

Reconsidering Public Discourse on Private Language Planning

A Case Study of a Flexible One-Parent-One-Language Model

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Abstract

The One-Parent-One-Language (OPOL) method is the most well-known and documented strategy for raising children bilingually. Much of the literature promoting OPOL has maintained that complete and consistent language separation on the part of the parents is critical for achieving active bilingual development. This paper, however, contests the notion that the successful implementation of OPOL *necessarily* requires parents to follow a policy of total language separation. By incorporating questionnaire, logbook, and in-depth interview data, a single case study is presented. The study suggests that theoretical family language models such as OPOL rarely align neatly with the practicalities and realities faced by interlingual families. It is suggested that for interlingual families it is quite natural to implement a more flexible, fluid, and context-dependant model of OPOL than has previously been acknowledged.

One-Parent-One-Language (OPOL)は「バイリンガル子育て言語習得方法」としては最もよく知られている方法である。OPOLに関する先行研究の多くは、親による徹底した言語分離がバイリンガル言語習得には欠かせないとしている。しかし、本論では、そのような言語分離は必ずしも必要ではなく、より柔軟性のある対応が必要であることを主張したい。アンケート、記録帳、インタビューによって行なったケーススタディーの一例を通じ、OPOLのような言語習得モデルは、「インターリンガル」な家庭において実用性、現実性に欠けていること、また、そのような家庭においては、状況やコンテクストに応じて柔軟に OPOL モデルを適宜利用していくことがより効果的であることを述べたい。

Introduction

Although intermarriage¹ is not as contemporary a phenomenon as is often purported, Japan has experienced a dramatic escalation in the rate of *kokusai kekkon* (international marriage) over the past few decades (Burgess, 2004). Accordingly, family language planning and bilingual childrearing are significant priorities for the increasing number of interlingual² families living in Japan. Such couples, it seems, are hungry for any advice that might divulge the ‘best way’ to raise children bilingually.

Recently however, Piller (2001) has suggested that much of the information advocated in the public discourse pertaining to bilingual childrearing strategies does not filter through into parents’ private language planning. By ‘public discourse’, Piller is referring to the way in which bilingual childrearing is described and promoted in both the popular and research literature. She argues that parents often “act in a societal context where bilingualism is increasingly valorized, but where a limited understanding of the sociolinguistics of bilingualism often leads to disappointment and self doubt” (2001, p. 61). While Piller correctly notes that parents often appear to blame themselves for their inability to successfully employ bilingual childrearing strategies, this paper suggests that much of the public discourse on bilingual childrearing has not been mindful of the socio-cultural factors that often render the rigid implementation of family language strategies untenable.

Specifically, the public discourse of the One-Parent-One-Language (OPOL) strategy has consistently advocated complete and rigid language separation; whereby both parents

exclusively use a different (usually their respective native) language with their child(ren) (e.g. Barron-Hauwaert; 2004; Caldas, 2006; Döpke, 1992; Kasuya, 1998; Lanza, 1997; Takeuchi, 2006). Yet while theoretically a rather uncomplicated strategy, it seems that for many interlingual families in Japan, OPOL is an impractical and unworkable method for raising children bilingually. This paper contests the public discourse that the successful implementation of OPOL *necessarily* requires rigid and complete language separation. The current case study investigates one family's flexible approach to the implementation of the OPOL method. When compared to what the public discourse has, to date, produced, the study offers a realistic OPOL model that is more befitting to the socio-cultural realities of many interlingual families living in Japan.

Family Language Planning

Although the term 'language planning' most often refers to public policies relating to national languages, it can also describe choices concerning the use of language at the individual level (Piller, 2001, p. 62). King and Fogle (2006, p. 696) describe 'family language' policies as overt and explicit "decisions about how language is allocated within family communication." In the context of interlingual families, family language planning refers to the beliefs, attitudes, strategies, and practices of parents regarding their bilingual childrearing.

As Lambert (2006, p. 11) points out, family language transmission (FaLT), has been actively researched in the fields of both psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics, most notably in relation to the developmental aspects of bilingual childrearing. Some of the more celebrated studies include those of Ronjat (1913), Leopold (1939-49), de Houwer (1987), Döpke (1992), Yamamoto (2001), Okita (2002), and Takeuchi (2006). This body of research has centered on what can be termed parental 'discourse strategies'; that is, the decisions about who will speak what language to whom, and when (c.f. Fishman, 2000).

Depending on the context, interlingual families are presented with the choice between several discourse strategies. Though various scholars have offered conflicting typologies of such strategies, the four most prominent of these are

- the OPOL strategy
- the Minority Language at Home (ML@H) strategy
- the Time and Place (T&P) strategy
- the Mixed Strategy

While these various approaches have been well documented in the literature, (see Barron-Hauwaert, 2004; Romaine, 1989; or Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2001) the present paper will limit its discussion to the OPOL method of bilingual childrearing.

The One-Parent-One-Language Discourse Strategy

Maurice Grammont is attributed with coining the term One-Parent-One-Language, when, in 1902 he published his theory of *une personne; une langue*. Grammont theorized that strict language separation was the most effective means of bilingual acquisition (Barron-Hauwaert, 2004: 1). It was a decade later, however, when Grammont's colleague Ronjat (1913) published his observations of his own son's French-German bilingual development that OPOL began to receive considerable attention (Barron-Hauwaert, 2004). Numerous studies concerning the implementation of the OPOL discourse strategy have since been undertaken, resulting in an array of sometimes conflicting conclusions.

Essentially, OPOL rests on three simple tenets. Firstly, proponents of OPOL assume that languages are tied to particular people, and that by ensuring complete language separation, children soon are able to develop metalinguistic awareness (Clyne, 1987; Lanza, 1997, both cited in Takeuchi, 2006, p. 20). Secondly, this method advocates complete and consistent language separation so that children can be exposed regularly to both languages from birth (Döpke, 1998, pp. 2-3). In this way, it is argued that the OPOL discourse strategy allows the child to receive maximum input (c.f. Döpke, 1992). Thirdly, the quality of language input, especially that of the minority language speaking parent, has been correlated with bilingual development (c.f. Döpke, 1992; Takeuchi, 2006, p. 20; and Kasuya, 1998). Parents are advised to engage in child-centered interaction with their children. Exponents of OPOL warn against inconsistent language use. According to the public discourse on OPOL, parents are advised to exclusively speak their native languages to their children, and children should also be required to exclusively use the language of

parents when addressing them. As Takeuchi (2006, pp. 19-20) has pointed out, OPOL attempts to teach children to use languages in contextually appropriate ways.

It should be acknowledged that the OPOL discourse strategy has been found to be an effective method of bilingual childrearing across a range of language combinations and cultural settings. Similar to Ronjat (1913), Leopold (1939-49) reported on his success in raising his daughter to be a productive English-German speaker in the United States. Taeschner (1983, cited in Döpke, 1992, pp. 16-17) was also successful in raising her Italian-German speaking daughters in Italy using the OPOL method. Interestingly, Saunders (1998) successfully employed what Barron-Haewaert (2004, pp. 177-178) has termed an “artificial” OPOL Strategy. Even though Saunders and his wife are both native English speakers, Saunders elected to speak German exclusively with his sons throughout their childhood in Australia. DeHouwer (1990) also reported on the productive bilingual development of an English-Dutch speaking girl in Holland. More recently, Caldas (2006) has reported on the successful productive bilingual development of his English-French speaking children in the United States. It should be noted that all of the authors of these studies were professional linguists and/or educators, and with the exception of DeHouwer, they all conducted their studies on their own children. Another commonality of these studies is that in all cases there seems to be close language proximity³ between the two input languages. Finally, with the exception of Leopold, these researchers all insisted that complete and consistent language separation was instrumental in the ‘successful’ productive bilingual development of their children.

Numerous other case studies pertaining to the implementation of OPOL as a family discourse strategy have reported somewhat less optimistic outcomes. As Takeuchi (2006) points out:

[T]he ‘one parent–one language’ is relatively effective in promoting active bilingualism among young children in a society where there is little support for the minority language. However, there is a general perception among parents in such families raising children bilingually that maintenance of the minority language into middle childhood and beyond is difficult.

(p. 1)

Several studies in the literature have revealed that a common outcome of the OPOL discourse strategy is the development of passive–not active–bilingualism. Such studies include Arnberg’s (1981) longitudinal analysis of four English-Swedish families in Sweden, Søndergaard’s (1981) account of his son’s Finnish-Danish bilingual development in Denmark, Porsché’s (1983, cited in Döpke, 1992, pp. 20-21) report of raising his son in West Germany to be an English-German bilingual, and Lanza’s (1997) investigation of an English-Norwegian family living in Norway (c.f. Döpke, 1992: 19-21). In the Japanese context, Billings’ (1990) study of OPOL in 38 Japanese-English speaking families, as well as Yamamoto’s (1995) study of intermarried families in Japan, both found that many interlingual families consider complete and consistent language separation to be a difficult discourse strategy to implement. Noguchi (1996) has suggested that families in which both parents are bilingual need not apply OPOL as rigidly as has previously been stated. Furthermore, some scholars take a particularly skeptical view of the hype surrounding the OPOL method of bilingual childrearing. Hamers and Blanc (2000) have argued that most accounts of OPOL lack “psycholinguistic proof”, and a study conducted by Bain and Yu (1980) found no significant differences between the linguistic outcomes of families that implemented OPOL and those that did not (c.f. Barron-Haewaert, 2004, p. 5).

Döpke’s (1992) study of the bilingual development of six children raised in English-German speaking OPOL families in Australia attempted, in part, to explain why some parents have experienced less ‘success’ with OPOL than others. Döpke concluded that unless parents adhere to a consistent and strict pattern of language separation, the development of productive childhood bilingualism is unlikely. She argued that it was essential for the parents to adopt a “child-centered model of interaction” when speaking to their children in the minority language in order for the OPOL discourse strategy to function effectively.

How can these vastly different outcomes be explained? In purist accounts of the ‘successful’ implementation of OPOL, it has been vigorously maintained that committed, stringent, and consistent language separation is paramount in maximizing the conditions

for bilingual development. While this may be the case, OPOL has also been criticized as being elitist and unrealistic (e.g. Romaine, 1989; Noguchi, 1996) and some scholars (e.g. De Houwer, 1995; Goodz, 1994) have argued that a rigid implementation of OPOL is neither a prerequisite nor a guarantee of productive bilingual development. Döpke (1998, p. 4) has attempted to address these criticisms, and has suggested that research should focus on “the very interesting and ultimately manageable question of what the forces are within the nuclear family which produce very different outcomes under very similar sociolinguistic conditions.” Yet, as this paper will highlight, interlingual families in Japan do not always live under “very similar sociolinguistic conditions”. Consequently, in this paper, I maintain that families should adopt a flexible approach in their successful implementation of the OPOL discourse strategy in instances where their particular circumstances, needs, and resources render it advantageous for them to do so.

Methodological Framework and Research Instruments

This paper details a single case study which forms part of a larger qualitative collective case study that documents the bilingual childrearing experiences of eight intermarried couples in Japan (see Jackson, 2006; 2007). As such, rather than attempting to identify significant commonalities amongst the participant families, the broader study attempts to elucidate the “important, atypical features, relationships and happenings” pertaining to the individual sociolinguistic circumstances of each family (Stake, 2000, p. 439). Family members have been allocated pseudonyms, and all other reasonable attempts have been made to maintain the privacy of the informants and their children. In order to tease out the complexities of the bilingual childrearing experiences of each family, I have employed three interrelated research instruments; a questionnaire, a parental activity logbook, and in-depth interviews. Each of these research instruments is explained below.

The questionnaire consisted of twenty-eight multiple-choice, closed, and open-ended questions. Reflecting their language preferences, the father’s questionnaire was administered in English, while the mother’s questionnaire was in Japanese. The questionnaire consisted of four categories of questions: Section A related to family background; Section B to second language learning histories and proficiencies; Section C to language use dyads amongst family members; and Section D to attitudes and perceptions about bilingualism. I designed the questionnaire by incorporating an eclectic mix of originally-devised questions with both modified and replicated questions appropriated from prior studies undertaken by Barron-Hauwaert (2004), Noguchi (2001), and Yamamoto (2001). The purpose in administering the questionnaire was for me to gain essential background information from which to frame specific probes for the subsequent in-depth interviews. Both parents were advised to complete the questionnaire independently. In order to triangulate the data, the questionnaire requested participants to self-report their language proficiencies and usage patterns, as well as to describe those of their spouse and children.

The second research instrument was the parental activity logbook⁴. The mother and father were requested to concurrently record their activities over a consecutive seven day period, with a particular focus on their interactions with their children. The parents were asked to record what language they used with other members of the family, and in what context. The principal aim of the logbook was to collect data relating to the amount and type of interaction between the participants and their children, as well as to indicate the contextual variables that influenced the language dyads within the family. Like the questionnaire, the logbook was employed to make the in-depth interview a more focused, efficient, and triangulated method of data collection (Tedlock, 2003, pp. 178-179).

Finally, the third research instrument was a series of in-depth interviews. The interviews were semi-structured, targeting specific issues or episodes alluded to in the questionnaires and logbooks. I elected to interview the father and mother separately because, as Okita (2002, p. 49) has shown, separate interviews of this nature are often deemed to yield more useful data than joint discussions. The interviews were audiotaped. They were conducted at the participant family’s home, providing an excellent opportunity to view the family in their ‘natural’ setting. In this particular case study, the interviews of both the father and mother were undertaken in English. The father’s interview took approximately 75 minutes, while the mother’s interview took about 40 minutes. Upon completion of the interviews, the tapes were transcribed and analyzed using a Grounded Theory approach.

Finally, the methodological weaknesses of this study need to be acknowledged. Although, during the process of collecting the interview data, I spent two separate afternoons with the family in this case study, I was not able to independently and comprehensively verify the participants' reporting of the family members' language proficiencies and use patterns. Furthermore, as a qualitative case study of just one family, the findings of this study are illustrative rather than universally applicable. It suggests that interlingual families are shaped by their particular—and unique—sociolinguistic circumstances involving variables that are not adequately acknowledged in popular or academic literature on the subject.

Informants—The Wright Family

The Wrights are an upper-middle class British-Japanese family of five. William is a lawyer in his forties based in suburban Kanto on what can be described as a generous 'ex-pat' package. His tertiary-educated wife, Wakana, is now a full-time housewife. She is the primary caregiver for the Wright's three children: a daughter, Anna (10); elder son, Ken (9); and younger son, Kai (4). From the birth of Anna, the family resided for less than a year in the United Kingdom before relocating to Tokyo for approximately two years where the second child, Ken, was born. The family then lived for a further three years in a rural town in the Kanto region. Following this, they again relocated to another city in England for two years, where their third child, Kai, was born. Finally, the family again returned to Japan, and has been living in the Kanto area for the last three years. The Wrights presently live in a detached two-story house in a comparatively affluent suburb of Tokyo.

The current language proficiencies of each family member can be seen in Tables 1 and 2 below. To account for inconsistencies in estimations between both informants, I have averaged the scores taken from both parents' questionnaires.

Table 1 Mean Japanese Proficiency Evaluations⁵

Name (Age)	Speaking	Listening	Reading	Writing
William (44)	8	9	8.5	8
Wakana (37)	10	10	10	10
Anna (10;8)	7	8	6	6
Ken (9;2)	7	8	6	6
Kai (4;4)	5.5	6	1.5	1.5

Table 2 Mean English Proficiency Evaluations

Name	Speaking	Listening	Reading	Writing
William	10	10	10	10
Wakana	8.5	9.5	8.5	8.5
Anna	10	10	9	9
Ken	10	10	9	9
Kai	2.5	2.5	1.5	1.5

Key

Speaking / Listening

- 0: Never says anything/understands nothing
- 2: Says/understands a few words and phrases
- 4: Can carry out simple conversations
- 6: Is functional in that language in 'everyday situations'
- 8: Is highly proficient, but not at native speaker level
- 10: Is a native speaker (or age appropriate native speaker)

Reading / Writing

- 0: No literacy skills
- 2: Reads/writes the alphabet/hiragana
- 4: English—reads and writes simple sentences but may make many simple errors
Japanese—reads and writes words in hiragana and katakana

- 6: Reads/writes simple material, but is not at an age appropriate native-speaker level
- 8: Reads and writes adult level material, with the aid of a dictionary and occasional help from a native speaker
- 10: Reads and writes at age appropriate native speaker level

William's association with Japan is extensive. He first came to Japan as a university exchange student in the late 1980's for one year to study towards his tertiary degree in Japanese language and law. William then attended another Japanese tertiary institution to continue his Japanese studies for a further twelve months in the early 1990's. Finally, he completed a Master's degree at yet another Japanese university in the late 1990's. In addition to his university studies, William has also undertaken private Japanese language lessons provided by a former employer. He describes himself as an English-dominant active bilingual, with a near-native command of the Japanese language. This evaluation is substantiated by William's wife's assessment of his Japanese ability. To be sure, William's Japanese language proficiency has enabled him to translate several Japanese academic works into English. As a practicing lawyer in an international firm, his work hours are long, and during the week he often returns home after the children have gone to sleep.

Wakana, William's wife, is in her late thirties. Her primary role is the management of the household. Wakana is a Japanese-dominant active bilingual, having studied English in a variety of settings. In elementary school, Wakana participated in English conversation lessons, and also studied English formally in both junior and senior high school. While a high school student, she also spent a year studying abroad in the United Kingdom—first attending a private language school and then a public high school. Wakana also took content classes in English at a prestigious Japanese university. Wakana self-reports her English listening proficiency to be at the native level, and her speaking, reading, and writing proficiencies to be at the near-native level. Her self-evaluation is supported by William's characterization of her English ability. As the primary caregiver, Wakana assists and supervises the children in the completion of their homework—the bulk of which is completed in English.

The Wright's daughter, Anna (10;8), is an English-dominant active bilingual. She currently attends an English-medium international school, but previously attended a rural Japanese kindergarten and elementary school. Anna's language proficiencies, as reported by her parents, are outlined in Tables 1 and 2 above.

The Wright's elder son, Ken (9;2), is also an English-dominant active bilingual. He was born in Tokyo, attended kindergarten in a rural Kanto town, and began elementary school in an English-medium public school in the United Kingdom. Since returning to Japan, he too has attended an all-boy international school in Tokyo. Ken's language proficiencies are also shown in Tables 1 and 2.

The Wright's younger son, Kai (4;4), is reported by both parents to be a balanced active-bilingual. However, it is worth noting that William and Wakana reported quite contradictory evaluations of Kai's language proficiencies. William indicated Kai's Japanese literacy skills were almost non-existent, but that he is functional in oral and aural Japanese, although below peer-appropriate level. William also stated that Kai's English language skills across all skill areas were negligible. Wakana evaluated Kai's linguistic abilities to be balanced, indicating that he can carry out simple conversations in both languages, but has only rudimentary literacy skills in English and Japanese. Kai is attending an English-medium kindergarten. William and Wakana are now seeking professional assistance to support his language development.

As might be expected of a family in which all members are active bilinguals, everyone in this family uses both English and Japanese within all language dyads. However, because these language use patterns are shaped by context and vary in degree, they reveal some rather atypical complexities.

Firstly, both informants described the proportional use of Japanese and English of all family members relatively consistently. William reported their proportional English-to-Japanese language use ratios as follows: William 90:10; Wakana 60:40; Amy 70:30; Ken 70:30; and Kai 60:40. With one exception, Wakana's estimation of these ratios matched William's. She recorded, however, that William spoke slightly more Japanese to other family members than he might realize (80:20). I acknowledge that these figures are merely approximations made by the informants. In general, however, it seems that William primarily speaks English to the other family members, and that Wakana uses

more Japanese in the house than she does English. All three children use proportionally more English than they do Japanese, something that is atypical of intermarried English-Japanese speaking parents in Japan (Yamamoto, 2001, p. 86). To be sure, of the eight families I collected data from for this research project, only in one other family did the children use proportionally more English than Japanese.

My analysis of the Wrights' language use indicates that language dyads within families can be heavily shaped by context. William and Wakana utilize both English and Japanese freely when speaking among themselves. When speaking to the children, however, William most often uses English, while Wakana most often uses Japanese.

The Wright's family language policy can be viewed as somewhat atypical because the language work that they undertake is largely targeted at improving the majority language—which is also the children's weaker language. However, this does not suggest complete language separation during William and Wakana's interaction with their children. They take a completely contextual approach to their language-use patterns. William, for example, volunteers as an assistant Cub Scout master at the children's local Cub Scout troop. Describing the Cub Scouts as "very much a Japanese language context", William explains:

I only speak Japanese there, including to the children...But even if they come up to me and speak English, if no one else is there I will tolerate it; if someone else is there, I won't. They'll have to speak Japanese to me...If they ask me something in English, I will reply to them in Japanese. And then say, "speak to me in Japanese". Because it is rude to the people around them. And I don't want them to stand out their whole lives.

Wakana's language use with the children is similarly contextual. Because she is the primary caregiver, she is also the parent that most often supervises the children's homework. Because the children attend English-medium international schools, homework tasks are set and undertaken in English. Wakana states:

When I help them, because children go to international schools, they bring their homework, which has to be done in English. So when I help them, after school with homework, I tend to speak English with them, but in everyday general conversation I *try* to use Japanese.

As such, the language dyads between Wakana and her children can best be described as contextually divided between Japanese and English, with a predominant use of Japanese. Because all three children are being educated in English-medium schools, and because they tend to play with either children who cannot speak Japanese or children who speak English and Japanese, they usually communicate with each other in English. Again, however, the children's language use patterns are contextual. They only use Japanese with each other when in the presence of monolingual Japanese friends, such as at Cub Scout meetings. Stated simply, the child-child language dyads are characterized by a contextual use of both English and Japanese, with a predominant use of English.

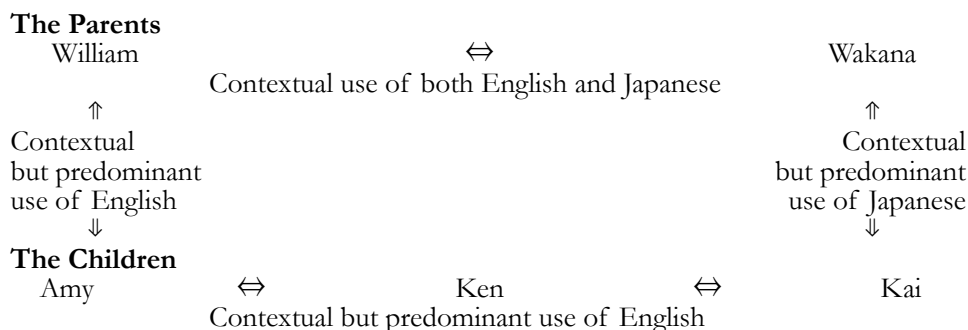


Figure 1 Wright Family Language Use Dyads⁶

Discussion

The Wright family serves as an interesting—although perhaps uncommon—example of how the OPOL discourse strategy can be successfully implemented without *necessarily* adhering to rigid and total language separation. Since the birth of their first child, the Wright's bilingual childrearing practices have been founded on the *general principle* that William should expose the children to English, while Wakana should be the children's primary model of authentic and culturally appropriate Japanese. Contrary to much of the public discourse pertaining to OPOL, however, both William and Wakana—in certain contextually defined settings—have elected to capitalize on their high second-language proficiencies when assisting with the bilingual development of their children. The two most noteworthy examples of this practice are William's use of Japanese while acting as the children's Cub Scout master, and Wakana's use of English when supervising the children's English-medium homework from their international schools.

Clearly, the high second language proficiency of both parents is an instrumental factor in shaping the Wrights' flexible interpretation of the public discourse pertaining to OPOL. With regard to the rhetoric regarding consistent and rigid language separation, William states:

The kids know we both speak each others' language pretty fluently, and so they are relaxed about using either language around both of us. I don't know if that is a good or a bad thing, but that is just a fact...In a situation where both parents can't speak each others' language, then that is the only way they have anyway. And it may well work. However, in reality, the children know that I speak Japanese, and they know that their mother speaks English...They have been aware of that since birth. They will speak the language that they want to speak at the time that they are speaking to you. And for then to ignore their question, and respond in English or visa-versa, it's odd. It's strange. And it...I think it is unworkable.

In addition to parental second language proficiency, another variable that appears to have influenced the Wrights' flexible implementation of the OPOL discourse strategy relates to the family's socioeconomic circumstance. William explains:

When we came back to Japan, we were in the lucky position where the children's education would be paid for. Now, however expensive a Japanese school is, it is not going to be more expensive than an international school, so basically, we could have sent the children to any school we wanted to.

While conceding that there are both merits and drawbacks to international and Japanese schools alike, the Wrights elected to educate their children in international schools. William elaborates:

Either way, you are compromising. So you have to formulate your own strategy...You are going to have to supplement one side. If you send them to Japanese schools, you are going to have to supplement their English. If you send them to international schools, you are going to have to supplement their Japanese...I think it is probably easier to send them to a Japanese school and supplement their English. Because a Japanese school is going to make sure they can read and write Japanese, and to read and write English is not that difficult, I think, compared to Japanese. But as I said before, we decided against that because we didn't think that...the quality of education they would receive in a Japanese school would open all the right doors for them academically.

Because the Wright children appear to be developing age-appropriate English, William and Wakana are not overly concerned with supporting the children's English. Rather, William's insistence that the children join a Cub Scout troop unrelated to the international school was a deliberate attempt to have his children exposed to a Japanese environment, giving them the opportunity to make friends with Japanese children away from their international schools. In addition, William's use of Japanese within the context of Cub Scout activities is an example of his attempt to supplement the comparative limited exposure to Japanese that his children receive at their international schools.

Similarly, the fact that the children attend international schools has made it necessary for Wakana to use English when supervising and assisting with the children's English-medium homework. As Noguchi (1996) has suggested, this allows the parents to be a model of active bilingualism for their children.

To summarize, the Wrights have taken a flexible approach to the implementation of the OPOL strategy. Their bilingual childrearing practices have always been based upon the general principles of OPOL—that William speak English and Wakana speak Japanese. However, the Wrights have adapted their approach to OPOL to suit their changing circumstances. Both William and Wakana have utilized their respective second language proficiencies to counter the challenges that a strict and unwavering implementation of OPOL would have produced. Finally, it should be said that the ongoing bilingual development of the Wright children could be viewed as 'successful.' The children are not completely balanced bilinguals—a category that is all too often held as the measuring stick of 'full bilingualism'. However, they are becoming increasingly articulate and literate in both English and Japanese.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the perceived gap between what Piller (2001) has termed the "public discourses" about bilingual childrearing strategies and the actual practices of parents as they implement their "private language planning." OPOL, perhaps the most documented of these discourse strategies, has been shown to be a relatively effective method of bilingual childrearing in the initial stages of childhood. However, it has proven to be a difficult strategy for many parents to maintain into middle childhood (Takeuchi, 2006).

Much of the public discourse surrounding OPOL has dogmatically maintained that complete and consistent parental language separation is crucial to realizing active bilingualism. Through a qualitative case study of a single family, this paper has questioned such a premise. Using three research instruments—the Questionnaire, the Parental Activity Logbook, and in-depth interviews—this paper explored the Wright family's flexible implementation of the OPOL strategy. As was stated above, the ongoing bilingual development of the Wright children appears to be progressing well, and the Wright's bilingual childrearing efforts appear 'successful'.

Of course, we cannot say that the Wright's flexible and realistic implementation of the OPOL discourse strategy *alone* successfully promoted the children's active bilingual development. The facts that the children are attending international schools and have also lived in the United Kingdom are clearly two significant factors in their bilingual development. Nevertheless, this case study is instrumental of the fact that, in reality, family language planning is much more complex than the neatly packaged models so often presented in the public discourse on bilingual childrearing. It seems evident that the Wright's pragmatic approach to OPOL was well tailored to their individual circumstances. The Wrights, like all interlingual families, make rational and informed decisions about their language use. In families where both parents are bilingual, it is quite normal—despite the public discourse on OPOL—for both parents to use both input languages in contextually defined settings.

The parents in this study incorporated the general principle of OPOL (i.e. that William would be the primary model of English for his children while Wakana would be the primary model of Japanese), yet in certain contextually defined situations, both parents used their respective second languages with their children. This practice appears in no way to have negatively impacted on the children's bilingual development. Rather, it seems that if the Wrights had not adopted this flexible approach, the children would have been deprived of the rich language experience that their parents were able to provide them.

Clearly, there were a number of factors that made it both possible and practical for the Wrights to adopt this liberal interpretation of the OPOL method. If William and Wakana had not had such high second language proficiencies, this kind of approach would have been impractical and unwise to implement. But because they were able to actively participate in certain contextually defined settings in their respective second languages, it made sense for them to do so. Also, the fact that the children attend English-medium international schools made it imperative that Wakana use English when supervising homework. She simply did not deem such an inflexible approach to this

context to be an option for her.

As Tokuhama-Espinosa (2001, p. 57) notes, despite the fact that the public discourse on bilingual child-raising frequently advocates the consistent implementation of a single discourse strategy, most families, in reality, display language practices that indicate the inconsistent use of several of these strategies at one time or another (c.f. Cunningham-Andersson and Andersson, 1999, p. 27). Although the Wrights' language strategy displays some characteristics of T&P - such as the exclusive use of Japanese at Cub Scouts—it is the OPOL strategy (all be it a flexible model) that most accurately describes what they are doing. Furthermore, T&P tends to emphasize linguistic boundaries for the children—such as having them exclusively speak English while at Soccer Camp; in contrast, OPOL focuses on the language use patterns of all family members, with an equal emphasis on the language use patterns of the parents.

It would be convenient to think that children acquire languages in a vacuum, but, of course, they do not. Bilingual childrearing is not a neat science experiment conducted under laboratory conditions. Consequently, this paper suggests a reconsideration of the prescriptive approach found in much of the public discourse on bilingual childrearing and family language planning. What is needed is an admission and an understanding that individual families have particular needs and circumstances that may not align neatly with what public discourses espouse. Specifically, the general principals of OPOL can be implemented as the basis for a home language strategy. We should not assume, however, that those families adopting a less rigid, more realistic approach to OPOL are pursuing an 'incorrect' or 'inferior' discourse strategy. The recognition of a new OPOL model that is both inclusive of, and responsive to, the various skills, aspirations and diversity of circumstances of individual families would be a helpful addition to the public discourse on bilingual childrearing strategies.

Acknowledgments

I am most grateful to the two anonymous reviewers, as well as the editor, for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

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¹ It is acknowledged that definitions of “intermarriage” or “mixed marriage” have always been contextually negotiated (see Waldren, 1998). Here I use the terms *kokkusuai kekkon*, intermarriage, mixed marriage and international marriage interchangeably to denote legally recognized marriages between Japanese nationals and their non-Japanese spouses.

² The term “interlingual family”, originally coined by Yamamoto (2001), is used to denote families that regularly use more than one language.

³ ‘Language proximity’ refers to the relative extent to which languages can be said to be similar to one and other (See Tokuhama-Espinosa (2001: 79-84).

⁴ Additional discussion of the logbooks appears in other publications relating to this research project (Jackson 2006: 92; 2007: 107).

⁵ These tables list averaged responses from both the father and mother’s questionnaires. The questionnaire was modified from Noguchi’s (2001: 268) prior study.

⁶ The template for this table, canvassing the family language dyads, has been adapted from Yamamoto (2001).