



# Bilingual Japan

## バイリンガル通信

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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.

### **Manuscript Guidelines**

Please consult the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 6th edition, as a style guide. Refer to recent issues of the JALT Bilingualism SIG Newsletter for instances of layout and referencing.

### **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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<b>DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE: September 15th</b>
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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 of 2021-2022! Firstly, we would like to thank **BSIG Officers** (<https://www.bsig.org/officers>) along with **ALL** our valuable members who have been contributing to the SIG's successful activities through long-term membership, presenting and sharing their academic research and personal lived experiences on bilingualism at the **PanSIG** and **JALT Bilingualism SIG Forums**. We are also thankful to all members who have been contributing to BSIG publications and/or events related to bi-/multilingualism and bi-/multiculturalism, submitting articles and book reviews to the SIG's **Newsletter**, the **JJMM Journal**, and an upcoming Issue of a **Special Commemorative Monograph** celebrating Bilingualism SIG's 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Happy birthday to all **BSIGers!!!!** Please do check your mailbox for a special surprise! Coming SOON!

Time flies indeed and it is time for the **PanSIG 2021 Conference!**

Our Programme Chair, Diane Lamb is inviting you to join an engaging **BSIG 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!**

We look forward to meeting you online at: <https://pansig2021.eventzil.la/session/1239>

**WHEN: Sat, May 15, 14:30-16:00**

In this Newsletter issue, **Michelle Komura** reflects on raising neurodivergent bilinguals by sharing her personal story with us which I was rather fascinated with. **Steve McCarty** and **Alexander McAulay** continue a discussion on semilingualism previously raised by Sarara Momokawa in the previous Newsletter Issue. **Helen Tang Nagasawa** shares numerous games and activities aimed at supporting kids' exposure to English. We hope you will enjoy reading all contributions from our valuable members.

We thank all the reviewers, contributors and the Newsletter Editor for their time and support, hard work, and dedication in producing this issue.

And, it goes without saying, we thank **YOU all** for your support and look forward to hearing from you! Please e-mail Alexandra Shaitan at [alexshaitan@yahoo.com](mailto:alexshaitan@yahoo.com) if you would like to get involved in BSIG activities more actively.

Best wishes,

Bilingualism SIG Coordinator,

Shaitan Alexandra.

## Case Study

### **At the Intersection of Bilingualism and Disability: Reflections on Raising Neurodivergent Bilinguals** -by Michelle Komura

As someone who went to graduate school in Japan, married a Japanese man, and wrote her Masters' thesis in Japanese, bilingualism was always going to be a guiding principle in raising my children. Indeed, informed by my previous linguistics studies (Master of Applied Linguistics), when my second child (S2/11;10) was born with Down Syndrome / Trisomy 21 (DS/T21), I had more doubts about his health and longevity than his potential language ability. Similarly, when both S1 (13;9) and D1 (8;8) were diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), I remained committed to bilingualism. For me, bilingualism represents an amazing adventure. But for my children, I see it as a means to ensure their human rights, as outlined in the UN's Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, specifically Article 24 which outlines the right to an inclusive education.

Accordingly, my aim in compiling this account is to illustrate the wealth of resources and options for parents raising exceptional children, as well as to

encourage all parents and educators to focus on the potential of all children regardless of their challenges. My Japanese monolingual husband and I (Australian) met and married in Osaka, and are currently raising two sons (S1, S2) and one daughter (D1). When our first child was born, I spoke Japanese and English to him alongside some signs (American Sign Language), while my husband naturally spoke only (Osakan) Japanese with him. We conversed monthly via Skype with family overseas, but for the most part, I was his only English-speaking contact. Most days S1 and I spent the day speaking (and signing) English before switching to Japanese in the afternoon before his father came home; evening and weekends I spoke both Japanese and English to him. S1 grew up seeing and hearing Japanese conversation between his parents, but apart from Skype, he never had much experience with being exposed to genuine English conversation between two competent individuals.

S1 enjoyed English television and

music, regularly watching available English language programs like Little Einsteins, Playschool, and The Wiggles. Receptive skills for both languages far outweighed production. His slower speech trajectory and difficulties with auditory processing and comprehension were indications of his neurodiverse brain. For the most part, he presented as English-dominant his first three years, oftentimes producing English utterances which followed Japanese grammar (yes/no questions) and his speech displayed delightful rhotacism, despite being able to distinguish between /l/ and /r/ sounds in English aurally. Our second son (S2) was born when S1 was 1;11. S2 was diagnosed with T21 at birth, but presented otherwise healthy with no need for any immediate surgical intervention (cardiac, etc.) which is quite common in T21. Unfortunately, his T21-related hypotonia (congenital muscle laxity) and the resultant oral-facial motor difficulties made feeding, sleeping, and breathing difficult, and he spent the first two years of his life sleeping upright in a baby-carrier /sling. While this was a stressful time, it also meant that he was always with me, ostensibly experiencing more language exposure than if he had been able to be placed down in a pram or bassinet.

Our home language patterns continued as before, with one exception – the incorporation of the Baby Signing Time (BST) series into our routine. S2 became a proficient signer, able to learn new signs from just one viewing, and given his oral motor difficulties, continued to use signs as his dominant language output. We soon required more signs than the four-part BST series could offer, and so began introducing the original Signing Time (ST) series.

I also undertook distance education modules in ASL allowing me to further support S2's language development. S2 used the same signs for Japanese and English words (there is some overlap between ASL and JSL, which is another reason why I chose ASL rather than Auslan (Australian Sign Language). Upon reflection, the BST/ST approach of using music with explicit instruction and peer modelling was the perfect learning resource for S2, as it draws on the developmental strengths found in T21, such as good visual memory and proficient imitation, without relying upon characteristic profile deficits in aural memory or oral-motor skills.

At the time, both children continued to attend my 'Mum & Me'

English classes and were exposed to various examples of natural learning and explicit instruction, including music and signing. S1 was recognised as being hyperlexic (as many autistics are), evidenced by being able to read early and having a great memory for music and movies, a characteristic which clearly aided the development of his bilingual abilities. S2 often underwent health screening tests at major hospitals in Osaka, and while our paediatrician and workers from the city welfare division were always very positive about S2's future and development, more often than not, medical professionals at major clinics expressed derisive comments and attitudes regarding both our use of ASL and our attempts at bilingualism more generally. It is difficult to say whether these attitudes were based on misinformation regarding bilingualism, intellectual disability, or a combination of both.

Nevertheless, as mentioned above, we never considered neglecting the bilingual opportunity presented by our family structure. In conjunction with the introduction of ST, our language education was further facilitated through the use of online and other educational programs, including Brill Kids, ABC Mouse, Reading Eggs, and Benesse's 'Kodomo

Charenji'. The audio-visual input was very popular with both children; S2, with his relative strengths in visual memory, had and still has a magnificent ability to memorise visual information, and S1 found being able to endlessly re-play the material particularly appealing, as he attempted to decipher the contextual cues which regularly flummox his ASD brain in real-time communication.

Furthermore, I also founded and managed an expat mothers' meetup group as a means of creating and ensuring that English-use would continue to hold social currency and value for my own and other bilingual children in Kansai. We participated in weekly English-speaking outings with other mothers and children, forming friendships and providing each other with valuable language input.

Our bilingual journey continued as above until I returned to Australia in 2013 for the birth of our third child when S1 was 5;0 and S2 was 3;1. My husband stayed in Japan at that time while I took our two sons to Australia. We stayed with family in North Queensland, during which time S1 was enrolled in and attended four months of primary school (prep/foundation year) in a small country-town school of 36 children (5-13 years old). At school, S1

was able to learn with same-aged peers, which not only improved his comprehension, grammar, and vocabulary, but also his pronunciation. Upon return from Australia, S1 attended Japanese kindergarten at Nen-cho (age 5) level, before subsequently entering the local primary school. S2 continued to learn and use signs, and both boys enjoyed spending time listening to Japanese music on our long car trips and continued to keep up with their Kodomo Charenji program, in an otherwise English environment. Teachers and neighbours were all supportive of bilingualism, which is perhaps to be expected in a younger, immigrant country such as Australia.

Having never done one before myself, I had never seriously considered short language-immersion trips as a tool to support bilingualism, but rather envisioned that at some point, in the far future, the children would undertake some sort of long-term homestay to bolster and hone their language skills. Although this may have been a possibility for S1 and D1, realizing this for S2 would involve a chaperone of sorts, and given the dearth of opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities post high-school, may not have been tenable at all. As such, we began to consider the possibility of the whole

family going on long-term exchange as a unit. Since our children were still young, with only S1 having entered the school system, my husband and I felt that if we were going to achieve this, then this would be the time. I closed my English classes and set off for Melbourne, Australia in June 2014 with three children, S1 (7;0), S2 (2;5), and D (1;11), while my husband supported us from Japan, until subsequently joining us the following year.

Once in Melbourne, S1 was enrolled at a government-run (public) Japanese-English bilingual primary school (one of two in Melbourne) and S2 began attending the kindergarten attached to the bilingual primary school. S2 also received disability-related funding for early intervention, including speech therapy, thus allowing for more personalised language input than the usual 15 hours of kindergarten. During the ten months before my husband joined us, we swapped over our linguistic routine and made Japanese our home language, with the children now talking to their father in Japanese via Skype, and continuing their ‘Kodomo Charenji’ programmes. S1 was the least receptive to me speaking Japanese (he was also speaking Japanese at school), while S2 and D1 were very accepting of it; this may have been partly

due to the fact that S2 was largely nonverbal and D1 was still Japanese-dominant at the time.

S1 was learning in both languages at school, where his vocabulary and pronunciation in English began to improve, although his characteristic – and common – autistic difficulties with comprehension remained. S2 was still a prolific signer with very limited speech, which was largely unintelligible to all but his family and therapists. He was well supported by his teachers in kindergarten, who encouraged him to communicate with words along with his peers (many of whom were also of Japanese heritage). The high percentage of recent immigrants in inner-city Melbourne, combined with the needs-based assessment of kindergarten places, meant that S2 was not the only child in his class who had limited English abilities. S2 attended kindergarten for 18 months, and by the time he began his school education attended the same bilingual primary school as S1. In 2016, his speech had become more intelligible. His Japanese pronunciation was still far clearer and easier to understand than his English, seemingly due to the predominantly CV pattern of Japanese.

In 2017, having been in Australia

for two and a half years, S1(9) and S2(7) both continued their education at the bilingual school in Melbourne, benefitting greatly from extensive Japanese language input, both at school and at home. S2 was fitted with hearing aids for fluctuating hearing impairment (mild to severe) and began making more accurate pronunciation, particularly regarding /s/ sounds in initial or final positions. During this time, D1(4) continued to develop her bilingual language skills. Although she attended a monolingual English kindergarten (six hours per week in a three-year-old kindergarten class), she was exposed to Japanese language through her father, and our friendships with Japanese families we had met through the school and as members of the wider Japanese community in Melbourne. Her bilingual vocabulary range was booming due in part to her autistic mind's amazing analytical reasoning ability. (She seeks and deduces the meanings of new words quite intentionally). She continued engaging with the Kodomo Charenji and Reading Eggs programmes, until the following year when we decided to replace our Kodomo Charenji subscription with one for Japanese television. (There are a number of systems available to access Japanese television when overseas in Australia). At the end of his second year of school, S2

(8;8) had memorised the entire M200 set of English sight words, and was reading independently in both languages, with some ability to answer simple comprehension questions about the text.

Although all three children were due to attend the same bilingual primary school in Melbourne from February 2018, our family moved interstate in March. Upon relocation to Cairns, all three children, S1(10;10), S2 (8;11), and D1 (5;09), attended a local monolingual public school, which offered Japanese as a foreign language from grade four. S1 had around six hours of Japanese language instruction per week, while S2 and D1 had none. The children accessed Reading Eggs and Study Ladder through school, so we no longer needed a home subscription. In light of the decrease in Japanese exposure through formal education, we were mindful to maintain our family language as predominately Japanese, and apart from Friday movie night, the children were now only allowed to watch Japanese television, with Sunday designated ‘Osaka Day’ – a day we spend together as a family speaking Japanese, eating Japanese food, and watching Osakan television programmes and videos.

Not surprisingly perhaps,

television has been a boon to maintaining interest and proficiency. For instance, initially S1 enjoyed watching Konan on television, before moving on to read Konan comics on his Kindle. S2 absolutely loves Doraemon, and Oshiri-tantei cartoons. D1 began by watching Okaasan-to-issho, but now has similar interests to S2. All three are provided with books and magazines featuring their favourite television shows in an effort to support their motivation to continue learning Japanese.

We have also taken the children on two short trips to Japan, which has also spurred their interest, especially for D1 who cannot remember living there. As Japanese citizens living overseas, the children are fortunate to receive textbooks from MEXT through the Japanese consulate, and have accrued quite a number. This came in handy after I began home-schooling S2 (10;4) and D1 (7;1) in the latter half of 2019, due to discontent with ableist attitudes and lack of commitment by the school regarding S2’s academic progress.

Before we began home-schooling, I designed and delivered a 4-week English intervention, to address disfluency, inaccuracy, and poor reading

comprehension. Despite his extensive knowledge of sight words and fairly sound phonics knowledge, difficulty reading novel words suggested that S2's knowledge was not being generalised. (A lack of generalisation is common for children with developmental disabilities.) After testing him using the UK Phonics Test (2016), I ran an intervention designed to teach specific grapheme knowledge and improve recognition of clusters and blends. After 18 intervention sessions, I tested him again and found that his score had improved from 42.5% to 87.5%, confirming that with appropriate instruction he could improve his language skills.

We have been home-schooling for more than 18 months now, focusing primarily on literacy and numeracy in both languages. The children work on Japanese, mathematics and English daily, as well as engaging in a variety of interest-based projects, sports, and self-led learning. Resources we currently use for Japanese include government-supplied textbooks (kokugo (Japanese), social studies, math, hoken (health class) etc.), kanji drill sheets (available online for free), kanji apps (e.g. Mirai Education Shogaku 1 NenSei Kanji Doriru), and Japanese television viewing. English resources are largely digital and

are used to target specific weaknesses (phonics, comprehension, fluency, and spelling). Popular resources include apps such as Endless Reader, Teach Monster, Reading Doctor (Blending, Spelling, etc.), Articulation Station (Pronunciation), ABC Mouse, Skoolbo, Adventure Academy, Reading Eggs (including Reading Eggspress), PM readers (eCollection), Easy Spelling Aid (an app that shows the spelling of any word spoken into the microphone), IXL, Night Zookeeper and Reading IQ (an online library of books which also include extensive read-aloud options). We also regularly engage in exercises to improve pronunciation (contrastive pairs), grammar/ sentence production (Colourful Semantics), and using story cubes to write/tell stories.

My approach for working with my children is short and frequent learning. As a former behavioural therapist, I aim to keep motivation high, and promote learning by engaging multiple times daily – some lessons are scheduled, and others just present themselves. With the onset of COVID-19, my eldest was added to the home-schooling tribe in 2020 and has spent the past four months learning the remainder of the 1026 kyoiku kanji. Together we read government supplied textbooks at lower levels to ensure we are

working on understanding the grammatical structures, rather than battling unfamiliar content unnecessarily.

Over the past decade, our family has remained committed to our bilingual goals in the face of varying levels of support, and occasionally outright disdain, from professionals involved in our children's education. As expected, the developmental trajectories of all three children, now 13;9, 11;10, and 8;8, have been variously influenced by their respective neurodiversities, manifesting as comprehension, spelling, and auditory processing difficulties (autism), as well as pronunciation, grammar, and handwriting difficulties (T21). While S1 is still English-dominant and reading at grade-level, his Japanese is better than ever, exhibiting longer and more grammatically correct, spontaneous speech. For S2 as well, although he appears to be English dominant, there has been a dramatic increase in vocabulary and mean-length of utterance in spontaneous speech in both languages, likely due to a combination of factors, namely increased compliance with wearing his hearing aids, participation in structured language instruction, and increased one-on-one peer interaction. Moreover, his speech has improved alongside his reading skills, suggesting

that, as evidenced by the research of Sue Buckley, explicit reading instruction has supported increases in spoken language. Although D1 remains the most balanced bilingual of the three, unlike her brothers, she learnt to read Japanese kana before English and is now enjoying the challenge of deciphering new English words phonetically and attempting to spell out known vocabulary. When their father is not home, the children now default to speaking English with each other most of the time, while adeptly switching to Japanese for inclusive family meals and family time.

In closing, I am absolutely thrilled that, despite living in Australia for the past six years, all three children are still enjoying reading and speaking Japanese, and are naturally proud when recognised as bilingual. Moving the family to Australia, after so many years in Japan, was not easy, but it has been an enriching experience. It is definitely something I would recommend for those interested in expanding their family's understanding of the wider world, and the wider world's understanding of unique, neurodivergent bilinguals. I look forward to continuing to document our family's language development from the flipside, when we move back to Japan in the future.

## 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.

### **The Myth of Semilingualism**-by Steve McCarty and Alexander McAulay

#### **A conversation between Professor Steve McCarty (hereinafter “S”) and Professor Alexander McAulay (“A”)**

**A:** We were both struck by Sarara Momokawa’s (2020) article in *Bilingual Japan* on semilingualism. You mentioned in the Mixed Roots Japan Facebook Group that the semilingualism issue comes up disproportionately, considering its rarity.

**S:** Yes, Sarara agonizes over whether she is bilingual or semilingual (not native speaker level in any language). In my university Bilingualism classes, students often find Japanese blogs with anecdotes like that, and nationalists or purists like to think that the native language has to be established first, which blows past most of the critical periods for becoming fully bilingual.

The semilingualism bugaboo seems to be part of the tyranny of the native speaker ideal, which conveniently allows bilingualism to be other people's business (他人事). Actually, people who are bilingual to some extent have vastly more communicative power than monolinguals. If a person is under native speaker level in any of the four skills in one language, and also proficient in another language, so what? The question is whether they have the language they need for their own

purposes.

The anxiety about semilingualism, the denial that one is bilingual to some extent, or nearly any other problem that seems to be about language is actually a social problem. It is the reaction of others to a person being different, often with stereotypes and misconceptions about plural languages, and no conception of biculturalism.

Sarara has therefore contributed to knowledge in the field by explaining her worries about semilingualism, detailing the timing and circumstances of her exposure to two languages. She was a returnee (帰国子女) who then went to schools in Japan taught only in English, which is not bilingual education – teaching in two languages. But she is successful in her work, like many people exposed to more than one language. The problem is social, how people who just want to belong and get along are perceived and treated by the mainstream.

With regard to her language development, what could readily have been elite bilingualism followed more the folk pattern of an immigrant, despite their expectation to move back to Japan. 'When in Rome syndrome' could describe such

cases where the native language is not sufficiently maintained abroad. While living in the U.S., Sarara did not attend a Japanese language school available on Saturdays. It is too little known that there is a Minority Language at Home (ML@H) approach to balance children's bilingual development. Such a family would speak Japanese at home in the U.S., and the same family would speak English at home in Japan, nearly the opposite of 'When in Rome'!

Again on the social level, international families may be measured against unrealistic, idealized expectations about bilingualism. The Japanese spouse or kids might therefore develop a complex about English proficiency or undergo a self-conscious phase concerning their unusual dual background. However, every life has turbulent phases, usually resolved eventually, and the young *hafu* generation is becoming prominent in Japanese society.

A: I first came across the term semilingualism when a returnee used it in my Film Studies class. She was struggling to understand the English reading material, and it brought out past frustrations with her own sense of being 中途半端 (partway) in both Japanese and English. My first reaction was that the term is rather pernicious. As you say, it arises from unfair social expectations that people have of multilingual individuals, and how those

expectations become internalized. Sarara's story was interesting in part because of the anxiety she feels about semilingualism. I agree with you that 'semilingualism' is not a thing, but the term seems to have gained a certain social currency that we need to push back against.

Personally, I feel my 20-year-old daughter is the 'success story,' comfortable in both languages and looking to put them to use in her career. She is already a globalized, cosmopolitan individual, the グローバル人材 (Global HR) that the government is putting so much stock by these days. No one would question her bilingual credentials. And she herself would probably feel comfortable self-identifying as bilingual. But having grown up in Japan, I know there are some cultural references and idioms she finds challenging when visiting the UK. It would not lead her to call herself semilingual, but she might bump up against discourses about the idealized English native speaker, and whether she herself is 'a native speaker of English.' As a parent, I feel part of the bilingual/bicultural nurturing role is to give her the tools to negotiate those discourses successfully.

My 17-year-old son, on the other hand, has the potential to struggle with the semilingual label. He is native Japanese, and has done all his schooling here. He does not like *Kokugo* (Japanese language

classes), like many of his male peers. His English fluency is not at his sister's level, and he can get frustrated trying to speak English at times. Right now, 17-year-old Jason would not be too bothered if his English withered away, but I know 27-year-old Jason, and 37-year-old Jason, will be dealing with different expectations. Who knows how Jason in the future will handle them?

**S:** I find the 'semilingual' label derogatory, overused, and tied to an insidious purism and hypersensitive perfectionism – so I agree that the notion is pernicious. It often seems to be an internalized complex of returnees whose Japanese naturally got rusty abroad, but they were faced with scorn or jealousy for imperfect Japanese or good English, in other words, for not being perfectly bilingual as expected.

The pattern with our sons is similar to your kids. Our older son is in New York City now, representing one of Japan's global companies. He uses English and has picked up a smattering of other languages. Our younger son in the entertainment industry has not needed English, but he is delightful and has blessed us recently with a granddaughter, 3/4 Japanese.

When our younger son did study abroad once for three weeks, it was enough to activate his English speaking with me for over a year. He just told me that he

understood the Disney movies and such as a child. The receptive bilingual has vast invisible structures of acquired language that can be activated fairly soon when actually needed.

I always placed their well-being above language or achievement, yet they both turned out to be popular and surprisingly successful. Parents tend to worry too much!

**A:** The point on acquired language being there for activation reminds me of our year in the UK in 2011. My son was seven at the time. When we left Japan, I would speak to him in English and he would invariably answer in Japanese. I was confident that in the UK he would start using English with me, and perhaps even with his Japanese mother. What surprised me was how quickly it happened – four days! We arrived on the Sunday, and on the Thursday he started initiating in English with his mother.

For me, I think well-being and nurturing bilingualism are intertwined. My son might end up being a receptive bilingual – his resistance to English over the years has been mighty. But if he does end up with less-than-satisfactory English (by whatever measurement), then it will not be something he can blame on me. I feel sorry for parents of monolingual Japanese *hafu* who get 'blamed' for their choices. I knew before my kids were born

that I never wanted to be that parent.

**S:** *Hafu* kids should not be monolingual, which is liable to make them monocultural as well, and then the foreign parent will have failed to pass on more than genes. Instead of pressuring them and meeting resistance, I just continued speaking to them in English, and I use only English in the family Line groups. Older son answers me in English, younger son mostly in Japanese, but we converse at a normal pace. No doubt your kids will gravitate to the language they need, and thank you for your persistence later!

**A:** Let me ask you, what vocabulary can we use to talk about – and talk to – the concerns and complexes of *hafu* who feel one or both of their language proficiencies to be below par? In other words, for those individuals who feel ‘unworthy’ of being called bilingual? In academic circles, we know there is a wealth of evidence showing semilingualism to be a myth constructed for ideological purposes (e.g., Martin-Jones & Romaine, 1986; MacSwan, 2000). As the *Bilingual Japan* readership consists of parent-practitioners as well as academics, what advice do you have for parents?

**S:** Becoming or being bilingual is always a matter of degree, so only ask if a person is bilingual *to some extent*. 例えば、「あな

たは、ある程度バイリンガルではないでしょうか。」

Moreover, similar to the receptive type of bilingual, what people call semilingual in most cases is actually a form of bilingualism!

I would therefore say to people like Sarara, welcome to the club of imperfect bilinguals, who can nevertheless reap the benefits of bilingualism to a certain degree.

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**Keep Kids Thinking in English**-by Helen Tang Nagasawa

**A Little Background Information**

Being bilingual was natural to me. I grew up speaking English and Cantonese with family, friends, and neighbors as a second generation Chinese American who lived in the heart of New York City’s Chinatown. I also learned Mandarin in Saturday school from childhood and even studied abroad in China for a semester in college, so Chinese was always a part of my linguistic identity. I had always envisioned that if I had children, I would bring them up at least bilingual. They would learn English at school, and I would speak to them in Cantonese (and probably send them to Chinese school). Never had I imagined that I would end up marrying my Japanese husband and living in Japan!

After having our first daughter (now 13), we decided that since we were living in Japan, the other language would be English. Besides the short daily English programs on *NHK*, English videos such as *Elmo*, Disney channel on cable, Skype calls with my parents, occasional workbook activities, and summer trips back to the U.S., I was the main source of English input for our two daughters (up until age 8 for our older daughter and almost 4-years-old for our younger daughter).

Then came the opportunity to live

in Vienna for three years for my husband’s work (2016-2019). Our daughters attended an international school where the medium of instruction was English. It is during this time when the kids solidified their foundations in reading and writing English.

Upon our return to Tokyo, catching up on Japanese was the main focus, especially for our older daughter who was finishing up sixth grade. Currently, our older daughter attends a junior high school with over 20% returnees and where she has 1/3 of her lessons (six lessons a week) as advanced English classes. Our younger daughter is enrolled in English retention classes for returnees once a week, but lessons are only an hour and a half.

Having fun is one of the best ways to keep the girls interested in English, so we have had family game nights playing English games. Here are some Jr.-editions (so younger kids will probably enjoy them more) of board games and two apps that can help build vocabulary, allow for some light reading, increase speaking, and what I find most importantly - promote *thinking* in English.

**5 Second Rule Jr**

At the top of our list is *5 Second Rule Jr*. Players need to name three things within five seconds. For example, “Name

3 Reasons to Smile” or “Name 3 Things You Sit On.” It may sound easy, but it can be a challenge when under time pressure, let alone within just five seconds. Everyone can see the little balls rolling down the twisting timer, and the other players have their eyes on you. Players have to think fast, say whatever comes to their mind, and just spit it out! Funny answers often come out and lead to loads of laughter. The game comes with 400 questions on 200 cards, six pawns, a 5-second twisted timer, a gameboard, and a rules sheet. It is aimed for ages 6-years-old and up, and for three players or more. However, two players (e.g. two siblings or a child/parent) can have just as much fun. The game can also be adapted for younger players by adding extra time and turning the timer over again (and again).

### ***Hedbanz***

Another hit with our younger daughter is the game *Hedbanz*. The game is targeted at ages 7+ and can be enjoyed by two to six players. It comes with 72 cartoon cards, 24 scoring chips, six headbands, a one-minute timer, and a rule sheet. The goal is for each player to guess the card that is put in his/her headband. There are question cards with sample questions for players to ask to help them guess what is on their card. For example, “Do I have legs? I am a (turtle).” or “Can I be eaten? I am (cheese).” A variation is

to have teammates or other players give clues about the card for players to make guesses about their own. Players need to tap into their vocabulary banks to find the right words. A quick browse online shows that *Disney* and *Harry Potter* editions are also available for those avid fans out there.

### ***The Game of Life Junior***

The goal of this game is to be the first player to get ten stars by visiting as many places (e.g. zoo, park) and going on as many adventures (e.g., muddle puddle, snow fun) as possible, as well as completing actions such as acting something out, or even singing! For each attraction players stop at, they receive a star. The action cards allow players to gain a star or money, or also lose them. Children can practice English by reading the cards and the places on the board. In addition, they can share their stories by thinking about how to recap their adventures to the other players. The game is for ages 5+ and two to four players. The contents are a gameboard, four tokens, a spinner and base, 96 cards in two decks, 48 stars, and the game guide.

### ***Monopoly Junior***

In *Monopoly Junior*, players win by having the most money when another player goes bankrupt. This junior version of the classic game is aimed at ages 5+ and is for two to four players. It comes with

one gameboard, four (plastic) tokens (dog, car, cat, and ship), 20 chance cards, 48 sold signs, 90 monopoly banknotes, one die, four character cards, and the game guide. One way to increase the children's reading opportunities and fluency is to allow them to read aloud not only their chance cards if they land on them, but also have them read their parents' chance cards - this is something our younger daughter loves doing. As for the length of the game, don't worry parents - compared to the standard version, this game *will* end (the quickest time was about 15 minutes for four players) and does not have the chance of going on for what seems like an eternity!

### ***Kids Charades***

Finally, there is *Kids Charades* (differently named versions are also available). This travel-sized game includes 50 charade cards with three words/phrases on each side, a score pad, a timer, a die, a pencil, and an instruction booklet. Players roll the die to see which word or phrase they need to act out in just one minute, so they need to think quickly about the word or phrase and how best to act them out or make gestures for their partner or team members to guess. Players cannot talk, mouth words or letters, or draw letters in the air, but can use mime symbols. This game also draws loads of laughter.

Since families also spend so much time on their devices, here are two apps that can also be fun for English-boosting purposes:

### ***Charades! Kids***

The *Charades! Kids* app is not only about acting out words and phrases like the card edition, but also has categories such as "Sing-A-Long" and "Disney Songs" for which players can sign or hum popular songs, and also "Fairy Tales," for which to describe characters. The "Acting Out" categories include anime and countries. Since the game is produced by an American developer and can be found in the Apple app store, some categories can be US-centric (with that primary audience in mind), such as "U.S. Cities," "Cereals," and "Candy Bars." Players have to play more or buy coins in the store for other categories such as "Pokemon" and "Things in the Sea."

### ***Heads Up!***

*Heads Up!* is a word-guessing game app. Players need to try to guess as many words as possible before the one-minute time is up. Players hold their cellphone (where the words will appear) against their forehead, and a partner gives the clues without saying any part of the word. The phone is turned down if the guess is correct and turned up to pass and move on to another word. Our family just

holds the phone against our chests and often gets confused turning it up or down, which also adds to the laughs. There is the option of recording the person giving clues so players can watch the playback, although we do not use the video option. The game is for ages 12+. Free decks such as “Animals Gone Wild” are available and suitable for younger kids. The app offers 75 categories of which you can purchase decks individually, such as “Marvel” and “Act It Out Kids!,” or as sets at a discount.

With summer vacation just around the corner, there will be more opportunities for many families to spend time together and a good chance to foster the kids’ English while having a good time. So dig these games out of the closet if you have them already. If not, consider buying some of them to keep your kids (and yourselves) laughing and *thinking* in English.



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