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BILINGUAL EDUCATION AND BILINGUALISM 30

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Language Use in Interlingual Families

**A Japanese–English
Sociolinguistic Study**

Masayo YAMAMOTO

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**To Jim, Pam, and JY
who have given me a rich, fulfilling, and fun life**

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Masayo YAMAMOTO

List of Symbols

Symbols Regarding People

pJ	: parent who is a native speaker of Japanese
pE	: parent who is a native speaker of English
pX	: parent who is a native speaker of non-Japanese
P ₁	: parent-1
P ₂	: parent-2
p ₁ cL, p ₂ cL	: parent who is a native speaker of the community language
p ₁ Y, p ₂ Y	: parent who is a native speaker of language-Y
p ₂ Z	: parent who is a native speaker of language-Z
M	: mother
mJ	: mother who is a native speaker of Japanese
mX	: mother who is a native speaker of language-X
F	: father
fJ	: father who is a native speaker of Japanese
fX	: father who is a native speaker of language-X
C	: child
C1	: first child (presence of sibling/s not specified)
C1-oc	: first child, without sibling/s (i.e. only child)
C1-sib	: first child, with sibling/s
C2	: second child
C3	: third child
C1-sib/C2/C3	: all children with sibling/s
C < 3 years old	: child younger than three years old
GM	: grandmother
GF	: grandfather
INT-1	: interlocutor 1
INT-2	: interlocutor 2
J-E bilinguals	: Japanese-English bilinguals

Symbols Regarding Languages

J	: Japanese language
E	: English language
X or Language-X	: non-Japanese language
Y	: language-Y
Z	: language-Z
B	: both of the given languages
pL	: parental language
cL	: community language

Symbols Regarding Language Interactions

\Rightarrow	: language use from speaker to addressee
pJ \Rightarrow pE	: parent who is a native speaker of Japanese addressing parent who is a native speaker of English
pE \Rightarrow pJ	: parent who is a native speaker of English addressing parent who is a native speaker of Japanese
pJ \Rightarrow C	: parent who is a native speaker of Japanese addressing child
C \Rightarrow pJ	: child addressing parent who is a native speaker of Japanese
pE \Rightarrow C	: parent who is a native speaker of English addressing child
C \Rightarrow pE	: child addressing parent who is a native speaker of English
\Leftrightarrow	: speaking mutually
pJ \Leftrightarrow pX	: parents speaking mutually
pJ \Leftrightarrow C	: parent who is a native speaker of Japanese and child speaking mutually
pX \Leftrightarrow C	: parent who is a native speaker of non-Japanese and child speaking mutually
C \Leftrightarrow C	: children speaking mutually
1P-1L	: one parent–one language principle

Chapter 1

Introduction

In *interlingual families*, i.e. families with two or more languages involved, parents sometimes do not share the same language as their native language.¹ Such families have the potential to provide their children with a bilingual environment and, hence, with the opportunity to become bilingual in their parents' languages. Children may even acquire more than two languages as their native languages when their parents are bilingual themselves. Due to this potentiality, it is commonly believed that communication in such families is conducted bilingually in both parental languages and, thus, that children will naturally and spontaneously acquire both of the parents' native languages, just as monolingual children acquire their parents' shared native language as their own native language.

In spite of this general expectation, however, great variation is found in the degree to which this potentiality is actualized. Some families actively use both of the parental native languages, while others use only one, either voluntarily or involuntarily, and others use neither. Likewise, some children actually grow up to be active² bilinguals, attaining an active command of both languages. Some children, on the other hand, become passive bilinguals, developing only passive abilities, and others even become monolingual in the language of the mainstream society, in spite of their parents' desire and efforts to raise them to be active bilinguals.

What causes such variation? Under what circumstances do some families choose to use both parents' languages while others use only one? Why do some children attain bilingual abilities while others do not? The present study investigates variation in language use and tries to identify factors which cause the variation – in other words, how languages are used in potential bilingual families and what factors affect language use, especially that of children.

There have been studies which try to identify such factors, highlighting the dynamics of bilingual use in interlingual families (see the review of previous studies in Chapter 2). However, there seems to be some terminological and typological discrepancy in identifying subject families among these studies. Sometimes different terms are used to refer to groups of families with similar language background while the same terms are employed to refer to different groups defined according to different criteria. As a result, it is possible that conclusions drawn from findings in one study may not be applicable to subject families in other studies.

In the present book, I first review studies of interlingual families, highlighting the dynamics of language use among the family members and children's bilingual development. Secondly, I discuss terminological problems in research on interlingual families and propose a taxonomy of interlingual families, with which research findings can be most appropriately interpreted and applied.

Then, I present the results of a survey regarding how languages are used in Japanese–English interlingual families in Japan. First, using data collected with a questionnaire survey, I try to capture the linguistic milieu of such families residing in Japan, by describing their familial background, language use, attitudes and perceptions about bilingualism, and their efforts in promoting bilingualism in their children.

Next, I analyze how the languages are used among family members and what factors influence the children's language use. Factors considered include the languages spoken to the children by the parents, the languages spoken among the siblings, the languages used as the medium of formal instruction, the gender of the speaker of each language, and parental perceptions of bilingualism.

Lastly, I report the results of follow-up interviews conducted with a small number of families drawn from the sample, each representing a particular type of familial language use. Conducted approximately two years after the time of the questionnaire survey, the interview study was intended to obtain a more detailed, in-depth insight into each family's linguistic situation and to examine changes in their language use as children grow up: a focus on the dynamic aspect of familial language use.

Research on interlingual families is still scarce and there is much yet to be studied. It is hoped that findings in the present study will enhance our further understanding of bilingualism.

Notes

1. While some scholars treat the terms *native language* and *mother tongue* distinctively (e.g. Pattayanak, 1998: 130), others use them interchangeably (e.g. Crystal, 1991: 230). The present study treats both terms as interchangeable.
2. There are two pairs of dichotic terms commonly used to characterize bilingual abilities. In this book, whenever possible I prefer *active* to *productive* and prefer *passive* to *receptive*.

Chapter 2

Studies of Bilingualism in Interlingual Families

Previous studies investigating bilingualism in interlingual families may be grouped together under two major traditions: the linguistic and the sociolinguistic/sociocultural.

Studies in the linguistic tradition primarily examine how bilinguals acquire two languages by focusing on selected linguistic items – phonetic, phonological, morphological, semantic, syntactic – or how they employ those features in their utterances. One of the most detailed and often-cited studies in the linguistic tradition is that of Leopold (1970, 1978), which described in detail the process of the child’s phonological, lexical, and syntactic development in German and English. Celce-Murcia (1978) observed in her study of the phonological and lexical development of an English–French bilingual child that the child’s lexical choices seemed to be affected by the phonological difficulty of words: the child avoided words with sounds which are difficult to pronounce.

In regard to the early syntax of bilinguals, Deuchar and Quay (1998), using data from an English–Spanish bilingual infant, argue that, among bilinguals in the early stage, mixed utterances are mostly due to limited lexical resources, not due to a single initial system. De Houwer (1990) found that her young English–Dutch bilingual subject acquired morpho-syntactic features of the two languages independently and also in the same fashion as monolingual children of each language. Volterra and Taeschner (1978) and Taeschner (1983) analyzed the language acquisition process of young Italian–German bilingual children and proposed a three-stage process that bilingual children undergo in sorting out their two linguistic systems.

Studies in the sociolinguistic/sociocultural tradition, on the other hand, highlight the dynamics of bilingual development or use. Such studies generally try to identify factors that promote or hinder bilingual development or use, which affect the maintenance of, or shift from, a minority-status

language. Since the present study is in the sociolinguistic/sociocultural tradition, I will first review at some length several major studies in this tradition and try to recapitulate salient factors found in those studies. Then, I will report the findings of previous survey studies on language use in interlingual families in the Japanese context.

Studies in the Sociolinguistic/Sociocultural Tradition

Döpke (1992a)

The main objective of Döpke's study (1992a and preliminary report of 1986) was to identify factors affecting the development of children's bilingual proficiencies, active and passive bilingualism. Döpke conducted case studies of six young children (2;4–2;8) who had been raised in an English–German speaking household, according to the one parent–one language principle¹ with each parent using only one of the languages. Her analysis suggested that among the factors influencing the promotion of bilingualism are the quantity and quality of linguistic input, parental interactional style, parental insistence on the minority language, and the emotional compatibility of the two languages.

Although Döpke places much more emphasis on the quality of linguistic input, in her view, both quality and quantity appear to be significant factors influencing the degree of bilingual development. It is important for children to be extensively exposed to the minority-status language in order to develop productive ability in that language. Döpke points out that later-born children in interlingual families often become passive bilinguals rather than active bilinguals, and attributes this fact to the reduced input of the minority language those children receive, in comparison to that received by their older siblings. Döpke also notes that the majority language is usually used for communication among siblings.

Regarding the qualitative aspect, Döpke suggests that productive proficiency in the minority language is developed when the minority language-speaking parent provides richer and more conducive linguistic input and also employs more teaching-oriented linguistic input than the majority language-speaking parent does. By 'teaching-oriented input' she means techniques such as paraphrasing, elaboration, expansion, and so forth. She also found it important for weaker-language parents to provide their children with more structurally-tailored input.

Another factor is a child-centred interactional style. Döpke found that her subject children conversed more frequently with parents who were