The Awareness and Development of Multiple Identities in a Multilingual Child Living in Japan

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As part of a longitudinal study of family and child trilingualism, this paper investigates the multiple identities of multilinguals through a case study of a trilingual child living in Japan. Based on an analysis of the language, social and family situations that the informant was involved in, the researcher/mother categorized the complex identities of the informant into seven characteristic and coexisting types: 1) group or social identity, 2) cultural identity, 3) language identity, 4) kinship or familial identity, 5) individual or personal identity, 6) ethnic or racial identity, and 7) nationality or national identity. Qualitative data for each identity type, comprised of examples drawn mainly from the mother's journal, recordings of conversations and interviews, is presented.

日本在住のマルチリンガルの子どものマルチ・アイデンティティの形成とそれについての本人の意識
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本論文は、三か国語話者家族と子どもの長期事例研究の一部として、日本在住の多言語習得者の子どものケーススタディーを通して、多言語習得者のマルチ・アイデンティティを研究するものである。本研究は対象児童をとりまく言語や、社会、そして家庭環境などの分析に基づいて、子どもの中にある複雑なアイデンティティを、特徴的かつ共存する以下の七つのアイデンティティ・タイプに分類した：1.グループまたは社会的なアイデンティティ、2.文化的アイデンティティ、3.言語アイデンティティ、4.親族や家族のアイデンティティ、5.個人としてのアイデンティティ、6.民族あるいは人種的なアイデンティティ、7.国籍や国家のアイデンティティ。さらに、それぞれのアイデンティティ・タイプに関する質的データを、母親の日誌記録、会話記録、インタビュー記録をもとに提示する。

INTRODUCTION

The issue of identity in a multilingual context is an important subject of research not only for researchers of bilingualism or multilingualism, but also for multilinguals themselves, for their families and for other people who come in contact with them. With the globalization of economies, spreading consumerism, sociopolitical shifts in various countries and regions, and increasing short- and long-term migration, many people find that their identities are being challenged and reshaped by observable and hidden currents within as well as outside of themselves.

Identity is usually considered to consist of a set of characteristically recognizable and definable features of an individual. However, in multilingual settings, it is inevitable that people come into contact with different languages, cultures and the ideologies that govern languages and cultures. Therefore, language ideology becomes a crucial factor in the construction of group as well as individual identities. For multilingual individuals, then, language ideology inevitably comes to the foreground and gives "other" people reasons for making conscious or subconscious decisions about how to position them in relationships.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Both case studies and studies of large groups that have been done on multilinguals in multilingual settings in recent years have revealed complex variations in the identities of multilinguals directly resulting from negotiation with other factors in mutilingual and multicultural societies, e.g., local communities, family situations, language values and choices, and political and economic positions (Bourdieu, 1991; Heller, 1995; Woolard, 1998; Pavlenko, 2001).

The current study draws on insights from two theoretical frameworks: the *poststructuralist* and

social constructionist paradigms. Poststructuralists argue that language or linguistic practice is a form of *symbolic capital* that is closely connected to and limited by other factors such as economic capital and social capital. As a result, different languages have different positions, values, and distribution designated and legitimized by dominant groups or dominant organizations such as local speech communities and schools (Bourdieu, 1991; Heller, 1995; Woodlard, 1998; Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001). According to this theory, language can no longer be viewed as a neutral factor in any given society; rather, it is socially situated and valued as it is governed by the power relationships of society and the ideologies of its dominant groups. For example, choosing an official language or lingua franca in a multilingual community and deciding on which language(s) to teach as foreign language(s) in a school are directly linked to the power structure within that society.

The second framework applied in this paper is the social constructionist concept that views the development of a multilingual's identity as a process of negotiation through social interaction with others in discourse (Auer, 1998; Gergen, 1994, 1999). In this approach, language used in socialization is believed to play a significant role in building an individual's identity. Through close analysis of individual cases of linguistic and social interaction or discourse, including codeswitching, social constructionists are able to examine the construction or negotiation of the identity of multilinguals (Gumperz, 1982). In contrast to the poststructuralist framework, this approach allows researchers to work on a relatively micro-sociolinguistic level; it often focuses on the study of individual "acts of identity" that can be captured in the close analysis of linguistic discourse.

This paper was also inspired by research on the subject of identity in the area of multicultural communication (e.g., Seelye and Wasilewski,1996). Identity within multicultural and multilingual communication is considered to be interwoven with other social and cultural elements and to carry symbolic value, as identity is often viewed symbolically as a means of offering explanation for social and cultural change. The various aspects of identity outlined in Seelye and Wasilewski's book, *Between Cultures* (1996), provided the author of this paper with support for her categorization of the identities of the informant.

Research on identity in Japanese bilingualism circles has seen an increasing number of contributions in recent years (e.g., Lie, 2001; Greer, 2003; Kamada, 2004), with a focus on multiethnicity at group and institutional levels (among others). These studies have demonstrated the complex identity of bilinguals and multilinguals from various backgrounds in Japanese society, where this case study was conducted.

The concept of negotiation is important to the studies of identity under the above-mentioned approaches and, therefore, to this case study as well. Negotiation is defined here as the long process of developing or building an individual's identity through interaction with others. Recognition must be given to the different types or variants of identity which an individual adopts; these are referred to as "multiple identities" in this paper. Negotiation takes various forms, including verbal communication and non-verbal behavior that may be conscious or subconscious to the people who are developing their identities.

When analyzing the development of identity at an individual level, it is also crucial to include hidden

aspects such as cognition, which control or underline one's perception, logic, decision-making, etc., as well as psychological factors that influence one's state of mind when interacting with others. Although important events at various stages of a person's life, such as foreign relocation, are often powerful in shaping his/her identities, the observation and recording of everyday interaction in a family or with friends can offer more detailed evidence of identity formation.

This paper is part of an ongoing longitudinal study on child trilingualism and trilingual education in Japan. In earlier studies (Shi, 2001, 2003), the author found evidence to support the poststructuralist theory of multiple identities coexisting in the multilingual child who is the informant of this study, and developed a typology of seven types/variants of identities: 1) group or social identity, 2) cultural identity, 3) language identity, 4) kinship or familial identity, 5) individual or personal identity, 6) ethnic or racial identity, and 7) nationality or national identity. (See Figure 1.) In the current study, a definition and explanation of each type will be presented, along with examples of each, in order to show the awareness and development of the multiple identities of the informant using the above typology.

FIGURE 1: Seven Variants of a Multilingual's Identity (Shi 2003)
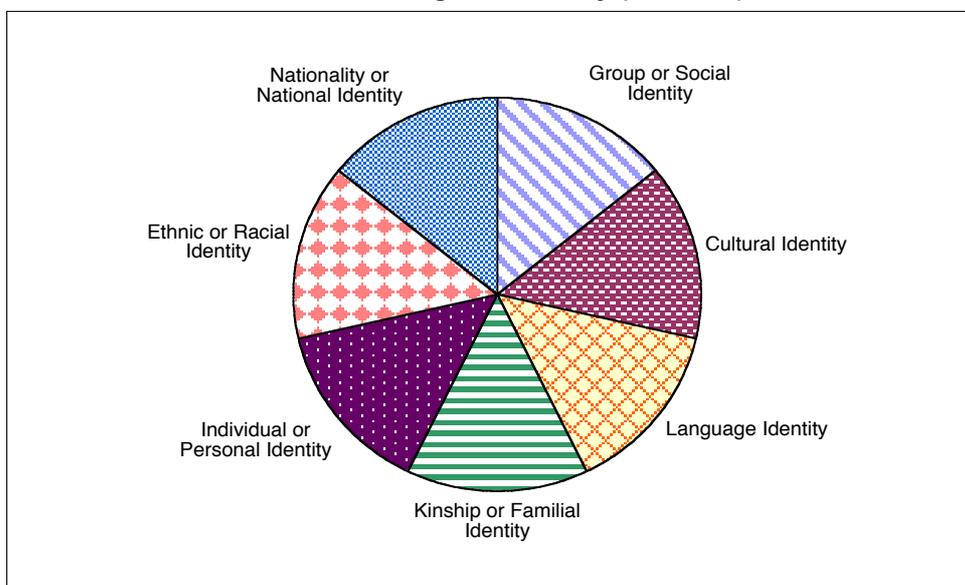
CASE STUDY

Informant

The informant of the study, JJ, is a trilingual Singaporean (by nationality) Chinese (by ethnicity) boy (11;8 [currently 11 years and 8 months old]) living in Tokyo. He was born in Singapore and lived there until he was two years of age. During the two years in Singapore, JJ was raised in a bilingual environment at home, receiving Chinese input from his mother, father and grandparents, and English from a full-time Filipina domestic helper. The only formal language education that JJ received while in Singapore was four months in an English drama class, where he learned mostly English songs through dancing and playing.

JJ was brought to Tokyo to live with his parents when he was two years old and was enrolled in a Japanese kindergarten two weeks after his arrival in Japan, having had no prior contact with the Japanese language or culture. When he graduated from the kindergarten, he went on to attend a

Japanese public elementary school in his neighborhood from Grade 1 to Grade 4 (only the first semester). At the age of 10;5, he was transferred to an international school (where the medium of instruction is English) in Tokyo in August, 2003.

JJ's home languages changed after he came to Japan. Both parents are trilingual speakers with Chinese (Mandarin) as their mother tongue, English as a working and academic language, and Japanese as a working and social language. Since the beginning of JJ's life in Tokyo, his parents decided to raise him not bilingually but trilingually, helping him acquire all three languages that they spoke. Specifically, the new family language system designated fixed roles for the three languages. The mother (hereafter, JJM) was to use only English as her language with her son, JJ; and the father (JJF) would use Mandarin only. Under this system, Japanese language learning was left entirely to JJ himself outside of home in his social communities and academic institutions.

This approach was adopted by his parents because there was no Mandarin or English environment for young children in public kindergartens and elementary schools at that time, and his parents believed that JJ would have no problem acquiring the Japanese language naturally while living in Japan. A more detailed report on JJ's language development can be found in Shi (2001). This language system was maintained rigidly for 5.5 years, with only occasional code-mixing; however, it was modified slightly to reinforce his Mandarin ability when JJ was transferred to the international school at age 10:5.

Most of the data included in this paper was collected while the informant was enrolled in a Japanese elementary school.

Methodology

The data for this study mainly came from the journal kept by the informant's mother (the author of this paper), which she kept since JJ's birth, and from observation (including recording) of the informant by the author and JJ's father (Mr. L.W.). In order to capture "acts of identity" (Kramsch, 1998) or "negotiation" in action at an individual level in a multicultural setting, this study also included qualitative data obtained from several other sources: interviews with JJ's elementary school teachers, Ms. T of Grades 1 and 2, Ms. Y of Grades 3 and 4, and Ms. K of Grade 5 at Osawadai Elementary School in Tokyo; interviews with JJ's Japanese classmate, YI, and friend, YK; interviews with YI's mother, Mrs. MI; interviews with JJ's piano teacher, Mrs. KH; and interviews with JJ's art school teacher, Mr. KO.

It is the author's belief that the seven variants of JJ's identity can be illustrated more clearly and the negotiative nature of his interaction with his family members made more evident by quoting his actual speech. Thus, for each identity type, one conversation or several short direct speech acts will be quoted as examples of the informant's awareness of this variant, with JJ's age at the time and the source of data shown in parenthesis.

RESULTS

Group and social identity

The first variant considered is the group and social aspect of identity. According to the social-constructive view of identity, all humans live in some group or social environment—from family to

outside communities—and interaction with these groups helps form and shape the individual's identities. Awareness of this aspect of identity is often marked by more differences than similarities between an individual and a group.

The key issue with this type of identity lies in the perception of oneself as being the same or different from other members of a certain social group. JJ's awareness of his group and social identity is demonstrated in the following examples.

1. "Others will look at me if I speak English or Chinese." (JJM's diary; 5)[1]

2. "I don't want to be different." (JJM's diary; 6)

3. "Mom, don't talk to me in Chinese or English. It's embarrassing." (recording by JJM; 7)

4. "I kind of like to help Jonathan [an American child who had just transferred into JJ's school] in class. A little embarrassing, though." (JJM's diary; 7)

5. [At a swimming school] "I don't want to be looked at every time my name is called." (JJM's diary; 10)

From the data above, it is evident that JJ was conscious of the fact that he was not Japanese and spoke more languages than his friends, but that he nonetheless wanted to be regarded as being the same as others around him. JJ had come to Japan at the age of 2 and was a competent native speaker of Japanese; moreover, his physical features did not distinguish him from Japanese people. Nonetheless, he was still aware that he was Singaporean-Chinese, and this placed him in the "*gaijin*" ["foreigner"] group, making him different from his classmates.

According to the author's observations, fitting in at school was not difficult for JJ, in general. The students in his class in Grades 4 and 5 (including YI and YK) reported that they never felt that JJ was different from Japanese children. However, JJ knew that his status as a foreigner would become marked when he used different languages and when his name was called in public, such as in a swimming school.

Therefore, hiding his multilingual abilities was a common strategy JJ employed to fit in the relatively monolingual situation in which he found himself. In this way, JJ's group and social identity developed rather strategically, with him making conscious adjustments in his behavior rather than forcing the larger group at the Japanese elementary school to accept his differences.

Cultural Identity

Cultural identity involves identification with a culture or cultures and manifestation of various aspects typically associated with the concept of culture or cultural behavior. Although language and culture are often closely associated, language is treated as a separate variant of identity in this paper and will be discussed in a separate section. Therefore, for the purposes of this paper, the main areas of cultural identity are defined to include non-verbal behavior, sports, foods, and interests or popular cultural topics commonly shared within a culture or subculture.

The following dialogue between JJ and his mother (M) illustrates that JJ was able not only to notice

cultural behaviors, but also, to separate these behaviors from language.

Example 6 (JJM's diary; 11)

JJ: Mom, guess who my best friend is.
M: Is it Yuyu [a Japanese boy at the international school]?
JJ: Yeah, he's my ASIJ [the international school] buddy. But Yuki is my Japanese school buddy.
M: I see. Who's your best of the best buddies, then?
JJ: Oh, I don't know…. Maybe Yuki. I don't know why, but I kind of feel we know each other more, like when he'll be upset or happy.
M: How do you mean?
JJ: I don't know. Kind of like I know what he's thinking without saying anything. I think I am very Japanese. Right, mom?
M: Really? Why is that Japanese?
JJ: 'Cause Japanese people don't always have to say EVERYTHING. You got to watch and feel more. Not like Americans, I think.
M: Maybe you like Yuki because you guys speak Japanese together.
JJ: Not really. Yuyu speaks Japanese too! Mom, he IS Japanese!

It is interesting to note that in the above example, not only was JJ able to identify a specific Japanese cultural behavior and to see that language and this behavior were not necessarily tied, but also, he was trying to associate himself with this cultural pattern. It seemed that he thought he was "Japanese", too, because he was the same as his Japanese friends in terms of this behavioral pattern.

Other aspects of culture that JJ tends to use to show his multicultural identities are food, sports and TV programs. For example, he oftentimes mentions that he is "more Japanese than the Japanese" because he eats more sushi than the average Japanese and he must have sushi as his first meal whenever he comes back to Tokyo from an overseas trip (multiple entries in JJM's diary, 4 - 12).

In terms of sports, JJ has a strong love of soccer and is a big fan of Japanese soccer. When asked why, he said that he knew the Japanese players a lot better than players of other countries and it was difficult to support a team from outside of Japan if he knew little about the players (JJM's diary, 9).

JJ also has a strong preference for Japanese comedians and Japanese *manga* (comic books) over other countries' equivalents. It is commonly accepted that it is difficult to comprehend jokes unless one is familiar with the culture. Thus, for JJ to enjoy Japanese comedians and comic books requires an intimate understanding of Japanese humor, which, in turn, reflects the Japanese side of his cultural identity.

In addition to his acknowledgment of his "Japanese-ness" because of the above-mentioned preferences, JJ strongly feels that he is also Chinese because he likes Chinese food such as *jiaozi* (dumplings). In fact, he pronounces the word in the Chinese way (*jiaozi)* instead of the Japanese way (*gyoza*) to show that he is Chinese.

Another aspect of JJ's multicultural identity is his Singaporean background. He often mentions the food in Singapore and claims that only Singaporeans can really understand why a certain dish (e.g., fried *beefun* for breakfast at a certain hawker center or outdoor stand) is tasty and popular (JJM's diary, 8-12).

In this way, JJ appears to be happy about his multicultural identities and demonstrates them without hesitation.

Language identity

The language variant of a person's identity simply indicates what language(s) a person uses or functions in. The word "language" is used here instead of "linguistic" to include both macro-level (e.g., language choices and policies) and micro-level (e.g., linguistic competence) usages.

As a multilingual person, JJ has been fully aware from a very young age that he has more languages than most of his peers, as shown in the examples below.

7. "Am I English if I speak English?" (JJM's diary; 5)

8. "Mom, why can I speak three languages?" (recording by JJM; 7)

9. "Shhh, let's speak English. Nobody will understand us." (JJM's diary; 8)

10. "I can speak English to Jonathan, Japanese to other friends in school. But I have no one to speak Chinese to. When can I use Chinese in Japan?" (JJM's diary; 9)

In 1995 when JJ was two years old, his grandmother in China asked him to perform some simple translation between Mandarin and English to test his bilingual abilities because she could not believe that a child that young was already able to use two languages separately. The result surprised her tremendously because JJ did a perfect job of translating simple vocabulary (e.g., "hand", "face" and "car") and sentences (e.g., "It is very hot today" and "I am hungry and thirsty") (JJM's observation). This was the earliest recorded incident in JJ's life that showed him that he was bilingual (later trilingual) and that he was "special" or "different".

Numerous accounts in the ongoing observation of JJ clearly indicate that his attitude towards his multilingual competence has become increasingly positive over the past seven years. He knows how to benefit from his multilingual abilities. The only exceptions were instances when he felt that he might attract unwanted attention or be isolated, as shown in the examples above.

It should be noted that JJ's three languages have different status in Japanese society. Japanese is a social and academic language to JJ and also the majority language of Japan. English is a foreign language, but enjoys the highest status of any foreign language in the Japanese education system and can thus be regarded as a prestigious language. Mandarin, on the other hand, is a minority language used by the Chinese-Japanese community and a language that is rarely taught in public schools prior to tertiary education.

For JJ, over and above any value attached to it by society, Mandarin is important because it is a language of his parents and relatives. He has been observed to have become increasingly positive towards the use of the language at home and in China. Despite the fact that Mandarin is the weakest of his three languages, JJ seems to have developed a special attachment to Mandarin. In an interview he stated, "Chinese is my family language" (interview with JJ, 2004).

The Japanese language, on the other hand, is JJ's strongest language and one of his two academic languages (English being the other). Despite the fact that he acquired the Japanese language without any family input or parental involvement, his Japanese ability accelerated quickly starting about six months after his arrival in Japan when he was two.

In interviews with the author, all of JJ's Japanese teachers (Ms. T, Ms. Y and Ms. K from Osawadai Elementary School; Mr. KO, the painting teacher of an art school JJ attended, and Mrs. KH, JJ's piano teacher) assessed JJ's Japanese ability as equal to that of his Japanese peers. In fact, the elementary school teachers even indicated that JJ's Japanese skill was always at the top of the class and that he seemed to be more sensitive to the linguistic features of Japanese than his Japanese classmates. One example given by Ms.Y was that JJ was very careful about prepositions in Japanese and often helped Japanese classmates with their grammar homework when he was in Grade 4 (interview conducted in 2002).

Kinship or familial identity

Kinship or familial identity looks at how a member of a family identifies and/or views himself/herself in relation to other members of the family. Typically, children tend to ponder over the explicit and implicit expectations of their parents and make adjustments accordingly. Bilingual and multilingual children often need to deal with their parents' expectations or lack of expectations concerning language and cultural development in different languages as well as cultural contexts resulting from either their parents' language and cultural background or relocation to another country.

The following examples show JJ vocalizing his feelings about what he believes are his mother's expectations in terms of languages and loyalties.

11. "I speak three languages because I am mommy's *ko"* [child]. (JJM's diary; 6)

12. "You always tell me that I have to speak your languages! Sometimes I like it, but sometimes I don't." (JJM's diary; 9)

13. [Watching an Olympic match on TV, without being asked for comment.] "Mummy, *gomen ne* [I'm sorry], I don't support Chinese [national] team." (JJM's diary; 11)

These three examples were selected to show developmental changes in JJ's familial identity. At a younger age, he seemed happy to associate his uniqueness with his parents. However, as the pressure of following parental desires mounted at times, JJ ultimately came to feel that being expected to be the same as his parents was too stressful for him. In the second example, he hints at the burden of having to speak his parents' languages. The third example shows that he felt that he was somehow expected to keep the integrity of the family by maintaining the same loyalties as his parents, but he could not. Hence, he apologized for wanting or needing to be different.

Being multilingual and multicultural, JJ is frequently faced with situations that could potentially "split him" from his parents and pose difficulties for him in terms of decision-making, as his background, thinking and life experiences are certainly different from his parents'.

Individual or personal identity

This variant of identity in a multilingual is formed in a similar way as in a monolingual. However, as discussed in the Familial identity section above, a bilingual/multilingual often grows up faced with

challenging and confusing bi-/multiple ethnic, cultural, language/linguistic and national issues within families and communities.

The following dialogue between JJ and his mother depicts JJ's individuality in relation to his cultural identity.

Example 14 (JJM's diary; 10)

M: JJ, Why do you like sushi so much?
JJ: 'Cause I like it.
M: Just that?
JJ: Just that. It's me. It's MY style. I got to have sushi before and after an overseas trip, *ne* [right?].
M: Is it because you are quite Japanese?
JJ: No. Don't you think I eat sushi more than Japanese? It's just ME, JJ.

All of the variants of identity of an individual are interwoven with each other. Cultural identity is influenced by language identity, as languages can help make cultural contact faster and easier. Similarly, individual identity is developed and enriched together with changes in other aspects of identity. In other words, each person's life is different from that of others, and therefore, produces different qualities in every person.

As JJ grows up, he increasingly demonstrates his own will and personhood more distinctly. His personality and character have also developed fixed patterns as would be expected. However, it is observed that the individual or personal variant is sometimes mistaken for other variants such as culture or ethnicity and, therefore, not given due recognition or attention, which could cause misunderstanding in communication. As the above example illustrates, JJ's mother "suspected" that the real reason for JJ's liking of sushi was that he wanted to demonstrate his "Japanese-ness", while JJ simply wanted to state his own food preference.

On the other hand, there is not enough evidence in this study to prove whether the multilingual individual himself has the same tendency to mistake individual characteristics for cultural or ethnic tendencies.

Ethnic or racial identity

Ethnic identity as used here represents the racial aspect of individuals inherited biologically from their parents. This variant often implicitly includes "a sense of belonging and pride in the ethnic group" (Baker and Prys Jones, 1998). Although it seems rather simplistic on the surface, it is, in fact, a very complicated notion for multilinguals and is often interwoven with other variants of identity. Multilingual children often inquire about their language and cultural identities because of their ethnicity, which may or may not be physically observable.

As shown in examples 15 through 17, JJ wondered about his language and cultural identities as a result of his awareness of his ethnicity.

15. "My friends said because you and Dad are Chinese, I am Chinese. But I wasn't born in China like you. Can I still be a Chinese?" (JJM's diary; 6)

16. "Are Japanese different from Chinese by blood? We look the same." (JJM's diary; 7)

17. "When I go to China or Singapore, I feel the same. Ha, ha, especially in the game centers. I feel like a real Chinese." (JJ's words as reported in an interview with JJ's Japanese friend's mother, Mrs. MI.; JJ: 8)

When JJ was younger, he was confused about the meaning of speaking "English" and being "English". He kept saying that he was "English" because he spoke "English" (Shi, 2001). To correctly comprehend his ethnicity was not easy for JJ. The issue of race or ethnicity even baffles adults. In the case of JJ, this variant of his identity is more a family topic than a social topic because the similarities in physical features between Chinese and Japanese have not posed any appearance-related problems for him.

Nationality or national identity

In this case study, national identity refers to the nationality or citizenship of individuals. As the number of people working, marrying and/or migrating overseas increases, understanding of and emotional attachment to the notion of nationality seem to be changing as well. For children like JJ who live with their parents in a "foreign" country for much longer than their "own" country, it is often difficult to judge the level of awareness of and/or loyalty to the country of their citizenship.

Examples 18 through 20 show instances of JJ trying to come to grips with the meaning of his nationality in terms of his identity.

18. "I don't know why I am Singaporean, but I guess it's because I was born in Singapore." (JJM's diary; 7)

19. "I feel like a visitor in Singapore. It's a great place for food." (JJM's diary; 11)

20. "I don't really know the meaning of holding the citizenship of a country. What does it mean?" (JJM's diary; 11)

It is not an easy task for multilingual and multicultural children to comprehend that the country where they have resided for many years (or perhaps all their life) is only a "host" country and that they are "foreigners" in this country just because they have citizenship in a different country. For JJ, it is natural to feel that he is more Japanese than Singaporean because he has lived in Japan much longer than in Singapore. His English is not the same as Singapore English and always makes local Singaporeans mistake him for a foreign tourist.

All the same, as it was for his ethnic identity, national identity has not caused JJ any major dilemma yet, as he has not been involved in any situations where he has had to take a political or philosophical stance.

CONCLUSION

This case study has demonstrated the awareness the young multilingual informant has of the seven types/variants of identities that were catalogued in an earlier typology (Shi, 2001) and has also illustrated the developmental nature of his multiple identities using his researcher/mother's journal as the main sources of data.

As shown above, the complexity of the informant's identities was reinforced by his multilingual abilities and multicultural background and by his family context. Examples of his discourse, as seen in this paper, exemplify his reactions to stimuli in various contexts of his life (e.g., in his family and school and with his friends) and offer a way to capture the developmental as well as negotiative nature of his identities. Research on the identities of multilinguals using the typology of the seven variants will be continued in order to further examine both the identity formation of multilinguals and the construction of the typology.

NOTES
* This paper was originally presented in a colloquium at JALT 2004 and an abridged version was published in the conference proceedings.
1. After the data in each of the examples, the source (e.g, JJM's diary or recording by JJM) and JJ's age in years at the time the data was collected are given in parentheses.

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