

## Research Paper: Final portfolio

### Raising Japanese/ English bilingual children in Hawaii

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SLS380

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12/12/2012

## **Introduction**

Hawaii is one of the most unique melting pots in the world, especially since it has influences from Asian countries due to immigration in the late 1800s. Japanese immigrants made up the majority of entire immigrants in Hawaii, so one of the languages in Hawaii, "Pidgin", contains a lot of Japanese words. Hawaii also is one of the best world resorts and is popular for Japanese people, so there are many Japanese tourists in Waikiki and Japanese speakers who are working there. Thus, it is easy to access to the Japanese language in Hawaii. Udo (2004) states that Japanese is one of the most popular second languages to learn and be spoken among people in Hawaii. Japanese immigrants would take advantage in becoming bilingual in order to preserve their communities in Hawaii, keep family culture or business opportunities.

The focus of this paper is what factors lead advantage and disadvantage of raising Japanese/English bilingual children, and also examples of success and failure in bilingual education. Hawaii's official language is English, but there would be many opportunities to gain access to the Japanese language. For example, there are some Japanese language schools such as "Rainbow Gakuen", "Hongwanji Japanese school" and "Moiliili Japanese school", therefore it may be more accessible for parents who are willing to teach their children to become fluent in English and Japanese in Hawaii than other countries.

## **Case Study**

I interviewed two of my friends. They are male residents of Hawaii who are Japanese/English bilingual speakers. Those interviewees, Shinji and Koji, were born and raised

in Hawaii in a family of Japanese immigrants from Tokyo. They both have one mother who are single and one older brother, and their dominant language in their family is Japanese. I would like to emphasize their mother is single because many resident bilingual speakers' parents have one-parent one-language situation, however my interviewees have only Japanese speaking mothers. Until attending pre-school (4 years old), they had been surrounded entirely in a Japanese speaking environment. Besides attending Hawaii's school system, the first interviewee, Shinji, was attending a Japanese language school until middle school, but the second interviewee, Koji's language environment was just between his other family members until adolescent.

### **Shinji's Case**

Shinji is 22 years old, and currently attending Kapiolani Community College as culinary major. Shinji had attended a Japanese language supplementary school called Rainbow Gakuen from pre-school grades through up to middle school grades. Shinji said that it was hard for him to study two languages. First, the thing that he did not like was that he had to spend extra time on weekends because the Japanese school where he had attended was a supplemental school, meaning that he went to public schools on weekdays and supplemental school on Saturday. However now, he has no problems with using two languages because of the Japanese school. He has used English daytime with peers, classmates and teachers of regular schools, used Japanese after school with family, and learned Japanese in Japanese at supplemental school on Saturday. I assume that he is very much balanced bilingual speaker because of his lifestyle in the past. He can code-switch depending on circumstances, for example, when he speaks to his friends from the supplemental school, he speaks in Japanese, but when he speaks to his friends from his middle-school, high school and college, he speaks English. As another example, he orders food at Japanese restaurant in Japanese even though the servers can speak English.

According to Shinji, his older brother, Hayato, also had bilingual education as same as Shinji, and he is managing a trading company which owes their mother. The company is dealing with Japanese companies and American Companies, so Hayato has to use both English and Japanese in business level. Hayato graduated University of Hawaii in Business major, therefore his English competence is quite high, but amazingly his Japanese level is also high even though he has not learned business levels of Japanese at the supplemental school. Hayato is also a balanced bilingual speaker, plus his both languages are at high level of competence.

I checked up Shinji's Facebook page how much he uses English and Japanese.

The screenshot displays the Facebook profile of Shinji Honjo. The profile picture shows a person walking. The cover photo is a video thumbnail for "DGK - ITS OFFICIAL - STEVIE WILLIAMS". The main post on the wall is a link to a YouTube video of Stevie Williams, with the text "stevie hittin up the deck!". Below this, there are three posts in English: "no one is at the skatepark today :(", "Yuki M Jenny likes this.", and "Jessica Sugihara More room for you. Haha". There are also two posts in Japanese: "おにぎり Hajime Onigiri Itabashi あら、残念！！日本では今夜、久々に姉妹祭だよ！！" and "Hiroki Serizawa No skatepark here in fukuoka". The bottom of the screenshot shows a post in Japanese: "メガネアイドル。ー with Zen Ushida and Shunji Keith Iwasaki."

As you seen on the above, his page is mixed with two languages, and his wall for past few weeks was about half English and half Japanese with various kinds of *Kanji* (Chinese characters).

## **Koji's Case**

Koji is 24 years old, and currently working at DFS Duty free as a salesperson. Koji said he feels his language competence in both language is limited and does not have confidence to use both languages effectively. He also can code-switch but prefer to speak English. For example, he orders foods in English at a Japanese restaurant if the servers can speak English. He mentioned that he did not have much language support from outside. He has taken beginner to intermediate Japanese classes at high school and expected that the class must be easy for him because he speaks Japanese at home, but he had a hard time studying grammar and writing especially *Kanji*. I became a friend with him at Kapiolani Community College through a teacher who told me to teach him *Kanji* and make him confident to speak in Japanese. At first when I have met him, he hesitated to talk in Japanese because someone in high school when he took a Japanese class told him that his Japanese sounds like a little girl. I presume that the reason why he sounded like a girl is he learned Japanese from only his mother. When he has been getting used to be in Japanese speaking environment, his bilingual skills were appeared. His pronunciation of Japanese is fluent, but I thought his word choice is limited, for example, he uses only *soshite* as a connective word, but many Japanese speakers use various types of connectives such as *sorede*, *dene*, *soshitara* or *shichatte*. It might be just his habit because he understands what other Japanese speakers say, and he said that he watches Japanese TV shows at home therefore he knows genuine Japanese which is not like "textbook language."

I checked up Koji's Facebook wall, and most of his posts were in English. Some his Japanese friends wrote comments in Japanese on his wall, but he ignored them or replied in

alphabets.



My interviewees said that their dominant language for themselves are English even though their dominant language in family is Japanese because they went to American schools. They also said that they are not sure about how they speak both languages. They are not realized that they are fluent bilingual speakers.

## Shin-Nisei

Udo (2004) noted that "*Shin Nisei* children in America who possess two different cultures and languages might have a difficult time in their school life due to the ambiguity of their identities, and due to their bilingualism. They might also have some unique experiences which

monolingual people would never have. The identities, self-esteem, or even academic performance of these bilingual and bicultural children may possibly be influenced by their environmental uniqueness."(p.7) *Shin Nisei* (which means 'new second generation of Japanese American') children's uniqueness have two sides that are advantage and disadvantage in their language development. By analyzing two interviews and the interviewees' background, I would like to point out what factors affect raising Japanese/English bilingual children in Hawaii.

### **Disadvantages and Negative effects**

The development of language competence is very depending on children's parents. If the parents really want their children to become bilingual speakers and let their children attend language schools, they can be fluent bilingual speakers like the first interviewee. Udo (2004) states children are highly capable to become balanced bilinguals, but it is depending on how their parents do effort on supporting the children for bilingual education. Thus if the parents give their children tepid and halfway balanced language development, the children would get confused in using two languages and demotivated. Udo also stated "supplemental schools could also be a great burden for the children, if what they learn there is beyond their expectations or motivations, or if proper kinds of supports for attending the school are not appropriately provided by adults." (67) Therefore just letting the children go to language schools would be stressful for them and could create bad affections on children mentally such in schooling or society. Teachers role is also important for children and parents to avoid failures in schooling. Teachers should clarify and support parents' goals and meanings of teaching languages for children.

In addition, letting children attend to optional schools need enormous money and extra time. When I asked Koji that why his mother did not let him go to supplemental schools or other optional education, and he said that his family did not have enough money at the time because his parents divorced and his mother refused to get support from his ex-husband. Therefore his family was not able to afford to give them other language supports.

### **Advantages and Positive effects**

Takeuchi (2006) proposes bilingual educators or parents who are willing to raise bilingual children how it should be set up the goals for children to become successful bilingual speakers. If parents can afford to their children enough language support and effort, their children can be balanced bilingual speakers. A professor of McGill university, Fred Genesee, says that being bilingual speakers have advantages such as developing ability to solve problems, more emancipated ingenuity and imagination and adopting an open-minded attitude to others than monolingual speakers.

Quezada and White (2000) mention how being bilingual speaker in the United States is beneficial in cognitively and socio-culturally. Bilingual education can expand children's possibilities in future such as jobs. The both interviewees work at places where are demanded using both Japanese and English. Especially a place like Hawaii, there are many job opportunities if people can use two languages such as English, Japanese, Chinese or Korean because of tourisms and international businesses. Shinji has worked at several places where he was able to use his language skills. Before, he has worked at a retail shop in Waikiki where many Japanese tourists come, and at a Japanese restaurant where Japanese chefs are working. At



these working places, Japanese speaking skills were required according to him and because of his language skills, he said he could get the opportunities to work those places. Koji's all jobs which he had before were also because of his Japanese speaking skills he said. Especially his current job which is working at DFS duty free in Waikiki requires Japanese speaking skills because a lot of customers are Japanese tourists and many of his co-workers are also Japanese, so he has to communicate with them in Japanese.

### **Conclusion**

Raising bilingual children in Hawaii has good and bad sides because the cost of living in Hawaii is very expensive and having extra opportunities cost money, but Japanese culture is a part of Hawaii and people are able to get good opportunities to learn Japanese. There are many supplemental schools such as "Rainbow Gakuen", "Hongwanji Japanese school" and "Moiliili Japanese school", and also there are private tutoring schools where people can learn Japanese such as "Kumon." Most Hawaii's public schools and private schools have Japanese classes, and colleges have Japanese classes. Therefore Hawaii is a great place to raising Japanese and English speaking bilingual children because learning Japanese in Hawaii is very accessible, and there are a lot of job opportunities.

This is one of my reasons why I come to study for my future career which is becoming a Japanese teacher. Through tutoring students who are Japanese Americans, I asked them why they are learning Japanese. One student said that he is learning Japanese because the language has to be his part of culture and if they cannot speak the language, it is his shame, and he continued that it is sad that he cannot talk to his grandparents in Japan because they cannot speak English. When I heard his story, I thought that there are many Japanese Americans who has

same feelings in Hawaii. To help them and support parents who are trying to raise Japanese and English bilingual speakers are my future goal.