in
MJJ-4	Filipino (M)	Japanese	To avoid being bullied
BHJ-1	Thai (M)	Haafu	To avoid being mistaken as a foreigner
BHJ-5	Nigerian (F)	Haafu	To avoid being mistaken as a fluent English speaker
BHJ-8	Peruvian (F)	Haafu	To blend in
BHA-6	US (F)	Haafu	To blend in
BJA-1	Korean (M)	Japanese	To avoid being bullied

Note. Abbreviations: F: Father, M: Mother

Excerpt 6

BHJ-5: 見た目が日本人に見えないからすぐばれてしまうけど隠しました。ハーフだからといって別に英語が話せるわけでもないからハーフってことがいやだったから。

I concealed my identity even though it is quite obvious that I did not look Japanese. Even though I am *haafu*, I cannot speak English so I really hated being *haafu*.

Discussion

Our findings indicate that mixed-ethnic youths' inability to speak the ML is not as common as reported in previous research. Only 14 (45.2%) of the 31 participants cannot speak the ML. However, many youths in the non-ML-speaking group ($n=9$, 64.3%) have beginner or intermediate level listening abilities. Their basic listening ability may not allow them to participate in dual-lingual interactions with their non-Japanese parents, i.e., where they can respond in Japanese to their parents' full use of the ML in conversation (Nakamura, 2018). However, these participants are likely to understand some common ML expressions that their non-Japanese parents regularly use. Only three participants (9.7% of the entire sample) assessed themselves as having no skills whatsoever in the ML, indicating that it was not used by their non-Japanese parents at all.

However, English is the ML for 11 out of the 31 participants (35.5%), making ML acquisition easier. In the non-ML-speaking group, Japanese-Ghanaian MHJ-2, MHJ-5, and MJJ-3 were not exposed to English by their fathers but acquired beginner

or intermediate listening, reading, and writing skills from school. If we exclude participants whose ML is English, the number of ML-speaking participants is fewer. Out of the 20 participants whose ML is not English, ten (50%) cannot speak it. Of the ten non-English ML-speaking participants, five participants have the advantage of having lived abroad. Therefore, only five participants (16.1% of the entire sample) whose ML is not English and have lived only in Japan can speak the language.

Therefore, with closer analysis, we find that the rate of active bilingualism involving an ML other than English to be quite low among the mixed-ethnic participants who were raised in Japan. Particularly, participants whose ML is an Asian language have no or minimal abilities in the language. In the non-ML-speaking group, MHJ-1 and MJJ-4 have only beginner level listening ability in Farsi and Tagalog, whereas MJJ-2 has no Tagalog skills. Only MHJ-9 has intermediate listening, reading, and writing skills in Tagalog. In the ML-speaking group, BHJ-1 and BJJ-1 have intermediate or native oral abilities in Thai and Tagalog, but cannot read or write them. In the absence of formal ML literacy instruction in schools (or even in weekend schools), only mixed-ethnic children whose parents are highly motivated to teach reading and writing acquire ML literacy skills, e.g., BHJ-7 who acquired advanced Portuguese reading and writing skills from his mother. Also, none of the Japanese-African mixed-ethnic participants speak the African ML of their African parents, e.g., Swahili, Twi, or Ga, even though they have varying levels of English ability. These results provide further evidence that there is a higher likelihood of successful ML maintenance and use in the family when the ML concerned is English, but less so when it is another ML. More outreach work is needed to support the acquisition of MLs other than English, e.g., educating parents on the benefits of using the ML with their children.

The findings also revealed that 24 out of the 31 participants (77.4%) feel close to their *haafu* identity. Previous research shows that mixed-ethnic children of younger ages tend to consider themselves to be Japanese (Almonte-Acosta, 2008; Ishii, 2010; Jabar, 2013), so it is reassuring to know that, in late adolescence and young adulthood, many youths of different mixed-ethnicities feel close to their *haafu* identity. This result suggests that mixed-ethnic children probably undergo some progression in their identity development. While they may have started by thinking of themselves as Japanese, they probably proceeded to a stage of identity exploration (Phinney, 1989). Some experienced identity confusion (see Excerpt 1) and became aware of their identity's ambiguity or hybridity (see Excerpt 3). Most participants currently feel close to their *haafu* identity regardless of whether they speak the ML or otherwise.

However, a closer examination of the non-ML-speaking and ML-speaking

participants' responses revealed that both groups generally provided different reasons for being attached to their *haafu* identity (see Table 5). Non-ML speakers tend to give visible markers of their otherness, i.e., their physical attributes, dual-nationality, half-foreign parentage, and *katakana* names, as their reasons. Phenotype (i.e., physical appearances) can precede the cultural elements of one's identity when ascribing an ethnic identity, particularly in racially segregated societies (Wallace, 2001). Therefore, some non-ML-speaking Japanese-African mixed-ethnic participants (and one bilingual Japanese-African) considered their marked physical dissimilarity from their Japanese peers as the basis for their attachment to a *haafu* identity. While extrinsic factors seemed to affect the identity perception of non-ML speakers, intrinsic factors relating to language, values, and identity hybridity were the main factors which determined the ML-speaking participants' closeness to their *haafu* identity. Particularly, many of them regarded their ML ability as the main reason for being able to relate to their *haafu* identity. As Excerpt 2 indicates, the regular use of the ML in the home reinforced their awareness of their mixed-ethnic identity. The participants' values were also frequently mentioned as a reason for their choice of a mixed-ethnic identity. Two bilingual participants, BHJ-1 and BHJ-8, felt that their values were more Thai or Peruvian than Japanese even though neither of them has lived in Thailand or Peru. Possibly, their ML abilities allowed their non-Japanese parents to impart their culture and instil values associated with their country. Also, ML speakers can enhance their linguistic and social capital by accessing ML media and communicating with friends and relatives in the home country. The fact that three non-ML-speaking participants considered their inability to speak the ML as the reason they feel close to their Japanese identity provides additional evidence that the ML plays a role in mixed-ethnic identity formation. These results have potential implications for the parenting of mixed-ethnic children in Japan. Children's ability to speak the ML not only improves parent-child communication but also affects how they construct their *haafu* identities. Specifically, ML-speaking children may construct their *haafu* identity intrinsically, based on their ML abilities, values, and identity hybridity, whereas non-ML-speaking children probably form their *haafu* identities extrinsically based on phenotypical appearances, nationality, and foreign-sounding names. While it remains uncertain as to which pathway in identity development benefits children's social and emotional well-being, non-Japanese parents in Japan should consider these potential differences when deciding to raise their children in the ML, Japanese, or another language.

The present study has a few limitations. Firstly, the results relied on the participants' self-assessment of their ML proficiency, which is prone to subjectivity. Secondly, the participants live in Tokyo or Kanagawa. Mixed-ethnic youths in urban

areas may have more opportunities to embrace multiculturalism in their friendships, music, art, food, and fashion, or “metroethnicity” as Maher (2005) calls it. Another limitation is that the choice of a Japanese, *haafu*, or non-Japanese identity in the survey may be too simple. Particularly, the *haafu* identity is subject to different individual interpretations. *Haafu* occasionally connotes “half-white” or “Eurasian” (Okamura, 2017). A Black American-Japanese could be considered simply as *kokujin* (black), and not *haafu* (Murphy-Shigematsu, 1997), so this could be the reason why Japanese-Ghanaian BNA-1 identifies closely with his Ghanaian identity. Japanese-Filipino BJJ-1 perceives that a *haafu* person has a high level of English proficiency and rejects the self-description *haafu*, even though he is a fluent Tagalog speaker. Likewise, despite feeling close to her *haafu* identity now, Japanese-Nigerian BHJ-5 once concealed her mixed-ethnicity because she did not want to be mistakenly perceived as a fluent English speaker (see Excerpt 6). The experiences of BJJ-1 and BHJ-5 have led them to associate the *haafu* identity with English language ability. Filipino-Japanese Yurika, in Nakamura (2020) provided a similar account. High school friends and their parents asked Yurika about her English ability and expected her to excel in English at school even though she was weak in English and was never taught English by her Filipino mom. The pressure from her peers made her hate studying English. These accounts show how language-related stereotypes made BJJ-1 and BHJ-5 reluctant to associate themselves with a *haafu* identity. The extent to which mixed-ethnic youths are subject to such stereotypes in Japanese society is a concern because it is likely to reinforce the prestige of English-Japanese bilingualism and devalue other forms of bilingualism. Further investigation is required to understand these different interpretations of the *haafu* identity and its co-construction by mixed-ethnic youths and the people around them.

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Table 4-32: Trends in births by parents' nationality.

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Appendix Questionnaire

(translated from Japanese)

1. Gender: Male/Female
2. Age: _____
3. Nationality: _____
4. Parents' nationality: Father: _____ Mother: _____
5. Place of birth: _____
6. Abilities in non-Japanese parent's language
 Speaking: Beginner/Intermediate/Advanced/Native
 Listening: Beginner/Intermediate/Advanced/Native
 Reading: Beginner/Intermediate/Advanced/Native
 Writing: Beginner/Intermediate/Advanced/Native
7. Education (Japan or abroad)
 Elementary school: _____
 Junior high school: _____
 High school: _____
8. Residence abroad: Yes / No
 Country of residence: _____
 Length of residence: _____
 Age: _____ to _____ years old
9. Have you ever concealed your mixed-ethnic identity? Yes / No
10. If yes, please provide reasons for (9): _____
11. Which do you feel close to? Japanese / *Haafu* / Non-Japanese parent's nationality

12. Why do you think so? (Please explain in 300 characters or so)
13. Have your parents ever talked to you about your identity? If so, how?
14. When did you first become aware of your mixed-ethnic identity?
15. Have you ever been asked about your mixed-ethnic identity? If so, how?
16. How did you perceive your own identity when you were in junior high, high school and college?