

# The Influence of the Japanese Parent's Gender on the Acquisition of Japanese by Children of Japanese-Australian Mixed Marriages

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This paper presents the results of a preliminary study on the acquisition of Japanese by children of Japanese-Australian couples. Using an interview format, a language-use questionnaire was administered to ten Japanese-Australian couples. While the results could not be generalized due to the small sampling size, frequencies were used to give some indication of where future exploration may be of value. The study analyzes the role of Japanese mothers and Japanese fathers as the minority language carriers in mixed marriages in Australia and their influence on the acquisition of Japanese by their children. The effect of the gender of the minority language parent is explored from a number of perspectives, including language use, language competency, schooling, language support, amount of time spent in the target culture, language opportunities outside the home, parental roles and parental attitudes. The findings suggest that the adults' proficiency in their spouses' native language is possibly one factor in determining the language-use patterns of the home and the Japanese language competency in the children of Japanese-Australian couples. The findings of the study are considered in light of research on other ethnolinguistic groups in Australia and comparisons are made with recent studies undertaken in Japan.

## <オーストラリア人と日本人の国際結婚に見られる親の性別による子どもの日本語習得への影響> オーストラリア・カトリック大学 スーザン・ルカサヴィチ

本稿の目的は、日本人とオーストラリア人という組み合わせの親を持つ子どもの日本語習得の結果を提示することである。この研究は、オーストラリアに在住する少数派言語の保持者である日本人の母親・オーストラリア人父親と日本人の父親・オーストラリア人母親の家庭を対象に、それぞれが子どもの言語習得に与える影響を分析したものである。検証した要因は、言語使用、言語運用能力、教育、家庭での親の支援、目標言語の文化環境で費やす時間、家庭外での言語使用の機会、親の役割と態度などと多岐にわたる。研究方法は、言語使用に関するアンケートを10組の夫婦にインタビュー形式を用いた。結果は配偶者の母語における運用能力が家庭内の言語使用構成と第二世代の子どもの言語運用能力を決定する一つの要因であることが判明した。この結果は被験者数が少ないため概括できないが、瀬度数はこれからの研究の方向性を示唆するものと思われる。この調査結果はオーストラリアでの他言語民族の研究と日本での最近の研究との比較に役立つものと思われる。

## INTRODUCTION

Australia is one of the most multicultural nations in the world. Immigrants come from a multitude of countries and speak a vast array of languages besides English. However, there is an increasing tendency in Australian society for migrants to marry outside their ethnolinguistic groups. Price (1988) found that 74% of the nation's first generation migrants marry someone born in a different country, while intermarriage occurs at a rate of 90% or more among second generation migrants. One consequence of this development is a major language shift away from the languages representative of the migrant communities to that of the dominant language within the host society. In the case of Australia, that shift is to English.

Thus, although first generation migrants are often bilingual, the second generation is not retaining this bilingual ability. According to Clyne (1991), language competency in community languages is being lost for a variety of reasons, and the loss is occurring at varying rates for the different languages. A number of studies dealing with language shift and mixed marriages in Australia have been conducted, but they have concentrated on the shift from European languages to English (Clyne 1982,

Pauwels 1985, Cahill 1985). This pilot study was undertaken to redress the lack of research in relation to the shift of an Asian language to English within the context of mixed marriages in Australia. The Asian language chosen for this study was Japanese.

In addition to exogamy (mixed marriage), numerous variables have contributed significantly to the language shift of Australian immigrants, including ethnolinguistic distribution and gender. In this study the effect of the gender of the minority language parent has been explored from a number of perspectives. This paper analyzes the role of Japanese mothers and Japanese fathers as the minority language carriers in mixed marriages in Australia and their influence on the acquisition of Japanese by their children.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A study by Pauwels (1985) of the Dutch community in Melbourne highlights the role played by mixed marriage in the language shift to English in Australia. Through a language-use questionnaire administered to the informants in the course of an interview, Pauwels showed that marrying outside the Dutch community reduced immigrants' language maintenance to approximately half that seen in those involved in intra-ethnic marriages. Furthermore, the use of Dutch had almost completely disappeared in the interaction with non-Dutch spouses and the children from these marriages. Pauwels went as far as stating that the children of Dutch-Australian mixed marriages are characterized by almost complete English monolingualism. Pauwels' study also found that parental attitudes to the minority language are influential on the children's competence in that language and their attitudes towards learning it. In terms of reasons for wanting their children to acquire Dutch, this community was, on the whole, more heavily swayed by career prospects than identity issues.

Another study that analyzed mixed marriage and its effect on the language use of offspring was conducted by Kirkman (1988), who compared mixed couples in Melbourne and Tokyo in which one of the spouses was a native speaker of Japanese. Kirkman found that factors which influenced the children's second language acquisition included the type of schooling, the languages used by the parents and the amount of time spent in the target culture. With regard to family language patterns, Kirkman concluded that when the Japanese competency of the Australian spouse was relatively low, communication between spouses was almost entirely in English, whilst daily greetings were in Japanese. In families where the Japanese proficiency of the Australian spouse was higher, each spouse spoke either his or her own language to the other or equal amounts of Japanese and English were used. Nearly all of the Japanese parents in Kirkman's study professed that they consciously spoke Japanese to their children, while the Australian parents said they used English almost exclusively. Since 92.5% of the Melbourne cases examined by Kirkman involved marriages between Australian husbands and Japanese wives, the dominance of this type of marital pattern must be taken into consideration when examining Kirkman's findings.

The significance of the gender of the immigrant parent on the minority language acquisition of



the children of mixed marriages in Australia was explored by Clyne (1982). Through cross-tabulation of information contained in the 1976 Australian Census, Clyne found that if the father was the ethnic language speaker in a marriage with an Anglo-Australian partner, the rate of shift to English was overall slightly higher than if the mother was the ethnic language speaker.

A study undertaken in Japan by Kamada (1995a) is supportive of Clyne's findings. Examining the stories of 22 bilingual children gleaned from interviews with 12 families in Japan, Kamada analyzed a number of variables that affected the children's bilinguality, including the gender of the minority language speaker in mixed marriages. Based on her interviews, Kamada hypothesized that among the children of mixed couples in Japan, those whose father was the minority language speaker were less likely to become bilingual than those whose mother was the minority language speaker. In the families of mixed couples that she studied, Kamada found that all four of the children whose mother spoke the minority language acquired bilingual ability. In contrast, only one of the five children whose father was the native speaker of the minority language attained bilingual ability. Kamada suggested that the amount of time spent by the father with the child is often insufficient to develop the minority language. She maintained that, due to economic and social reasons, fathers may often be unable to make the kind of sacrifices that mothers do in order to pass on the minority language. Furthermore, she argued that the parental drive to maintain the father's native language is often overridden by other responsibilities, and that the task of language and education are commonly left to the mother.

In contrast, Dopke's study (1992) challenges the traditional view that minority language speaking mothers are likely to be more successful in raising their children bilingually than are fathers who speak the minority language. In her study of six German-Australian children being raised using the principle of "one parent-one language" in Melbourne, most of the fathers interacted with their children in a more child-centered manner, which was more conducive to language acquisition, than did the mothers. Among her subjects, one child learned German from his father whilst four of the children failed to learn German from their mother.

Dopke argued that extensive exposure to the language with the mother through the day can be offset by quality interaction with the father at night. She suggested that the difference in the quality of interaction between the mother and father was due to the different roles played by them. Housekeeping and child rearing in Australia are still commonly accepted as the mother's responsibility. However, much of the verbal interaction necessary to undertake these responsibilities with the child does not promote extensive linguistic interchange. On the other hand, fathers often do not feel the same sense of responsibility for housework and are more likely to concentrate on play activities tailored to the linguistic needs of the child. Dopke concluded that, in the case of the one parent-one language principle, the quality of the input is more important in the acquisition of a minority language than is the quantity of that input.

However, according to Chang (1994), the level of exposure to the minority language is a key

factor in relation to the competency levels attained by the children. Chang's study investigated the role of parents in enhancing the development of bilinguality by children in pre-schools in Singapore. Her findings reinforce the importance of parental input in the development of bilinguality in pre-school and primary school children.

Thus, research to date suggests the difficulty of transmitting the minority language to the children of mixed couples in Australia and points to the importance of the parental role in language transmission, but has not yet shown conclusively whether the gender of the parent who speaks the minority language is significant in determining the degree to which children will acquire that language.

## **RESEARCH FOCUS**

The areas of investigation addressed in this study are based on the following two questions:

- 1) Is there a relationship between home language-use patterns and the gender of the Japanese spouse in mixed Japanese-Australian couples?
- 2) Is there an association between the Japanese language competency of the children of Japanese-Australian couples and the gender of the Japanese spouse?

Subsidiary consideration is given to other variables in the Japanese language acquisition process and their relationship to the gender of the Japanese parent. These include schooling, language support, amount of time spent in the target culture (Japan), language opportunities outside the home, parental roles and parental attitudes.

The findings are considered in light of research on other ethnolinguistic groups in Australia and comparisons are made with recent studies undertaken in Japan. For the purpose of this study, English is considered to be the majority or dominant language and Japanese, the minority language.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Informants**

Informants for the study were contacted through personal networks and a professional organization for language teachers. A convenience sample was used because of the limited availability of suitable informants and the preliminary nature of this study. However, as the gender of the Japanese parent was the key variable being considered, it was essential to ensure that a gender balance existed in relation to the number of informants. Consequently, the sample consisted of five Japanese females with Australian spouses and five Japanese males with Australian spouses. Further selection criteria included:

- Native English speaking Australian spouse
- One or more children in the family
- Current residence in Melbourne
- At least five years prior residence in Australia
- Intention of permanent residence in Australia



Demographic information relating to informants' backgrounds is compiled in Table 1.

TABLE 1: Informants' Profiles

Family Number	Parent	Age	Nat.	Occupation	Years Married	Time in Australia	Time in Japan	Second Language	Ed. Level	Children Sex Age
1	Mother	42	Aus.	Housewife	12 yrs	---	2.5 yr.	---	Year 11	Girl 10
	Father	43	Jap.	Self Employed		9 yrs	---	English	Year 12	Girl 10 Girl 4
2	Mother	44	Aus.	Jap. Teacher	20 yrs	---	1.5 yr.	Japanese	Grad. Dip.	Girl 18
	Father	49	Jap.	Jap. Chef		22 yrs	---	English	Year 12	Girl 14
3	Mother	40	Aus.	Shop assist.	12 yrs	---	3 wk.	---	Grad. Dip.	Boy 9
	Father	52	Jap.	Jap. Teacher		29 yrs	---	English	Grad. Dip.	Boy 4
4	Mother	33	Aus.	Housewife	6 yrs	---	1.3 yr.	Japanese	Degree	Girl 6
	Father	43	Jap.	Jap. Chef		14 yrs	---	---	Year 9	Boy 3.5
5	Mother	31	Aus.	Housewife	10 yrs	---	2 yr.	---	Year 11	Girl 3
	Father	34	Jap.	Student		10 yrs	---	English	Year 12	
6	Mother	49	Jap.	Jap. Lecturer	17 yrs	22 yrs	---	English	Ph.D.	Girl 14
	Father	48	Aus.	Manager		---	1 yr.	Japanese	Year 12	
7	Mother	49	Jap.	Piano teacher	26 yrs	26 yrs	---	English	Jr. Col.	Boy 25
	Father	55	Aus.	Manager		---	1.3 yr.	Japanese	Year 12	Boy 22
8	Mother	39	Jap.	Jap. Teacher	17 yrs	24 yrs	---	English	Grad. Dip.	Girl 8
	Father	44	Aus.	Engineer		---	3.5 mo.	---	Degree	
9	Mother	40	Jap.	Kumon inst. P/t	11 yrs	7 yrs	---	English	Jr. Col.	Girl 6
	Father	50	Aus.	Prison officer		---	6 mo.	---	Jr. Col.	Boy 2
10	Mother	49	Jap.	Manager	24 yrs	24 yrs	---	English	Year 12	Girl 18
	Father	48	Aus.	Manager		---	3 wk.	---	Year 11	Boy 17

\* P/t = part-time; Grad. Dip. = graduate diploma (equivalent to the first year of a U.S. master's course); Degree = college graduate; Jr. Col. = junior college graduate

Analysis of Table 1 suggests there were some minor differences between the two groups of informants. The average age of the couples with Japanese mothers was six years older than that of the couples with Japanese fathers. Furthermore, the Japanese mothers had been married longer and resided in Australia for a longer period of time than had the Japanese fathers. There is also variety in the informants' occupations, although 80% of the Japanese participants were employed in fields related to Japan.

### **Data Collection**

A language-use questionnaire was administered during the course of an audio-taped interview conducted individually with each spouse in the 10 selected Japanese-Australian couples. The children of the informants were not interviewed. The interviews were semi-structured in nature and were approximately 30 to 40 minutes in length. Informants were interviewed on a range of issues, including language-use patterns, language competency and attitudes to language learning and language acquisition. The interview schedule drew upon questions previously used in studies by Kirkman (1988) and Pauwels (1980). The five-point scale employed by Kirkman (1988) to analyze language-use patterns and competency was also utilized in this study (cf. Tables 2 and 3). An English version and equivalent Japanese version of the interview schedule were prepared (cf. Appendices 1 and 2, respectively).

Self-reporting has come under criticism in the past (Romaine 1989). However, it is believed that some level of accuracy has been achieved in this study by having both parents complete the scales and respond to questions, as well as by including observations made by the researcher.

### **Data Analysis**

The relationships between the children's Japanese proficiency and the different variables outlined above were considered in relation to the gender of the Japanese parent. Statistical tests of significance were undertaken using chi-square procedures to determine whether the differences between observed and expected frequencies were significant. Perhaps due to the small size of the sample, no significant association between the research variables was evident. As this was a preliminary study, frequencies were therefore employed in reporting the results to give some indication of where future exploration with a larger sample may be of value.

## **RESULTS**

### **Language Use**

In families dealing with two or more languages, individual family members may vary the language they use according to whom they are speaking. For example, the minority language parent may use the majority language to communicate with his or her spouse, but choose to speak to the children in the minority language. Moreover, individuals may use their stronger language to respond to interlocutors



who speak to them in their weaker language. Therefore, in examining the patterns of language use in the families of mixed couples, it is necessary to consider not only the language used between the different members of the family, but also to examine the language chosen by each party in the interactions.

In the current study, informants were therefore asked to report on the language they use with their spouse, the language they use with each of their children, the language each child uses with them, and the language the children use with each other. Reports were made using a five-point scale patterned on that developed by Kirkman (1988) and offering the following choices: 1) English only, 2) mainly English with some Japanese, 3) equal amounts of English and Japanese, 4) mainly Japanese, and 5) only Japanese. The results are reported and discussed below.

### Language Spoken to Spouse

The language spoken between spouses gives some indication of the children's level of exposure to the minority language in their home environment. Given that studies by Clyne (1982) and Kamada (1995a) suggested that mothers are the better carriers of the minority language and that Chang's (1994) study discussed the importance of exposure to the minority language in the development of bilinguality, it was expected that Japanese would be used more extensively in the homes in which the Japanese spouse was the mother.

**TABLE 2: Language Use Between Parents**

Language Spoken to Spouse	Native Japanese Speaker in the Family			
	Father		Mother	
	Australian Mother	Japanese Father	Japanese Mother	Australian Father
English only	3	1	2	3
Mainly English with some Japanese	1	2	2	2
English/Japanese equally	0	0	0	0
Mainly Japanese	1	1	1	0
Only Japanese	0	1	0	0
<b>Total</b>	5	5	5	5

**Notes:** No associations amongst the variables were found to be significant ( $p > .05$ )  
All categories of informants  $n = 5$

However, as can be seen in the results presented in Table 2, English use was predominant in communication between spouses in both family groups, with seven out of ten native Japanese informants reporting to use either 'English only' or 'mainly English' with their spouse. Two Japanese fathers used Japanese with their spouses, in contrast to only one Japanese mother who communicated with her spouse in Japanese. The difference between the two groups of informants is not large, but nevertheless, it is contrary to my original expectation that there would be a greater use of Japanese in the homes with Japanese mothers.

#### Language Spoken to Children by Parents

The informants' reports of the language they used with their children are summarized in Table 3.

**TABLE 3: Parent-Child Language Use**

Language Spoken to Children by Parents	Native Japanese Speaker in the Family			
	Father		Mother	
	Australian Mother	Japanese Father	Japanese Mother	Australian Father
English only	3	0	2	4
Mainly English with some Japanese	1	2	1 <sup>a</sup>	1
English/Japanese equally	0	2	1 <sup>a</sup>	0
Mainly Japanese	1	0	2	0
Only Japanese	0	1	0	0
<b>Total</b>	5	5	6	5

**Notes:** No associations amongst the variables were found to be significant ( $p > .05$ )

All categories of informants  $n = 5$

<sup>a</sup> Indicates same mother with different language patterns for offspring

The most striking feature of Table 3 is that three of the five Japanese mothers reported using either 'English only' or 'mainly English' when communicating with their children. In contrast, no Japanese father said he used only English in communicating with his children. Two fathers reported using mainly English with some Japanese, and two fathers reported using equal amounts of both languages. The remaining father used only Japanese. These results are thus not supportive of Kirkman's findings; in that study, Japanese-speaking parents were found to consciously speak to their children in Japanese (Kirkman 1988).

One of the drawbacks with the data in the present study, however, is that the frequency of



interaction between the Japanese parents and their children was not accurately determined. It is not sufficient to consider only the language of communication; the amount of interaction taking place in the minority language is also crucial. The Japanese fathers' reports of greater use of Japanese with their children suggests a more Japanese-enriched environment in these families; however, preliminary analysis of the level of interaction between the parents and children suggests that this may not be the case. Four of the five Japanese fathers reported heavy work schedules, which meant that their contact with their children was limited to ten hours or less per week. One father stated that even when he was at home, he was often in a separate room from his children, watching Japanese television. Thus, even though the proportion of the communication between the Japanese fathers and their children that takes place in Japanese may be greater than in the case of the Japanese mothers in the study, the total communication time in Japanese between the Japanese mothers and their children may actually be greater.

Turning to the language used between the Australian parents and their children, we find that with the exception of one mother, all generally used English in speaking with their children. The mother who communicated with her children in Japanese (the Australian mother in family 4) stated that her use of Japanese was a natural extension of her interaction with her spouse, who had quite limited English proficiency.

#### **Language Spoken to Parents by Children**

The informants' reports of the language their children used in communicating with them revealed very little difference between the two family types. With the exception of one family in which the Japanese parent was the father and one with a Japanese mother, the children in all of the families reportedly used 'English only' or 'mainly English' in communicating with their parents. The children who spoke the most Japanese to their parents belonged to family 4, a family in which the Japanese parent was the father. Since this father could speak little English, Japanese was the language used by the parents to communicate with each other and with their children. These children were thus receiving greater exposure to the minority language.

#### **Language Spoken Between Siblings**

In this study, 30% of the couples had only one child, so it is difficult to draw conclusions about the language used between siblings. Having stated this, however, a number of preliminary observations can be made. All of the informants' school-aged children communicated with their siblings in English. Moreover, one child from each of the two family types had recently begun school and their parents indicated that they had already noted a greater use of English when these children were interacting with their younger pre school-aged siblings. These results offer some support for Yamamoto's (1995) findings that suggest there is a correlation between the language of instruction at the children's school and the language chosen for communication between siblings.

However, as the language of instruction for all children involved in the present study was English, direct comparison is difficult. Nonetheless, this pattern of language use, with the second generation utilizing English as the main language of communication amongst siblings, was also evident in Cahill's (1985) study of the Italo-Australian community, even though both parents in the families in that study were native speakers of the minority language. In the present pilot study, the children are from mixed marriages with only one native Japanese speaking parent. It is therefore quite probable that the level of exposure to the minority language would be considerably less, and thus the likelihood of children communicating among themselves in the majority language would be higher.

### **Changes in Language Patterns**

Almost all informants noted in their interviews that changes had occurred in their children's use of Japanese over a period of time. The most noticeable change, according to the parents, was the decrease in the use of Japanese upon the child's entry to school. Clearly, the impact of schooling cannot be ignored in relation to the shift away from the minority language to English. Three of the Japanese fathers and two of the Japanese mothers noted the negative impact schooling had on their children's Japanese language competence.

Isolation was noted as having a further negative impact on the use of Japanese. Two Japanese mothers said they had discontinued using Japanese with their babies shortly after they were born and resorted to using English, the language they shared with their spouse. Both mothers commented on their feelings of isolation and strangeness in using Japanese in an otherwise English-dominated environment. According to figures made available through the Consulate General of Japan in the January 1999 issue of the *Japan Information Newsletter*, there were a total of 2,409 Japanese with permanent resident visas in Victoria in 1998. This small number, together with the widespread geographical distribution of the Japanese community, suggests a lack of support for the development and acquisition of the minority language. This situation was most probably further exacerbated by the Japanese participants' lack of extended family in Australia.

Another cause of changes in family language patterns may be developments in the parents' proficiency in their non-native language. For example, the Japanese mother in family 1 reported that as her own level of English competency improved, the amount of Japanese she used with her daughter decreased. The relationship between the parents' proficiency in their spouses' language and their children's bilinguality is therefore explored in the next section.

### **Language Proficiency**

In the families of mixed couples, the parents' ability in their non-native language may be a factor in determining family language-use patterns. In the home environment, it is natural that people will choose the language in which they can communicate quickly and easily. Thus, parents' proficiency in their spouses' language will affect the language environment created for the second



generation, and consequently, may influence the children's minority language acquisition. However, to date, this factor has received little attention in the literature.

In my data, there appeared to be a link between the language-use patterns in the homes of mixed couples and the level of competency of both the Japanese and Australian parents in their non-native language. In homes where limited English proficiency was reported by the Japanese spouse, a higher use of Japanese was reported by the different interlocutors, including the children.

To investigate this link, I asked informants to report not only on their own level of competency in their non-native language, but also that of their spouse and their children. This was undertaken specifically to alleviate some of the difficulties encountered with bias and self-reporting. The reports are summarized in Table 4. It is interesting to note that there was very little difference in the assessments given by the spouses about each other's level of language competence and or in their assessments of their children's Japanese language ability.

As is shown in Table 4, the Japanese informants were generally more competent in English than their Australian spouses were in Japanese. Given that the country of residence is Australia and that all participants in the study had lived in Australia for substantial periods of time, this was not unexpected.

Among the Australian spouses, the Japanese competency of the mothers was higher than that of the Australian fathers. This can be explained by the fact that the Australian mothers in the study had spent comparatively longer periods of time in Japan than the Australian fathers, as is evident in the background information given in Table 1. Time spent in the target culture is a significant factor affecting language competency levels (Kamada 1995a, Kirkman 1988).

The informants' assessments of their children's Japanese language proficiency are presented in Table 5. Given that most previous studies have suggested mothers to be the better carriers of the minority language, it was anticipated that there would be significant differences in the Japanese competency levels of children in the two family types. However, as can be seen in Table 5, the children with Japanese mothers displayed only a slightly higher level of Japanese competency than did the children of Japanese fathers, and the differences were not found to be significant. This was true for all four linguistic skills.

The two exceptions to the overall tendency for the children of Japanese mothers to display greater Japanese proficiency than the children of Japanese fathers occurred in the same family. Although the native Japanese speaker in family 4 is the father, both of the children were rated as having native-like Japanese speaking and listening skills. The exceptional Japanese proficiency of these children probably derives from the fact that of all the families in the study, theirs appears to provide the most Japanese-enriched environment. Their family was the only one in which both parents used Japanese when interacting with each other and with their children.

Overall, the difference in minority language proficiency between the children in families in which the minority language speaker is the mother and those in which the minority language speaker is the father was not as pronounced as in Kamada's (1995a) study. Although Kamada's research was

undertaken in Japan and employed different methodology from the present study, it is possible to make some preliminary observations. Apart from the fact that the difference in minority language competency levels between the two family types was not as evident in the Australian context, the present study also found quite a disparity in the overall minority language competency levels of the children. The children of mixed couples in Japan appear to achieve greater levels of competency in their minority language than children raised in Australia, perhaps because the minority language in Kamada's study was English, a language that enjoys great international prestige and a high level of institutional support in Japan. Furthermore, the difficulties of learning Japanese outside the society in which it is the dominant language cannot be underestimated. Further investigation is needed, however, before more conclusive comparisons can be made.

**TABLE 4: Parents' Proficiency in Spouses' Native Language**

Skill      Level of Ability		Native Japanese Speaker in the Family			
		Father		Mother	
		Australian Mother	Japanese Father	Japanese Mother	Australian Father
<b>Speaking</b>	1. Native-like	0	0	2	0
	2. Can say almost anything	2	1	1	0
	3. Can talk about daily events	0	3	2	2
	4. Can say a few words/phrases	3	1	0	1
	5. Unable to speak	0	0	0	2
<b>Listening</b>	1. Native-like	1	0	2	0
	2. Can understand TV/movies	1	3	3	2
	3. Can understand if spoken to clearly/slowly	0	1	0	0
	4. Can understand a few words/ fixed phrases	3	1	0	1
	5. Unable to understand	0	0	0	2
<b>Reading</b>	1. Native-like	0	0	2	0
	2. Can read almost anything	0	2	3	0
	3. Can read only simple materials	2	2	0	2
	4. Can read no more than individual words/syllables	0	1	0	0
	5. Unable to read	3	0	0	3
<b>Writing</b>	1. Native-like	0	0	2	0
	2. Can write almost anything	0	2	2	0
	3. Can write simple letters etc.	2	2	1	2
	4. Can only write alphabet/syllables	0	1	0	0
	5. Unable to write	3	0	0	3

**Notes:** No associations amongst the variables were found to be significant ( $p > .05$ ).  
All categories of informants  $n = 5$



TABLE 5: Children's Japanese Proficiency (as Assessed by Parents)

Skill	Level of Ability	Native Japanese Speaker in the Family			
		Father		Mother	
		Australian Mother	Japanese Father	Japanese Mother	Australian Father
Speaking	1. Native-like	2	2	0	0
	2. Can say almost anything	0	0	0	3
	3. Can talk about daily events	1	1	4	2
	4. Can say a few words/phrases	6	5	3	2
	5. Unable to speak	1	2	1	1
Listening	1. Native-like	2	2	0	1
	2. Can understand TV/movies	1	0	3	3
	3. Can understand if spoken to clearly/slowly	1	2	2	1
	4. Can understand a few words/ fixed phrases	5	6	2	3
	5. Unable to understand	1	0	1	0
Reading	1. Native-like	1	1	0	0
	2. Can read almost anything	0	0	1	2
	3. Can read only simple materials	1	0	1	2
	4. Can read no more than individual words/syllables	1	2	2	3
	5. Unable to read	7	7	4	1
Writing	1. Native-like	1	0	0	0
	2. Can write almost anything	0	0	0	0
	3. Can write simple letters etc.	1	0	2	3
	4. Can write only alphabet/syllables	3	3	1	4
	5. Unable to write	5	7	5	1

Notes: No associations amongst the variables were found to be significant ( $p > .05$ )

Children of Australian mothers and Japanese fathers:  $n = 10$

Children of Australian fathers and Japanese mothers:  $n = 8$

#### Other Variables

Having examined the differences that are evident in language use and language proficiency in the informants' families, it is important to consider the relationship between the gender of the minority language parent and some of the other variables that may have an effect on their children's Japanese language acquisition, namely, schooling, language support, time spent in the target culture, parental roles and parental attitudes.

### **Schooling**

As explained above, half of the Japanese informants mentioned the negative impact of mainstream schooling on their children's Japanese proficiency. However, since Kikman's (1988) and Yoshimitsu's (1993) studies have shown the importance of formal Japanese studies in the acquisition of Japanese, the role played by formal or informal classes taken to support the children's acquisition of Japanese must also be considered.

In my study, all of the school-aged children with Japanese mothers were presently attending, or had attended in the past, some type of course to assist in their acquisition of Japanese. In contrast, two children of Japanese fathers, though of school age, were not undertaking any studies to assist their acquisition of Japanese. However, preparations were in place for one of these children to go to Japan on exchange for six months to assist in her Japanese language studies in senior high school. This can be taken to be indicative of the parents' positive attitude towards formal Japanese studies.

The Japanese father of the other child, however, had a very different attitude in relation to the issue of Japanese language courses for his children. As a Japanese language educator of adults, he felt that his children could acquire Japanese successfully as adults if they were sufficiently motivated. Consequently, he was not particularly concerned about whether they undertook Japanese language study at this point in time.

In summary, with the exception of this father, who displayed a very relaxed attitude, all families of both family types exhibited positive attitudes towards their children undertaking formal Japanese language courses.

### **Language Support**

If children are to acquire Japanese language competency while living in Australia, they need to be exposed to the language in many different forms. Table 6 tabulates the information provided by the parents in this study on the type of language support that was provided in their homes.

The importance placed on reading by both sets of parents was demonstrated by the fact that all Japanese families provided Japanese language storybooks for their children. The main difference between the two family types was the wider range of language support aids provided by the families in which the mother was Japanese. These language aids included books, videos, audiocassettes, flashcards and games. The stronger emphasis placed on language aids by Japanese mothers correlated with a slightly higher level of Japanese competency in their children, as reported previously. It is possible that this greater use of aids is a tangible indicator of a greater level of consciousness of the need to foster language development.



**TABLE 6: Japanese Language Aids Used in Homes**

Teaching Aid	Native Japanese Speaker in the Family	
	Father	Mother
Books	5	5
Videos	2	3
Audio cassettes/Records	1	4
Hiragana Flash cards	0	2
Games	1	1
<b>Total</b>	9	15

**Note:** No associations amongst the variables were found to be significant ( $p > .05$ )

During the interviews, parents were asked which language they used when reading with their children. With the exception of one Australian mother, all of the Australian parents indicated that they read to their children in English. In contrast, the Japanese parents displayed a greater diversity in their language choice. Of particular significance was the fact that more Japanese fathers chose to use Japanese when reading with their children than did Japanese mothers. A possible explanation for this is that in Japanese society women are generally considered responsible for their children's education. The task of reading the English school reader with the children may therefore more often than not be undertaken by the mother.

However, as in the case of parental language choice when speaking to the children, it is not sufficient to consider only the language used for reading with them: the frequency of this activity is also important. With one exception, all of the Japanese fathers in this study indicated that their participation in this activity was fairly limited. The fact that these fathers used Japanese in reading to their children was, to some extent, negated by their limited participation. In contrast, the Australian fathers reported a higher level of involvement in this activity.

#### **Time Spent in the Target Culture**

As previously stated, studies undertaken by Kirkman (1988) and Kamada (1995a) found that the amount of time spent in the target culture was a key factor affecting language competency. The relationship between the frequency of family trips to Japan and the gender of the Japanese parent was therefore explored in this study. The informants' reports of the number of times their children had visited Japan are presented in Table 7.

**TABLE 7: Children's Visits to Japan**

Number of Visits Children Made to Japan	Native Japanese Speaker in the Family	
	Father	Mother
0	2	0
1	3	2
2 - 3	5	1
4 - 5	0	2
5+	0	3
<b>Total</b>	10	8

**Notes:** Children in families where father is Japanese:  $n = 10$   
Children in families where mother is Japanese:  $n = 8$

The close ties that often exist between women and their families may be the reason why the Japanese mothers who participated in this study were more likely to make visits to Japan to spend time with their families. Even given the different ages of the children involved in this study, it is possible to see a pattern emerging, both in terms of the number of trips and the total amount of time spent in Japan.

As seen in Table 7, over half the children of Japanese mothers had visited Japan four or more times. In contrast, no child with a Japanese father had visited Japan more than three times. Moreover, the two children who had never visited Japan were the offspring of a Japanese father, although it is possible that their father's extended family's presence in Australia was influential in this matter.

There was a direct correlation between the length of time spent in the target culture and the number of trips taken by the children. Over half of the children with Japanese mothers had spent periods in excess of four months in Japan, in comparison to children of Japanese fathers who, at most, had spent between one and three months there. As stated above, the age difference of the children involved in the study needs to be considered, and consequently it is not possible to draw definitive conclusions; nevertheless, it appears that the Japanese mothers tended to place a higher priority on trips to Japan.

#### **Parental Roles**

In language acquisition, not only the quality but also the quantity of target language input is important. Ellis (1994) has claimed that all theories of second language acquisition acknowledge the



need for input. The amount of time parents spend with their children is one indicator of the amount of target language input.

The informants' profiles indicated that three of the five Australian mothers were full-time mothers, while the remaining two worked part-time. The Japanese mothers, on the other hand, all worked in a full-time or part-time capacity. As previously reported, all but one of the Japanese fathers indicated heavy work schedules, and this meant that contact with their children was extremely limited. Generally, the time the Japanese fathers reported spending with their children was less than 10 hours per week, but in one case it was as little as two hours per week. In the only family with a Japanese father where Japanese was used as the language of the home domain, the Australian mother stated that she took responsibility for the children's Japanese language acquisition in the home. While her Japanese language competency enabled her to take on this role to a certain degree, this was not the case for most of the other Australian spouses. One of the Australian mothers stated that she believed it was her husband's responsibility, claiming that if he wanted his children to speak Japanese, then he should take a more active role in facilitating their acquisition of the language.

In the interviews a number of responses from the Japanese fathers indicated that, having been socialized in Japan, they expected the mothers to take the responsibility for rearing and educating the children. Over half the Japanese fathers believed that if the children's mothers were Japanese, the children would have higher Japanese proficiency levels. The children's low Japanese competency levels were to some extent rationalized by this belief. It seems that these fathers were acknowledging that the limited time they spent with their children did not provide sufficient exposure to the Japanese language to support higher levels of proficiency.

Kamada (1995a) hypothesized in her study that the amount of time spent by minority language speaking fathers was often insufficient to develop the minority language. Parental roles within the family often determine the level of interaction that occurs between parents and their children. It is possible, then, that it is not so much the Japanese parents' gender that is important, but rather the children's level of exposure to the language, which is to a great degree determined by gender-based parental roles. Support for this line of argument can be found in Kamada's (1995b) study of a Dutch family in Japan and Dopke's (1992) study of German children in Australia.

#### **Parental Attitudes**

The informants gave a broad range of reasons for wanting their children to acquire Japanese language skills. The majority mentioned the importance of children understanding Japanese culture and maintaining their Japanese heritage and identity. In addition, both Australian and Japanese mothers considered communication with Japanese family members an important reason for their children to learn Japanese. The Australian spouses also cited better career prospects as an important incentive. In contrast to the other informants, the Japanese fathers in this study had difficulty in providing reasons for wanting their children to acquire Japanese language skills. The

limited number of responses given by the Japanese fathers raises concern about their level of language consciousness.

This lack of consciousness was also displayed in the Japanese fathers' relative lack of awareness of the difficulties their children may experience in acquiring Japanese. An awareness of difficulties is essential if parents are to provide a Japanese-enriched environment for their children. Yet there was what appeared to be a distinct attitudinal difference in relation to the difficulties perceived by the two groups. In the families with Japanese fathers, the informants felt that their children were advantaged in learning Japanese in Australia because of the presence of a Japanese-speaking parent. In contrast, the Japanese mothers indicated that the many difficulties they experienced made their task of assisting their children in acquiring Japanese in Australia very hard.

## CONCLUSION

This preliminary study has analyzed the relationship between the gender of the Japanese parent in Japanese-Australian mixed marriages and their children's language use, language competency, and a range of other variables. It has attempted to evaluate the effectiveness of Japanese mothers and Japanese fathers as the minority language carriers in mixed marriages. Contrary to my original expectations, there was not a significant pattern of difference in language use between the two family types. Although the children of the Japanese mothers in this study did show a slightly higher level of competency in Japanese, this difference was not as pronounced as I had originally expected, or as was hypothesized by Kamada (1995a) for children of mixed couples in Japan. In fact, the Japanese fathers in this study reported using Japanese in their interactions with their children and spouses slightly more than the Japanese mothers. It appeared that this usage might be linked to the informant's ability in his or her spouse's native language.

In fact, notwithstanding its limitations in terms of the small convenience sample and the age difference of the children involved, this study suggests that the competency of the adults in their spouses' native language is one factor in determining the language-use patterns of the home and the Japanese language competency of the children of Japanese-Australian couples. It appeared that the limited English proficiency of two of the Japanese fathers, complemented by their wives' competency in Japanese, had a moderating effect on the anticipated influence of the gender of the minority-language parent on the language-use patterns and language competency of the children. The Japanese mothers who had an excellent command of English were in the position of being able to communicate competently with their children in English. It is possible that this had a negative impact on their children's acquisition of Japanese. This is not automatically the case, but clearly, competency in their spouse's native language means that parents in mixed marriages are in a position to make a conscious choice about the language they will use with their spouse and their children. Conversely, lack of competency in their non-native language limits the choices parents can make. These findings suggest that in future studies some consideration should be given to the



adults' proficiency in their spouses' native language as a variable which may influence the acquisition of minority languages in children of mixed couples.

Considering the slightly higher number of interlocutors using Japanese in the homes with Japanese fathers, it is interesting to note that it was the children of the Japanese mothers in this study who were reported as having slightly higher levels of Japanese competency. Possible explanations for this can be found in the analysis of the relationship between the gender of the Japanese parent and the other variables investigated in this study. For example, the children of the Japanese mothers had spent longer periods of time in Japan, and the Japanese mothers demonstrated a higher level of language consciousness and awareness of the difficulties their children were facing in their acquisition of Japanese. The findings in this study also suggest that the Japanese fathers tended not to spend much time with their children to enable the development of the minority language.

The children from both family groups, in the main, reportedly used English to communicate with their Japanese parents and their siblings. This shift to English was in line with previous findings about other ethnolinguistic groups in Australia, such as the Dutch (Pauwels, 1980) and the Italian communities (Cahill, 1985).

The methodology employed in this study differed from that of Kamada's study (1995a) and consequently, it is difficult to make comparisons. Preliminary observations suggest however, that the children of mixed couples in Japan where the non-Japanese parent is a native speaker of English may reach higher levels of competency in their minority language than the children of Japanese-Australian couples living in Australia. The language status and institutional support awarded to English in Japan, as well as the difficulties of learning Japanese outside the society in which it is the dominant language are possible explanations for this difference.

Further studies using appropriate language testing methods would be useful in our understanding of factors which affect the maintenance of a minority language. In this study, the gender of the children of the informants was not considered as a variable. Future research which considers this would be beneficial in light of the present push in Australian elementary and secondary schools for second language study.

Clyne (1991) is fairly pessimistic about the maintenance of community languages in Australia. The results of this study also lead us to be somewhat pessimistic about the future of Japanese as a community language in Australia. My findings suggest that although there are differences in language use and language competency among the children, which may be influenced, in turn, by the gender of the Japanese parent, these differences are not very pronounced.

If bilingualism or competency in the minority language is desired in cases such as the children of Japanese-Australian couples, it is essential that the levels of the parents' language consciousness be raised. There are a variety of ways in which this could be done. Research results and practical suggestions could be disseminated through the media and staff in all sectors of the education system.

Of particular importance is the role played by infant welfare authorities who deal with children in the zero to five-year age range. Furthermore, educational institutions could organize programs to assist in the maintenance of minority languages.

In today's world of increasing globalization, the need for a multilingual workforce is evident. The children of mixed couples have the potential to be bilingual, but their bilingualism is a precious resource that at present appears to be eroding in many societies. There is thus a need to consider measures that can be implemented to avoid further language shift, not only for Japanese but for other community languages that are represented in Australian society as well.

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**APPENDIX 1**  
**English Interview Schedule**

**General Schedule**

1. Name
2. Age/year born
3. Native language  
Second language
4. Occupation
5. Educational background
6. Year of marriage
7. Number of children, age of children, type of schooling
8. *(For non Japanese)*  
Have you been to Japan? How long? Purpose of trip?  
*(For Japanese)*  
How long have you lived in Australia?
9. Have your children been to Japan? How long? Purpose of the trip(s)?
10. Do you intend to return/go to Japan permanently in the future?

**Language Skills**

11. How would you evaluate each child's competency in Japanese with regard to their speaking, listening, reading and writing abilities? (Use scale)
12. How would you evaluate your competence in your spouse's native language?  
(All four linguistic skills; use scale)
13. What language do you generally use at home?  
Parents to each other  
Parents to each child  
Child to parents  
Siblings with each other
14. Have any changes in the language used at home occurred? What was the cause of the changes?
15. Do you actively encourage your children to acquire Japanese?
  - in what ways?
  - have you read to your children in Japanese? How often?
  - have you taught your children in an informal or formal manner?
  - are your children undertaking any formal study of Japanese outside the home? Details.
  - how much time do you spend with your children on average each week ( now and in the past if this has changed)

16. What correction methods do you use if your child uses Japanese incorrectly?
17. Do your children have opportunities to use Japanese outside the home?
  - relatives?

### Attitudes

18. Do you think it is difficult for your children to acquire Japanese language skills in Australia? Why or why not?
19. What level of Japanese do you want your children to reach? (for each of the four linguistic skills)
20. Why do you want your child to reach this level? Do you consider it important for your child to acquire Japanese? Why?
21. What is your attitude to bilingualism?
22. What do you consider are the most important influences on the development of your child's Japanese language skills?

## APPENDIX 2

### Japanese Interview Schedule

#### 1 回答者の背景として

- 1) お名前は何ですか。
- 2) お生れになったとしは何年ですか。
- 3) 母国語、及びそれ以外におでるになる言語は何ですか。
- 4) ご職業は何ですか。
- 5) 最終学歴は、いつ、どちらですか。
- 6) 結婚された年は何年ですか。
- 7) お子さんは何人いらっしゃいますか。  
それぞれの年齢、性別、出生地、通われている（通われていた）学校
- 8) オーストラリア滞在はどのぐらいですか。
- 9) お子さんは日本に行かれたことがおありですか。どのぐらいの割合で行かれましたか。  
通算でどのぐらい滞在されましたか。
- 10) 将来日本に帰国されるご予定はおありですか。

#### 2 言語能力（評価基準はKirkman, 1988 参照）

- 1 1) それぞれのお子さんの日本語の能力はどのくらいだと思いますか。  
話すこと 聞くこと 読むこと 書くこと それぞれについて。
- 1 2) ご自身の英語の能力はどのくらいだと思いますか。  
話すこと 聞くこと 読むこと 書くこと それぞれについて。



### 3 言語使用

13) 普通お宅ではどの言語をお使いですか。

配偶者同士で話されるとき

1) 英だけ 2) 主に英 3) 半々 4) 主に日 5) 日だけ

それぞれお子さんに話されるとき

1) 英だけ 2) 主に英 3) 半々 4) 主に日 5) 日だけ

それぞれお子さんがあなたと話されるとき

1) 英だけ 2) 主に英 3) 半々 4) 主に日 5) 日だけ

お子さん同士で話されるとき

1) 英だけ 2) 主に英 3) 半々 4) 主に日 5) 日だけ

14) 言語の使用について、何か変わったことがおありですか。

15) お子さんは英語と日本語を混ぜて使うことがおありですか。

そのことについてどう思われますか。

16) その他で、お子さんが日本語を間違えた時、たいてい直されますか。

できましたら、例をあげて頂けませんか。

17) 英語、日本語、あるいは両方をお子さんに聞かせることがありますか。

英語と日本語の割合はどのくらいですか。

18) お子さんに日本語を教えようとされたこと、あるいは配偶者の方が教えようとされるのを手伝われたことがありますか。今でも教えられていますか。

教えようとされたのはいつごろですか。

具体的にどのようなことをされましたか。

またその理由は何ですか。

19) 平均で週にどのくらいお子さんといっしょに過ごされますか。以前と比べて変わりましたか。

20) 現在、お子さんは日本語学習のための特別な学校あるいはプログラムに参加されていますか。

それはどちらで行われているプログラムですか。

いつごろからそれに参加されていますか。

どのくらいの割合でそれに参加されていますか。

21) その他に、お子さんがご家庭以外で日本語に接する機会がおありですか。

22) お子さんにVCE (\*高校三年生が受けるビクトリア州共通の試験)や大学で日本語を勉強して欲しいと思われますか。

### 4 言語学習上での問題

23) お子さんがオーストラリアで日本語を学習されるのは、大変だと思われますか。

また、そう思われたことおありですか。

どんな点が大変だと思われますか。

それはなぜだと思いですか。

### 5 言語使用及び言語学習に関する意識

24) お子さんにどの程度日本語ができるようになって欲しいですか。

話すこと 聞くこと 読むこと 書くこと それぞれについて。

25) おこさんの日本語学習の理由の中で、最も重要なものは何だと思われますか。

26) バイリンガルについてどうお考えですか。

27) お子さんの日本語の上達のために一番大切な事は何だと思われますか。

28) 後でわからないことがあった場合、また連絡させて頂いてもよろしいでしょうか。