

English Literacy Retention in Three Pairs of Japanese Bilingual Siblings

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This article presents a case study of three pairs of Japanese returnee siblings in order to investigate whether any social factors affect their L2 literacy. Based on results obtained through individual reading conferences, the study reveals that the returnees did not exhibit much regression in terms of oral reading, but comprehension skills, especially those requiring a high level of cognitive maturation, seem to be affected heavily by language loss or cognitive immaturity due to age. These findings are discussed in relation to social factors such as the children's literacy engagement. One of the study's implications is that the home is an important domain for maintaining L2 literacy, especially when more recreational and socio-interactional uses are emphasized.

海外において一定期間を過ごし、帰国する学齢期の児童の現地語能力は、渡航年齢、在留年数など多くの要因によって差があるが、彼らが一様に直面するのは、帰国後の言語保持・伸長の問題である。本研究では、海外生活を通じて英語を習得している小学生6名（3組の兄弟姉妹）に対し、読解力査定を縦断的に行い、物語の再構築をはじめとする発話データに基づき、英語によるリテラシー能力の特徴を記述した。先行研究により、児童の言語保持・喪失には、年齢的な要因が大きな役割を果たすことが指摘されているが、本研究においては、兄弟ごとにリテラシー能力及びその保持状況が類似していることが明らかとなった。また詳細な質的記述から、家庭という領域の重要性が指摘され、第二言語が「楽しみ」のため、また「相互のやり取り」のために使用される場合、特にその傾向が顕著であることが示された。

Introduction Returnees in Japan

Japanese children who have experienced living with their family in a foreign country for a significant period of time and have returned to Japan are called returnees (or *kikoku-shijo* in Japanese). Although they were initially seen as somehow disadvantaged due to a somewhat stereotypical view that they were undisciplined and held a variety of undesirable western values such as individualism and directness (Nakabayashi, 1981), the general attitude towards Japanese returnees gradually became more positive in the late 1970s as their highly proficient English helped them become part of the international elite (Goodman, 1993). Japanese societal images of returnees have therefore shifted from educationally disadvantaged to internationally-minded children with bilingual and bicultural skills (Fry, 2007). However, many children still experience problems coming to grips with their cultural identity and (re)entering the mainstream Japanese educational

system.

Upon returning to Japan from overseas, such children face several problems that arise out of the largely monolingual and mono-cultural nature of Japanese society and its educational systems, which force them to channel back immediately to a “normal” life as Japanese children, rather than encouraging them to maintain their bilinguality. Their priorities shift to adaptation or assimilation to their native country under the pressure of necessity. At the same time, a lack of sufficient support for children with multicultural/multilingual backgrounds results in an overall loss of the language that children have acquired. One of the most crucial issues is how returnee children readapt to the language and culture of Japan, while at the same time maintaining the language that they acquired in their host country (Yashiro, 1995).

While these children have developed intercultural communication skills and literacy in multilingual settings, such proficiencies have also been shown to deteriorate rapidly (Hansen, 1999; Yukawa, 1997). Very young children in particular, find it difficult to maintain the second language skills they have acquired once they return to the largely monolingual environment of Japan (Reetz-Kurashige, 1999).

Biliteracy retention in returnee contexts

The present study is designed to investigate English literacy practices of Japanese returnee children who speak English as a second language (hereafter L2) after they come back to Japan. The phenomenon of reading and writing proficiently in more than one language is not new, however the term “biliteracy” is a relatively recent one, having only gained currency in second language research during the past decade or so. It is now widely accepted that literacy is no longer a concept merely claimed as the ability to read and write (Cook-Gumperz, 1986). In the present study, “biliteracy” is addressed as skills to understand, interpret, communicate and use the information obtained from written texts associated with varying contexts in two languages (Webber & Johnston, 2000).

There are two main motivations behind the present study. Firstly, studies of literacy development in childhood have traditionally been carried out in monolingual contexts, in the fields of child bilingual development. However, how children acquire and handle two languages proficiently has also seen a surge of interest (Watanabe, 2003). Yet biliteracy has often been treated as an issue for school education and few studies in biliteracy have documented how Japanese bilingual children retain their literacy in two languages in the period of disuse of the L2. In addition, Yashiro (1995) points out that the demands for more sophisticated curriculum design for returnee children require further research on biliteracy retention.

Secondly, an investigation into bilateral retention is worthwhile since there are clear advantages in continuing L2 development, both for the individual and for society. On the individual level, the research clearly indicates that those who continue to develop multiple languages have certain cognitive advantages over their monolingual counterparts (Baker, 2006, Hakuta, 1986). On the social level, the increasing number of children living in multilingual settings, along with a growing concern for cultural and linguistic diversity, requires suitable approaches for maintaining and making use of their literacy skills. There is also a need to understand the process of literacy retention and development among returnee children who regularly function in more than one language.

Literature review

This section will discuss previous studies that have examined the influence of various

factors upon L2 retention. In particular we will review a variety of earlier studies that have investigated language retention among children whose L2 was acquired in natural settings.

Berman and Olshtain (1983) and Olshtain (1986, 1989) conducted a series of longitudinal studies that examined the English retention of children who returned to Israel where their L1, Hebrew, is mostly spoken. A limited reversal of the acquisition process with younger children aged five to eight years was found. This suggests that younger children experience greater language attrition compared with the older children aged 8-14 years. A point to take note of in these studies is that the participants' period of L2 disuse was comparable, in that they were all examined with oral and written tests immediately after return to their native country. From this point of view, this is a very rare and valuable sample indeed. However, it remains unclear whether the age factor truly has an influence on the L2 retention because the younger children were reported to have not mastered reading or writing in English at any time during the investigations. Furthermore, other important variables such as the social statuses and language backgrounds of the children were not examined in detail. For instance, no assessment tool was used to identify the English proficiency level of the participants, even though every participant was reported to have native-like fluency in English.

Cohen (1989) focused on age differences in language retention when he conducted a study similar to that of Olshtain (1989) on two trilingual siblings aged 12;9 and 8;7. It has been argued that productive vocabulary, especially of nouns, is a rather vulnerable aspect of the language. This study suggested that disuse of the participants' L3 (Portuguese) resulted in lexical loss and the effect of age on the subsequent retention process was also found.

Hansen (1999) studied four American children aged respectively nine, seven, four and three who returned from Japan to the United States and who had acquired Japanese as their L2 in natural settings. She found that age difference and the level of L2 proficiency attained were factors in later language loss. The findings of this study suggest that the attrition of the younger children occurred extremely rapidly in comparison with their older counterparts. Likewise, Fujita (2002) investigated retention among 36 Japanese returnee children who had acquired English in natural settings, reporting that both the rate and amount of L2 retention were affected by age. She pointed out that L2 retention was closely related to the age, including the child's age on returning to Japan (that is, the age of their removal from L2 use.) Children returning to Japan before the age of nine were more likely to lose their L2 than those returning later. In short, there seems to be a "cut-off" at nine years of age; children with high second language skills who were removed from the L2 environment before this time tended to suffer more from L2 attrition.

A recent study which also investigated the relationship between L2 retention and age was conducted by Tomiyama (2009). This study, which examined two siblings aged 10;0 and 7;0 whose L1 and L2 were Japanese and English, was based on storytelling data obtained over a period of 31 months. Each sibling was asked to tell a story by looking at a wordless picture book that included illustrations showing a clear storyline. The results indicated that age played an important role in retaining grammatical skills and that literacy was reported to be an important factor in terms of L2 maintenance. However, the participants were asked to accomplish exactly the same task (i.e. narrating the story along the pictured storyline) as many as seven times during the period of data collection, meaning excessive repetition of the task might have had an influence on their productive

grammatical and lexical skills.

Yoshitomi (1994; 1999) presents a qualitative case study of Japanese returnee children who are in the period of L2 (=English) disuse, which provides a tentative description of the linguistic features of returnee children's L2. Speech data were elicited from multiple tasks including free interaction, story-description, planned speech and listening comprehension and data were collected from four Japanese children aged nine and ten. The study aimed to examine change in the participants' linguistic skills in real time communication at different stages of attrition. The main finding of Yoshitomi's research was that the overall accuracy of English use showed greater attrition as time elapsed, compared with syntactic skill and lexicon. It also revealed that social and individual factors, such as motivation and the opportunity to use the L2, were associated with L2 maintenance.

Research questions

Taking into account these previous studies on the phenomenon of child English literacy in the returnee context, the following research questions have been generated to guide the present investigation.

- (1) What are the immediate contributing experiences that affect returnee children's English literacy practices and retention?
- (2) How do Japanese returnee children construct English literacy environments after they come back to Japan?
- (3) What kind of personal and social factors affect the retention of English literacy among young Japanese returnees?

Methods

Position of the present study

An overall theoretical framework for looking at reality has always been an important means of justifying and legitimizing any specific research method. Two alternative sociological frameworks are worth considering.

Firstly, the school of philosophy known as *Positivism*, the pervading approach of the mid-1900s, is still commonly used in various fields of research. This approach emphasizes measurement of easily scaled or quantified variables that generate highly reliable data (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993). Positivism is a model of the research process which treats "social facts" as existing independently of the activities of both participants and researchers (Silverman, 2001).

Secondly, *Social Constructionism*, which has gained increasing prominence since the 1970s, incorporates the idea that the reality in which we live has multiple features and is constructed without any preconceived notions. Constructionism is a model which encourages researchers to focus on how phenomena come to be what they are through the close study of interaction in different contexts (Silverman, 2001). There are two widely known approaches to this framework; the *Interpretive Approach* and the *Critical Approach*. In the former, research data are designated as a reconstructed partial reality and the purpose of the study is sharing an interpretive understanding about the regulation of human behavior in a specific situation. A clear advantage in adopting this approach is that interpretive understanding contributes greatly to grasping the social phenomenon under investigation. In the Critical approach, which had widespread recognition in the 1960s, researchers consider the reality as what can be remade and deconstructed. This approach aims at investigating how inequitable distributions lead to inequalities among

individuals and identifying contradictions between actual and perceived conditions of material life (Bottomore, 1984).

The approach taken in the present research is an interpretive one: a qualitative case study was conducted based on detailed examination of a limited number of selected individuals. Since the biliteracy practices of Japanese returnee children involve a complex variety of social phenomena, to capture them within existing theoretical frameworks is beset with difficulties. Essentialist, static explanations cannot be convincingly made in this case.

Participants

In order to screen the returnee children, the following five criteria were adopted. The participants should be children who: 1) received primary education in the Japanese language at an elementary school at the time of investigation; 2) used Japanese as their first language; 3) had two parents whose first language was Japanese; 4) returned to Japan after a prolonged (greater than three years) sojourn abroad prior to the investigation; 5) received primary education in English at a local elementary school or an international school in a mainstream class. Only those who satisfied all of the above criteria were recruited for the study.

To collect the participants, a network sampling was adopted. The researcher initially approached the International Children's Bunko Association to identify a few children who met the study's criteria, and then asked those participants to recommend further members. Table 1 outlines a list of the participants.

Table 1. Participants in the study

Participant	Gender	Age	Age at transfer	Age on return	LOR	Place
Jim (SP1-Oldr)	male	11;8	7;3	10;3	3;0	US-Minnesota
Tom (SP1-Yngr)	male	9;1	4;9	7;9	3;0	US-Minnesota
Eri (SP2-Oldr)	female	9;11	4;4	9;4	5;0	UAE-Dubai
Saya (SP2-Yngr)	female	7;3	1;8	6;8	5;0	UAE-Dubai
Meg (SP3-Oldr)	female	11;0	1;3	9;6	8;3	US-California
Rico (SP3-Yngr)	female	8;6	0;0	7;0	7;0	US-California

Age=age at time of data collection length; LOR=length of residence

Tomiyama (2009) mentions a number of advantages to enlisting the cooperation of siblings as participants in investigating L2 attrition. First, siblings have very similar language profiles, social backgrounds, language environments, and incubation periods (see Gardner, 1982), as well as identical family circumstances, which means that the major relevant factor that could affect L2 retention is age. Furthermore, in the current study the second siblings in each pair ceased living in their respective L2 environments at relatively young ages (7;9, 6;8 and 7;0), so they can be considered as belonging to the category of "very young children", a group which has been reported to have a tendency to lose their L2 faster and to a greater degree than older siblings, who are less vulnerable to attrition (Olshtain, 1989; Yoshida, Arai, Fujita, Hattori, Nagano, Okamura, Tanaka, Yanaura & Yoshitomi, 1989). For this reason, six pairs of young returnee children (three pairs of siblings, two female pairs and one male pair, 7;2-11;8) who had lived overseas were recruited as participants in the present study. The age at which the older siblings returned (10;3, 9;4 and 9;6) is also significant because they are all above the "cut-off" period (Fujita, 2002). In short, the ages at which the younger and older siblings returned

to Japan divided the participants into two groups, one with the potential to experience severe attrition and the other showing resistance to language loss.

The base-line data established from the children's school reports abroad or a formal assessment measured just before their removal from the L2 environment showed that each participant had attained grade-equivalent literacy skills in English. All the participants were from upper-middle class families and had moved to other countries because of their father's job. Their parents, all Japanese nationals, had college educations and were highly proficient in English as well.

Participant children's social relations in English

In addition to the above summary, as part of the case study it is worth briefly describing from a qualitative perspective the social relations that each sibling pair had in English.

Jim and Tom from Sibling Pair 1 had little conversation in English with other members of their family. All their close friends at school and in their neighborhood were monolingual Japanese. Thus, they had no opportunity to use English on a regular basis upon their return to Japan. Although, like the other sibling pairs, they enrolled in a language maintenance program (one hour/week), the classes mainly focused on *Eiken*, the Test of Practical English Proficiency taught by a Japanese teacher, mainly involving English grammar explanations in Japanese. Furthermore, they had no "distant" audiences to whom they could write or talk, such as through email or Skype.

Eri and Saya in Sibling Pair 2 had already gone through a linguistic shift from English (in which they used to communicate with each other) to Japanese, which became their dominant language on return to Japan. It was very difficult to fully maintain their English use at home when considering that primary children are constantly exposed to the Japanese language and its culture for several hours a day at school. However, their interactive English use was maintained to a certain extent by participating in the English language *bunko* in Tokyo, a small library activity that promoted biliteracy. Saya (SP2-Yngt) also attended a language maintenance program run by the local government, the Musashino Multicultural Educational Assistance Office (one hour/week), which served as her additional interactive English use. Another point to be noted is that they frequently interacted with their friends or teachers at their former school overseas, writing or receiving e-mails on a regular basis.

Only English was spoken at the home of Meg and Rico (Sibling Pair 3), a fundamental language policy adopted by the family after returning to Japan—a dramatic change from their family language policy in the United States, when they only spoke Japanese at home. As a result, the most intimate interactions consisted of relatively small, but influential English use of in the home domain. They were also receiving private English lessons provided by a native English-speaking teacher (one hour/week), which aimed at developing conversational skills on certain academic topics, based on the curriculum frameworks of California Department of Education. The two had occasional contact with their friends living abroad through e-mail.

In sum, some degree of social relations in English was retained by SP2 and SP3 despite the challenges these returnee children faced in preserving their English-related networks while forming new social links in Japan.

Participant children's literacy engagement

The participants had varied levels of literacy engagement upon their return to Japan. Jim and Tom (Sibling Pair 1) did not read or write anything at all except for their homework from English maintenance classes. They produced a few written pieces in English each

week, most of which they wrote for educational purposes. For most of the texts they wrote in English, the topics and content were pre-determined because they were largely related to their textbooks.

In contrast, Eri and Saya (Sibling Pair 2) experienced many hours of informal reading and writing in English at home. Eri clearly enjoyed English literacy. She was fond of writing short messages or notes, which was strongly connected to her play. She often wrote whatever came to mind in short phrases in English for no specific audience and also wrote e-mail, letters and cards to friends overseas. She produced some excellent pieces of work such as story writing, developing imaginative plots with clear structure, descriptive phrases and sophisticated connectives. She seemed to be aware of what was required for a successful piece of writing and was able to include this in her work. Furthermore, she read independently, showing good expression and understanding and obvious enjoyment in reading, choosing a good range of appropriate texts at home. Therefore, Eri's uses of literacy were mostly recreational and socio-interactional with some educational uses carried out due to her father's encouragement. Her younger sister Saya was also an avid reader and was capable of selecting texts of interest to her. She could read fluently and decode complex unknown vocabulary items, which helped in developing her comprehension skills. Like her sister, Saya also made socio-interactional use of English, often writing and reading e-mails, letters and cards.

Meg and Rico (Sibling Pair 3) were the most frequent and enthusiastic English readers among the six participants. They read for approximately 30 minutes before going to bed on weekdays, and on weekends they spent most of their free time reading. Their mother stated that they read everywhere inside the house, sitting on the floor or on the sofa and even standing in the corridor. As noted above, their home was an extremely text-rich environment, particularly with regard to English print materials. Among their possessions, the largest amount of print resources was recreational materials in English, which were apparently chosen very carefully by their parents. There was also a significant amount of bilingual educational materials, written both in English and Japanese. A notable characteristic of the family's text environment was its high-quality, academic nature. This suggests that a rich variety of literacy resources at home may help contribute to literacy retention. Meg and Rico also produced a large number of written texts in English, such as stories, e-mail and diaries. On one occasion, Meg wrote on an empty box, "Instructions: When Rico goes mental, take this box and hit her head with it at least ten times (lightly) until she goes back normal." Rico copied an entire driver's license in English, although she did not understand the meaning of some of the words. They spent a large amount of time reading and writing for recreational purposes.

Data collection

The main assessment tool employed in the present research is the Developmental Reading Assessment, Kindergarten through Grade 3, Second Edition (Hereafter DRA, Beaver, 1988). Consisting of a set of individually administered criterion-referenced and standardized reading assessments for children attending kindergarten through Grade 8 (Beaver, 2001), the DRA comprises the primary means of collecting data about regarding the participants' literacy levels. The DRA was adopted because it is research based, with demonstrated reliability and validity (K-8 Technical Manual Developmental Reading Assessment, 2009). It is also designed to reduce cultural bias in assessment. The authors of the DRA state that the texts were developed to reflect cultural diversity.

Procedure of reading assessment

The reading assessment was undertaken during the period from January to July, 2009. The reading session was conducted in English by the researcher, a Japanese/English bilingual, at three to four week intervals over the six month period. During the assessment, children were urged to select a text that seemed just right from a range of levelled texts, preview the book or make predictions, read aloud, then retell the story, and respond to the relevant questions. The entire assessment process was performed individually with each child and took from 10 to 40 minutes, depending on the level of the text selected.

Results and discussion

Ten categories of reading behavior (see Figure 1) were evaluated using the text-specific observation guide included in the DRA in order to score the participants' literacy performance.

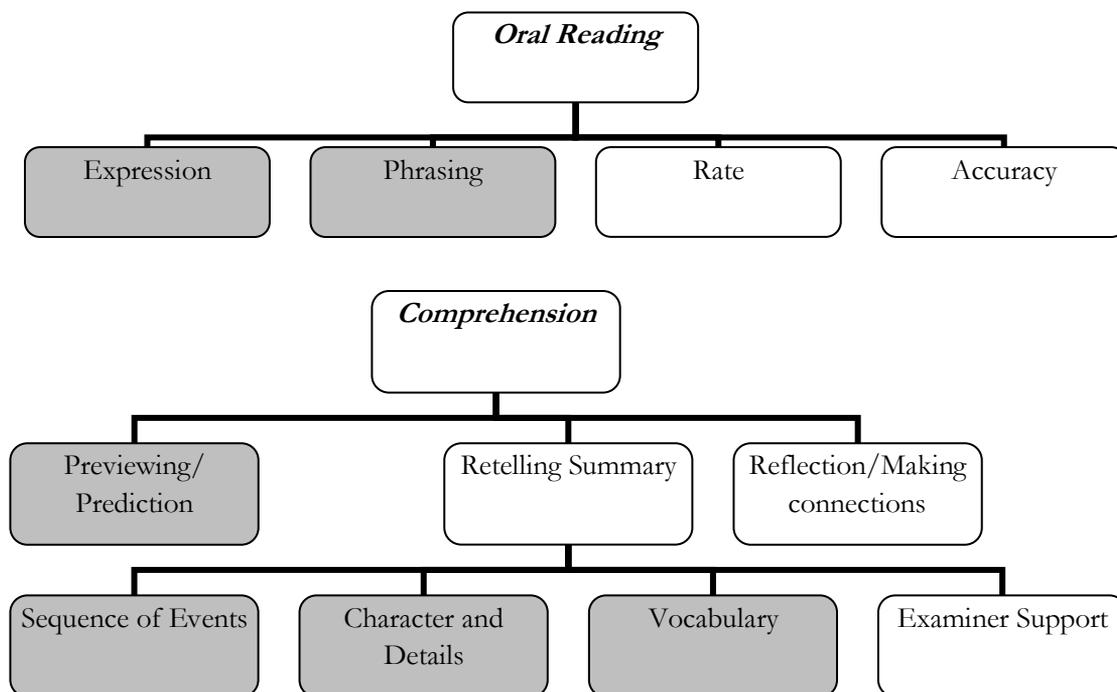


Figure 1. Evaluation Items in Oral Reading and Comprehension

In DRA assessment, seven evaluation items (the gray-colored items in Figure 1) require relatively subjective judgments in scoring student responses. Thus, it is important to examine the extent to which different evaluators agree in the assignment of a given child's performance. For this reason, the participants were assessed by two evaluators; one was the author and the other was another Japanese-English bilingual who had substantial experience administrating tests of linguistic competence to bilingual children, and who will be referred to as "the examiner" in this study. Disagreements between the two raters' evaluations were discussed until both raters were in agreement on all the items.

Oral reading

Table 2. Scores for Timed Oral Reading over Participants and Sessions

	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	Mean
SP1-Oldr	4	3.917	4	4	4	4	3.979
SP1-Yngr	3	3.125	3	3	3	3	3.023
SP2-Oldr	4	4	4	4	4	4	4.000
SP2-Yngr	4	4	4	4	4	4	4.000
SP3-Oldr	4	4	4	4	4	4	4.000
SP3-Yngr	4	4	4	4	4	4	4.000

As can be seen in Table 2, the children from SP2 and SP3 consistently achieved the maximum scores (=4), as was also the case with Jim (SP1-Oldr) if the 3.917 in the second session is rounded up. Tom (SP1-Yngr) also showed little fluctuations between each session, and his overall scores in oral reading fluency were much higher than those in the comprehension component. Hence, it is possible that oral reading skills seem insusceptible to loss at least for the first or second year of incubation. However, in Tom's oral reading, there were multiple errors in substitutions, incorrectly sounded out words and omissions, seriously affecting both the flow and meaning, such as for "Dot" (the name of a character), which he read "don't", or for "were" (plural past), which he read "we're". These sorts of reading errors appeared where he did not quite understand what he was reading. Judging from the baseline data on Tom's literacy skills, an indication of attrition was certainly found in his performance. A close examination of the errors observed in other children's oral reading reveals that they are regarded as accidental or careless "mistakes" rather than as errors (e.g. for "wood dam" read "wooden dam", for "at the bottom" read "in the bottom"). The results suggest that Tom's oral reading skill might remain intact to some extent while the other returnee children's oral reading fluency was relatively immune to attrition.

Previewing and prediction component

Table 3. Scores for Previewing and Prediction Component over Participants and Sessions

	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	Mean
SP1-Oldr	3	3	3	3	3	3.5	3.292
SP1-Yngr	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.000
SP2-Oldr	4	4	4	4	4	3	3.750
SP2-Yngr	2.5	2	2.5	2.5	2.5	3	2.500
SP3-Oldr	3.5	4	4	4	4	3	3.750
SP3-Yngr	3	3.5	4	4	4	4	3.727

Although the DRA is not designed to score children's linguistic performance such as lexical diversity, grammatical complexity or accuracy, the previewing and prediction component strongly reflects progressive regression of lexical items and the use of communication strategies to compensate for it. Excerpts are provided for comparing the participant's performance in describing a common scene in the same story, "A New School", where a girl called Kate goes to a new school. As explained above, each participant was asked to describe a situation by looking at the pictures before reading the written text.

As can be seen in Table 3, Tom (SP1-Yngr) consistently received the minimum scores at each session, which reflected his loss of productive skills in English. He was not talkative in either language, but he seemed particularly reticent to communicate in English perhaps due to the greater level of attrition he had experienced. In the first reading session, which was held approximately 18 months after he returned to Japan, he already seemed to have forgotten much of his English, demonstrating considerable difficulty in describing the story. Based on his speech alone and without looking at the illustrations, it was almost impossible to follow what was happening in the story he told.

On the other hand, Tom's older brother, Jim (SP1-Oldr) spoke fluently while describing the scene. Although there were grammatical errors apparent in his narratives, they did not affect comprehensibility of the sentences. Furthermore, his speech was much easier to understand when heard than it appears in the transcripts. He uses various kinds of communication strategies such as simplifying his speech in a quite natural way, which contributed to the high scores that he obtained in the assessment.

As for SP2, both performed equally well in oral reading fluency, yet their results in the prediction component showed great disparity. As can be seen in Excerpt 1, Saya (SP2-Yngr) frequently initiated self-repair by pausing or using self-repetition to reach the right expression, which consequently prevented her from effectively conveying the overall message fluently. She also frequently attempted to verify the correctness of her utterances with rising intonation. These features in her narratives provide evidence that she paid less attention to the sequence of the events and more attention to finding the most appropriate word to describe the scene.

Excerpt 1. (Saya, SP2-Yngr-T1):

Um, her mom and dad... are taking the boxes into the house. ...And [5] Kate is sad? (*Yeab, I think so, too.*) Kate is in her school. [5] Um, the teacher is reading a story? (*Yeab, right.*) the boys is reading a book. Kate is also reading a book. They're playing with bricks? (*Yeab, O.K.*) Um, it's lunchtime now, and a gir-, a girl is si-, sitting next to Kate. Kate is going home with her mother... and the bus is... stopping.

Eri's description of the scene was very long and elaborate. She described almost all the key events in detail and even hilariously dramatized one of the stories. Still, her prediction became shorter and simpler in the final session, in which her score dropped one point to 3. This may have been simply due to a distraction or a temporary lack of enthusiasm because in her speech data from the final session she explicitly expressed that she was exhausted on that day.

The scores of Sibling pair-3 show little difference, both remaining in the range of 3 to 4 at each session. Surprisingly, very similar narrative structures can be found in their responses. They describe most of the events depicted in the illustrations, yet their narratives are relatively dry and simple. Neither of them showed any problem in finding appropriate lexical items, nor did they struggle to use grammatical sentences in their speech. In short, there was no apparent evidence of regression in their utterances with respect to previewing and prediction reading skills.

Story retelling

Table 4: Scores for Story Retelling over [??]Participants and Sessions

	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	Mean
SP1-Oldr	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.5	3.292
SP1-Yngr	1.75	1.875	2	2	2	2.125	1.977
SP2-Oldr	4	3.75	4	4	4	4	3.969
SP2-Yngr	3.75	4	3.625	4	4	4	3.896
SP3-Oldr	4	4	4	4	4	4	4.000
SP3-Yngr	4	4	4	4	4	4	4.000

In retelling the story in his own words, Tom rarely presented a long stretch of speech to summarize the text and only seldom spoke without being prompted by the examiner to gain further information on a given story. Excerpt 2 is from Tom's speech during the story retelling when he summarized the text mentioned above. It takes the examiner five prompts before Tom retells the complete story, which scores 1 point in the examiner support item (i.e. the descriptor "Retells with no questions or prompts" scores 4 points).

Excerpt 2. (Tom, SP1-Yngr-T1):

- Examiner: Start at the beginning, please tell me what happened in this story?
 Tom: She doesn't like new school but she gets good at it so like the school, new school.
 Examiner: What happened at the beginning?
 Tom: Urn...the teacher read the book, story.
 [3]
 Examiner: What happened after she read a book?
 Tom: They read, they read a book...
 Examiner: What happened after that?
 Tom: At math time, they... made s-, s-, thing.
 [4]
 Examiner: What happened after that?
 Tom : At lunch time? Um, girl [5] girl gived [givd] cookie and said thank you.
 [3]
 Examiner: How did the story end?
 Tom: The...Kate? Like new school, so she said to his mother, shes [shiz] mother.

In contrast to his younger brother, Jim (SP1-Oldr) was eager to elaborate on his retelling towards the later sessions, as shown in Excerpt 3. His use of communication strategies to compensate for attrition worked quite effectively, resulting in relatively high scores.

Excerpt 3. (Jim, SP1-Oldr-T1):

Kate? was sad to move but she moved to new school and at um... reading time? The classmates helped Kate and she was little sure but she wasn't sure she still like, no, and at... math time? The class-ta, classmates helped Kate to like find shape and she liked [laiktid] new school and lunchtime? Sh-, the girl and Kate were got friend? And she liked new school, Kate. And sh-, Kate told mother that um, Kate, uh, I love new school, y-,

yeah, and...

Sibling Pair-2's narratives verify their high ability to retell and understand the text, including the main ideas, important factors, and characters, events or topics. In addition, their schematic knowledge about fiction text is rich, often opening and ending with formulaic phrases such as "and they lived happily ever after". There is one notable implication derived from their story retelling. Saya's description suggests that she retells the story by means of memorizing written text and dialogue (the underlined parts in Excerpt 4) with greater memory capacity and reproduces them as in the text.

Excerpt 4. (SP2-Yngr-T1):

Um, Kate moved to a new house...and then she was sad... because she didn't like her new school. And then, uh, she, dad, dad... go to the new class and then the teacher said sit by, sit near me... and, and the teacher read some stories... and then at story time, the boy sat next to Kate... on the rug and then they finded [faɪndɪd] a book for Kate and at math time... with shapes Kate made a house and the girl made a dog... and the boy made a, uh [6] at lunch time the girl sat... next to Kate and then she gave a cookie and then Kate said thank you and then... her mom picked up and then Kate xxx to say what happened at school.

In comparison, Eri (SP2-Oldr) expresses the story in her own words and shows no apparent difficulty in coming up with moderate expressions to replace the expressions ruled in the text. For instance, she used the passive voice (e.g. "she was asked to eat the lunch with the girl"), which seemed quite natural from the viewpoint of narrative discourse or the theme of the topic. Although the strategies they used to retell the story were different, both obtained high marks in the assessment.

As shown in Table 4, Rico (SP3-Yngr) and Meg (SP3-Oldr) performed very well, demonstrating excellent story-retelling skills. Unlike the other sibling pairs, there was no noticeable difference in their story-retelling performance, with both girls providing a great deal of detail about the text and what happened. Both their highly proficient English and their vast prior knowledge had an impact on their retelling of the text. The two examples below provide insight into their ability to memorize specific words and lines of the text in order to reconstruct the story effectively.

Excerpt 5. (Rico, SP3-Yngr-T1):

She was moving so she, she was worried that she wouldn't have liked the school and have any friends and then her father took her to her new classroom and the teacher said to sit next, sit uh-, sit beside her and she read a story to everyone and then she liked the story but she wasn't sure she liked the new school and then two boys helped her find a book and... they sat together on a rug and read together and then math a boy and a girl helped her find a tub of shapes and a girl, she made a house and then a girl made a house and a boy made a bird and at lunch time a girl asked her to sit next her and then she gave her a cookie and after school she walked home with her mom and talked her that she liked the school.

Reflection and making connections component

Table 5. Scores for Reflection and Making Connections Component over Participants and Sessions

	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	Mean
SP1-Oldr	3.5	2.667	2	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.542
SP1-Yngr	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	1.091
SP2-Oldr	3.75	3.5	3.5	4	4	2.75	3.5
SP2-Yngr	2.5	1.75	2.25	2.75	2.5	2.75	2.417
SP3-Oldr	3	3.5	4	4	4	3.5	3.563
SP3-Yngr	3.5	3.75	3.75	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.591

From the beginning of the data collection, Tom (SP1-Yngr) had difficulties communicating in English, especially during the inferential comprehension segment of the test, in which he gave up attempting to express himself all together. He showed great difficulty even in coming up with simple sentences or one-word utterances, although these were observed in other components when he was required to validate his own inferences or judgment. He often replied with “I don’t know” or “Nothing”, but at the final session, he attempted to convey his intended meaning toward the end of the session. Excerpt 6 is taken from Tom’s speech, where he talked about the importance of keeping a promise after reading a story in which a mother told her son to come home before dark. As shown below, the examiner jointly constructed the conversation with Tom and asked him for missing information to fill in unconnected linguistic items. He managed to use “save (a promise)”, a direct translation of the Japanese expression, “*yakusoku* (a promise) *o* (particle) *mamoru* (save, protect)”, although incorrectly, to mean, “keep a promise”. As a result, Tom’s score at the final session showed slight improvement.

Excerpt 6. (Tom, SP1-Yngr-T6):

- Examiner: What was the important thing that happened in this story?
 Tom : ((flips each page and points to page number 5))
 Examiner: There? Page number 5? Why do you think that was important?
 Tom: Because, because this guy was dark to go this place and the... listen the mother? the mother said before dark to, before dark go back to the forest, lake? And as he didn’t, he didn’t, he got dark to get here so he was, he didn’t save a [4]
 Examiner: Oh, promise!
 Tom: ((smiling)) Yes!

Jim’s scores ranged from 2 to 3.5. He understood important text implications and occasionally included supporting details, but at the same time, he exhibited problems trying to find the right words and sentence structures to express them. Excerpt 7, taken from Jim’s fourth reading session, provides evidence of his English attrition. Here, he is reading a story about a frog that complains about his own color, wishing to become like other animals. The researcher intuited that he had intended to say, “even if you think you have a bad color, you should be proud of the way you are”. In the prediction and story-retelling components, he chose to describe only a list of separate events, but used communication strategies effectively to compensate for his lack of vocabulary. However, as stated earlier, responding to questions concerned about reflection and making connections demands the highest level of experience-based comprehension. At this level, higher cognitive skills such as using portions of the text to support his thinking and

judgment are required. Thus, Jim (SP1-Oldr) was not able to strike a balance between what he intended to express and his grammatical and lexical problems.

Excerpt 7. (Jim, SP1-Oldr-T4):

Examiner: What do you think the author is trying to tell you in this story?

Jim: If you like, if, if it, if it's like the, you think a bad color? just um, uh-, take like your color as a great color, yeah, and like so.

Saya (SP2-Yngr) who was the youngest (=7;3) among the participants seemed to have difficulties in responding to such questions due to an apparent lack of cognitive maturity. From a linguistic perspective, there were no qualitative or quantitative errors observed in her responses. However, her scores in the area of making connections were lower than those in other areas because she was not capable of reflecting on what she had read to determine its significance and to understand the author's intent. In addition, she occasionally rushed through a text and did not always understand the meaning of certain important words, making it difficult for her to recall the story. Her response in Excerpt 8 and that of her older sister Eri in Excerpt 9 are both based on the story about the frog mentioned earlier.

Excerpt 8. (Saya, SP2-Yngr-T4):

Examiner: What do you think the author is trying to tell you in this story?

Saya: Um, green is a great color.

Excerpt 9. (Eri, SP2-Oldr-T5):

Examiner: What do you think the author is trying to tell you in this story?

Eri: You can be yourself and you don't have to copy other people.

Saya's brief response provides evidence of her limited ability to make inferences about what she had read. Her older sister Eri, on the other hand, was able to read between the lines and go beyond the text itself to identify deeper meanings within the story. She knew how to draw conclusions and form her own opinions by searching for relevant information from the text.

Both of the children in Sibling Pair 3 demonstrated excellent performance in this area. They showed their recognition of the message or themes developed by the author even when they were not mentioned directly in the text. They were able to identify the information they had learned and discuss what they thought was the most important event in the text. Considering Rico's age and level of cognitive maturation, it was surprising that she was so often able to make thoughtful connections that reflected a deeper understanding of the story. As shown in Excerpt 10, both sisters' provide responses that reflect a higher level of thinking.

Excerpt 10. (Rico, SP3-Yngr-T3):

Examiner: What do you think the author is trying to tell you in this story?

Rico: If any, you have ugly you think and your friends think it's no really matter because it doesn't matter how are the people think and matters how you think.

Excerpt 11. (Meg, SP3-Oldr-T4):

- Examiner: What do you think the author is trying to tell you in this story?
 Meg: I think the author who wrote this book was telling the reader about you should be glad the way you are because you shouldn't try, you know, to change anything and really to be just the way you are.

Summary

The graph in Figure 2 provides a summary of the results obtained through the reading assessment. The children's responses to each item relating to the four aspects of reading (oral reading, prediction, retelling and reflection) are scored on a 4-point scale using a continuum with detail descriptors.

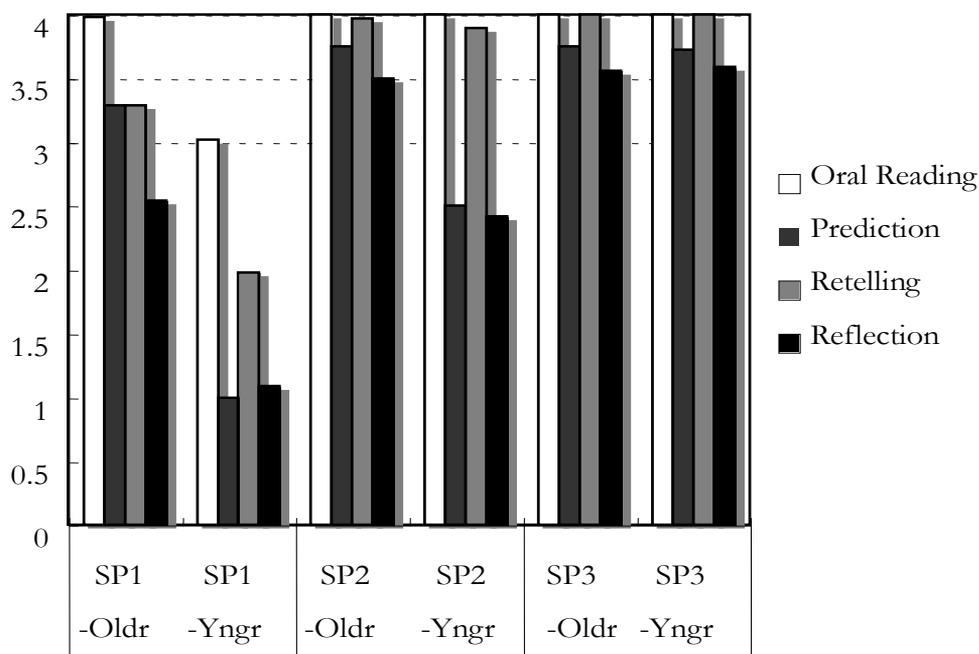


Figure 2. Participants' mean scores in the DRA rated on a 4-point-scale

Overall, the scores of the Oral Reading Fluency exhibited evidence of retention. The participating children seemed to maintain their oral reading skills well. There were, however, indications that Tom (SP1-Yngr) was not capable of allocating attention to both reading with accuracy and understanding meaning, as some of his errors in oral reading seriously affected sentence comprehensibility.

In scene description, a part of the previewing and prediction component, Tom (SP1-Yngr), the returnee child with the most severe attrition, was not able to produce any informative utterances. In contrast, his older brother Jim, who obtained relatively high scores, seemed to utilize communication strategies and relied on paraphrase to compensate for his lack of vocabulary. Saya (SP2-Yngr) spoke with frequent

self-corrections and repetitions, paying too much attention to accuracy. She was not able to convey meaning at the same time, resulting in her lower scores. Eri (SP2-Yngr), on the other hand, was able to elaborate her scene description including emotional expressions and showed excellent performance. There were no noticeable differences in sibling pair-3. Although their scene description tended to be monotonous and simple, almost all the key events were included.

As for story retelling, Tom (SP1-Yngr) and Saya (SP2-Yngr) showed similar patterns, in that their scores were much better than those in the prediction component. Nevertheless, Tom's ability to describe a story was quite limited. One possible reason for their improvement might be that working memory capacity may have been a factor in their story-retelling performance. This implies that the retelling of the written text seemed to help the younger children in getting through the adverse circumstances of trying to maintain productive ability in English. The other children also obtained high scores in story retelling. This suggests that, at least for these children, the reproductive skill of story-retelling is stable and not much affected by the cessation or decrease of L2 use.

Finally, there are several significant findings regarding inferential comprehension demanding cognitive maturation. Firstly, Jim (SP1-Oldr) who was assumed to be cognitively more advanced than the younger siblings, showed greater difficulties in expressing himself due to his lack of vocabulary and inability to construct appropriate sentences. The communication strategies he adopted in the prediction component were relatively ineffective when he was required to express a high level of comprehension. Secondly, Saya (SP2-Yngr) was not able to synthesize the information in the text with her prior knowledge or figure out what the author did not state explicitly in the text. This may be another indication that presenting interpretative comprehension taxes younger children who are not cognitively mature enough, even if there is no apparent evidence of language loss.

The result for Sibling Pair-1 is in accordance with the weaker maintenance of productive skills reported in previous research. Some attrition was found in terms of loss of vocabulary and grammar. Their use of words was considerably limited and word selection was occasionally inappropriate as well. The results imply that both Tom (SP1-Yngr) and Jim (SP1-Oldr) have seemingly lost a large portion of their English proficiency and their age difference did not play as big a role as previously reported. Besides their ages, the length of residence overseas seems to be an influential factor in accounting for the difference in their literacy performance. Their length of stay in the U.S. was three years, which was somewhat shorter than the other children. Yet considering the period between the time when initial "exposure" to English occurred and the termination of L2 contact, their length of stay overseas is assumed to be a less significant factor. In fact, Jim (SP1-Oldr) spent more years in an educational setting, which presumably provided him with more opportunities to solidify his English including literacy skills than the other younger participants.

Social factors on English literacy retention

A number of factors influence the maintenance of a returnee child's L2, including the age on arrival at the L2 environment and the length of residence overseas. However, to the best of my knowledge, the issue of social factors has been left largely unexplored in the domain of L2 retention research, especially in the returnee context. In investigating English literacy retention in returnee children in primary levels, it is important to take

into consideration the parents' view of language maintenance and home practice of literacy.

Although the parents of Jim and Tom (Sibling Pair 1) admitted that English maintenance is important, they preferred not to reinforce English use with their children. This was based on their belief that the development of academic Japanese was more crucial for their children because they were planning to put Jim and Tom in for several entrance examinations at private junior high schools, and their Japanese fell far below the grade-equivalent level especially in lexical aspects. Their mother stated that her children were required to acquire full-literacy skills, reaching standard level in Japanese. Thus, literacy practices in English carried out by Jim (SP1-Oldr) and Tom (SP1-Yngr) were found to be narrow and were restricted to educational use, reflecting their parents' attitude.

Sibling Pairs 2, Eri and Saya's parents, on the other hand, were strongly interested in their children's English retention and showed active participation in their linguistic activities in English. Particularly, their father tended to consider that he was primarily responsible for his children's English retention, showing a contrasting attitude from the other fathers. This tendency was seen strongly in him, in that he was even ready to be absent from his work to observe the language maintenance program in which the children participated. Their mother was also eager to fill her children with intellectual curiosity using both languages, providing an extremely text-rich environment at home for their literacy, particularly with print materials written in English including a regular subscription to an English newspaper.

The parents of Meg (SP3-Oldr) and Rico (SP3-Yngr) also emphasized the significance of English retention as of siblings-2 while admitting that there is much difficulty. The parental attitude toward their children's English is characterized by the language policy of the family, in which English only was to be strictly spoken at home by the children. The children, including their 12-year-old sister and 4-year-old sister, spoke to each other and to their parents in English, which the parents actively encouraged after returning to Japan, although the parents usually responded in Japanese. Judging from the observation carried out by the author, the children spoke both languages well, had no apparent problem switching from one language to another and never mixed their languages, although the youngest child seemed to be passing a phase of mixing the two. A print-rich environment was also provided for Meg and Rico (Sibling Pairs 3). Their living-dining area contained a large number of print materials. These books consisted mostly of picture books that were suitable for primary and kindergarten children, generally kept around the dining table where the majority of day-to-day literacy activities were carried out. There were many posters, maps, pictures, handwritten notes and lists of words in both languages pinned on the wall. One more thing to be mentioned about the parental attitude toward English retention is that they were eager to provide the best educational settings including English maintenance classes with their children, and were willing to try out various classes and transfer their children to a better environment until finding the most suitable place.

Although all the parents stated that English literacy retention is important for their children because it is a means of organizing and sorting theoretical ideas, and also obtaining large amount of information, each parental attitude varied. The parents of Jim and Tom (Sibling Pair 1) considered that English literacy is an important factor for their children's wellbeing in Japan, as well as ensuring professional success in the future, but that L2 retention should not be emphasized at the expense of risking the opportunity to

be on par with their Japanese classmates. The parents of Sibling Pairs 2 and 3, on the other hand, seemingly do not expect their children to establish only Japanese identities leading a “normal” life as Japanese children or immediately acquire the Japanese language. They considered it very important for their children to continue to develop their English to a point that may be considered bilingual and biliterate (based on the parents’ subjective judgment) in order to have a wider field of vision. Thus, their stance toward English maintenance was very enthusiastic.

Conclusion

The results obtained through the reading conferences revealed that the returnees who took part in this study did not exhibit much regression in terms of oral reading. While they generally maintained their oral reading skills, their comprehension skills, especially those that required a high level of cognitive maturation, seem to have been affected heavily by either language loss or cognitive immaturity due to age. It was also found that even returnee children who had seemingly lost a great portion of their English were capable of performing better in literacy tasks when utilizing various types of communication strategies.

These findings are discussed in relation to social factors, such as the children’s literacy engagement rather than simply age alone. Suggestions are made as to what kind of social factors work effectively in returnee children’s second language maintenance. One of the implications of the present study is that the home is an important domain for maintaining L2 literacy, especially when more recreational and socio-interactive uses are emphasized. Social relations play an important role in maintaining and developing their L2 from the viewpoint of the motivation and the opportunity to use English in communicative situations as well. Parental attitudes offering scaffolding, encouragement and assistance in the children’s English literacy practice is crucial. It is hoped that the findings of the present study will benefit returnee children, parents, educators and all others involved in second language maintenance.

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Appendix

Transcription symbols

The following transcription symbols were used by the researcher when transcribing audio-taped speech data.

(())	Nonverbal sounds and gestures, e.g., ((laugh)), ((nodding))
...(multiple period)	Short pause, between 0.5 and 2 seconds
[5]	Longer pause; the number in the square brackets indicates the length of the pause in seconds
xxx	Unintelligible utterance
<i>Italics, (italics)</i>	Words or phrases said by the researcher; simultaneous or overlapping talk is written in parentheses
!	An exclamation mark denotes a sharp rise at the end of a word or phrase and words pronounced with emphasis
?	A question mark denotes rising intonation at the end of a word or phrase
Wor-	An utterance is cut off or unfinished