

Japanese supporting group HIMAWARI KAI

A report on the lecture of preserving the mother tongue

For foreigner parents raising their children in Japan
To develop language skills of the children
-Teaching mother tongue and Japanese language-

Lecturer: JUNKO MAJIMA

Professor at Osaka University, Graduate school of Language and Culture

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This booklet is about the lecture given by Professor Majima for the foreigner parents on July 6th, 2014, which was about education to preserve their mother tongues. It also includes the Q and A session that was held after the lecture.

Summaries in Chinese, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Japanese for foreigner parents are also available.

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To develop the languages skills of children -Teaching mother tongue and Japanese language-

Junko Majima, Professor at Osaka University, Graduate School of Language and Culture

Introduction



I am Majima and I teach Japanese language at Osaka University. I'm so glad to meet you all. First, I would like to introduce some staff members from Osaka University. This is Ms. Chiho Sakurai, a Spanish-speaking researcher. Mr. Sūn Chéngzhì can speak Chinese. Ms. Mika Kondo speaks Vietnamese. Ms. Shu Fei is a graduate student who speaks Chinese.

The topic of this lecture is "To develop the language skills of children -Teaching mother tongue and Japanese language-". I will give a lecture first, then there will be a time for group discussions. We will be divided into groups depending on the first language.

What is mother tongue?

Do you know what "mother tongue" means? There are 4 factors in explaining mother tongue.

- the very first language that you have learned
- the language you feel most comfortable speaking
- the language that you use the most
- the language that relates to your identity (What's my nationality? Who am I?)

That language is called mother tongue. It is a very important language.

Today's agenda

First, I will talk about the importance of mother tongue. Then I will talk about the types of bilingual education. For example, if a person speaks his/her mother tongue and Japanese, speaking two languages is called "bilingual". There are many types of bilingual speakers. One may speak both languages fluently, or one may speak one language better than the other language. After that, we will see what kind of factors are necessary for a person to become bilingual speaker. Followed by it, there will be an explanation on how those two languages are related.

I will then introduce two examples of bilingual speakers. One example is a child of international marriage. That child's parents are Japanese and Taiwanese. She speaks both languages very well. The other example is a child from a Chinese family. She became a fluent Japanese speaker, and improved her Chinese skills even more.

At last, I will talk about what parents can do to support their children.

1. Importance of mother tongue

We are in Japan now. We use Japanese language every day. If we could understand Japanese language, then do you think that there is no need for other languages? I think that is not true. For example, I am Japanese. I can speak and understand Japanese. I use only Japanese every

day, and that is totally fine. But it is sad if foreigners like you and your children can only speak and understand Japanese.

A journalist from Asahi Newspaper told me a story few years ago. That journalist had a chance to interview many adult-foreigners who grew up in Japan. They spent time in Japan from their childhood to adulthood. The journalist had interviews in Japanese, and the foreigners had no problem at all. However, they could speak and understand their mother tongue only a little.

When they were asked “What did you want to do when you were a child? What did you want your parents and other adults to do for you?”, they all answered “I wanted to learn my mother tongue.” And “I wish they had taught me my mother tongue.” Those foreigners had forgotten their mother tongue or had never acquired it and they feel very sad about it. I hope your children will grow up being able to use both mother tongue and Japanese and never feel sad about not being able to use his/her own mother tongue.

(1) Parent-child bond → stable mind

Mother tongue is essential for building a parent-child bond. It is very important for a child to be in communication with his/her parent using the language of his/her parent. If a mother is not fluent in Japanese and a child grows up fluent in only Japanese, then it will be difficult for a child to have communication with his/her mother. The child may think “My mom cannot speak Japanese, so I cannot talk with her. I want to communicate only in Japanese.”

Then the child may look down on his/her mother because she cannot speak Japanese, and eventually the child will not listen to his/her mother at all. It is really sad. It is sad that a mother and child do not have a common language (a tool for communication) to talk about marriage, job or any other complicated and important life events. It is essential for parents and children to have a language that they can use for communication.

That language is also a language that they can use to communicate with their grandparents who are in their mother country. If all these communications are available for the children, their minds will be stable. Therefore, mother tongue is very important. It is essential for a parent-child bond, a family bond and stable minds.

(2) Learning ability, Thinking ability, Foundations of Cognitive capacity

We all think and we all use words to when we think. If we do not have words, we cannot think. Thinking requires language. A child who can think in his/her mother tongue will be able to think in Japanese. To be able to think in one’s mother tongue is vital to build one’s basic cognitive skills. If a person can communicate well in his/her mother tongue, he/she will be able to communicate in Japanese well later. If he/she is weak at mother tongue, he/she also will tend to be weak at Japanese. Thus, both languages are important, but mother tongue plays an important role in the beginning phase, because it is the basics of learning ability, thinking ability and foundations of cognitive capacity.

(3) Basis for identity

Identity is the answers to questions such as “Who are you?” and “Who am I?”. If a child thinks “I am Chinese, but I cannot understand Chinese.”, then he/she will be confused what his/her actual nationality is. If one’s identity is not clear, then that person may be emotionally unstable. Mother tongue is important for a person to clearly know “I am Chinese living in Japan” or “I’m American living in Japan”.

(4) Maintaining mother tongue as a right

Children who grow up in Japan may stay in Japan forever. He/She may use Japanese every day, and he/she may use Japanese only at work after graduation. But things may change. In the

future, he/she might visit his/her mother country, where his/her mother is from, and might work or study there. There will be many options available if children know their mother tongue. It will be great if a person could have his/her mother country as a choice of residence in the future.

2. Types of bilingual

Language achievement types (Nakajima 2001)



A: single wheel is fine.



B: one big wheel and one small wheel is okay.



C: two well-balanced wheels with full air will take me farther



D: unless it becomes like this...

Types of bilingual based on language achievement

Wheels represent languages in the picture above.

As in A in the picture, a person who speaks only one language is called “monolingual”. And there is no problem with it.

The big wheel in B is the mother tongue and the small wheel is the second language. If a person speaks one language better than the other, it is called “dominant bilingual”. And there is no problem at all either. Two wheels makes it easier to go farther than one wheel.

If both wheels are big as in C, we can go much faster and much farther. It is such a wonderful and useful bicycle. If a person can speak both mother tongue and the second language well, it is called “balanced bilingual”.

But if a person cannot speak neither language, he/she cannot go anywhere. If both the mother tongue and the second language is limited, a person cannot talk well or communicate well with others. It is called “double-limited bilingual”. This will be a problem. If a person mixes two languages in a sentence, or stops using neither of them in the middle, he/she may become “double-limited bilingual”. This will cause a big problem, so we must work hard to avoid it.

Let’s aim for B, or C if possible.

Types of bilingual based on four language skills

Listening, speaking, reading and writing. These are called four language skills. If a person can listen, speak, read and write in both mother tongue and the second language, that person is called “read and write bilingual (biliteral)”.

If a person can listen, speak, read and write Japanese because he/she learns it at school, but can only listen and speak and has no reading nor writing skills in his/her mother tongue, it is called “conversational bilingual”. He/she cannot read in mother tongue, so he/she cannot obtain information from written materials, but he/she can carry a conversation in mother tongue.

If a person can listen, speak, read and write Japanese, and can comprehend mother tongue when spoken, but cannot speak the language, it is called “listening comprehensible bilingual”.

In case of a listening comprehensible bilingual child, he/she answers in Japanese when the mother speaks to him/her in mother tongue. If the mother can understand Japanese, there is no need for the child to speak in mother tongue; thus he/she will stay unable to speak mother tongue. The child’s skills of mother tongue will be weaker and weaker and he/she will eventually lose mother tongue. That is sad.

As explained above, there are three types of bilingual.

3. Factors related to bilingual

Then what are the factors that make different types of bilingual? There are three basic factors; 1) circumstance of a child, 2) circumstances of the parents and 3) circumstances of the people (environment) around.

Circumstance of children

At what age, did your child come to Japan? It is often said that if children come to Japan at the age of 9 or 10, there are greater chances for them to learn Japanese quickly. If they have studied at school in their mother country until the age of 9 or 10, they can probably listen, speak, read and write in mother tongue without any problem. They can translate Japanese into mother tongue and understand it well when studying Japanese after arriving in Japan. Then they will learn Japanese quickly and soon become fluent speakers.

But if they were born in Japan and could learn both mother tongue and Japanese little by little or haphazardly, there are possibilities that they become double-limited bilingual. If a child has achieved one language well enough by the age of 9 or 10, he/she does has acquired the ability to think. But if a child moves back and forth between his/her country and Japan, he/she may be confused and may not achieve neither languages. It is not always true, but it is possible. Thus the age of arrival at Japan is a critical factor.

Length of residence in Japan since a child came or was born in Japan is also critical.

Also, the level of mother tongue, and experience of being at school either in mother country or in foreign countries also influential.

Personalities play an important role, too. There are children who are outgoing and enjoys talking with others, on the other hand, there are children who are timid and shy and feels uncomfortable speaking with strangers.

Having many brothers and sisters makes difference, too. Talking with one’s brothers and sisters provides chances of speaking mother tongue at home; thus, more possibility to achieve higher speaking skills. There are many circumstances of a child as explained above.

Circumstances of parents

Next, I will talk about socioeconomic circumstances. The time spent with children differs

on the business of the parents. While some parents can spend some hours talking with their children every day, others barely have time to talk. Spending long time with children is ideal for the children, but the quality of the talk also means a lot. What you talk with your children at home is important. “Get up!”, “Finish your breakfast.”, “Go to school.”, “Do you have everything with you?” “Did you do your homework?” “Don’t forget to take a shower.” “Go to bed now.” If all you are saying to your children is like the above, then that talk does not mean a lot. Children wouldn’t learn many words nor achieve their language skills through such conversation, because same conversation is just repeated over and over.

Reading many books and talking together about it will improve the quality of the conversation, so it will be effective even if the conversation lasts short.

Parents’ levels of Japanese also can be effective factor. Some parents are fluent in Japanese, and they can speak Japanese as well as their mother tongue. Then there won’t be major problems.

However, if the parents’ Japanese is limited, they might use their children as translators. For example, if parents take a six-year old child to city hall and ask him to translate, the child knows all the necessary words for communications at school, but cannot understand formal or complicated expressions used at places like city hall. Then the child would be disappointed. He cannot help his parents and may feel ashamed of himself. That would make being a translator a bad experience. That is not good. If parents cannot understand Japanese well, you should hire an adult translator, not your child.

Parents’ educational policy and future plans may also have influence. “Until when are you planning to stay in Japan?”, “Do you want your children to learn both Japanese and mother tongue?”, or “maybe you don’t.” Parents with clear visions for the future would influence children.

People around

By people around, I mean educational environment. If grandparents of a child live in mother country, it will be great for a child to have chances to have communication with his/her grandparents.

But sometimes Japanese grandparents do not wish to hear their grandchildren talking with the foreigner parent in a language that they do not understand. For example, a child of a Japanese father and a Thai mother was talking with his mother in Thai. Then his Japanese grandparents said “We do not want to hear our grandchild talking with his mother in Thai, so please stop speaking in Thai.” Then the mother stopped speaking her mother tongue Thai, and only used Japanese which she didn’t feel comfortable speaking.

Same thing may happen among nursery school teachers, school teachers, and adults around them. Not considering bilingual education and telling them “You are in Japan now, so please speak Japanese only” is not a great idea at all. When a child and a mother are practicing both their mother tongue and Japanese, I hope others would consider it as a wonderful thing and encourage them.

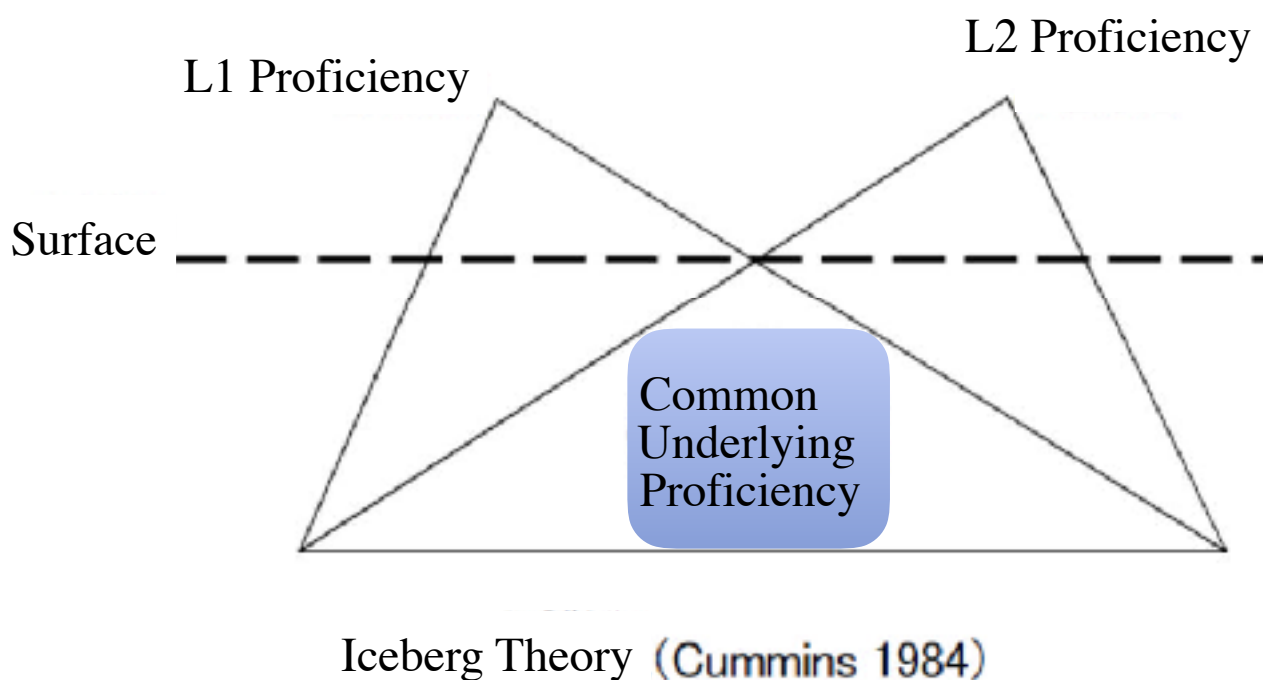
4. Relationship between two languages

This is a hypothesis by Jim Cummins from Canada, called “The Iceberg Model”. It is an image of iceberg floating in the water. Above water, it looks like there are two individual icebergs, but these are actually connected under the water.

For example, when a child is speaking Chinese (language 1) and Japanese (language 2), it may seem as there are two individual languages in his mind and they are not related at all. In fact, there are some aspects that are shared by both languages.

Especially the things that are learned or thought in mother tongue are easily transferred into second language. In other words, things already learned in mother tongue can be used in Japanese

Relationship between two languages



language after arriving in Japan.

For example, if one has studied math calculation in his mother tongue, the concept of calculation would be the same, only in a different language. But trying to explain the things that are learned using Japanese in mother tongue is difficult. There are only few chances of such situation and the learners' motivation is low.

5. Examples of successful bilingual education

An example of international marriage

A 4-year-old girl with a Japanese father and a Taiwanese mother. She speaks in Japanese with her father and in Chinese with her mother. She reads Japanese books with her father and Chinese books with her mother. She is fluent in both languages. She can understand and speak Japanese just like other Japanese children and the same for Chinese. So, she is considered as a perfect balanced bilingual and a read and write bilingual (biliteral) at this moment.

Her father is a former student of mine. He told me that when he married a foreigner, he followed the rules that I taught. The rule is "one person, one language". The father speaks only Japanese and the mother speaks only Chinese. The father and the mother communicates in English, but with their daughter, the father only uses Japanese and the mother uses only Chinese. Therefore, home language is 50% Japanese and 50% Chinese.

Moreover, both the father and the mother have big families with grandparents and many relatives respectively. So, she communicates with her Japanese relatives in Japanese while in Japan, and talks in Chinese with her Taiwanese relatives when she visits Taiwan twice a year.

When she talks with her mother in Chinese at home, her Japanese grandparents cannot understand a word they say, but they are very supportive. They tell her mother, "It is okay that we do not understand. Please talk to her in Chinese."

She communicates in two languages every day, and her parents read books to her in their

mother tongues. They never mix Japanese words and Chinese words in a conversation. When her father reads books to her, it will be read in Japanese from the beginning to the end. And the same for her mother, when she read in Chinese. When two languages are mixed in a conversation, it confuses children, so they would never do that. They say that they have been following the “one person, one language” rule for 4 years and their daughter is not confused at all.

An example of a Chinese family

The father and the mother of this Chinese family are not fluent in Japanese, so they communicate only in Chinese at home.

The child was born in Japan. When she was in the first grade, everybody was worried about her because she wasn't fluent in neither Japanese nor Chinese. We had a chance to evaluate her Japanese and Chinese ability at her school in Osaka. We did assessment when she was in first, third and fifth grade.

In first grade, she wasn't fluent in neither language. In third grade, his Japanese has improved a little, and he spoke Chinese better. Then in fifth grade, her Chinese has improved a lot.

Please listen to her conversation. (Listen to the recording. K: child T: teacher)

1st grade Chinese: a conversation was recorded after reading a story of a snowman and a rabbit which is from a Chinese textbook.

K: (in Chinese) It seems that I understood, snowman, put a rabbit in the snow.

T: (in Chinese) Who made the snowman?

K: (in Chinese) The rabbit.

T: (in Chinese) Why did the rabbit's mother make the snowman?

K: (in Japanese) I don't know.

The snowman and the rabbit were good friends. When the rabbit's house almost got on fire, the snowman throw himself over to put out the fire. So, the rabbit's house was saved. After reading the story, she was asked a question “What was the story about?” and she tried to explain the story. But she didn't understand the story well, and couldn't answer the questions in Chinese and said “I don't know” in Japanese.

1st grade Japanese: a conversation was recorded after reading a picture book “Goldfish Toto and the Cloud in the Sky” (Meiko Nishimaki, Koguma Publisher)

T: What was the story about? Please explain the story as you explain it for someone who has never heard the story before. When you are finished, please tell me so. Okay K, please begin.

K: What?

T: What was “Goldfish Toto and the cloud in the sky” about?

K: Well, that, I forgot too much.

T: Really?

K: Yup. I easily forget the story that I read for the first time.

T: You easily forget it? Then, let's try remembering it.

She was like this and kept telling us that she can't remember the books she has read at all. Her Japanese skills were also weak. Her classroom teacher was really worried about her.

3rd grade Japanese: a conversation was recorded after reading a story called “Baby turtles” (Nakamura Tsuneo, Tenohira Publisher)

T: Who was the first one to appear in the story?

K: The parent-turtle.

T: Right. The parent-turtle appeared first. Where did it go first?

K: Well, to the land?

T: Uh-huh.

K: Or not. It went to Anjo, then to the land, then, at there, it lay-laid eggs, and next, the begin how many centimeter part, you know.

T: Uh-huh.

So, she somewhat remembered the story, but couldn't explain it well. When she said "dig" "dag", he meant "dug".

5th grade Japanese: a conversation was recorded after reading a story called "A fanciful robot" (Shinichi Hoshi, Aozora Publisher)

K: One doctor said that the robot he made is excellent and a rich man called Mr. N wanted to buy it. So, he paid the, huh, he paid and bought the robot, then huh, he took it to his villa and lived with it.

She could go on with the story quite fluently. She also cold what is not written in the book. Here is an example that shows she actually read between the lines.

T: Then, this robot, the doctor said that it is excellent in the beginning, didn't he? Do you think it is excellent? Or not?

K: Yeah, it thinks by itself, so I guess it is excellent.

T: Well, you just said something good. Can you explain it one more time? The robot thinks by itself?

K: Well, this robot is intelligent, yeah, has intelligence, and does whatever told to do, but, ah, ah, the person who bought the robot may end up not exercising much, robot itself, didn't do anything and broke there.

She is not only reading the written words, but can think and tell what he has understood.

5th grade Chinese: a conversation was recorded after reading "Pinocchio"

K: (in Chinese) A craftsman made Pinocchio. He thought something was missing of Pinocchio, so he curved a smiley face on Pinocchio. Then Pinocchio went out. Then he met a fox (he mispronounced fox), and asked "Can you lend me your bag? It may look good on me." Pinocchio gave his bag to the fox. The fox went running.

I think she is speaking very fluently. Could you see how she has improved from 1st grade to 3rd grade, then to 5th grade?

How could she become bilingual? Chinese is dominant, but she has not studied Chinese at school nor she has not learned to read Chinese at home.

She told us that she watched videos and TV programs in Chinese, and she learned how to read. She understood the content of the story from the pictures and sounds, as she read the subtitles. She has kept doing so every day since 1st grade, she knows how to use Chinese expressions and now can read Chinese. For her, Chinese is dominant, but as her Chinese skills improve, her Japanese skills are improving. She is not a top student in the class, but is above average and is a smart

student.

6. What parents can do

What parents should bear in mind

Now, I will talk about what parents can do for the foreign-rooted children. What I have written here is not mandatory, but just some ideas. So please try what you think you can do.

First thing is “one person, one language”. Following the rule just like the previous example of an international marriage family; the father always speaks in Japanese and the mother speaks in Chinese all the time.

Next, if the child can not only carry on a conversation, but also can read and write, that will be a big advantage. It is always good to aim for “Bi-literal (a person who can listen, speak, read and write)”. Being able to read and write in mother tongue makes a big difference; one can gather information from written sources such as internet, books, newspaper and so on that are written in mother tongue.

But children can’t grow up to be bi-literal by just telling to do so. Parents need to create an environment at where children can read books in mother tongue. You need to make written material, written sources accessible for the children.

Then, parents should communicate with their children in a language that you feel comfortable speaking. Children can easily tell if a mother is feeling comfortable or not. If a mother keeps speaking in Japanese, which she doesn’t feel comfortable speaking, then a child might look down on his/her mother.

Teachers at schools or nursery schools in Japan don’t know much about bilingual. You need to talk to people around you, especially the teachers at school or at nursery school, and ask them to encourage your children to value their mother tongue and work on it.

I introduced many ideas, but you do not have to follow them perfectly. It is important to keep doing it, even little by little. Please don’t scold your children nor tell them “NO” if they can’t do it right when they are little. Please praise them if they could do a bit, and please keep doing it. It would be great if they could become balanced bilingual in 5 years or in 10 years.

What parents can do

- “one person, one language” in case of international marriage
- aim for “read and write bilingual (bi-literal)” (being able to read and write is a big advantage)
- make books in mother tongue (any written material) accessible for children
- parents use the language they feel comfortable and communicate in it with children
- tell the importance of mother tongue to your family members, relatives and people around you (school faculties etc.)
- “keep doing” is important, not perfection

Please try

- please enjoy having conversation with your children in your mother tongue
- please read picture books and books in mother tongue to your children. Please show the book and read it to them. Please talk about the story after reading a book. That will be a high-quality conversation. Then the children will love to read. It is important. There is a big difference between

children who love to read and who don't like to read. Children usually love to read in the beginning. So, please try to give them fun experiences reading books. I said "books", but it can be TV programs, videos, animations or manga. It can be anything if there are written words. That will help children build vocabulary. And talking about it after reading it is essential.

- please praise them what they have improved, and never scold what they can't do in their mother tongue. Please encourage them by giving praises such as "You are doing it well. You have improved." Children would give up on learning their mother tongue if they are being scolded all the time. So please encourage them, praise them that they are genius and make them want to learn more and want to read more. Children easily find out if you are just casually praising them, or you are really praising them, so never give a perfunctory praise by saying "You are great." Please praise them from the bottom of your heart.

- and lastly, it is not fair for you to tell your children to work hard while you don't work hard to improve your Japanese skills. It will be great if children can see how you are working hard to improve your Japanese skills, and encourage each other at home.

My lecture ends here.

Now I will introduce the reference books. They are all written in Japanese, but please read them if you are interested.

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Questions and Answers

I want to raise my child to be bilingual

Questioner A: Thank you for a valuable lecture. I am Japanese and my mother tongue is Japanese. My wife is Chinese and her mother tongue is Chinese. Our child is 6-month old now, but I want to

raise this child to be bilingual. In a previous example of bilingual, you said that the husband and the wife talk in English. In our case, I understand some Chinese and my wife understands some Japanese, so we mix Japanese and Chinese when we communicate. If our child keeps listening to it, will my child get confused?

Majima: To what extent, do you mix Japanese and Chinese? Do you bring in a word in Chinese when speaking a sentence in Japanese?

A: I would say half and half. I would use a word in Chinese when speaking in Japanese. Or sometimes, I would speak in Japanese and my wife replies in Chinese. In that case, it is following the “one person, one language” rule, isn’t it?

Majima: Please avoid using a word in a different language when talking in other language. Your child will get confused. If you and your child talk in Japanese, your wife and your child in Chinese, you and your wife using one’s mother tongue will follow the “one person, one language” rule. But there will be a problem when three of you talk together.

“one person, one language” is a principle rule, but there are also other ways; such as limiting the time or specifying the place. Rules such as communicating only in Chinese at certain period of time, or speaking only in Japanese when in a certain room may work as well.

We would like to know how your child grows in 3 years, 5 years and 10 years. You and your wife’s second language skills may have improved a lot more.

Bilingual doesn’t happen tomorrow, if you do something today. Please think in a long term. Your child doesn’t speak now, but there are a lot of things going on in his/her mind. Children build up language skills by listening a lot, then eventually can speak. It takes time. So please don’t give up on them, but think in a long term.

Also, it is important to make it clear for people around you that it takes time to be bilingual. Don’t let them compare your child and other monolingual Japanese children and say “Your child is not speaking as much as the other children. There may be some problems.” In 10 years, your child will be more flexible person, not like other monolingual children.

A: Thank you very much.

My children are not interested in their mother tongue

Questioner B: I am Chinese and my husband is Japanese. The older child is 5 years old and the younger one is 1 year old. My husband and I communicate in Japanese only. I don’t have a chance to teach Chinese to my older child even I want to. My child knows that I can speak Japanese, so he/she doesn’t try to use Chinese. When I talk to him/her in Chinese, he/she hates it. He/She doesn’t accept it. He/She says, “It’s such a pain. Please speak Japanese. Everybody understands Japanese. What’s wrong with it?”

Majima: It is easier for him/her to communicate in Japanese, right? His/Her Japanese skills have improved, so he/she doesn’t want to make efforts to speak Chinese, I guess. Your child feels comfortable, because you have no trouble speaking Japanese.

But still, it is important to tell your child that Chinese is also important for you whenever you have a chance. And if your child could have some happy or fun experience speaking, listening or reading Chinese. Have you read Chinese books to your child?

B: I have when he/she was little. But now, he/she refuses it.

Majima: I know it’s tough. Obviously, Japanese is dominant in Japanese society, and speaking Chinese is not necessary. That’s why parents’ effort and others’ understanding is essential for Chinese acquisition in Japan. Your child can’t be bilingual naturally.

How about having a 30-minute Chinese reading and talking time in bed with you and your child every day. Without the father nor the younger child. It would be fun time to have his/her mother all to him/herself and communicate in Chinese during that time. Being able to listen and speak in Chinese will be his/her privilege. Try to make it a wonderful and fun experience for your child.

B: Thank you very much. I'll try it.

Majima: Let's have a break here. Next, let's share your experiences in your language groups and let's share it with each other at the end.

< Questions and discussions in groups >



Majima: Okay then, interpreters from each group, please report what you talked about in each group.

<Thai> 1 participant (details on p.17)

Sato: Her daughter used to communicate with her in Thai, but recently she started to refuse it. When she talks to her daughter in Thai, she can understand it, but asks her to speak in Japanese. Then when she tries to answer in Japanese, the daughter picks on her correcting her mistakes in Japanese. The situation is tough for her. We talked about how to create a fun environment to speak Thai.

<Vietnam> 3 participants (details on p.18)

Kondo: Both families have children who are younger than 2, so there aren't any major problems yet. But after hearing today's lecture, they would like to start talking to their children in Vietnamese and read Vietnamese books to them. They have many books in Vietnamese. Also, now they know that age 10 is a critical age to acquire mother tongue, so they'll work hard.

<Peru> 2 participants (details on p.21)

Sakurai: These 3 children were all born in Japan. The youngest child is 2 years old and the oldest child is in elementary school, but they all want to acquire their mother tongue. It is difficult to maintain mother tongue unless the children read in their mother tongue, so they want their children to be able to read.

<Chinese> 20 participants (details on p.24)

Song: In our group, there was a question if it is okay to point out the pronunciation or word mistakes when the children are speaking Chinese. Also, we talked about the importance of having a chance to read more, and following "one person, one language" rule and not mixing the languages.

Young children can't see the needs or the importance of studying Chinese, so they often say that they don't want to study it. So, we shared our experiences on how to make them be interested in Chinese. For example, one family has set one hour of study time on Saturdays from 7 o'clock to study Chinese. One family reads Chinese books before going to bed and talk about the fun part in the story. Someone said that it is important for the family to have fun using Chinese, not to teach Chinese to the children.

Majima: Thank you very much. It's so nice to have an opportunity like this, so you can ask questions or share your thoughts in your mother tongue.

Just as reported now, there is a period of time when children doubt "Why do I have to study mother tongue? I live in Japan!" During that period, scolding or forcing them to study will not work well. We need to motivate them, so acquiring mother tongue will lead them to good experiences. It is important to do something fun using mother tongue, not forcing them to memorize and study their mother tongue.

Critical period for language acquisition is said to be 9-10 years. If one works hard for 10 years, the foundation for language skills is built. To become balanced bilingual, let's work hard to build the foundation for language skills. Having fun experiences will be irreplaceable for children.

Details on Questions and Discussions in each language groups

*We edited according to the topics, so the order of the topics may be different from actual discussions.

<Thai group>

Participant A: a Thai woman, her husband is Japanese, daughter was born in Japan and is an elementary school student

Advisor: Junko Majima

Interpreter: Emi Sato (Thai interpreter)

Participant A: I am Thai and my husband is Japanese. My daughter, now an elementary school student, was born in Japan and she is fluent in Japanese. When she was little, she used to speak in Thai with me, but started to refuse to speak Thai recently. She understands what I'm saying in Thai, but she answers in Japanese, not in Thai.

My daughter tells me to speak in Japanese, so I try hard, then she picks on my mistakes and looks down on me saying "Mom, you make so many mistakes in Japanese. You are an idiot."

Majima: You should talk to her in a language that you feel most comfortable. If you talk with confidence, your child will respect you.

A: But my daughter says "Mom, you should speak in Japanese." Maybe she doesn't feel confident enough to speak in Thai.

Majima: Critical period of language acquisition is 10 years. How about looking for her role model or letting her to think about her future job?

A: She wants to work at a candy store now.

Majima: Thai-Japanese bilingual working at a candy store! Isn't it wonderful? Do you think you can encourage her see how future opportunities will expand if she can speak Thai? Or set a role model who can speak both Thai and Japanese?

How about asking her father to support you?

A: Her father speaks only Japanese. I came to Japan 10 years ago, and studied Japanese for 3 years, but my Japanese is good enough to carry on daily life conversations. I want my daughter to acquire Thai, because I want to use Thai to talk about complicated topics in the future.

Majima: Could it be possible that your daughter is saying all the expressions that she was told and got hurt at school?

A: I don't know. She strongly refuses to speak Thai. She only watches Japanese TV program. When we talk with our relatives over Skype, she speaks very briefly. When the topic gets complicated, she gives up saying "I don't want to talk anymore." Recently she is interested in learning English.

Majima: It is good that she wants to learn something. There is no restriction on how many languages one person can learn, so there is no problem. She can learn 3 or 4 languages, if she keeps studying her mother tongue. Children have big capacity, so trying to find what interests them, including cultural factors, is important.

<Vietnamese group>

Participant B: international marriage, a Vietnamese woman, her husband is Japanese, two children; 27 months old and about 1 year old

Participant C: a Vietnamese woman, her husband is Vietnamese, a child 24 months old

Advisor, interpreter, record keeper: Mika Kondo (a member of supporting Vietnamese children's mother tongue group)

Current situation of children

Participant B: To tell you the truth, my child is still little, so I don't have any specific problems right now. It seems like my child understands Vietnamese and began to say "Da vang (Yes)". My older child temporarily lived with my relatives in Vietnam when I was giving birth to my second child, so it seems like my older child understands Vietnamese better.

Participant C: My child also seems to understand when I talk to him in Vietnamese. My child is a boy, so probably that may be the reason why he doesn't talk much, right?

B: My child is also a boy, but he loves to talk. He also likes to sing, and now he can sing a children's song, only a part of it.

C: That is amazing.

Kondo: I often sing songs in the class, too. Recently, You Tube is really useful to get the music.

Future for the family, future for the children

Participant C: I am really concerned about when we will go back to Vietnam, because of my husband's job. If my son starts school in Japan, but ends up going back to Vietnam, will he be able to catch up?

Participant B: I'm married to a Japanese man, so I will live in Japan from now on. But if parents are both Vietnamese, then that is a big problem. There are so many things to do at school in Vietnam.

C: That's right. So sometimes I think maybe it is better for us to go back to Vietnam sooner, rather to wait until my child starts school and make him suffer at school in Vietnam. I know we live in Japan, so speaking Japanese may be advantage for him in the future, but...

Kondo: I see. I think it is a good opportunity for your child to study Japanese while you are in Japan. I'm pretty sure your child can adopt to school in Vietnam, if you teach him how to write in Vietnamese at home.

C: I hope he remembers some Japanese after going back to Vietnam. I believe it is parents' job to create an environment for him to remember Japanese. If he chooses to go back to Japan in the future, that's the choice he should make.

Talks and reading books at home

Kondo: Are there any books in Vietnamese at home?

Participant C: Yes, there are. We bought some books in Vietnam.

Participant B: Yes, I have some. My son can't read it yet, but he enjoys looking at the pictures.

Kondo: Please read books to your child while showing words and picture.

B: I will. I also tell my son stories without using books. I tell him fairy tales of Vietnam. My son enjoys listening to it.

Kondo: That is wonderful. Please talk about the story and ask him how he felt about it after telling the story.

Acquisition of mother tongue, encouragement for mother tongue study

Majima: It is said that mother tongue is acquired by the age of 10, so please work hard until that time. It is hard to acquire mother tongue after 10 years old.

Participant C: Age 10 is the key. I'll remember that.

Majima: It's great if you can have a role model who can speak both the mother tongue and Japanese.

C: One of my friends can speak both Japanese and Vietnamese, so I'll try to set my friend as a role model for my child.

B: If one person can speak both languages, there will be many job opportunities. One can contribute to the society.

C: I want my child to learn English, too. English is highly valued in Vietnam, so I think it will be good.

Understanding of others

Participant B: My husband and I believe it might be good if he can speak both the father's language(Japanese) and the mother's language(Vietnamese) and we talk about it quite often. But the grandparents on father's side don't believe so...

For example, if I talk to my children in Vietnamese, grandparents say "Mom, you are speaking Vietnamese too much. If you do so, the son may have problems when he starts school. Maybe he has troubles not understanding Japanese, or maybe his friends won't play with him anymore." Then I don't know what to do.

Kondo: That wouldn't happen, so don't worry about it. Besides teaching Vietnamese to children from Vietnam, I sometimes teach Vietnamese language and culture to Japanese children as a part of education for international understanding. When I teach Vietnamese language, I ask Vietnamese children to speak Vietnamese in front of Japanese children. Then Japanese children are amazed and praise them by saying "Cool! You can speak Vietnamese!"

In Japan, people don't understand mother tongue or bilingual that much. I hear stories that teachers from nursery school tell parents to use Japanese at home.

Make the support system well-known

Kondo: When compared to other places, there are more support system for foreigners in Osaka. When your children start school, please consult the school that your children need support for Japanese and the mother tongue. They will help you with interpreter and school supporter.

Participant B: I didn't know such system.

Kondo: Unfortunately, not in every town and at every school... Frankly, it all depends on school and teachers. But school may make actions with a strong demand from the parents, so please consult the school first.

B: Yes, I will.

Summary

Two families who participated this time have children who are still very young, so it didn't really ring a bell when other mothers are saying "my child refuses to talk in mother tongue" or "my child is having problems catching up with school studies". They are trying to be ready for it. They

both took language education for their children seriously, and I was surprised to see how these Vietnamese ladies are enthusiastic about language education, as they already have Vietnamese books. Also, as they listened to the lecture and looked at the handouts over and over, and told me sincerely told me that they will talk to their children in Vietnamese more.

Meeting these enthusiastic mother, I strongly felt the needs for ways to inform foreigner families about school supporters and preferential treatment for high school entrance exam, and ways to deliver materials for mother tongue education; thus, foreigner parents can raise their children in Japan without any concerns.



<Spanish group>

Participant D: A Peruvian woman, her husband is also Peruvian, her son R is 8 and was born in Japan, R has visited Peru once when he was 3.

Participant E: A Peruvian woman, her husband is also Peruvian, she has two daughters, C is 12 and M is 10, a son I is 5, they were all born in Japan, at home, the children speak in Japanese among them, but they speak in Spanish when they talk to their parents (both at home and away from home)

Advisor, interpreter: Chiho Sakurai

Record keeper: Aki Nashigi (a school supporter interpreter for Spanish)

Conversations in mother tongue

Participant D: Every year on a New Year's Day, I talk to my relatives in Peru on the internet. I try to make my daughter R to greet them in Spanish, but she can't speak well. She doesn't want to. It seems like she is embarrassed to speak Spanish or is feeling big pressure when speaking Spanish.

There is a much older cousin who lives nearby. She came to Japan when she was in junior high school, so she can speak Spanish perfectly. When my children talk with this cousin, they don't have any problem communicating with her when it is in Japanese, but when she talks to them in Spanish, they become silent. I think there is a big difference if a person is born in Japan, or has gone to school in Peru.

Sakurai: Children around the age of 8 may act like that because of their self-assertion, disobedience,

or embarrassment. I think it is important that you read story books to them in Spanish in a fun environment, and keep doing it with patience.

D: Compared to R, her 2-year-old brother D (born in Japan) has no antipathy for speaking Spanish. He enjoys animation songs that are sang in Spanish on the internet.

Sakurai: It's great that's a good prompt for him to enjoy listening and speaking Spanish. Using more of the same kind of tool may be helpful.

Participant E: In my friend's family case, they are a Peruvian family and the parents are both Peruvians, but they use Japanese at home. The child started Kumon from the age of 3 and acquired Japanese. So, now the child has learned to write Japanese (letters) beautifully, but says 'I don't understand' when it comes to Spanish. I think that is very sad.

Reading and writing in mother tongue

Participant D: My children understand daily conversations in Spanish, but they cannot read nor write.

Participant E: I have taught C to read from the age of 6 and to write from the age of 10. I make her read simple articles in a magazine written in Spanish and ask her "What was the article about? I haven't read it yet, so tell me about it" and let her explain the article to me. As a parent, I think she is studying Spanish hard.

I just began teaching her sister M how to read and write, but she is not interested in Spanish. Rather, she says "I want to study English."

Right now, it seems like her brother is more interested in Spanish than M, and he has learned how to write "I love you, mom" in Spanish and writes that everywhere.

E: I think if there are some language study sites on the internet that allows viewers to study how to read and write in Spanish, that may be fun for them to study.

Sakurai: There are some tablet-style teaching material that rings "Ding-dong" when a child writes Hiragana correctly. If there are some gadgets like that in Spanish, that may be of their interests.

E: On Japanese TV, there are many programs that provides Japanese subtitles, not just programs for children but also news and other programs. It is interesting for me to watch it, because I can match the sound and the letter in my mind. If there are some Spanish TV programs for children that provides Spanish subtitles, that may be helpful...

Sakurai: On Multimedia DAISY, there are some software that provides stories in many different languages with sound and subtitles, or software that provides names of items in Spanish, both with the pronunciation and the spelling. It may be helpful for learning how to read and write in mother tongue, because it links the pronunciation and the subtitles on the screen. (showing some samples.) There may be more. Let's look for more and share the information.

It will be great if you can aim for a being-able-to-write step, starting from listening-and-understanding step, then to a getting-familiar-with-the-letters step.

Culture of mother country

Participant D: I want my children to know not only the mother tongue, but also traditional dance and many more other cultural aspects. Right now, my children don't know much about Peruvian culture and I am very sad.

Participant E: My children participate in the group hosted by Peruvian living in Osaka, where they can learn Peruvian dance. It seems like it is a good chance for them, because they can communicate with other Peruvian children.

At one of Peruvian friend's house, the parents always talk about what is good about Peru, families in Peru, traditional dishes in Peru to their children in Spanish. So, their children love and are interested in Peru, so they watch Peruvian TV programs and videos quite often.

Sakurai: May be C enjoys acquiring Spanish through communications with such people.

E: C teachers Spanish to her friends at school, too.
Sakurai: That is wonderful.

About children's studies and careers

Participant E: I am worried that I cannot teach what my children study at school in Japan, or even in Peru, because what they teach in Peru have been changing.

C wants to become a teacher at nursery school in the future, but I don't know which high school she should choose or how students should apply for universities. I want more information. Also, my friend told me that there are some coupons that help us for the tuition of cram school, but I don't know the necessary procedures...

Nashigi: Maybe you can ask the teachers at junior high school, when there is a parental meeting with the teacher. I can give you the translated documents about the cram school coupons.

<Chinese group>

20 participants (including participants with Japanese spouses and German spouses)

Advisor, interpreter: Sūn Chéngzhì

Record keeper: Minori Suma (interpreter of Chinese)

Sūn Chéngzhì: Hello, I am Sūn Chéngzhì from Osaka University. Do you have any questions? Questions about Dr. Majima's lecture and any questions or problems at your home are okay. Let's talk about it together.

Chinese language environment

Participant E: How can I create a Chinese language environment for children in Japan?

Sūn Chéngzhì: There are two ways.

One way is creating language environment at home. Just like Dr. Majima has said in her lecture, it is important to stick to "one person, one language" rule. For example, a mother speaks in Chinese and a father speaks in Japanese, or in case both mother and father speak in Chinese, it is the same.

But when children grow older, they may not speak in Chinese with their parents easily. They might speak in Japanese all the time. Then, deciding the time schedule may work well. For example, Monday and Saturday mornings are Chinese speaking period, so children should Chinese TV program with the mother during that period. And children can enjoy Japanese movies or Japanese books with the father some other time. Setting time schedule for language, such as doing this on Saturday mornings and that on Sunday mornings, is a good idea.

One more important thing is, if the father gets home late from work and the time spent with his children is limited, then make it a rule to speak in Japanese after the father comes back home. Then children will recognize "Oh, dad is back from work. And he will talk to me in Japanese." Then rules become customs, children will speak with the mother in Chinese, in Japanese with the father, and in Japanese with their friends outside of their home.

So, one way is creating the environment at home, the other way is creating the environment outside. There aren't many options available for this, but participating in Japanese groups may work. For example, in Minoh, there is a Chinese class for children on Saturday morning, so children can enjoy Chinese speaking environment there. Creating environment such as participating Japanese teaching group and study there, is important.

Participant F: How can I join those groups?

Sūn Chéngzhì: Please ask the city hall. If you ask them "I came from China and I want my children to learn Japanese." Or "I want my children to learn Chinese." Then they will introduce you some groups. For example, if you go to Hirano Ward Office, they will tell you. Also at Japanese school, some information is available. Also, Chinese people living in Japan have lots of information, so

asking them may help. You should check the local government and your friends for more information.



Motivating the children

Participant G: How can I answer a question like “Mom, why did you learn Chinese?”?

Sūn Chéngzhì: That is a very important question. When your children ask you such question, you should be happy, because it means that your children are interested in their mother tongue. You want to tell your children “I’m Chinese. And I’m proud of it. I want to talk with you in that language.”

G: But my child wouldn’t understand it.

Sūn Chéngzhì: I know. He may not understand it the first time.

G: So, telling him “I am Chinese, so please study Chinese.” Is that what you mean?

Sūn Chéngzhì: That’s right. First, you must share what’s in your mind with your children. Whether your children will learn mother tongue or not depends on the parents. For example, there are parents who think Chinese is not necessary because they will raise their children in Japan. That is okay, too. But if you want your children to learn two languages, you need to tell that to your children. Then they have an idea. That is important. One child said “I am Chinese, so I study Chinese. I study Japanese because I live in Japan.” He said that when he was in 5th grade. It takes time.

G: For example, I study Japanese because I live in Japan. My children understand it. For example, I study English because I’m interested in their culture. But how about my children? “He is Chinese, so he studies Chinese” isn’t enough to stimulate him. If he is not interested, he will no improve.

Sūn Chéngzhì: I see your points. It is difficult for a 5,6-year-old child to understand that he needs to study Chinese because he is Chinese. They don’t understand the concept of nationality. But please tell him that it is the mommy’s language. I think he will enjoy talking with his mom intimately, using mommy’s language. How about spending one hour every Saturday reading Chinese books to him and ask him to tell you about the story. He might not enjoy it in the beginning. He may say “I understood the story, so I don’t have anything to talk about it.” But please keep trying. One hour, every Saturday. He will refuse it in the beginning.

It’s not “thinking”

Participant G: Well, I teach my child 100 Kanji characters every night, but he wouldn’t do it.

Sūn Chéngzhì: I see. You said you “teach him”. That is the problem here. It is wrong to force him to study. Please tell him, “Let’s have fun using Chinese.” Chinese is the means of communication

for a mother and a child. It shouldn't be taught. For example, please tell him "Oh, we have a Chinese book today. Let's read it together."

G: But he needs to know Kanji characters.

Sūn Chéngzhì: He doesn't need to. It is too early to make him write or teach him now. He needs to have the habit of using the language first. When the child become interested in Chinese, he will ask "How do you write this in Chinese?" When you get this kind of question or some other signs, it is time to teach him.

G: But in China, they teach Kanji characters in elementary school.

Sūn Chéngzhì: Of course they study Chinese at school in China. They need to "teach" following the "National Language" curriculum.

But it is not the same for Chinese families living in Japan. Please think that Chinese is one of the tools to bond children and parents. Children living in Japan probably think Chinese is not necessary now. Even if they study, they don't have any chance to use it. If you force them to study, they will lose motivation.

But if they can communicate and have fun with their parents using Chinese, that makes a difference. Reading books is also good. It is important to build the basis for vocabulary.

But please don't force them to read 10 books that you bought from volume 1 to volume 10. Children's interests vary. Choosing 2 or 3 books of their interest may be good. Animals, history, or maybe stories about princess for girls. Taking children to book stores and letting them choose is also an option.

Reading books to children

Participant H: I have a question about books. Where can I buy them?

Sūn Chéngzhì: There are some book store where they sell Chinese books in Nihonbashi. Or you can order them. Maybe you can ask your relatives living in China to send some books to you. If you order books overseas, then they will be dealt as imported books and ay cost more than buying books in China. From China, it may cost 400 to 500 yen per book. After you finish reading them, you can give them to someone who wants them or you can donate the books to the library.

(Editor's note: In Osaka city, there are many foreign books at local libraries and you can borrow them for free. At some libraries, you can send request to other libraries from your local library if the book is not available, so please check at your local library.)

Sūn Chéngzhì: It is important to have chances for your children to be exposed to Chinese writing. Children starts having interests in written letters at the age of 3. If the father is reading the newspaper, a child may come to see. So please have as many chances as possible to be exposed to written letters.

Participant J: My child is interested in Japanese books, but not in Chinese books.

Sūn Chéngzhì: I see. Interests must be brought up. Your child is interested in Japanese book, because he is exposed to Japanese a lot. So, to make him interested in Chinese books, you need to bring up his interests by reading Chinese books to him at bed time. It takes time.

Participant H: How should I read?

Sūn Chéngzhì: In the beginning, please read books to him just like you talk to him.

As Dr. Majima said, mother tongue is acquired by the age of 9 to 10. We must work hard until that age, for him to become bilingual. Children growing up in Japan are 3-5 years behind when compared to children in China. You may think his progress is slow. But there is nothing wrong with it. Around the age of 15, he will become bilingual and his language skill may exceed that of the children in China.

H: So, I need to keep reading different books to him. Are school text books okay?

Sūn Chéngzhì: Please read books other than textbooks. It is better for him to have a lot of chances to read. Please do not teach him. Ask your child to talk about the stories. After reading a book, please

ask “Which part of the story did you like the best? Why?” Asking “Why?” is the key. Probably, your child will answer “Because it’s fun.” It is okay. Later, he will tell you “Because it got caught.” “Because it was destroyed” as his vocabulary builds up.

By asking “Why?”, you will have more opportunities to speak. In the beginning, when the mother asks in Chinese, the child may answer in Japanese. That is totally okay. You don’t need to tell him to answer in Chinese. You don’t need to correct him. Please lead him to speak Chinese little by little. Please keep talking to him in Chinese, then gradually he will answer in Chinese.

How about Japanese language skills?

Participant H: My child is exposed to Chinese at home and is exposed to Japanese at school. I am worried about his Japanese language skills.

Sūn Chéngzhì: You don’t have to worry about it. Now, I am worried if you are teaching him Japanese at home or not. You may speak Japanese, but you are not Japanese and your Japanese skills are different from the ones of Japanese person. It will be more helpful for your child to improve his language ability, if you talk to him proudly in Chinese.

Your child will soon understand Japanese spoken at school.

Essential steps for reading and writing

Participant K: Is it important for my child to learn Pingyin?

Sūn Chéngzhì: No, it is not. Pingyin is not taught in China either.

K: Isn’t it taught at nursery schools?

Sūn Chéngzhì: No. They omit it. Things have changed drastically from the time we, including me, learned at elementary schools in China. Did you know that? When we studied at nursery schools and elementary schools, they took time to teach us. Now, it is taught as they play. When we learned the character 「国」 of 「国家」, we learned it as “g u o”, but now it is pronounced as “guo” not using Pingyin “g u o”.

Participant G: But still, isn’t Pingyin necessary when typing? I’m teaching my children Kanji, but if they know Pingyin, then they can’t use PC, can they?

Sūn Chéngzhì: The teaching order matters there. When we learned it, we were taught in the order of Pingyin→Kanji→word typing. But for children, Kanji→Pingyin→word typing is the preferred order. Kanji first. Actually, Pingyin and word typing may be in the same category.

G: But if you don’t know Pingyin, they you can’t study independently. Isn’t it right? Do you see what I mean?

Sūn Chéngzhì: I do. You want to help your child build autonomy. But it’s too early.

G: If my child doesn’t know Pingyin, I can’t teach him in order.

Sūn Chéngzhì: I think you are trying to teach your child in the order that you had learned. But when children are growing up in a foreign country, their interests must come in first place. When they become interested in written characters, then help them read and write. Pingyin and word typing can be done later. Using Pingyin just like you have studied at school in China does not have the priority.

Participant L: How about when taking a Chinese exam?

Sūn Chéngzhì: It is too early to think about it now.

L: My husband learned Chinese using Pingyin.

Sūn Chéngzhì: Yes. When foreigner adults learn Chinese, they use Pingyin as we learned. But when children speak at home, “listen and speak” is more important. Understanding mommy’s language and now he/she can communicate with his/her mother. After being able to listen and speak the language, then it’s time to study reading and writing. If all four are done at the same time, it is too much burden for children. First listen and speak, then read and write, when they become interested in written characters, teach them Pingyin. Children will refuse when they are forced to study. It is important to clear this “refusal”.

Here is an example. A child was practicing the violin. In the beginning, he was motivated and he practiced the violin. But every time he made a mistake, his parent hit him. Then he stops playing the violin. The parent hit him and forced him to play, but he firmly refused to play the violin. In the end, the parent had to give up. “Being interested” is the key for children. It will be “teachers” for them. Studying is the same. They must have some interests first, then gradually teach them more complicated things. Then autonomy will be built in them.

Learning 3 languages

Participant M: I’m a mother of 3 and 0-year old children. I’m from Macau. Both of my children were born in Japan. I didn’t speak Japanese in the beginning, so I communicated with my husband in Macau language or Mandarin (Chinese). My child goes to nursery school. Other Japanese children at nursery school speak Japanese fluently, but my child is behind in Japanese acquisition. Since my husband can speak Mandarin and Japanese, we started using Mandarin and Japanese at home.

But my parents in Macau only speak Macau language. So now, they can’t communicate with my children. It is very hard for me. Children can’t choose language by themselves. I want my children to be able to speak Mandarin, Japanese and Macau language. Can they?

Sūn Chéngzhì: 3 languages for a 3-year-old child is a big burden, but it is possible. But it is important to decide one language at home, for example “Chinese”. It is very important. And please don’t “teach” Japanese. You are fluent in Japanese, but that is different from Japanese spoken by Japanese people. So, it is better for you to speak Chinese. Children will express themselves in Japanese outside of home, and speak in Chinese when at home. Then your children will not be confused with languages, and it will not be a big burden for them.

For your younger child, it is the best time to teach him Chinese and Macau language. But please avoid mixing these two languages. Please don’t say a word in Macau or in Chinese. Please switch the language depending on the situation. For example, when cooking, you speak in Chinese. Bed time stories will be told in Macau language. You need to distinguish the language depending on the situation. It may happen in the case of international marriage, but mixing two languages in a sentence “Quickly (Hayaku-spoken in Japanese), eat your meal (chi fan-spoken in Chinese)” must be avoided.

M: I was totally wrong about it.

Sūn Chéngzhì: For your children to learn 2 languages, parents need to learn, too. Please read books together, tell them stories, and read picture books or manga together. You will improve. Please take your time. It is time to build vocabulary now.

Participant N (Japanese): I know a person who grew up speaking 4 languages since she was little. Then a person can learn more languages easily. That person knows 10 languages now. It is not impossible. It may take longer time than a monolingual speaker, but in 10 years, he will improve a lot. So please praise him and help him improve.

When to study

Participant M: I have a question about when to start studying. My child is 3 years old now, and his Chinese skills are as good as his Japanese skills. At home, we only speak in Chinese. But I want to teach him Macau language, when should I start teaching him?

Sūn Chéngzhì: It may not be a good time to start teaching him Macau language now. He is 3 years old, right? You said that he can speak two languages now, but that is just answering simple questions. He cannot answer questions like “Why did that child do that?” He needs to build strong basis.

But it is a good time to talk to him about Macau now. He may be interested or may find it fun. But please be careful not to force him.

Majima: There is no one best or definite rule, but if you talk to him about Macau and he becomes interested, then that may be the time. If he seems to be not interested, then you want to wait a little more.

Participant O: My children are 6 years old and 20 months old. I missed the chance to teach my 6-year-old child Chinese.

Sūn Chéngzhì: In that case, let's influence your older child by talking to your younger child. Talk to your younger child in Chinese. The older child will hate it when his mom talks to his younger brother in Chinese. But later on, he will understand what mommy is saying to his younger brother. That will be a good time. Then please set a time to read Chinese books with the older child or watch dramas and movies together.

There is a problem of "when?", but it is never too late. Arousing your children's interest in language learning is the key.

Arousing the children's interest

Participant N(Japanese): I wonder if my experience would be useful. I am Japanese and my son was two years old when I was in Shanghai. My situation was completely opposite from that of yours now. My mother tongue is Japanese and I was raising my son in China. My son spoke only Japanese at home, but I wanted him to be bilingual. But if I force my son to write Pingyin or Kanji, he would hate it, since he was so young. So, I tried everything to expose him to Chinese, without making him think that he is studying Chinese. For example, he loved playing Pokemon cards, so I gave him Pokemon cards both in Japanese and Chinese and let him compare those cards. I also bought Pokemon manga books in Chinese. While he was in China for three years, he could listen and speak Chinese, but after coming back to Japan, he didn't have any opportunity to listen nor speak Chinese, so he has forgotten Chinese. Still, he remembers the pronunciation that he heard when he was little, so I tried many things for him to keep up the words he could remember. Also, I told him how fun it is to study Chinese and how that would enrich his life at every opportunity. I also brought him to China sometimes, or took him to join the community so he could communicate with his friends. I wanted him to have opportunities to enjoy speaking English, Chinese and Japanese. If he wants to study more in the future, he should do so.

Sūn Chéngzhì: Talking about "when", how to arouse your children's interest in language learning is the key. I will tell you the case of my friend. My friend came to Japan when her child was 4-5 years old. After coming to Japan, that child started to refuse studying Chinese. Then the father wrote on the blackboard, "Daddy will teach Chinese to mommy from 7 to 7:30 every night." Then the child was curious to know what daddy and mommy are doing. Then the child had an interest in Chinese and started to study a little. That wasn't "teaching", but the child wanted to know more out of curiosity. After that, the child began to study every night.

One mother was asked by her child, "Why do I have to study Chinese when I don't have any opportunity to use it?" So, she went back to China for a week or two with her child. There the child had opportunities to have fun and study using Chinese. Then the child got interested in studying Chinese. After coming back to Japan, the child was proud and was excited to tell his classmates what he did in China and which insects he saw in China. Then he became passionate about studying Chinese. He was motivated to study Chinese, because it was such a fun experience for him to go back to China every year. It is essential to keep children motivated.

Participant P: It seems like going back to China every year works well. But in my case, I don't have any relatives in China. I hope there are some places where young children can study Chinese together, like Chinese nursery schools, maybe for a short time, in Japan. A place where they are motivated continuously.

Sūn Chéngzhì: It certainly will help children to be motivated, if they attend Chinese nursery schools, even for a short time. In the case of my classmate, her daughter was born in Japan and she attended

elementary school in Japan, but there were only 2 foreigners in her class; a girl from Korea and herself. She didn't have any opportunity to speak Chinese, so her mother made it a rule not to speak Japanese at home, and invited Chinese friends to their home on a regular basis. Having tea with the children, her mother created more opportunities to listen and speak Chinese for her. When doing so, they could exchange new information. There are also Chinese events that are held by local government and local groups. You need to keep looking for more information.

How to treat mistakes

Participant G: My daughter can listen and understand basic things. But she can't speak Chinese. Will reading picture books and asking her questions, and watching movies together help her speak gradually?

Sūn Chéngzhì: Yes, it will help her. But it takes time. In the beginning, children only speak a few words. For example, "yes", "eat", "drink", and so on. Then it will get longer, two or three words. This will take long time.

G: What should I do if my daughter makes mistakes? For example, if she says "Rice eat", saying the verb and the object in an opposite order?

Sūn Chéngzhì: It is important that you do not correct children's mistakes. If you could understand what your child meant to say, let it through. And please remember where your child made a mistake. Then, when there is a similar situation, please tell your child in a correct way. Please don't correct children's mistakes.

G: What if my daughter makes a mistake for the second time?

Sūn Chéngzhì: It is okay. Your child will make mistakes for several times. It will take time. But if you correct her, she will say "I don't want to say it next time." Just like when we speak Japanese. When we try hard and speak Japanese, and if we happen to be corrected or criticized, we wouldn't want to try it again. Maybe we won't use the same expression, or we will try using different expressions. That is not a good way to learn a language.

In case of Chinese children growing up in Japan, their vocabulary is smaller than that of Japanese children. Their Chinese vocabulary is definitely smaller than that of Chinese children living in China. And that is reasonable. But if a child keeps working hard, a child's learning speed of Chinese and Japanese, and maybe of English, will be faster in 10 years. Bilingual people have wider views. At the age of 3-5, the difference is only a little. Right now, things that they can't do catch your attention. But when they become junior high school students, things will change. The world will widen. Please work hard and try to look at the long term.

Slides

Today's agenda

Slide 1

Lecture

- Importance of mother tongue
- Types of bilingual
- Factors related to bilingual
- Relationship between two languages
- Examples of successful bilingual education
 - Example of an international marriage
 - Example of a Chinese family
- What parents can do

Groups discussion and stories (Chiho Sakurai and Seishi Song)

Slide 2

For foreigner parents raising their children in Japan

To develop language skills of the children

-Teaching mother tongue and Japanese language-

JUNKO MAJIMA (Osaka University)

Japanese supporting group HIMAWARI KAI “Lecture on maintaining mother tongue”

July 6th, 2014 at Civic community center Hirano

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Slide 3

Language achievement types (Nakajima 2001)

A: single wheel is fine.

B: one big wheel and one small wheel is okay.

C: two well-balanced wheels with full air will take me farther

D: unless it becomes like this...

Slide 4

Importance of mother tongue

- Parent-child bond → stable mind
- Learning ability, Thinking ability, Foundations of Cognitive capacity
- Basis for identity
- Maintaining mother tongue as a right

- Future choices for residence (possibility of living in one's mother country)

Slide 5

Factors related to bilingual

- Circumstances of children
 - age of arrival in Japan (born in Japan / age of arrival, school education in mother tongue?)
 - length of stay in Japan
 - level of mother tongue abilities (school educational experience in mother country or foreign country)
 - personalities (outgoing, talkative, timid)
 - brothers and sisters
- Circumstances of parents
 - socioeconomic circumstance
 - time spent with children (quality and quantity)
 - language ability (Japanese language ability)
 - educational policy, future plans
- People around
 - grandparents of children
 - teachers at nursery school, school education, people in the community

Slide 6

4 language skills and types of bilingual

Sound

Receptive

productive

Letters

1. listening comprehensive bilingual
2. conversational bilingual
3. read and write bilingual

Slide 7

Successful example 1

- an international marriage family
- perfect read and write bilingual at the age of 4
- father: Japanese, mother: Taiwanese

- language at home
- understandings of the grandparents and the relatives
- conversation + reading books in two languages
- residence

Slide 8

Relationship between two languages

Language 1 language 2

On the surface

In-depth

Iceberg theory (Cummins 1984)

Slide 9

What parents can do

- Rule of “one person, one language” in case of international marriage
- Aiming for balanced bilingual (bilateral) (it is advantageous if one can read and write)
- Making mother tongue books accessible for children
- Parents should speak proudly in a language that they feel comfortable with their children.
- Having other parents and people around (people at school) understand the importance of mother tongue
- It is important to “keep doing”, not doing it perfectly

Slide 10

Successful example 2

- an elementary student of a Chinese family
- born in Japan
- problems with both languages in the 1st grade
- became read and write bilingual in the 5th grade
- learned how to read Chinese from the subtitles of video and TV programs
- Chinese is dominant, but Japanese skills also improved

Questionnaire

Please cooperate for better future activities of Himawarikai.

Please check the items that apply to you.

Q1. How would you rate your Japanese abilities?

- I don't have any problem with conversation, reading and writing.
- I can read and write
- I can listen and speak
- I can speak a little
- I can't understand Japanese

Q2. How did you know about this lecture?

I got information from

- the brochure
- an acquaintance
- Japanese class
- my children's school
- other

Q3. Why did you come to this lecture?

Because

- I was thinking about my children's linguistic problems
- I was thinking about raising my children in Japan
- I wanted to listen to a lecture by an expert
- there is an interpreter
- there is childcare
- it is easy to come here
- it's free

Q4. How was the lecture?

- It was very good
- It was good
- I'm somewhat dissatisfied
- I'm dissatisfied

Why?

Q5. What kind of lecture or even would you expect in the future?

Himawarikai supports Japanese language education for everyone from an infant to a senior citizen. We also plan events that foreigners can participate. What kind of lecture or event would you expect in the future? Please let us know if you have any requests for us.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Results of Questionnaires at the lecture for foreigner parents about retaining mother tongue. (2014. 7. 6)

26 participants, 20 respondents, 77% response rate, 17 children at childcare service

Residence of the participants

Hirano-ku 9

Yao city 5

Toyonaka city 4

Sumiyoshi-ku 2

Kita-ku 2

Nishinari-ku 1

Asahi-ku 1

Languages of the participants

Chinese 58%

Japanese 15%

Spanish 11%

Vietnamese 8%

Thai 4%

German 4%

Q1. How would you rate your Japanese abilities?

- I don't have any problem with conversation, reading and writing. (6) 30%
- I can read and write (6) 30%
- I can listen and speak (5) 25%
- I can speak a little (6) 30%
- I can't understand Japanese (1) 5%

Q2. How did you know about this lecture?

I got information from

- the brochure (1) 5%
- an acquaintance (8) 40%
- Japanese class (11) 55%
- my children's school (0) 0%
- other (0) 0%

Q3. Why did you come to this lecture?

Because

- I was thinking about my children's linguistic problems (14) 70%
- I was thinking about raising my children in Japan (9) 45%
- I wanted to listen to a lecture by an expert (10) 50%

- there is an interpreter (1) 5%
- there is childcare (1) 5%
- it is easy to come here (4) 20%
- it's free (5) 25%
- other (0) 0%

Q4. How was the lecture?

- It was very good (18) 90%
- It was good (2) 10%
- I'm somewhat dissatisfied (0) 0%
- I'm dissatisfied (0) 0%

Why?

- I am happy to know that I can raise my children to become bilingual.
- After today's lecture, I want to have more opportunities to talk with my children in my mother tongue and motivate them to be interested in speaking their mother tongue. And all the advice on how to expose my children to their mother tongue was helpful.
- I clearly understood the importance of mother tongue and how to improve language skills of my children.
- The content of the program was very good. After this program, what I think about raising my children has changed. I was talking to my children mixing two languages, but from now on, I will distinguish two languages when I talk them, and I will use my mother tongue when talking with my children.
- I had a good chance to study. Thank you very much.
- As in the successful example 1 case, the father spoke only Japanese and the mother spoke only Chinese to their children at home, and their four-year-old child has become perfect read and write bilingual. By knowing that, I want to work hard and follow this example. It is difficult to continue, but I will do my best. My child is already 10, and it may be too late, but I will not give up.
- A good opportunity to learn. I will do it.
- The second successful example 2 encouraged me about children's mother tongue education. I want to look at the long-term result.
- I recognized many things. There were things that I have never thought about. It was great to share each other's experiences in a group.
- I appreciate all the suggestions.
- I will have an opportunity to meet my Chinese parents who live in Japan once a month and talk with them. It was great to hear an expert's advice.
- I was doing many things in a wrong way. For example, mixing Chinese and Japanese when talking to children is wrong. Also, it is important to motivate and interest them, rather than teaching languages to them.

- Now I know what I should do when my children make mistakes when speaking mother tongue.

Also, what kind of linguistic environment do the children need.

- I want to participate this kind of lecture again.