



Bilingual Japan

バイリンガル通信

Winter 2020/2021 Volume 29, Number 3
The Newsletter of the JALT
Special Interest Group on Bilingualism

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Contribute to *Bilingual Japan*

Bilingual Japan is the official newsletter of the Bilingualism Special Interest Group (B-SIG) of the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT). The purpose of this publication is to provide B-SIG members with articles and reports about bilingualism research and bilingual child-raising in Japan. *Bilingual Japan* also provides information about recent B-SIG activities.

The content of this newsletter depends on contributions from its readers. All SIG members and other interested parties are invited to submit articles or reports for inclusion in these

pages. Start by writing about your family's experience or something about bilingual parenting that concerns you. Even if you feel that what you have to say is trivial, there is always someone who will be interested. Everyone has a story to tell, and we look forward to hearing yours.

Regular Columns

- Consult the description at the top of each of the Regular Columns in this issue.
- Length: 1500 - 3000 words
- Submit articles to the respective column editors.

Feature Articles

- These articles are longer and/or deal with topics not covered by the Regular Columns.
- Length: Up to 3,000 words or longer.
- Submit articles to the editor at e18d1101@soka-u.jp

Guidelines for Case Study Articles for the JALT Bilingualism SIG newsletter

The goal of a case study is to show how the process of teaching* and acquiring a minority language & culture is carried out in individual cases. Writers should clearly explain to the reader the relevant information regarding the main characters of the story, the situation that these characters came from and/or are presently in, and the strategies and methods used to advance toward the stated goal. While a case study is usually written by a parent about that parent's child or children, any contributor who is suitably informed about a particular situation is eligible to submit an article for publication.

Obviously, contributors should keep in mind their audience. Most Bilingualism SIG members (numbering over 200, all of whom receive three online issues annually) have various years of experience in this field. Many joined the SIG when their children were young, hoping to learn how to raise their children to be bilingual, bi-literate, and bicultural. A contributor should strive to contribute to our readers' desire to know and learn, keeping in mind that our members have a wide range of personal backgrounds, current family circumstances, and material and social resources.

* (Terms such as 'teaching', 'teachers', 'learning', etc. are used broadly in these guidelines and can/do include people, practices, and experiences beyond a traditional school environment.)

Submission guidelines:

It is advisable to check with the editors before writing your article. It is best to propose an idea or an abstract and then proceed upon the editors' feedback. Reading past case studies is advisable.

Deadlines are the middle of January, April, and September. Articles should be 1500-3000 words, though exceeding the upper cap, within reason, can usually be accommodated. In certain circumstances, much longer articles are accepted but may be split into two parts, appearing in successive issues. Check with the editors on this.

Editorial guidelines:

Case studies in this newsletter are generally not academic in nature. Rather, they are a focused narrative on the real experiences of people in specific situations. References to research and theory, if used at all, should be used sparingly. Many case studies are fine without such references. However, meandering narratives will be rejected or sent back for revision. Articles should convey a clear story that reveals the efforts and outcomes towards teaching and learning of the target language and/or culture, whether successful or not.

Article structure:

- Introduction

This first part of your article should provide the relevant information about the 'teachers' and 'learners' (often the parents and children) – demographics, past and current residencies, education history, language abilities, teaching strategies and methods, lifestyle and social circumstances, etc. Pseudonyms are acceptable but should be acknowledged. A thesis statement of sorts should be included to alert the reader to the direction and scope of the article.

- Body

This section should clearly deal with the main events of the article. Convey the steps taken to address the problems stated in the (so-called) ‘thesis statement’ and the results of those steps. This is sometimes the most personal part of an article, and conveying the thoughts, feelings, and behavior of the participants towards successes or failures can be powerful. Be fair, be accurate, and be honest.

Typically, there is a third party involved in a case study -- a teacher, principal, a school, family member, a ‘Saturday School’ board member’ etc. It is beneficial to the reader to explain this party’s position and behavior adequately and honestly.

Details matter. Explain the methods you use in enough detail to give the reader a sense of how that method worked in those circumstances. For example, methods might include reading English books at bedtime, Skype sessions with cousins back home, Saturday school projects, daily ‘English-only’ periods, or home-school routines. Helpful detail would include any ‘spin-off’ activity *vis a vis* bedtime reading; particulars of Skype sessions, i.e. do the kids just ‘wing it’ or are talking points set up beforehand? What is the proficiency or ‘success’ of the exchanges? What excites kids in Saturday Schools to do mid-week English homework in preparation for the Saturday lesson? What are the social benefits of such an arrangement? For periods where ‘English-only’ is in effect, how does the child respond? Do all siblings, or spouse, participate? To what affect?

- **Conclusion**

Wrap up your article by briefly summarizing the wins and losses, what you have learned, and the path forward in the long and winding road ahead.

In the end, as a case study contributor, you are a storyteller. As always, good stories have drama, suspense, protagonists who struggle, antagonists who thwart, success, failure, humor, irony, courage, uncertainty, etc. Most importantly, good stories always connect with the reader. Your reader will be much like you -- having much on the line, such as a precious child who they dearly want to succeed in life. Your story will resonate with them. Tell it well.

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DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE: April 15th
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Coordinator's Message

Dear Bilingualism SIG Members!

Hope this message finds you well despite the busiest time of the academic year! Firstly, we would like to thank BSIG Officers (<https://www.bsig.org/officers>) along with **ALL** our Special Interest Group members who have been contributing to the Bilingualism SIG successful activities through long-term membership, presenting and sharing their research and lived experiences at the **PanSIG** and **JALT Bilingualism SIG Forums**, and SIG events related to bi-/multilingualism and bi-/multiculturalism, submitting articles and book reviews to the SIG's newsletter and the **JJMM Journal**, and other various contributions.

A special note from our Programme Chair, Diane Lamb-Obara: **PanSIG Forum 2021!**

The Bilingualism SIG is inviting parents, along with their children, for a casual “Tea Time and Sweets” interactive event aimed at providing participants with a platform to share their stories and experiences about language learning and growing up bi-/multilingual in Japan. In this laid-back forum, we welcome long-time members with advice, as well as newbies looking to learn! Please join us for this exciting time to talk, meet other families, and make new friends!

PanSIG 2021 will take place May 15-16, 2021 in Mishima, Shizuoka Prefecture. Proposals for PanSIG 2021 must be submitted by **February 1st, 2021** at pansig2021.eventzil.jp. Notifications of final acceptance of proposals will be sent via email between mid-February and early March, 2021. Please note that this event will be a hybrid event (partially online). **Also, the PanSIG committee is monitoring the Coronavirus situation closely, and is prepared to move the conference entirely online if needed.**

We would like to express our gratitude and thanks to **Stephen Ryan** and **Risa Hiramatsu** for making sure BSIG publications are delivered timely despite the on-going challenging circumstances that have affected all of us. Our special thanks go to all authors who have shared their work with us via the JJMM and Newsletter publications. We could not have done this without you. In addition, we would like to thank all reviewers for their support and hard work in providing the authors with a relevant constructive feedback and support.

This Newsletter issue showcases contributions from **Alexander McAulay** who provides an insightful discussion pertaining to the on-going debate related to the term ‘hafu’ used in the context of Japan. **Roger Grabowski** shares a personal case study with readers highlighting an emotional journey of raising three kids as a foreign father and coping with the loss of his wife. **Sarara Momokawa** discusses the issue of bilingualism and/or semi-lingualism that many of us could relate to. **Danica Young** shares an update on a variety of apps Bilingual Early Learning that should definitely be of interest and use to many of us. Thank you very much to all contributors who have kindly shared their work with us.

We thank you all for your support and look forward to hearing from you! Please e-mail Alexandra Shaitan at alexshaitan@yahoo.com if you would like to get involved in BSIG activities more actively.

Best wishes,

Bilingualism SIG Coordinator,

Shaitan Alexandra.

Book Notice

Announcing a major publication from B-SIG founder member, Yamamoto Masayo, of Kwansei Gakuin University

Contemporary Studies in Bilingualism and Multilingualism

First Edition

Four Volume Set

Edited by Yamamoto Masayo

November 2020 | 1 600 pages | SAGE Publications

ISBN: 9789353284596

From the publisher's flyer:

The epoch-making advancement in bilingualism was made in 1962, when Peal and Lambert concluded that bilingual children did much better than monolingual children on both verbal and nonverbal intelligence tests. Much progress has been achieved since then, due to advances in research technology and the increasing number of people speaking a wider variety of languages. Furthermore, the field itself has expanded, as new frontiers of investigation have been explored, including the bilingualism of languages indifferent modes, such as spoken/signed bilingualism. This Major Work builds upon the previous work in the field and extensively covers the recent developments.

More information [here](#).

Feature Article

Readers are encouraged to submit articles related to various other topics or issues related to language learning, identity, education, or child raising. Please contact the editor Risa Hiramatsu at e18d1101@soka-u.jp for more information.

Hafu, not Double: A Matter of Settled Will by Alexander McAulay

When my first child was born in 2001, one of the many things I was fretting over as a first-time father was the appropriacy of referring to my child as ‘hafu.’ I was reassured by my friend Mary, who had attended ‘Growing Up Bilingually: The Pleasures and Pains,’ a Bilingualism SIG roundtable held at JALT National in 1997 (see Ryan 1998). She told me about the easy acceptance of the term as a mark of self-identity by many of the participants. The fact that young adult hafu themselves were comfortable with the term helped to assuage my fears. By the time the documentary *Hafu: The Mixed-Race Experience in Japan* was released in 2013, any resistance I had to calling my children hafu had evaporated. Made by two hafu filmmakers, Megumi Nishikura and Lara Perez Takagi, the film further cemented the term ‘hafu’ as not only acceptable in Japanese society, but as the pre-eminent term for self-identification among hafu living in Japan. The film spawned a Facebook group, Hafu Japanese, that currently has a membership of over 7,000. Hafu and parents of hafu in the group share and discuss a myriad of Japan- and hafu-related topics, covering the whole spectrum from frothy to

weighty. Spending time in the group makes one realize that the term hafu is valued, has utility, and is beneficial to the lived experience of hafu themselves.

And yet, every now and then, someone pops up in the group – invariably a newbie, usually a parent – to suggest that the term is inappropriate and has negative connotations. They argue that it implies ‘half of’ and not ‘whole.’ It ignores or eschews the non-Japanese side of the individual. As such, they say, the term ‘double/daburu’ is more encompassing and apt.

This argument is a fallacy based on the assumption that ‘hafu’ is an English word. It is not – it is Japanese. Certainly, it is used by English speakers with knowledge of Japanese society when speaking English. However, the analogy is a statement such as “John is not very genki 「元気」 today,” or “I’ll spend the holiday weekend at my jikka 「実家」 in Ehime.” In these statements, the Japanese word is code-switched into the utterance for convenience, or ease of understanding. A competent English speaker would not use ‘genki’ or ‘jikka’ in conversation with someone with no knowledge of Japan or

Japanese. In this way, the term ‘hafu’ is used in statements such as “We shouldn’t assume that all hafu 「ハーフ」 speak English.”

For this reason, it is rather peculiar when English-speakers discuss the sensibilities of a Japanese word, ‘hafu.’ The fact is, it *is* a Japanese word and no matter the etymological connections to the English word ‘half,’ it does not register as “50 percent” for the Japanese user any more than “nice” in English brings to mind the original Latin meaning of “ignorant” for some English speakers. I would argue that for most Japanese, hafu just means one kind of Japanese person, not someone who is ‘less Japanese.’ Imagine if, in English, my children were called *go-ju pasento*¹ in British social discourse. In other words, hypothetically, British society adopts the borrowed Japanese word *go-ju pasento* to describe individuals who have one Japanese parent. In this situation, British people might say “Did you know Rie Miyazawa is actually go-ju pasento?” or “Naomi Osaka is probably the most high-profile go-ju pasento these days.” No British person who does not speak Japanese would or could take the meaning ‘50%’ from that foreign borrowing. Similarly, English speakers might register ‘half’ when they hear the Japanese word ‘hafu,’ but most Japanese speakers do not take the same meaning. They simply understand that one parent is not Japanese. This is the main reason

why using the term ‘double/daburu’ might be lost on a Japanese if you correct them for using ‘hafu’ – you are arguing against a point that the Japanese speaker had no intention of making. Whatever ‘offence’ English-speakers find in ‘hafu’ does not relate to Japanese, the language and culture where the term lives and breathes. Here in Japan, the term is celebrated and used positively, by both hafu themselves and most Japanese people. To borrow a term from Scottish politics, the term ‘hafu’ is the “settled will” of the hafu population.

Academic studies support this assertion. Dow (2017) notes that “Many hafu themselves have embraced this label and used it to self-identify” (p. 73), and this is echoed by Oshima (2014) and Yoshida (2014). In media, Tetsuro Miyazaki’s *hafu2hafu* project gives voice and image to hafu from around the world. News organizations like CNN now use the term in their coverage of Japan (e.g. Jozuka 2020). Certainly, there are discussions around the term. One issue is the sub-categorization of hafu into ‘visible’ and ‘invisible’ hafu (i.e. those who ‘look foreign’ and those who ‘look Japanese’) and how the media venerates the former. At other times, media will exhibit casual racism against hafu by talking about whether an individual is hafu OR Japanese, seen most recently in the annual New Year’s Eve episode of GakiNo Tsukai. Interestingly, the semantic boundaries of the

¹ 五十パーセント/50 percent

term are tested by its application to people who do not have a Japanese parent, in utterances such as “Ken is a Korean-Chinese hafu.” However, these discussions do not invalidate the term, but instead are evidence of its usefulness and empowering potential in social discourse.

Times change and language and society evolve, and so the term ‘hafu’ may in the future be eclipsed by another term. It is quite possible that ‘hafu’ might appear quaint and dated to future generations. In the present, however, as the *Hafu* filmmakers state, “it is the most commonly used label and preferred term of self-definition.” Any parent arguing for ‘double’ ignores that preference at their peril. Hafu have spoken.

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- Yoshida, S. (2014). *Being hafu (biethnic Japanese) in Japan: Through the eyes of the Japanese media, Japanese university students, and hafu themselves* (Doctoral dissertation, College of Humanities, University of Utah).

Filmography

- *Hafu: The Mixed Race Experience in Japan*. 2013. [film, DVD]. Written and directed by Megumi Nishikura and Lara Perez Takagi.

“Are you bilingual?” is a question I am often asked in my home country, Japan. Strangely enough, this often seems to imply being bilingual in Japanese and English. Other languages, while they are no less important, seem to be forgotten. I often hesitate to answer, because the moment I tell them that I grew up in Japan and the U.S., the usual reaction I receive is, “Oh, that’s why! You had it easy learning English because you learned it as a child!” What remains seemingly unsaid, but implied is, “And you know, it’s not fair. I had to learn English in a non-English speaking environment, so you have no idea how difficult it is to learn English when one is brought up in the Japanese education system.” I cannot disagree, because I can only imagine that that would be the case. Yet, I would strongly have to disagree with the part of “having it easy”, for I have constantly lived in the fear of becoming a semi-lingual as opposed to a bilingual.

I am ethnically Japanese, but because I was born in Canada, I spent the first three months of my life exposed to some amount of English. I am not sure if this brief period made any durable impact on my linguistic make-up. My parents did tell me that I produced (what seemed to them) unusual babbling as a baby, a kind of babbling that Japanese baby born in Japan would usually not make. Aside from this brief stay in Canada, I lived in Japan until the end of my third elementary school year. My family was scheduled to live in Boston for two

years during my fourth and fifth year of elementary school. My parents sent me to an English conversation class for children about a year before leaving for the States. In addition to these classes, my father taught me English every night after dinner. He was not an English teacher, but as an academician, his English skills in reading and writing were more than sufficient to teach a beginner like me. His pronunciation teaching, however, was not entirely accurate. For years, I pronounced the letter “j” in the French way, because that was what he had taught me. It was only years later, in high school, that a good friend of mine asked me, “Why do you pronounce your js in the French way?” I was stunned to learn of my mistake, but was thankful to have a friend who was kind enough to correct me. I also remember attending a day-camp during the summer at the American School in Japan, in Chofu, Tokyo. I remember enjoying the camp, but I do not think there was enough comprehensible input for me to make much progress in English at the time. Also, my elementary school in Japan provided a weekly English class, but it did very little to help me improve my English skills.

As planned, I went to Boston at what would have been the start of my fourth grade in Japan. Because of the different school calendar between Japan and the States, I experienced being a fourth grader for only two months. This did not seem to be much of a problem, because I could hardly understand

what the teacher was saying anyway. I had English as a Second Language (ESL) classes for the first three months, in addition to the regular classes. I was mistakenly put into a high-level class in ESL since I could read English. The teacher, however, had not realized that I could read, but not understand what I was reading. This was in a public elementary school, in what I later found was called the immersion program. For some students, it was not immersion, but submersion. In order to avoid being submerged, I frantically started to read extensively in English. I read aloud the Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie* books, as well as *Nancy Drew* mystery stories by Caroline Keene, and R.L. Stein's *Goosebumps* series. Fortunately, I enjoyed reading, so that reading extensively was not a great burden. I could also sense that I was making progress, so I never doubted that I would not be able to speak English in the near future. This kept my motivation high.

Not everything was so smooth, however. I struggled to be accepted as a member of my class. But I do remember the moment when I felt I was finally recognized as a valid member of the class community, and that was when I played piano in front of my classmates. I could literally see the change in my classmates' expression, which seemed to say, "Oh wow, she can't speak English, but she can play the piano." Unlike in Japan where one is supposed to be as modest as possible (and possibly hide one's skills for the fear of being seen as a show-off), presenting what one is capable of doing, at least in America,

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seemed to be a very good idea.

Meanwhile, my only use of Japanese was at home, with my family. Because there was an active "Japan Society" in Boston, I knew that there were many Japanese children who attended a Japanese school on Saturdays, in addition to their weekday regular schooling in the public education system. The parents of these children chose to send their children there, because they believed that when they went back to Japan, their children would have difficulty readjusting to the Japanese education system. The Japanese school on Saturdays was one way of trying to make sure that their children would not forget their Japanese, and possibly their Japanese identity. For better or for worse, I did not attend the Japanese school, because I was attending a Saturday program at a local music school. As a result, I read and wrote very little Japanese during this period. I was emotionally quite stable, despite my limited English abilities, because I had found a place for myself in this music school. On Saturdays, I was there all day, taking classes in music theory, ear training, choir, jazz, and chamber music, and since the main language was music (and not English), I was able to establish my identity as a child immersed in making music. Years later, I discovered the books written by Minae Mizumura, a Japanese fiction and non-fiction writer, who had also moved to the States as a child (when she was in junior high school). During her first few years in the States, she recounts how she buried herself in reading Japanese literature. I was surprised when I came across this writing, because it had never occurred to me, while I

was in Boston, to even pick up a book in Japanese. Mizumura recounts how she read Japanese classic literature during her teenage years there, and that through her reading of them, she created an image of Japan that no longer existed, one that was idealized and beautified. The difference between Mizumura and I is that she moved to the States at an age when her identity as a Japanese was already firmly fixed. I, on the other hand, had not yet established any real identity as any individual belonging to a particular country or ethnicity.

During my first summer in Boston, I attended a month-long YMCA camp. There were a couple hundred campers, but I did not meet any Japanese-speaking camper or staff during this entire period. Looking back on this, I think this was a fortunate coincidence. I could only rely on myself to deal with this situation. There were daily announcements of the activities that were offered each day, but at first, I always seemed to miss the details. I often went to the wrong activity at the wrong time. But since I had to survive somehow, I started to speak English in whatever way I could. English for survival. That might be the best way to get people to start speaking. My integrative motivation at this time was extremely high, as I wanted to be accepted as a proper member of the camp, and not just as an outsider who happened to be sharing the same physical space. I remember that in one of the campfire sessions we had with our cabinmates, we were each given a few minutes to talk and share a story. I am not sure where I got the courage from, but I remember giving an impromptu speech about how I felt everyone

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was a “group” and that I was included in it. On the following day, I noticed that my cabinmates seemed to have grudgingly accepted that at least here was a camper who was not going to keep quiet about being unaccepted and unrecognized. But I now think that this speech had been risky, because I could just as well have been ignored, or worse, ostracized. Fortunately, neither of those things happened, and I finished the month-long camp in one piece.

It was this YMCA camp that was to be one of my major turning points in my English learning development. I was nowhere close to speaking good English, but I could see that my classmates took me seriously if they realized I was making the effort to speak English. It was also fortunate that there were no other Japanese students in my class at my elementary school. I had no other language I could use aside from English. Also, thanks to my YMCA camp experience, I was released from the ESL classes, and participated in all classes, together with my regular classmates.

After spending two years in Boston, I went back to Japan with my family. Originally, my family had planned on sending me back to the elementary school where I had been before moving to Boston. However, my parents feared that I would forget English as soon as I was back into the Japanese education system. For this reason, I entered an international school in Tokyo for two years, where classes were taught in English. I have always wondered what became of my classmates, especially the Japanese ones, from my international school. Certainly not all, but

some had been there, because they were the ones who never quite found their place within the Japanese education system, either socially or academically. They were, so to speak, the children who had become outsiders of their own country's education system. There were no Japanese classes at this school, which meant that for Japanese students, their ability in Japanese automatically fell behind others who attended non-international schools. Did the parents of these children hope that their children would become "global citizens"? It seemed as though we were all becoming not balanced- bilinguals, but semi-linguals. Since the academic standards were not very high, most students probably would have had difficulty getting into the top schools in the States. Similarly, their chances of entering the top ranking universities in Japan were not high, because they were already out of the "system", and once one is out of it, it is usually very difficult to get back in.

After going back to the States to attend four years of high school, I spent the first two years of college in London, studying piano performance. I am sure that I have good memories of the city somewhere, but I cannot recall any now. Speaking American English in London really did not seem like a good idea, but with my identity firmly established in American English, I could not throw it out the window, just because I was living in London. It was amazing though to see the difference in the way these Londoners treated me, depending on which accent I used. I felt that I had two handicaps. The first was that I was speaking English with an American accent.

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The second seemed to be, although I would rather not believe it, that I was an Asian speaking with an American accent. Racism will be an issue anywhere, but London just happened to be the first place where I confronted it head on. One amusing, yet rather bitter experience related to the issue of an accent occurred when I was working as a concert usher in London. During one concert's intermission, a British gentleman in the audience struck up a conversation with me. I have very little memory of the conversation itself, for what he said left such an impact that everything else seemed irrelevant, when he pronounced, "Queen's English is the best. All other English. I don't like them."

It is, in a way, remarkable that one simple and banal remark from a complete stranger--who probably has no recollection of his own words now---can have upon another human being. I am thankful, in a rather twisted way, to this prejudiced gentleman, because it has made me acutely aware of accents as someone earning bread and butter teaching English.

Partially due to my encounter with the man who could not stand any other English except his own, I decided to continue my studies in Leipzig, Germany, where I would no longer have to apologize for my American accent. I did, however, have to apologize for my nonexistent German. In my university there, I met many frustrated professors who had difficulty teaching someone who seemed to understand her own name, but little else. I had gone to Germany with my own little prejudice, which was that most German people

can speak English and enjoy talking in English. But in reality, many professors gave an apologetic, yet an irritated reaction when I asked if I could speak in English to them. It was only when my German housemate told me that the older generation of East Germans had to learn Russian as their foreign language that I realized my naïve lack of historical understanding. One amusing exchange I had with a store clerk in Leipzig went like this: “Do you speak English?” I asked. His reply was, “*Nein, ich spreche Deutsch.*” (“No, I speak German.”)

After spending five years in Germany, I returned to Japan in my mid-twenties and attended a university for the second time. I quickly realized that I was facing my semi-linguistic crisis. I had started out as a native speaker of Japanese, but somewhere during my teenage years, it had changed to English. This did not mean, however, that my English was as good as someone who had been born and raised in an English-speaking environment. To add to the confusion was German, which I had never mastered. It seemed that the amount of whatever linguistic skill I had remained the same. It was just how that skill was divided up between the languages that had changed over the years. Strangely, I was now feeling utterly alien in my own country, and with the language that used to be my mother tongue as a child. People who met me for the first time seemed to have difficulty placing me in their known categories of people. It seemed customary to be asked, “But you aren’t a *jun-japa*, are you? You must be a *nannchatte*.”

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Japanese, right?” For any readers unfamiliar with these awkward and somewhat politically incorrect-sounding terms, *jun-japa* is a shortened form of *junsui-Japanese*, which translates to “pure Japanese.” To my relief, this concept of “pure” had no racial connotations. Instead, it was used to find out whether one was a returnee not. The other terminology, *nannchatte-Japanese*—which I found equally unsettling—was used to put me in the category of the undefined.

As a student in a Japanese university, I was alarmed by my low level of Japanese. I had been successful in convincing myself that I was proficient in Japanese, but this perception changed instantly when I was unable to follow the academic lectures in Japanese without a frantic use of my Japanese-English electronic dictionary. As one would panic when losing one’s wallet or a cellphone, I panicked when I could not locate my electronic dictionary. My kanji writing, especially by hand, was worse than an elementary school student’s. Whenever someone asked me to fill out a form in Japanese, I broke out in cold sweat. Essay writing in Japanese was unthinkable. My presentation skills in Japanese were laughable. People’s reactions were even more amusing. They gave looks of puzzlement because they saw someone who looked very Japanese and spoke the language without any noticeable accent, yet I was displaying multiple signs of my *un-Japanese-ness*, whatever that may be.

I scrambled to meet my graduation requirements by taking classes that were offered in English. Whenever I saw that my

GPA was going down the ladder, I enrolled in courses taught in English in order to raise it the best I could. It was as though I was going through the same experience that I had as an elementary school student in Boston. In order to relearn or perhaps acquire Japanese, I started to read books aloud in Japanese, although not the books for children, as I had done with my English learning. When I went to study in my university's library, I made sure to pick a corner desk when working on my brightly colored kanji drill books meant for elementary school children.

I have been back in Japan now for ten years, and working as an English teacher, I have met people with similar backgrounds who are straddling multiple languages and cultures. There is no doubt that all have

struggled with their languages in some way. But one factor that contributed to my struggle with both Japanese and English was the timing of learning them. I was nine years old when I was thrown into an all-English-speaking environment. Looking back, I think that my foundation in Japanese had not been firmly established then, which is why I later came to feel more at ease using English rather than Japanese. I have always felt somewhat half-baked, and that is the potential danger of changing the linguistic environment for a child in their linguistically sensitive period, whenever that may be. I have experienced years of both linguistic and cultural confusion, although I do not mean to complain, for they have also enriched my life in more ways than I would probably ever know.

2020 Resource Review: Online Updates and Apps for Bilingual Early Learning by Danica Young

The pandemic has pushed everyone online even more than before and there's no question that parents have been exhausted with their share of online learning, game play, and Netflix. Yet, in saying this, developers have also seemed to jump at the chance to expand their options and offer more. While many readers in our community have reported success with online programs for early learners like *Reading Eggs* (Mason, 2016), *Baby Sign Time* (Kaga, 2017) and BBC's *Alpha Blocks* on the English side, we thought we'd take this time to scan the web and see if there was anything new available, that is specifically targeted at language acquisition for bi/multilingual learners who are just starting out. This article also adds parents' comments found on some of the popular social networking sites. Families raising young bilingual children were also asked their thoughts about some of the resources mentioned in this article. Finally, as most of the above-mentioned programs cost money, we did our best to focus on FREE ones, since at this early stage, many families just want a try before continuing to invest more money in online pursuits!

Bilingual Learning Apps

1. The *Baby Learn Languages* series (iOS) has several apps, each for learning a different language. Parents can input a primary language and the app. uses that information to make visual flashcards to help children master

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simple vocabulary such as food, animals, and nature. Users can only play a couple packs for free, and then after that it costs 120 yen per pack or 730 yen to open all of the packs. There are three levels: learn mode, memory game, and word quiz. One positive aspect is that users can both see the pictures and read the words, so it works for very young children who need to improve their vocabulary.

<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/baby-learn-languages/id507280005>

2. Poly.cards

Poly.cards is very similar to the above series, except its cards use drawn figures instead of photographs and the free card bundles are a little more practical. Parents can set the two languages they want their child to learn within the app, instead of just one like in *Baby Learn Languages*, but the pay bundles are more expensive at 1100 yen for five sets and 2700 yen for the lifetime bundle.

<https://apps.apple.com/bg/app/poly-cards/id1490778651>

3. Pepe Loves Books

This is an absolutely adorable app., based on both content and graphics, but unfortunately only available from English to Spanish. As you will find with many of the app options, only a small smattering are actually free. This one, however, is an exception, in that it's a whole children's book in a series of very

sweet, well-animated stories about Pepe the dog, based on a real live dog. There is a special bonus feature where you are linked to a page where you can see pictures of Pepe. I love how the story can be put into both English and Spanish and there is the option of reading to yourself or being read to. So far only one other Pepe book is available for about 99 cents USD, but two more are on the way.

<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/pepe-loves-books/id930323063>

4. PIBO

This is an app with a very nice library of Japanese children's books that the app can read aloud. There are 369 books available, but again like most of the "free" apps, the books have to be unlocked to read more of them. They are very visually attractive, and are definitely books that I have seen previously on store shelves with attractive covers and illustrations, which are great for young readers of hiragana and katakana, as they can read along or listen to the app reader read. They also have different levels labeled such as 1 year old to 3 year old, so it is easy to pick the books that are age and level appropriate. The only drawback is that the stories are only in Japanese and the language cannot be changed. As one mother mentioned, her husband, who is the native Japanese speaker, comes home late from work and is often too tired to read bedtime stories (or the children are already asleep), so an app like this helps her get input.

<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/pibo-japanese-picture-books/id765195011>

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5. Mochian

Mochian is like a Japanese language online learning textbook for English-speaking students, but only the basic beginning levels are free. The positive aspect is that the lessons extend all the way to the N1 level. They have flippable flashcards with pronunciation and a picture, so users can see different variations of the word. It also occasionally tests the learner for practice. It's cutely animated and the lessons are broken down into easy compartments - such as "Nice to meet you", "At School" and "Traveling". It's very much like a learning textbook on-the-go, but requires headphones. It's a great way to brush up on Japanese.

6. Rainbow Mimizu's Hiragana and Katakana

These free apps are definitely geared towards young learners of Japanese. There is practice for writing, and recognizing the symbols and their sounds. There are separate apps for hiragana and katakana, but both are quite fun and come with cute animated practice games. The characters speak slowly and have good pronunciation, so it doesn't sound too robotic. One parent commented to me that "She played the hiragana one a little. She likes it but unfortunately her Japanese is still limited so I'm not sure how much she understood. She was bored with it after 15 minutes." (A. Yasua, personal communication, 2020) The sentiments that many other parents expressed were similar. The games on this website failed to keep their children's interest for very long.

They may be well-intentioned overall, but typically don't hold the children's interest.

<https://www.rainbowmimizu.com/>

7. Lingo Deer

This app is more or less a competitor for Duo lingo. It consists of free language learning games, with little competitions to motivate the user, and is full of extremely diverse activities for tasks such as sentence order, reading, writing, and pronunciation. It is freer and very diversified, but it's also very popular with a lot of language options so it's quite possible readers have already heard of it and/or used it. If not, it is definitely worth a try. Unlike a lot of apps on this list, Lingo Deer has the freest content, in that it doesn't have as many in-app purchases. It is definitely worth a try for many ages, not only young learners.

<https://www.lingodeer.com/>

The Results

Unfortunately, overall, most of the families that were asked to look at and try the apps were unsatisfied with them for various reasons. An American mother mentioned that her child isn't allowed on the phone yet, and that the above-mentioned list includes nothing for Kindle. Also, at nearly 3-years-old, her child is only just starting with the pre-literacy phase. (A. Yasua, personal communication, April, 2020). At this stage, it's a challenge for children to engage so actively with apps like these when they are not yet reading. She mentioned that her young ones are interested in shows like *Paw Patrol* and *Daniel Tiger*, so learning apps related to their favorite characters are more motivating. Another

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mother mentioned the same about her 3-year-old son, who likes songs from *Sesame Street*, *Elmo*, and *Okaasan-to-Isshou*. Apps related to these shows peak his interest for long periods of time. With that said, we also know from bilingual families that active parental engagement at this stage is essential in the pre-reading years, and so there may be benefits of just being exposed to the language and having input while playing on the apps with mom and dad, albeit it feels like the app is ineffective.

When it comes to lower elementary school students, past bilingual reports have mentioned that apps are not used so much for learning vocabulary and language, but rather for trouble-shooting problem areas and reinforcement, such as spelling and reading fluency in English, as well as basic reading comprehension and Kanji practice in Japanese. These children responded better to learning apps that gamified their learning experiences. They mentioned voluntarily spending time on and enjoying free games like *Scrabble*, *Wheel of Fortune*, and *Hangman*. Thus, for the next article in this series, free apps for bi/multilingual elementary school students might be a topic to explore, after they are able to engage with them more.

Conclusion

In the words of Graham Mackenzie (Spring, 2017), "There are undoubtedly a lot of very poor English language learning apps aimed at young learners out there and it can take a lot of work to trawl through them all and find something that is both educational, intuitive and fun.... What is important is that an app has long term appeal so that a child will keep

going back to it, be it to get extensive phonics and spelling practice or exposure to TV in English, and we have found it is often worthwhile paying a little bit of money for those kinds of apps when you find them. Unfortunately though, there will likely never be a magic app solution for all the more challenging aspects of literacy, so don't throw away those workbooks just yet." These words go along perfectly with the findings here. These free apps are often not effective because they are not often the type that can keep children's attention in the long run. Paying for higher quality definitely makes a huge difference. With any sort of practice material, especially when it comes to apps and online materials, ideally, users will return time and time again in order to maximize practice time and cement what they are learning. It would be hard to call an app effective that cannot manage to do that.

It seems that the apps available currently through the Apple app store that have the label of free in Japan are lacking in these crucial areas, especially when trying to compete with special free and cheaply available options such as YouTube programs and Netflix. Currently these apps have not

managed to measure up in the minds and hearts of their targeted audiences and are lacking a "sticky" quality. But as times can and do change; there is a clear market for better and more effective free apps to emerge in the future (especially if they can profit off of ads). It also serves to keep in mind that apps are only reinforcement and practice. They aren't going to ultimately teach language. While the right tools can be essential to ignite the passion to learn and keep young learners coming back, for now, it seems that purpose is better served by using paid apps rather than free ones.

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Foreign Father, Three Kids, Cope with Passing of Japanese Mother – Part 2 by Roger Grabowski

In Part One of this article, I explained that my wife Misako and I were committed to raising our children bilingually in Japanese and English. I concluded Part One by writing that, when she passed away suddenly in April 2017, leaving me the single father of a nine year-old boy and seven and five year-old girls, “I was confident that Misako and I had at least laid the proper groundwork for our children to function in both English and Japanese as my family started the next, unknown chapter of our lives.” I never could have imagined how soon our kids’ bilingualism would be necessary. As Misako lay in the hospital, about to pass away, my parents, siblings, and a couple good friends came to Tokyo from the U.S. to be with us. As I was busy at the hospital, and then with the subsequent funeral arrangements, our children were pressed into service as translators, helping my family with everything from ordering food and giving directions to taxi drivers to reading the buttons on our washing machine and TV remote. Amidst the crushing grief, not to mention the overwhelming busyness of taking care of all of the necessary arrangements, I can’t imagine what I would have done without the kids’ help. In addition, I suspect that spending time with our American family helped them negotiate the initial sadness and confusion that they suddenly had thrust upon them as their mother lay dying.

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After the funeral, my family returned to the U.S., our kids went back to school, and we embarked on this next, unknown chapter of our lives. I had always been involved in as many aspects of child-raising as I could, but there was much that I had never had to consider, as I could entrust Misako with all Japanese paperwork and communications; those were now left up to me to deal with or ask for help with (I remember realizing that I did not know how to say fabric softener in Japanese).

My university allowed me to cut back to two days a week of teaching for that first semester as my family adjusted to our new life. Indispensable to making that adjustment have been Misako’s parents, particularly her mother, who, despite dealing with her own grief of losing a child, came over often to help me with the mountains of paperwork (school, banking, taxes, legalities, etc.) that Misako would have taken care of previously. As I returned to a more full-time work schedule, she continued to be a constant presence in our lives, coming over several times a week to wait for the kids to come home from school. I am truly blessed that I have been able to rely on her to help us. She has even been nice enough to give me the occasional “night off”, staying over or taking the kids to her house.

I always did my best to help out around the house and I made dinner on

weekends. But, since Misako was home more and I worked a lot, she obviously did most of the cooking and cleaning. Obaa-chan is usually nice enough to do a load of laundry when she comes over--and she is a genius of closet/cabinet/dresser organization--but the housework basically comes down to me. I tell my students that housework is my "other job". Fortunately, I enjoy cooking and have gradually built up my arsenal of recipes—mostly Japanese--to go along with our old weekend favorites. Initially, I got a few comments like "Mommy's curry was better" (true enough—it was better) but our children are not picky eaters, fortunately, and I have them help me plan meals to keep everyone happy.

Part One detailed our informal policy of language use in our house, which I called "Daddy's Home", in which everyone was expected to speak English while I was in the house. Our children have lived their entire lives in Tokyo, have gone only to Japanese public schools, speak Japanese as their first language, and have limited exposure to English. Our policy was meant to maximize that limited exposure, which is mostly time spent with me. Obviously, that policy changed dramatically after Misako's death—Obaa-chan does not speak a word of English, so when she and I are both here, my kids and I code-switch vigorously, with them often carrying on two conversations at the same time. However, when it is just the four of us, they speak much more English. Part of the Daddy's Home policy was to speak only English at the dinner table and, while I still try to enforce that,

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sometimes I am just too tired. However, just as it had been before their mother passed away, they and I still communicate only in English.

We still play games such as Uno and Connect Four in English when time permits. Unfortunately, the pernicious presence of the iPad has cut down on such interaction, as I suspect it has in many families. In addition, the kids have their favorite Japanese television shows, some of which we watch together, but even as we watch a show in Japanese, we comment and make fun of it mostly in English.

Another way in which our children's emerging bilingualism has come into play that I never would have expected is that I often need their help with Japanese. I (justifiably) lack confidence in my written Japanese ability and when I have to write messages to their teachers in their renrakuchō -- a booklet, delivered back and forth by the child, in which teachers and parents communicate by writing messages -- or compose emails or Line text messages, I often ask them for editing help. It no doubt has helped them with their meta-linguistic awareness in Japanese as they correct my clumsy writing and help me with the finer points of grammar. ("It's wa, not ga, Daddy!") I must admit that their willingness to help me often makes me over-reliant on them, even in situations I should take care of myself. When the telephone rings and I do not recognize the caller's number, I'll lazily hand the phone to Rob and say "Here—deal with this."

Unfortunately, one parental duty that I cannot help them with very much is homework support. I can handle elementary-

school level arithmetic, but when it comes to kanji or Japanese reading, they rely on Obaa-chan, their friends, and each other as I am useless.

As I described in Part One, when Robert was seven or eight years old, he became engrossed by American sports, which became his “spark” to engage with English, as he watched games, read about sports, and talked to me, all in English. I had been hoping for a similar spark for my daughters, and finally it emerged in the form of “tween” movies and their companion soundtracks. In particular, becoming engrossed in Disney’s Descendants series led to the High School Musical and Zombies series, and The Greatest Showman, among others. Watching the movies multiple times and singing along to the soundtrack CDs led to noticeable improvement in their comprehension and vocabulary, often in funny ways, as Sayaka and I have a running argument as to whether a character is rapping what’s up or wassup. They have watched a few movies in both English and Japanese and then compared the two. Asami told me that Frozen II was better in English, “because the jokes are funnier”, an experience I hope will encourage her to always opt for the original English soundtrack when watching a movie or TV show.

I have never worried about their English listening and speaking, which has developed naturally from living in our bilingual house. But recently I have put more focus on fostering their literacy development. When there is an opportunity, I sit down and read with them for a few minutes at least. It is

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worth noting that this has been a rare positive development to come out of the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, as I have worked from home most days and we have had vastly more time to read together. Previously, I was too busy. Usually, they read out loud to me and I help them when necessary; depending on the text, they might read quietly and then they tell me about it or ask me questions. As much as possible, to maintain their motivation, I let them choose what they want to read, unless they chicken out and pick something far too easy. Asami (third grade) and Sayaka (fifth grade) enjoy low-level graded readers and the Atama ii series of “choose your own adventure”-style stories.

The time we have spent reading together has led to noticeable gains in fluency, phonetic awareness and word recognition for all three children, but most of all for Rob (first year of junior high), who enjoys reading about sports and geography and whom I have challenged with graded readers and timed readings brought home from my university. He told me recently that he is still a bit more comfortable reading in Japanese, which is not surprising, but enjoys English reading more. (We had a good laugh when his junior high English class was practicing writing the alphabet the day after he had read the sports page of the Japan Times with me.) At the very least, I would like to instill the habit of reading into them, as their mother loved books, as do I. One less successful activity that I have tried is the “English Diary”, for which the rules are very simple: each entry must be at least one new sentence about anything and it must be a

new and original sentence, which we will then check together. It certainly has helped them, especially with easy spelling and punctuation. Unfortunately, it only works if I make them do it, which I tend to forget to do, sometimes for very long stretches.

When Misako died, I described my Japanese as “intermediate but quite conversational”. As I mentioned, I frequently rely on our children and mother-in-law to help me. But, as the primary caregiver and single parent, I find myself in situations in which I have to use Japanese, particularly regarding their schooling and activities such as ballet, basketball, and baseball. It has become entirely routine for me to be the only Westerner (and usually the only man) present at parents’ meetings and gatherings. In such formal settings I certainly do not understand everything being said—not even close—but I am able to get by in one-to-one situations like parent-teacher conferences, in which the language is more casual and in which I can ask for clarification when I don’t understand. On the whole, my Japanese has improved, but I am still not nearly as proficient as I need to be. When her mother died, Asami was entering her final year of yochien - Japanese kindergarden - which is notorious for its rules and parental involvement. As any yochien parent would tell you, it is absolutely not meant for single-parent families. I made a constant mess of which days Asami was to bring a bento, wear her gym clothes or uniform, come home early, etc. I made it through in one piece thanks only to the

generous help of other moms, to whom I came to sign off my messages as *nayanda papa*, “dad in distress”. I have needed a bit less help navigating elementary school, as my two older kids were already there when Misako died. When necessary, however, I am able to call upon a circle of my kids’ friends’ parents who have been extremely helpful and understanding of our family circumstances and my limited language skills. I do not know if it actually “takes a village to raise a child”, but it has certainly taken the generosity of a Tokyo neighborhood to help me raise mine.

Outside of our home, our children still do not have much exposure to English. Prior to 2020, we took annual summer visits to Chicago and they even got bonus spring break trips to the U.S., travelling with my sister and my parents. In the States, they spend so much quality time with their cousins and are immersed in playing and watching bad TV in English that, when we came back to Tokyo last August, Robert was finishing his summer vacation writing homework and turned to me and said “How do you say statue in Japanese?” as he had forgotten. (I am proud to say I was able to answer him.)

The past three years have gone by very quickly. Sometimes when I am annoyed or stressed out I have to remind myself that, in losing their mother at a very young age, my children have gone through a horrible trauma. I will never understand how that feels. However, they have continued with their lives just as they probably would have if their mother were still here, and their perseverance gives me strength. They talk about their

mother often, and sometimes as if she is still here, like when Asami told me her list of people she likes the most (I was lucky to crack the top 10).

I miss my wife horribly, every single day and would never wish what we have experienced on my worst enemy. It is not easy. But we are here, living our lives, relatively drama-free. I think there are two reasons that my children and I have been able to survive as we have, and both tie back to Part One of this article. First, we (mostly Misako) made the effort to meet people in our neighborhood and community. The help and support I have received has not been born from charity or people taking pity on a poor widowed foreigner. Hundreds of people came to pay respects at Misako's wake, the line running down the street, the most ever for our small local funeral home, according to the owner. Many told me they appreciated the help and advice Misako had provided them—being a few years older than most other moms, perhaps she served as an *onee-san*, older sister. I am sure that my extenuating circumstances have made a difference, but people have been extremely kind. Very simply, I wouldn't be a beneficiary of their kindness if they didn't know us in the first place.

Furthermore, as difficult as our lives have been at times, I cannot imagine how

much harder things would be if my children could not speak both English and Japanese. Their bilingualism has, of course, meant that we are able to communicate at home and has made it possible to navigate the world outside our house as well: school, the community, our families and friends, both in Japan and the U.S. In addition, because they speak English, I have been able to take a more active role in their lives than I might have otherwise and, I believe, be a better parent. When Misako and I decided to raise our kids bilingually, we knew that it would be a benefit in ways that we could not predict. For better or for worse, we were right.



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