

## Book Reviews

### **The Bilingual Edge: Why, When, and How to Teach Your Child a Second Language**

By Kendall King and Alison Mackey

New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers (2007) 289 pages.

For the past decade or so, parents in the United States and elsewhere have been following a trend to attempt to make their children smarter through the use of products such as the Baby Einstein video series and other purportedly educational toys. Now Georgetown University linguistics professors Kendall King and Alison Mackey, both mothers of young children themselves, offer American parents yet another way to give their children a leg up—through the wonders of bilingualism. In *The Bilingual Edge*, King and Mackey explain clearly and simply why, when, and how to teach children a second language, backing up their ideas with a wealth of current research and personal experience.

Although written primarily for a lay audience of parents living in the United States, *The Bilingual Edge* contains plenty of information for parents with all levels of expertise living anywhere in the world. Serious researchers will be frustrated by the lack of in-text citations, but the authors provide a sufficient list of references for each chapter at the end of the book for those who want to delve more deeply into the literature. Additionally, non-US residents will find themselves skipping over much of the chapter on how to find good second language learning programs, which focuses on North American locations.

The book is divided into four sections with two to four chapters each, for a total of twelve chapters. Section One provides the rationale for teaching a child a second language, explaining the familiar cognitive and social benefits that come with bilingualism in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 explains and debunks ten myths about second language learning, such as the mistaken idea that mixing languages is a sign of confusion. These two chapters provide useful ammunition for parents who are committed to bilingualism for their children, but who face opposition from friends, family members, or teachers who either do not understand the point of teaching children a second language or may even view bilingualism as somehow harmful to a child's development.

Section Two deals with the questions of which language to teach a child and when to begin (Chapter 3 and 4, respectively). For most bicultural families living in Japan, these questions were probably already answered long before their babies were born. Nonetheless, these two chapters provide some interesting anecdotes about other families' language choices and summarize some useful research about the differences between younger and older learners. Chapter 5 discusses the effects of individual differences like birth order, gender, personality, aptitude, and learning styles. This chapter offers comfort and advice for parents who are concerned about the differences in the linguistic development of their children compared to that of other children in their families or communities.

Section Three tackles perhaps the most important question in the book: How? Chapter 6 deals with promoting language learning at home and divides families into three types, offering tailored advice for each type. According to the authors' classification, there are *majority language families* (both parents speak the majority language of the community they live in), *mixed language families* (one parent speaks a language other than the majority language), and *minority language families* (both parents speak a language that is not the majority language). For all family types, the main advice is that parents should make use of all opportunities to use the target language in meaningful and enjoyable activities that are integrated into the family's routines in realistic ways. Curiously, however, the authors seem to imply that majority language families have an easier time of promoting second language use at home, even though the parents are not proficient in the second language. This may be because they assume that these parents will make greater use of the other methods for promoting language learning that are discussed in the next two chapters.

Chapter 7 covers language learning through edutainment, such as music, TV/videos, and language software. The authors conclude that for younger children (babies and

toddlers), these forms of technology should be used carefully and only through interactive parent-child activities. They point to research that shows that edutainment toys for babies and toddlers are not as effective as the manufacturers claim. For older children, however, technology provides powerful tools for supporting language development. In Chapter 8 the authors capably explain how to choose a good second language learning program and cover several types of bilingual education. As mentioned previously, this chapter will be most useful to parents living in the United States, but it does include a great number of factors to consider for parents who have a wide range of educational choices, wherever they may live.

Section Four is titled “What if...?” and deals with concerns and questions that parents may have along the way towards bilingualism. This section covers many of the same issues dealt with in the earlier chapter on myths and misconceptions, but it expands on those points and goes a little deeper into the research. Chapter 9 addresses concerns about mixing and switching languages and offers advice for what to do when a child fails to use the target language. The authors assure parents that code-mixing and code-switching are normal and should not be cause for alarm. Strangely, however, the authors provide unconventional definitions of code-mixing and code-switching, which slightly undermines their assertion. They explain that code-mixing occurs when “language learners combine two languages due to *incomplete knowledge* of one or both languages,” while code-switching “is common among highly proficient adults and children, a sign of *mastery* of two languages” (p. 194). The authors also state that code-mixing eventually goes away, further suggesting that there is something wrong with it. More traditional definitions describe code-mixing as the combining of elements of two languages within a sentence or phrase, and code-switching as the shifting from one language to another across sentence boundaries (Bokamba, 1989). These are also known as intra-sentential and inter-sentential codeswitching (Meyers-Scotton, 2006). These definitions are preferable as they provide more accurate descriptions of actual bilingual language use.

Chapter 10 deals with language delay, special needs, lack of progress, and unsupportive advice from “experts” such as doctors and teachers. The authors suggest that parents with such concerns should keep in mind the benefits of knowing two languages and not allow these challenges to become barriers to bilingualism. In Chapter 11 the authors briefly discuss trilingualism and dialects, stating that adding a third language is not an unreasonable goal, which may in fact be easier if a child already speaks a second language. Finally, Chapter 12 addresses concerns about family disagreement or child resistance to bilingualism and other problems along the way. The authors urge parents not to let language issues become a source of arguments in their families and to try to be flexible and creative about providing situations where their children will actually want to use the second language.

In addition to the main text, the book includes several useful features that make it easy to find information and help readers get the most out of the book. There are “Fast Facts,” which are short summaries of important points offset from the main text. The book also includes many “Spotlights on Research,” which summarize significant research findings. There are also several “Exercises” at the end of some of the chapters to help parents synthesize the information with their own family situations. Finally, each chapter ends with a quick summary called “Points to Remember.”

Although intended for an American audience, this book offers parents everywhere an easy-to-read and entertaining overview of the latest research on the benefits and the means of helping their children attain bilingual proficiency.

## References

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## **Raising Children Bilingually Through the 'One Parent-One Language' Approach: A Case Study of Japanese Mothers in the Australian Context**

By Masae Takeuchi

Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang AG (2006) 385 pages.

Many couples with different native languages hope that their children will become bilingual and therefore be able to communicate with both parents and their relatives in their mother tongues, while also presumably being able to enjoy better career opportunities and a wider worldview. A little reading about bilingualism often leads them to adopt the "one parent – one language" or OPOL approach with their children as the most commonsense way to impart both languages (see Jackson, this volume). Although research has shown that many children exposed to two languages in this way gain only receptive knowledge of the minority language, several studies provide clearer answers as to why some children actively use both languages while others do not (see especially Döpke, 1992 and Lanza, 1997). Most of this research, however, has been done on very young children—usually around the age of two or three, when infants acquiring two languages simultaneously are just learning to use them appropriately. Yet while many parents have success in getting their children to speak two languages in early childhood, once the young bilinguals enter school they often stop using the minority language, perhaps because it does not develop as quickly as the majority language or because they do not wish to be different from their monolingual peers. There is therefore a great need for research on why some children continue to use the minority language after starting school while others do not. It was to fill this gap that Masae Takeuchi conducted her doctoral research on school-age Japanese-English bilinguals in Australia. Some of the early fruits of her project were published in this journal (Takeuchi, 2000) and presented in the Bilingualism Colloquium at JALT2000.

Now *Raising Children Bilingually Through the 'One Parent-One Language' Approach* presents the complete results of Takeuchi's study. Chapter 1 gives a brief overview of the book, and then in Chapter 2 Takeuchi provides a review of previous research on child bilingualism and the OPOL approach, including studies on factors associated with "successful" and "unsuccessful" cases. This is a clear, comprehensive description of methodology and findings that would serve as a good starting point for anyone planning to raise a child bilingually or conduct research in the field. In addition, Takeuchi includes an overview of studies on parental input in language acquisition by monolinguals, focusing on interactional styles found to promote language development. She goes on to summarize research on the maintenance of languages other than English in Australia, as well as research on Japanese-English bilinguals in Australia. This 56-page literature review in itself may well be worth the price of the book.

Chapter 3 contains a detailed description of the methodology Takeuchi employed. Her study consisted of two separate parts, both well designed and implemented. First, Takeuchi conducted semi-structured interviews with 25 Japanese women who were married to non-Japanese Australians residing in Australia and who had adopted the OPOL approach to raising their children bilingually. The mothers' answers were analyzed to try to determine characteristics that led to active bilingualism as well as those that were less successful. Takeuchi then arranged to conduct longitudinal case studies of four girls who were raised by Japanese mothers using the OPOL approach in Australia, tracking the language use by the mother-daughter pairs around the time the girls started primary school—the time when it is thought that many bilinguals give up using the minority language. Over the course of approximately two years, Takeuchi recorded daily conversations between the Japanese mothers and their daughters at three-month intervals. The recordings were transcribed and analyzed in terms of the language used by both participants, the mothers' responses to the use of English by their children, the linguistic forms the mothers used, and the children's responses to each form.

Chapter 4 presents the results of Takeuchi's interviews. As in previous studies, only a small portion of the participants—seven of the 43 children—spoke exclusively or almost exclusively in the minority language with their mothers. Even though all of the mothers had wanted to teach their children Japanese, many had not anticipated the problems they might encounter and did not know how to handle them. Nine of the mothers did not

have specific plans on how to raise their children bilingually, and all of these mothers gradually switched over to using English with their children. Most of the other mothers gave up speaking Japanese when they began to have trouble communicating with their children. Only seven of the mothers continued speaking Japanese despite such problems, and only five insisted that their children use Japanese with them. It was these five children who consistently used Japanese with their mothers.

Takeuchi points out that many of the other mothers tried to increase the amount of Japanese input from other sources such as play groups, Japanese ethnic school, Japanese-speaking friends and relatives, and trips to Japan, but that there was little correlation between such input and the children's active use of Japanese. Instead of such outside input, it was the mothers' determination to transmit Japanese to their children and their commitment to regular interactions with them that proved to be the most important factors in determining which children continued to actively use Japanese. These mothers were not afraid to insist that their children speak Japanese. However, they did make sure that their interactions were interesting to the child. In addition, these five mothers continued to make time for daily interactions with their children even after they started primary school and went on reading Japanese books with their children most days even after they were able to read on their own.

The results of the four case studies, reported in Chapter 5, echoed the interview findings. Of the four girls studied, three continued to actively use Japanese with their mothers while one displayed a shift to English over the course of the study despite her mother's efforts to continue talking to her daughter in Japanese. Takeuchi points out that the three mothers whose daughters continued speaking to them in Japanese used Japanese more consistently, but that the difference in the degree of consistency was small. The mother in the "unsuccessful" case used Japanese in 92.4% of her taped utterances and straight English in only 2.2%, compared to 94.7% Japanese and 0.7% English for the mother in the "successful" case who was the "least consistent".

Rather than faulting the "unsuccessful" mother's "inconsistent" language use, Takeuchi uses a wide range of detailed discourse analysis to show that in fact, the effect of parental discourse strategies varied according to the child's Japanese proficiency, and that for children who have not reached a certain "threshold level", "nothing but a strategy which provides translations and reminds the child of the language choice will be successful" (p. 353). In this assertion, she makes a brave and welcome departure from the findings of earlier research by Lanza (1997).

Her analysis revealed that there were two major differences between the mothers' behavior in the "successful" and "unsuccessful" cases. First, all three of the mothers whose daughters continued to speak Japanese to them did a lot of reading of Japanese books with their daughters and also helped their daughters with homework from the Japanese ethnic school or other Japanese studies. In contrast, the mother of the girl who shifted towards English use did not spend time reading or studying Japanese with her daughter. Second, in their interactional styles, the "successful" mothers were more sensitive to their daughter's interests and encouraged them to talk more, giving them a lot of feedback, maintaining topics for longer periods, and dominating the conversation less. The mother of the girl who experienced language shift, on the other hand, tended to look at catalogues and picture books with her daughter and then ask a lot of "test questions" that served more as language drills than meaningful conversation. Moreover, she often shifted the topic of the conversation, usurped conversational turns, and failed to pick up on her daughter's attempts to return to topics that she found interesting. These factors, rather than the mothers' language choice, specific linguistic functions such as questions that they used, or even the types of strategies they used to deal with their children's use of English (as emphasized by Lanza, 1997), had the strongest correlation with their daughters' language choice.

As a whole, Takeuchi's work is impressive. Her methodology is strong and her analysis is insightful. Rather than blindly accepting previous research, she carefully analyzes her data, and for the most part, lets it speak for itself. While I thought that she was a little too hesitant to distance herself from her mentor Döpke's insistence on parental consistency in language choice, I felt that she nonetheless made it clear that the difference in consistency in her four case studies was minimal. In looking at the effect of different language functions such as questions, Takeuchi's observations provided new

insights into why different functions elicited different responses.

Moreover, in applying Lanza's system of analyzing parents' responses to their children's inappropriate language choice, Takeuchi made an important new distinction between two types of codeswitching. While noting that the mothers sometimes completely shifted into English in terms of lexicon, pronunciation and grammar in response to their daughter's use of English, in many other instances, the most "successful" mothers used the English words their daughters had used (often terms related to Australian school life) but pronounced them as if they were Japanese and inserted them into Japanese sentences in grammatically correct ways. Takeuchi dubbed this type of codeswitching "integrated non-standard borrowing" and convincingly argued that it should be treated differently from full-scale switches into English. In these ways, as well as in her focus on school-age children, Takeuchi has made important contributions to this field.

In addition, her book offers a number of important insights into the difficulties of raising children bilingually. Especially in her description of the children in the case studies, the problems mothers and children face with the children's increased exposure to the majority language are poignantly brought into focus. Moreover, in one case, we are shown that parents with more than one child do not always raise their children in the same way. One of the mothers in the case study, influenced by the advice of a speech therapist, had given up on raising her oldest child bilingually, but went ahead and spoke Japanese with her second child.

Takeuchi also shows how parents can change their policies. In many cases, mothers gave up on Japanese, but in an interesting exception to this general rule, one mother reversed an early decision to use English with her daughter and began speaking only Japanese with her daughter from the age of 4:7 in preparation for her daughter's entry to the Japanese ethnic school. Interestingly, this was the girl in the most "successful" case study. This mother also generally ignored her daughter's occasional use of English in conversation and just "moved on"—the strategy Lanza (1997) suggested would have the least desirable results. Yet Takeuchi argues that this mother's sheer determination to maintain good communication in Japanese with her daughter, along with her emphasis on reading together and her sensitivity to her daughter's interests, were enough to ensure that her daughter would keep speaking Japanese to her. Thus, throughout the work, Takeuchi lets real stories shine through in all their complexity.

For all these reasons, I would highly recommend this book to both parents and researchers. I should warn readers, though, that much of the writing is rather dry and highly repetitive, as is the case in many doctoral theses. In addition, there are quite a few mistakes in grammar as well as a number of typographical errors that should have been eliminated by more thorough proofreading. Yet despite these minor flaws, it will make a valuable addition to your library.

## References

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