This paper challenges the tacit yet pervasive assumption that intermarried fathers play peripheral, subordinate roles in the bilingual childrearing of their children. The author’s ongoing research is a qualitative sociolinguistic investigation of the language work undertaken by native English speaking intermarried fathers residing in Japan, and their experiences of the bilingual childrearing process. In this paper, a preliminary discussion of a recently conducted case study details one family’s experience of implementing a specific discourse strategy. The extent to which parental second language proficiency, the gender of the minority language speaking parent, and future plans affect patterns of language use and bilingual childrearing strategies in intermarried families is examined.

Keywords: fatherhood, intermarriage, discourse strategy, parental L2 proficiency, childrearing, bilingualism, language work, Japan

1 Introduction

Bilingualism is often thought of as a rare or unusual phenomenon, but in reality, it is neither. To be sure, it is estimated that a staggering 3000-5000 languages are spoken in a world comprised of approximately 150 countries (Harding and Riley 27). Consequently, the fact that bilinguals outnumber monolinguals shatters the widespread but erroneous perception of an unambiguous relationship between language use and national or ethnic identity. In Japan, where until recently the myth of linguistic and cultural homogeneity has remained pervasive (Noguchi 2001a; Weiner), contemporary sociolinguistic scholarship is beginning to elucidate both the existence and experiences of the interlingual families living there (Noguchi and Fotos; Yamamoto 2001).

To date, however, sociolinguistic studies of interlingual families can be characterized by three fundamental tendencies. First, the majority of such studies have generally tended to focus on the children in such families, viewing them as a ‘language product’, while affording only peripheral attention to the parental involvement in the ‘process’ of the child’s bilingual development. Second,
those studies that have concentrated on the parental experience of bilingual childrearing have generally adopted the perspective of intermarried mothers living as a minority, and have found these women to be both marginalized by culture, and subordinated by gender (e.g.: Okita; Imamura; Liamputtong; Varro). And third, the majority of studies have predominantly focussed on European or North American contexts (e.g.: Harding and Riley), and have often been based on observations of the authors’ own children (Harding and Riley 46. See, for example, Caldas; Cunningham-Andersson and Andersson; Saunders).

The research project outlined in this paper deviates from the afore-mentioned propensities of the existing literature. This study is a sociolinguistic analysis of the language work that native English speaking intermarried fathers in Japan undertake. As such, it seeks to investigate how the fathers themselves experience and understand the bilingual childrearing experience. Secondly, unlike the majority of previous studies, the men under investigation in this project are raising their children outside their native countries. As such they can be viewed as cultural and linguistic minorities. Thirdly, while an increasing number of Japan specific studies have been conducted on bilingual childrearing in intermarried families (Kamada; Noguchi 2001b; Yamamoto 2001), this study is unique in that it is the first to specifically deal with the bilingual childrearing roles and practices of non-Japanese intermarried men in Japan.

This paper will first introduce three key concepts related to the study: bilingualism; the family as a language domain; and ‘language work’ in interlingual families. It will then outline four widely used strategies in family language transmission: one-parent-one-language; minority language at home; mixed strategy; and time and place. Following this, a brief overview of the methodological instruments developed for this project will precede discussion of a single case study. Specifically, the extent to which parental second language proficiency, the gender of the minority language speaking parent, and future plans affect patterns of language use and bilingual childrearing strategies in intermarried families will be examined. Finally, preliminary findings and emerging themes from the case study will frame the future direction of the project and implications for future research will be suggested.

2 Key Concepts

This research project can best be understood when framed around three core concepts: a feasible definition of ‘bilingualism’; the family as a ‘language domain’; and finally, the notion of ‘language work’ in interlingual families. These three concepts are briefly discussed below.
2.1 Defining Bilingualism

Dated definitions of bilingualism implied the complete mastery of two languages, but more recent interpretations have catered to the subjectivity of the term (Harding and Riley 22-45; Liddicoat; Romaine). Most notably, Mackey has characterised bilingualism as a relative concept, and posited that bilingual proficiency varies in terms of degree, function, alternation, and interference. He identified a number of factors – such as age, sex, memory, intelligence, language aptitude, and motivation – that influence the extent to which an individual may be bilingual (see also Romaine 11). Given that the term bilingualism is indeed both relative and subjective, it may be more helpful to think not so much in definitive terms of whether or not a person is bilingual, but rather how bilingual s/he can be supposed to be.

Furthermore, the difficulty of neatly defining bilingualism is exacerbated by the fact that there are indeed different types of bilingualism. Common dichotomous terms used to describe such categories include: dominant/balanced bilinguals; early/late bilinguals; and active/passive bilinguals (see Harding and Riley 31-42).

For the purposes of the current research project, the term bilingualism is employed to denote one’s knowledge and use of two languages in varying contexts of everyday life. This broad definition highlights the fact that proficiencies in both languages vary across key linguistic skills and situational contexts, and is consistent with the way in which the term is used in other recent studies (e.g.: Shin; Yamamoto 2001).

2.2 The Family as a Language Domain

Joshua Fishman can be credited with popularising Schmidt-Rohr’s initial conception of muttersprache “language domains”, arguing that language choice is contextually influenced by the controlling factors of group, situation, and topic\(^2\). Language domains, which Clyne (1991: 54) has also described as “contextualized spheres of communication”, include such settings as work, school, church, and of course, the family. This idea of “contextualized spheres” is not unlike Bourdieu’s notion of “practice” across differing “fields”, and is a concept that is now extensively used in sociolinguistic analysis (Boxer 3). The family domain specifically, notes Boxer (4), is fundamental to building identity through language socialisation, and in intermarried families where bilingual, bicultural childrearing is a priority, it is assumed to be of even greater significance.

\(^2\) Fishman’s famous paper originally appeared in 1965 in La Linguistique 2, 67-88, but was accessed in Li Wei’s recent volume of reproduced works.
It should be emphasised, of course, that when speaking of the family domain as a contextualised sphere of linguistic practice, not all members necessarily use the same language with one and other. Yamamoto (2005: 594), for example has highlighted the variation of possible language dyads that may take place within intermarried families. To further complicate the issue, a number of language practices are possible within each dyad – exclusive use of either the majority or minority language, mixing of both the majority and minority language, or even the use of a third language. To borrow from the title of Fishman’s famous paper, ascertaining “Who speaks what language to whom and when?” is therefore the critical question in understanding the ‘why’ dimension of language use patterns of the interlingual families participating in this study.

2.3 ‘Language Work’ in Interlingual Families

The term *language work* has been borrowed from Okita’s recent study of bilingual childrearing in the United Kingdom. Okita herself draws on Delphy and Leonard’s (21) feminist account of marriages in contemporary western societies. Okita summates their argument, stating that ‘family work’ can be categorized into three types:

1) economically or practically productive work, 2) cultural work (for display) ‘directed to produce social and cultural capital rather than just economic capital: which stresses that individuals are concerned not only with having money and property, but also status, attention, fame, a reputation for generosity, etc.’ (p.21), and 3) emotional work. The last two categories in particular are relevant…Both involve language, both in terms of the extensive use of speech, and teaching language to the child. In addition, both are *emotionally demanding* types of work.

One of the main contentions of Okita’s study was that, because of the gendered nature of childrearing, a great deal of the work related to bilingual childrearing undertaken by the minority language speaking mothers in her study was grossly underestimated. Such work is, to quote from the title of her book, “Invisible Work”. It is the author’s contention, however, that the language work of minority language speaking men in intermarried families may also be grossly underestimated (Jackson 2006a, 2006b).

Language work, as it pertains to the fathers in this study, can be understood to mean all of the strategies, decisions and practices undertaken by the fathers in their attempts to raise their children bilingually. Such strategies, decisions and practices include – but are not limited to – such matters as: formal schooling arrangements; language use patterns in the home; structured language teaching (or the provision of it); providing and participating in linguistic networks outside the home (e.g.: clubs, playgroups, visiting other minority language speaking families); exposing children to cultural and
linguistic material in the minority language (e.g.: television shows, videos, books, CDs, etc.); and the provision of trips to the minority language speaking country(s).

3 Strategies in Family Language Transmission

Current trends in sociological understanding suggest that one’s identity is socially constructed; that is, that it is both learned from, and negotiated during interactions with others (Leeds-Hurwitz 1). In view of this, it can be said that the family, initially at least, is the principal cultivator of one’s cultural identity. Our cultural identities, to be sure, are shaped by a range of components – for example, culinary, religious and musical traditions – and it has been shown that different ethnic and cultural groups afford such elements varying degrees of importance (Leeds-Hurwitz 6). Notably, regarding language specifically, Smolicz has argued that some cultural groups hold language to be a “core value” of their culture, while other groups do not (see also Clyne 2003: 64). Nevertheless, language is an integral facet of cultural identity for the vast majority of people (Heller). Language is, after all, the medium through which we socialize our children, and it can tell us a great deal about the cultural values of any given group.

Intermarried, interlingual families, by definition of course, are faced with the task of raising their children in two (or possibly multiple) languages. Yet while there exists a tendency to presume that children in interlingual families simply ‘pick up’ the minority language naturally, contemporary studies have demonstrated that mere exposure to two languages does not guarantee active bilingualism, and the attitudes and linguistic practices of parents are critical factors in determining bilingual development (De Houwer).

What motivates parents to attempt to raise their children bilingually anyway? One recent study (Lambert) has shown that parental motivation towards language transmission is determined by a range of variables. Lambert argues that it arises from the attitudes, needs and aspirations of parents in situations of language contact. These in turn are linked to the socio-political context and to the socio-historic dimensions of the transmission language itself. Some of the reasons underpinning family language transmission are the attainment of bilingualism for practical purposes, the preservation of ethnic identity, and the wish to maintain homeland culture, motives which are all tied to the communicative, symbolic, cognitive, and instrumental functions of language in society.

(2)

Parental language input is, of course, the central pillar of bilingual childrearing, and it often manifests in the implementation of a transmission strategy within the family domain. So let us now consider the more common strategies of family language transmission.
Depending on the context, a number of strategies are available to the interlingual family. Various researchers have categorized these strategies differently; therefore it is difficult to definitively say how many such strategies exist. Cunningham-Andersson and Andersson, for example, make the simplistic distinction between just three categories: one-parent-one-language (OPOL); minority language at home (ML@H); and artificial bilingualism. Conversely, researchers such as Barron-Hauwaert and Tokuhama-Espinosa both identify seven strategies that can be adopted by multilingual families. Some of these strategies do not fall into the parameters of this research project (e.g.: trilingual strategy, artificial strategy). Consequently, drawing eclectically from the works of Barron-Haewart, Tokuhama-Espinosa, and Romaine, the following section outlines four of the more commonly adopted strategies that potentially can be used by interlingual, intermarried families in Japan.

3.1 One-Parent-One-Language

The origins of this strategy can be attributed to French linguist Maurice Grammont, whose work was extended by Jules Ronjat. Contemporary well-known studies of OPOL in the Australian context include those of both Döpke and Saunders. As the name of this strategy superficially suggests, OPOL requires that the parents each speak their respective native languages to the child. OPOL relies on consistent and exclusive language separation. However, although the very name of this strategy appears self-explanatory, there are in fact, several variations of OPOL. Barron-Haewart (165-8) has divided this strategy into two main strands: OPOL-ML; and OPOL-mL.

OPOL-ML (majority language) is a variation of the strategy in which the majority language is the more dominant in the home. In such families, one parent is the sole source of the minority language. In the context of this study, this strategy describes families in which the parents each speak their respective native languages to the child, where the child speaks the respective native languages to each of his/her parents, where the parents speak Japanese to each other, and where the children also speak Japanese to each other. Stated simply, in OPOL-ML families, Japanese, as the community language, is also the dominant language in the household.

OPOL-mL, (minority language) on the other hand, is a strategy in which the minority language receives support from the non-native speaking parent. Although the parents use their respective native languages when communicating to the child, they speak to each other in the minority language. Of course, this approach requires that the both parents are proficient in the

---

3 For a comprehensive historical account of the development of OPOL, see Barron-Hauwaert’s recent work.
minority language. In the Japanese context, the parents speak their respective native languages with the child, but converse with each other in English.

### 3.2 Minority Language at Home

In this strategy, both parents and the child/ren use the minority language in the home. Therefore, in the context of this study, such families adopt an ‘English Only’ policy in the home. ML@H, as Barron-Hauwaert points out, can either

be employed temporarily as a way to establish one language in the early years, or used as a way to promote a language when living away from the country…In a mixed language couple, where the parents speak different languages…one parent willingly uses his or her second language at home or with the family to support the other partner’s minority language…Seeing a parent use two languages too is a great role model for the child.

(169)

It seems reasonable to assume that, in the Japanese context, the ML@H strategy is popular with families where the Japanese parent’s second language proficiency is higher than that of the non-Japanese parent’s Japanese ability.

### 3.3 Mixed Strategy

As the name suggests, in this strategy both the minority and majority languages are mixed freely. This strategy appears to be most prevalent in regions with large bilingual communities (such as Brittany, France and Catalonia, Spain), and Barron-Hauwaert reminds us that although this strategy is often associated negatively as producing the “symptoms of confused and impure language use”, she maintains that it is important to “distinguish between young children mixing by default, and the other child’s and adults specific and rule governed code-switching” (172-3). In the context of this study, it is reasonable to assume that the mixed strategy can only be employed effectively when both parents are proficient in both English and Japanese.

### 3.4 Time and Place

Less common than the other strategies, this approach establishes linguistic boundaries determined by either location or time. For example, a family might designate meal times for the exclusive use of the minority language. Similarly, the children might engage in a hobby such as ballet or karate, the instruction of which would be undertaken exclusively in the minority language. Sending children to ‘language summer camps’ can also be regarded as fitting into this strategy.
3.5 Language Strategies: A Dogmatic Myth

Despite the oft-held myth that consistent and rigid implementation of a single language strategy is the only method in which to raise children bilingually, it should be emphasised that most families in fact display language practices that indicate the inconsistent use of several of these strategies at one time or another (Tokuhama-Espinosa 57). Furthermore, most families come to realize the need for the family language system to be flexible enough to change with the altering circumstances of the family (Cunningham-Andersson and Andersson 27). It should also be noted that whilst there has been considerable debate as to which of these strategies is the “best” or most “effective”, it may not be possible to speak of these strategies in such terms. To be sure, Noguchi has questioned the significance of any one particular strategy, suggesting that

Research to date may have overemphasised the importance of strategies such as the one-person / one-language [OPOL] and the home language / community language [ML@H] systems to the exclusion of language use patterns involving bilinguality on the part of all family members.

(2001b: 267)

4 Research Instruments

This qualitative research project seeks to canvas the diversity and complexity of experiences, attitudes and patenting practices of native English speaking intermarried men in Japan. Pointedly, the study does not endeavour to identify significant commonalities amongst the participants that might ‘prove’ tendencies within the study’s context regarding bilingual childrearing. To the contrary, this study is more concerned with the “important atypical features, relationships, and happenings” relevant to the individual participants of the study (Stake 439).

The project is a collective case study comprising of eight native English speaking father-Japanese mother intermarried families residing in Japan. All participant families have multiple children between the ages of 4 and 13 years, one or more of whom currently attend elementary school. Parents participating in this project have been deliberately selected from diverse educational, employment, and second language proficiency backgrounds.

The three research instruments used to collect data from both the father and mother of each family participating in the study are briefly explained below.

4.1 Language Learning History & Use Questionnaire

The Language Learning History & Use Questionnaire (L.L.H.U.Q.) consists of twenty-eight multiple choice, closed, and open-ended questions. The fathers’ L.L.H.U.Q. is in English, whilst the mothers’ version is in Japanese. The questionnaire is comprised of four sections: Section A pertains to family
background; Section B to second language learning histories and proficiencies; Section C to family language use patterns; and Section D to attitudes and perceptions about being bilingual. The questionnaire is an eclectic mix of originally designed, replicated and modified questions from previous studies. 4 One of the main aims for administering the L.L.H.U.Q. is for the researcher to gain essential background information from which to frame specific probes for the subsequent in-depth interviews. The father and mother are advised to complete the questionnaires independently of each other. In an attempt to triangulate the data collected, it requires both self-reporting, as well as reporting of their spouse’s and children’s language proficiencies and use patterns.

4.2 Parental Activity Logbook

Regarding the second research instrument, the Parental Activity Logbook (P.A.L.), both parents are asked to record their activities over a consecutive seven-day period. The logbook requires parents to detail both when they are at work, and when they are at home. Significantly, the parents are requested to record what language they speak to the other members of the family in, and in what context. In addition to contextual language use patterns, it is hoped that patterns concerning the distribution of domestic labour and the amount and nature of parent-child interactions will emerge. Like the L.L.H.U.Q., the P.A.L. is designed to render the in-depth interviews more productive, in that it allows the researcher to identify specific recent episodes in the family’s lifestyle from which to formulate tangible interview questions. Furthermore, the P.A.L. serves as an additional triangulation tool in that it assists the researcher in verifying whether self-reported language work in the L.L.H.U.Q. is actually being undertaken.

4.3 In-depth Interview

Undoubtedly the richest source of data for this project is the in-depth interview. As stated previously, both the L.L.H.U.Q. and the P.A.L. are instruments designed to make the in-depth interviews as productive as possible. Although there are some deficiencies with interview data collection – namely the fact that the researcher’s presence may influence subject responses and that not all subjects are equally insightful or coherent – the principal merits of in-depth interviews are that they allow the researcher to actively guide the data collected, and that the subjects can provide historical information (Creswell 186). Furthermore, as Fontana and Frey (663) point out, interviews are not static, neutral tools for extracting data, but rather the source of “negotiated texts” that evolve from the

4 Previous studies from which questions were either replicated or modified for inclusion in the L.L.H.U.Q are: Barron-Hauwaert’s ‘Language Strategies for Bilingual Families’; Noguchi’s ‘Bilinguality and Bilingual Children in Japan’; and Yamamoto’s ‘Language Use in Interlingual Families’.
subjective interactions between interviewer and interviewee. In this sense, “by abandoning the attempt to treat respondents’ accounts as potentially “true” accounts of “reality”, we open up for analysis the culturally rich methods through which interviewers and interviewees, in concert, generate plausible accounts of the world” (Silverman 823).

Interviews are conducted in the homes of the participants, a setting that provides the researcher with an additional opportunity to observe the family in its natural setting. Parents are interviewed separately; the fathers in English, while the mothers may elect to participate in the interview in either English or Japanese. The interviews are audio recorded, and participants are given the opportunity to verify the accuracy of the transcripts.

5 The Case Study: Meet the Rogers Family

The Rogers are a family of four. They live in a suburban residential area of a major city in the Kansai region, Western Japan. The father, Rick, is a 40-year-old American university language instructor. His wife, Reiko, is also 40, and works part-time in the fitness industry. The Rogers have two children; a son, aged 12, and a daughter, aged 8. Rick has lived in Japan for approximately eleven and a half years. Rick and Reiko met and married in Japan. Shortly after the birth of their first child, the family resided in the United States for a period of four and a half years, but returned to Japan shortly after the birth of their second child.

Rick came to Japan “in order to get some teaching experience and to experience living abroad”. Rick took some introductory Japanese language classes in university, and did attend a Japanese language school briefly upon arriving in Japan. Rick self-reports as being an English dominant passive bilingual, and this evaluation is substantiated by Reiko’s description of his Japanese language ability. Though Rick can understand and partake in simple conversations in Japanese, he does not feel proficient enough in Japanese to use it with his children.

Reiko, on the other hand, is both self-described, and confirmed by Rick, as being a Japanese dominant active bilingual. Reiko attended junior college in the United States, as well as a private language school there. Reiko also studied English in a number of formal settings in Japan – high school, university, and a private language school. She self-reports her English ability to be at the ‘near-native’ level, an evaluation confirmed by Rick.

The Rogers’ son is reported by both parents as being a Japanese dominant active bilingual. Though English initially was his first language, language shift occurred, and Japanese is now the stronger of his two languages. The Rogers’ son’s Japanese ability is at the peer appropriate native level across all skill levels. Rick reports that his son’s ability in English is “highly proficient, but not at the native speaker level”, while Reiko reports her son is “functional in the language in everyday
situations”. The Rogers’ son attends a public elementary school where Japanese is the language of instruction. He does, however, have some opportunities to interact with other native English speakers in the neighbourhood.

Finally, the Rogers’ daughter is also described by both parents as being a Japanese dominant active bilingual. Though born in the United States, she moved to Japan before her speech in English began to develop. The Rogers’ daughter is reported by both parents to be at the peer appropriate native level in Japanese across all skill levels. Rick describes her oral/aural English proficiencies to be at the near native level, and her literacy skills to be rudimentary. Reiko describes her daughter’s English oral/aural skills to be “functional in everyday situations”, and her literacy skills to be minimal. Like her brother, the Rogers’ daughter attends a local public elementary school where Japanese is the medium of instruction. Until recently, she had also been interacting with other English speaking children at a Sunday children’s English reading group.

### 5.1 The Family Language Use Pattern

Although Rick describes English as the family language, the L.L.H.U.Q. indicates that the family language use pattern is relatively evenly distributed between English and Japanese. According to Rick’s questionnaire, the English: Japanese use ratio of each family member is recorded as follows: Rick – 95:5; Reiko – 40:60; Son – 50:50; and Daughter – 50:50. Reiko’s assessment generally supports Rick’s reporting. Her questionnaire approximates the English: Japanese use ratio of each family member to be: Rick – 90:10; Reiko – 40:60; Son – 40:60; and Daughter – 40:60.

Although applied inconsistently, the language strategy that best describes the Rogers family is OPOL – m.L. When analysing specific language dyads within the family, some interesting variations emerge. Firstly, with almost no exception, Rick and Reiko use English when speaking to each other. Given Reiko’s comparatively stronger second language proficiency, this is not surprising, and is consistent with findings in similar studies (Yamamoto 2001: 85). Rick also speaks English exclusively with both his son and his daughter. They both exclusively speak English to him. According to Rick, “[The children] always deal with me in English. They don’t like me speaking Japanese…[Daughter’s name deleted] would rather be a translator than have me speak Japanese to her friend”. This preference of the children is a little surprising and is contrary to the findings of several previous studies (Yamamoto 2001: 87).

For the four and a half years that the family lived in the United States, Reiko exclusively spoke English to the children. However, Reiko now tends to speak more Japanese with the children than English. The language dyad between Reiko and both of her children highlight the fact that
language use patterns are both fluid, and contextual. According to Reiko, “When Rick is around…usually I keep speaking English to the children too. They respond in Japanese, but…”

The language dyad between the two siblings is consistent with findings from similar studies (see, for example, Yamamoto 2001: 86). As the figure below illustrates, they predominantly use Japanese with each other, but occasionally converse in English.

![Diagram of Rogers Family Language Use Dyads](image)

**Figure 1.** Rogers Family Language Use Dyads

### 5.2 Language Work in the Rogers Family

An initial analysis of the Parental Activity Logbooks serves as a departure point from which to understand the type and amount of language work undertaken by both Rick and Reiko in the bilingual childrearing of their children. As stated previously, both parents were asked to simultaneously complete a logbook for the duration of one week. It is acknowledged that the week recorded might not have been representative of a ‘typical’ week in the Rogers household, however it did serve as a basis from which to target specific aspects of language work in the in-depth interviews. Importantly, the logbooks provide a contextual record of language use patterns of both parents.

The first significant finding to emerge from Rick’s logbook is that he exclusively spoke English to all members of the family in all contexts for the entire period of recording. To be sure, Rick indicated in his L.L.H.U.Q. that he speaks only English to his children, even in the presence of extended Japanese family members and friends. Some of the contexts in which Rick’s interaction with the children explicitly constitute language work include playing cards and other games with the children in English, watching television and movies together in English, chatting one-on-one with the children in English about child-centred topics, and interacting while cooking and shopping with the children in English. It should be noted that the P.A.L showed Rick to be at home and interacting with the children more than Reiko. This may be due to his relatively short and flexible working hours, the close proximity of his home to his office, and the fact that he tends to work a great deal from home. Nevertheless, Rick believes the efforts he has made have “been more toward biliteracy than

---

5 The Language Use Dyads graph layout has been adopted from Yamamoto 2001
bilingualism”. Rick occasionally reads to the children in English, and until recently, actively participated with the children in a Sunday reading group. Finally, when interviewed, one additional type of language work that Rick felt to be significant was the provision of extended trips to the United States. Rick explains, “The thing that has been helpful has been going back to the States…Going to Soccer Camp for a week. And that was really great, with all these English speaking kids and adults, all day long for a week … [and] just being around my mother and father…”

Reiko, in contrast, displays diverse and contextual language use patterns. According to her logbook, the contexts in which she interacts with the children in English tend to be activities when Rick is present (such as meal times). When guests are present, or Reiko and the children are out with friends, she uses Japanese. Although Reiko does not appear to engage in any structured language work, such as reading to the children in English, it would be incorrect to assume that she does not play a role in the bilingual upbringing of the children. Reiko’s consent to using English as the family language when Rick is present, thereby increasing the children’s exposure to English, obviously is a major component of the language work that she undertakes. Reiko’s L.L.H.U.Q. also indicates that “when the children are having problems with expressing something in English, [she] correct[s] them when [she] can”.

This and the previous section has sought, in part, to answer Joshua Fishman’s famous question “Who speaks what language to whom and when?” In the following section, however, a further interrogative to the riddle will be posed – ‘Why?’ Why do individuals make the decisions they do regarding language use? What motivates their language patterns? And how much agency do they possess in determining them? It is in the following section that these issues will be explored.

5.3 Explaining Language Use Patterns: The ‘Why?’ Factor

In examining possible variables that shape the Rogers’ bilingual childrearing practices, one must first examine the reasons why Rick and Reiko are attempting to raise their children bilingually.

Rick, in his L.L.H.U.Q. cites the central motivating factor towards bilingual childrearing as follows: “Because English/American culture and Japanese culture are a part of who both of them are. And because it should provide more opportunities from which they will be able to choose in the future”. Yet, there appears to be an even more pragmatic reason motivating the Rogers’ childrearing efforts. In the interview, Rick explains:

It wouldn’t really be possible to be a monolingual family in Japanese, because my Japanese isn’t good enough… For me, I don’t really have to, and I can’t do a lot of things in Japanese, especially…to try and deal with the family in a language that I am just not that good at, when they can speak English fine, it doesn’t make any
sense…And so, I guess my poor Japanese has been a boom to my children’s English.

Though the extent to which parental second language proficiency affects the degree of bilingualism reached by children has been actively debated in several studies (Kamada; Noguchi 2001b) such comments indicate that, for the Rogers family at least, Rick’s relatively low proficiency in the majority language has made it necessary to raise the children bilingually.

There is, of course a complementing factor motivating the use of English in the Rogers’ home. It could be argued that it is precisely because of Reiko’s high English proficiency that the family is able to function effectively in English. So not only does the minority language speaker’s low proficiency in the majority language appear to promote use of the minority language at home, it seems also reasonable to suggest that, in practice, high second language proficiency on the part of the majority language speaking parent also seems to enhance bilingual childrearing efforts.

In addition to parental second language proficiency, another possible factor influencing the Rogers’ language use patterns and bilingual childrearing strategy may indeed be related to the family’s long-term aspirations. In the L.L.H.U.Q., both Rick and Reiko explicitly expressed their hope that the children would complete their higher education in the United States. Furthermore, in the in-depth interview, Rick made specific mention of the fact that he is currently investigating his employment options in America, and that, for his family, there is, at the least, a distinct possibility that they might relocate to the United States in not too distant future. It seems reasonable to suggest then, that the family’s future aspirations and goals play a role in shaping family language use patterns and transmission plans. It seems likely that intermarried families in Japan that intend, at some point in the future, to emigrate have a stronger motivation towards bilingual childrearing than those families who intend on settling in Japan permanently.

One final theme to emerge from the Rogers’ case study relates to the gender of the minority language-speaking parent. There has been extensive debate on the issue, and several Japan specific studies have suggested, because of the socio-economic expectations placed upon fathers in Japan, intermarried families in which the father is the minority language speaker are less likely to raise active bilingual children than those families where the mother is the minority language speaker (Kamada). In light of the Rogers case study, this assumption warrants careful consideration. Data collected in the L.L.H.U.Q., the Parental Activity Logbooks, and the In-depth Interviews suggest that Rick spends at least the same amount of time with the children as does Reiko, and that he was actively involved in the majority of tasks associated with the language work of bilingual childrearing. In addition, this case study appears to support Döpke’s contention that quality interaction is more important in successful language transmission than the mere amount of language contact. To
summate, it seems more feasible to suggest that the gender of the minority language speaker is not as important as the resources, time and motivation of that parent to undertake the language work required in bilingual childrearing. Rick enjoys what could be described as a ‘family friendly’ employment situation, with generous vacation allotments coinciding with school holidays. Because he is able to spend several hours interacting with both children on a daily basis, he is well positioned to undertake the necessary language work in the raising of his two bilingual children.

6 Conclusion

This paper has outlined the tangible, real, and pivotal role that minority language speaking fathers can play in the bilingual childrearing process. After explaining the concept of language work within the family domain, the paper has highlighted some of the documented strategies used in the transmission of family languages. Importantly, the paper detailed a recently conducted case study of the Rogers family.

By implementing three research instruments, the L.L.H.U.Q., the P.A.L., and In-depth Interviews, data was collected regarding the type, amount and attitudes towards the language work performed by the father of the Rogers family, Rick. Whilst it should be acknowledged that the relative status of English as a ‘global language’ might have influenced the perspectives and practices of the informants, this case study identified several potential factors that may affect language work in bilingual childrearing.

The Rogers family described their family language transmission plan as being an inconsistent application of the One-Parent-One Language (OPOL – m.L.) strategy. It should be noted here that even though the central theoretical underpinning of OPOL is complete and consistent language separation (Döpke; Barron-Hauwaert), the Rogers have never applied this strategy rigidly. Although Rick only ever uses English when speaking to all members of the family, Reiko, on occasion will use English when addressing the children. Despite this inconsistency, both of the Rogers children have acquired high levels of proficiency in the English language. This suggests that the oft-touted importance of total language separation may not be as crucial to active bilingual development as previous studies would have us believe.

The Rogers case study also lends credence to the argument that parental second language ability can indeed influence the outcome of bilingual childrearing efforts. Rick’s minimal Japanese ability unquestionably acted as a motivating factor in the family’s bilingual childrearing efforts, and Reiko’s high proficiency in English made it possible for the family to function predominantly in
English. Furthermore, Rick’s limited Japanese ability also appears to have been an additional motivating factor in encouraging the children to use English when speaking to their father.

It can also be assumed, from the Rogers case study, that the future aspirations and goals of the family may indeed influence family language transmission strategies. Clearly, the distinct possibility that the Rogers would relocate to the United States in the future, as well as the parental aspirations that the children would complete their higher education in America appear to have made the acquisition of English a priority for this family.

The Rogers case study certainly raises several questions about the effect of the gender of the minority language speaking parent on the outcome of bilingual childrearing efforts. Rick was found to be both motivated and actively involved in the majority of the language work required of his children, and this case study suggests that the gender of the minority language speaking parent is less important in the bilingual childrearing process than the access to resources, time, and motivation of the parent to engage in the language work itself.

The Rogers Case Study is, of course, an interpretation of the experiences of just one family. It is necessary, therefore, to compare this case study with the other families participating in the larger research project before definitive findings can be drawn. The Rogers family have, however, provided an interesting lens through which to view the bilingual childrearing experiences of interlingual families, and this case study has helped to further theorize about the project as a whole.

Works cited


---. “‘Foreign fathers” – Native English speaking fathers’ contributions to bilingual child-rearing in intermarried families in Japan”. *New Voices: Cross-Cultural Encounters in the Australia-Japan Relationship.* The Japan Foundation. (Nov.) 2006b. 87-98.


ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE:
lockiejackson@hotmail.com
Author/s: Jackson, Lachlan

Title: ‘Talking tactics’ – fathers’ language work in bilingual childrearing in intermarried families in Japan

Date: 2007


Publication Status: Published

Persistent Link: http://hdl.handle.net/11343/34876

File Description: ‘Talking tactics’ – fathers’ language work in bilingual childrearing in intermarried families in Japan