

## STEPS ON THE PATH OF BILINGUALISM

SHEILA CLIFFE\*

### INTRODUCTION

It is a fact that bilingualism or trilingualism is a normal state for more than half the world's population. This occurs quite naturally, due to many different circumstances. For example, tribes or small language groups may inter-marry with other small, neighbouring groups or into a larger language group. In many countries one language is used in the home, and another is used for business, work or education. Colonization, occupation, displacement by famine or war, migration caused by a change in government, are all factors that can lead to bilingualism or a change in language use.

However, in some countries bilingualism is not thought of as a natural phenomenon and in some situations it can lead to distrust, or be seen as positively undesirable. To a certain extent the world still values breeding in both man and beast. The cost of a long pedigree, pure-bred dog being high, while that of a mixed dog of unknown parentage is low, or non-existent. Bilingualism smacks of displacement, immigration, of not belonging. For many immigrants the fight for integration means monolingualism with the surrounding culture. In this kind of situation the native language is often completely lost by the second or third generation. This is known as subtractive bilingualism.

### LANGUAGE POLICIES

Language policy has become a very political issue. California's bilingual education program has been attacked as being a way of keeping immigrants down rather than integrating them successfully. The students start out studying in their own language and then gradually change over to English, but lower grades and a high drop-out rate show that the program is not working as it was hoped. Many people want to go straight into the English classroom. It is hard for those who live in a strictly monolingual environment to imagine the amount of language shift that occurs in the lives of both

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\*Sheila CLIFFE, the Course of English Language & Literature

individuals and communities everyday. There are a very small minority of people who could bring up their children monolingually but choose to try to bring them up bilingually. There are many different reasons for this. They range from inter-racial marriage, to increasing opportunity on the job market. This kind of bilingualism is called additional bilingualism, it doesn't usually involve language loss, (as often occurs with immigration) and usually occurs among the educated classes in society. The French immersion education program in English speaking Canada is an example of promoting this kind of bilingualism. It is worth noting that many of the parents who involve themselves in bilingual child-raising, are themselves linguists or work with language in some capacity.

## **LANGUAGE ACQUISITION**

Psychologists were the first people to have anything to say about the way humans learn language. Sapir and Whorf proposed that language was necessary in order to think, because we think in language and language shapes our thoughts. Piaget saw it as a cognitive tool, enabling humans to do things and to manipulate their environment, Chomsky, a linguist, saw language acquisition as happening because of an innate system, set up in the brain. He called it LAD, the language acquisition device, but he couldn't explain what activated it. There remains much more that is unexplained than explained, and the difficulty of doing research on the brain is obvious. Every parent knows however that their child is both thinking and communicating long before being able to speak. It is not known in what way input affects the learning process, but it is known that the child will pick up the language of the surrounding environment, and become sensitive to the phonemes in that language.

Ellis has made a distinction between language learning and language acquisition that is helpful to understand. Language acquisition is what happens naturally and requires little or no conscious effort. This is what happens when babies learn their mother tongue. Language learning takes place in the classroom and requires conscious effort and metalinguistic awareness. Language learning may or may not lead to acquisition of the target language.

There are many factors that are known to affect language learning in some way. If all the factors could be controlled then it would be easy to try and discover how humans learn language, but the factors are all interacting and they cannot be controlled, which makes research, even observation, very difficult. Age is an important factor. People generally assume that small children are the fastest learners followed by teenagers and adults, who are thought to be incapable of native-speaker competence in a new language,

are the slowest. This is probably because almost everyone learns their first language with no apparent difficulty. Research does not actually support these views and there are several studies that suggest that young adults, who are able to bring some metalinguistic awareness and study to their learning, may fare better than children. Sex is known to be a factor in language learning and women usually have the edge over men. It is thought that an outgoing and assertive personality is a helpful factor and confidence seems to aid in the learning process. Motivation is a very important factor. It is not classified as only high or low, but also as integrative or instrumental. Instrumental motivation is motivation to learn a language for a specific motive, such as passing an exam or getting a job, whereas integrative motivation is concerned with being identified with the target language group. Integrative motivation seems to correlate with a higher level of language learning success. IQ or general intelligence is another factor and aptitude, a leaning towards languages, (probably closer to a musical level of intelligence, rather than general intelligence) is also an important factor. The relation of the first and target languages is also very important. It is thought to be much easier to learn a language close to ones own language: E. g. It will be easier to learn English from German, (another Indo-European language) than from Chinese, which is unrelated to English.

In this study it was also considered that the language use of the parents, which affects both amount of exposure and motivation, sibling position and amount of group experience were also significant factors.

## **THE STUDY**

It was decided to observe the language use in an English speaking international pre-school in Japan. The purpose was to try to pin-point any of the variable language learning factors that would predict the outcome for the children in terms of language learning. The international school situation is rather unusual in that the target language is not the language of the surrounding society.

## **THE SITUATION**

The preschool was an overtly christian group set up on the premises of an international christian school. The preschool was international in that the children were from many different language, cultural and racial backgrounds. The language of the preschool was English. It is important to remember that this was an immersion environment. The children were not there studying English. English was used as a means of communication. The teacher was not a language teacher. The teacher saw her purpose as

facilitating the children to be able to socialize and interact well with each other, teaching them to care about God, the world and each other and preparing the children to enter kindergarten.

The preschool ran five mornings each week for four hours. However not all children entered every day. Some children entered everyday and some entered on the same one or two days each week. There were nine children and the teacher present each day. The children were not being taught any specific academic skills, such as reading or doing arithmetic, though some of the children developed an interest in letters during the course of the year. The day would start with a period of free play and then there would be circle time. The children sang a good morning song and then had another song or story and looked at their calendar. After this the children would go outside if the weather was fine. If the weather was good they would spend up to two hours per day outside. One period was spent on the jungle gym and the other period was spent exploring and looking at the natural world, bugs, plants and other treasures. They would sometimes go for walks and would use the mini-gym for exercise when the weather was bad. Other activities the children were involved in were drawing and painting, craft activity, games and puzzles, singing and stories. Towards the end of the morning they would have a snack time together.

## **THE SUBJECTS**

The children were all three or four years of age on September 1st 1997. There were six boys and three girls in the group examined. Every child had had some previous English experience when the preschool started. Four of the children had two Japanese parents. Three had one Japanese parent and one native English speaking parent and two children had two English speaking parents. The profiles of the children follow. The profiles include age, sex, sibling position, language/cultural background and experience in that order. (C = Child.) The stronger language is written first.

C 1 3, Female, 3rd child with two older sisters. The child is from Canada. Both parents are English speaking Canadians recently arrived in Japan, from Switzerland. The child is an English speaker, but is accustomed to hearing other languages spoken. The child has regular summer trips back to Canada.

C 2 3, Male, 2nd child with one older sister. The child is from The United States of America. The mother is a Philippina and the father is an American. Both parents are English/Tagalog bilingual and occasionally speak in Tagalog. The family recently arrived in Japan from the States. The family has trips to the Philippines. The children



speak in English.

- C3 4, Female, 1st child with a younger sister. The child has a Japanese mother and an American father, with Japanese origins. (The father is a Japanese 2nd generation "nisei" from Hawaii.) The parents are both bilingual. The mother is Japanese/English bilingual and the father is English/Japanese bilingual. The family has spent some time in Hawaii but they now are resident in Japan. The children speak in Japanese and English.
- C4 3, Male, 1st child with a younger sister. The child has a British mother and a Japanese father. The mother is English/Japanese bilingual and the father is monolingual Japanese (with a little English receptive ability). The family is resident in Japan. The child speaks in Japanese and English.
- C5 4, Male, 3rd child with two older brothers. The child has a Japanese mother and a South African father. The mother is Japanese/English bilingual and the father is English/Japanese bilingual. The family is resident in Japan. The children are bilingual, the older boys are in an English school environment, and choose to speak in English.
- C6 4, Female, 1st child with a younger brother. The child has Japanese parents. Both parents are Japanese/English bilinguals. The child has grandparents who are long term residents of Hawaii. The family has frequent trips to Hawaii. The family is resident in Japan. The child is Japanese monolingual with some receptive English ability.
- C7 4, Male, 2nd child with an older sister. The child has Japanese parents. Both parents are Japanese/English bilinguals. The older sister is in an English school environment. The child is monolingual with some receptive English ability. The family has relations in Hawaii and have some trips to Hawaii. The family is resident in Japan.
- C8 4, Male, Only child. The child has Japanese parents. The parents are Japanese/English bilinguals with intermediate English ability. The child is monolingual Japanese with receptive English ability and a little English vocabulary. The family is resident in Japan.
- C9 3, Male, Only child. The child has Japanese parents. The parents are Japanese/English bilinguals with intermediate English ability. The child has had experience living in America as a baby but is now resident in Japan.

## METHOD

The intake of children was different each day and the data was collected on Tuesdays. This day was chosen as it seemed to have a good balance of sex, age and native and non-native English speakers. It was supposed that the linguistic data from a day with a higher proportion of non-native speakers would prove more variable and more interesting than on a day with a higher proportion of native speakers. Data collection was in the form of a questionnaire administered to the teacher at three points during the nine month academic year. The first questionnaire was given in October, the second one in February and the third one in June, (at the end of the academic year). The questionnaire reflects what the teacher believes is happening and although may not be reliable for statistical purposes, gives a good idea of the kinds of interaction that are happening in the classroom. In October a video was also taken but was felt to be a little obtrusive. It did not reveal interesting specimens of speech, as a class of nine three and four year olds is too noisy to record individual conversations.

The questions on the questionnaire related to three specific areas. The first area was communication between the teacher and the child. The second area was between the child and other children, or the child when playing alone, the third area was about general observable behaviour as related to language. The teacher answered in percentages of language use and sometimes added comments. The questions were as follows:

- Q 1 How much of your speech directly to this child is in English and how much is in Japanese?
- Q 2 How much of this child's speech directly to you is in English and how much is in Japanese?
- Q 3 How much of your speech does this child respond to as if he/she understands?
- Q 4 How much of this child's speech is in English when playing alone?
- Q 5 How much of this child's speech is in English when playing with other children?
- Q 6 Does this child graduate towards others of the same language background?
- Q 7 Does this child correct or translate his/her own speech?

- Q 8 Does this child correct or translate other children's speech?
- Q 9 Do you observe any changes in behaviour when the child changes languages? Aggressiveness etc. Explain.
- Q10 Do you observe any changes in preferred games when the child changes languages?
- Q11 Does the child change languages when angry, upset or sad?
- Q12 Any other comments about the child's language, pronunciation, grammar etc.

(See appendix for questions and answer chart together.)

## RESULTS

The results are very interesting and show very varied patterns for each child. The teacher appears to have tried to use only English as much as was possible and used a strategy of repeating in Japanese rather than just changing into Japanese when children didn't understand. The results for each child are discussed individually below.

C 1. As a native speaker of the target language she used and responded to English with complete understanding. The teacher commented in both October and February that she was using some Japanese phrases, e.g. "Kore nani?" (What is it?). Without any apparent effort to learn Japanese, she picked up the words from the environment. This also demonstrates that the Japanese speaking children are asking for names of things. This could be for one of two reasons. There may be objects that they don't know and they are asking for an explanation of the purpose of the object, or they are asking for English words for objects that they are using in their play. The latter explanation seems more likely, as there cannot be many strange objects that they don't know in their classroom environment. Unfortunately the child left the program at the end of March and there is no data for the final questionnaire.

C 2. This child is also a native speaker of the target language. This child is very sensitive and shy, and had recently been subjected to a major upheaval in his life, (the move to Japan from the U.S.A.) Also during the year, his mother had a new baby. The child took a long time to adjust to the group situation. His mother remained in the classroom for part of the morning, for a long period of time. Gradually he was able to separate from her and began to interact with the other children. He always responded

to everything in English and by the end of the year was showing a preference for English speaking playmates.

C 3. This child is a bilingual and started out by inserting Japanese verbs and nouns into her English. By February she had stopped doing this. She was using one hundred percent English to her teacher. She started out using about fifty percent of each language in her solitary play, but this went up to eighty percent English during the year. The child is able to play with English speakers in English and Japanese speakers in Japanese and appeared to show no preference. By the second questionnaire she was showing some metalinguistic awareness and was doing some translation or correction on her own and other children's language. Unfortunately this child became seriously ill and finished the program at the end of March.

C 4. This child is bilingual and responded to the teacher's English with English plus about ten percent Japanese, the teacher thought, but the child had pronunciation problems and started out very unclear in both languages. The child was able to play in English with English speakers and Japanese with Japanese speakers. Throughout the program he used about fifty percent English and Japanese in play, but went up to a hundred percent English with the teacher. By the second questionnaire the teacher commented that his pronunciation was improving. He played "Ultraman" in Japanese only, (an imaginative hero and monster game, from a popular Japanese television program), and showed a tendency to be angry in Japanese not English. Not in the second questionnaire, but by the third one he was doing correction and translation on his own and others' speech. By the end of the year he was beginning to share his thoughts in English.

C 5. This boy started out bilingual but difficult to understand with unclear pronunciation. At the start of the year he was using eighty percent English when playing with others and played alone in English. In the second questionnaire he still played alone in English but used English with English speakers and Japanese with Japanese speakers. In the last questionnaire the child was playing alone ninety percent in English and ninety percent in English with other children too. The child didn't show a preference for any language speaking play partner, (but with older siblings who play in English he seems to be happier in English), but this child got sad, angry or upset in Japanese. By the end of the year the child was doing some translating or correcting on his own and other children's language.

C 6. This girl is one of the children that the teacher used some Japanese repetition with.

The teacher started out by repeating thirty percent of utterances in Japanese and this went down to ten percent and finally zero. The child started out with a strong preference for Japanese. She spoke only about five percent English to the teacher and responded as if she understood only five percent of the time. The child's solitary play contained only two percent English and this went up to ten percent. Her English responses went up to fifty percent and remained there. Her apparent level of understanding went up to seventy percent. With other children her English content went up to twenty percent. This child showed a preference for the same language background playmate. By the second questionnaire she was translating or correcting her own language and she continued to do this, though she did not appear to correct or comment on other children's language use. By the end of the year she was constructing English sentences to share her ideas and the teacher commented that the child knew she could please the teacher by speaking in English. The teacher also observed some behavioural changes and noted that the child was quieter and more gentle when using English than when she used Japanese.

C 7. The teacher started out by using one hundred percent English with the child, later repeating ten percent in Japanese and then returning to complete English use. This boy used one hundred percent English with the teacher, but he would use avoidance rather than substitute a Japanese word in his English. If he couldn't say something in English, he would just shut up and not speak. The child's understanding went up from eighty to ninety percent of utterances. The child started off playing alone in English forty percent of the time but this went down and remained at ten percent. The child began to show a preference for similar language background playmates, but could use English with English speakers and Japanese with Japanese speakers. By the end of the year he was doing correction on his own and other children's language and the teacher commented that his utterances were longer than before.

C 8. With this child the teacher used one hundred percent English which went down to down to seventy five percent English only and then back up to one hundred percent with five percent explained in Japanese. The boy replied in English ninety percent of the time. This went down to fifty percent and then back up to ninety percent. His response as if he understood also went down from eighty percent to fifty and then back up to seventy percent. The figures for playing alone went down from forty percent to ten percent and stayed there. The figures for playing with others went down from twenty percent to ten percent and up to thirty percent. The child showed a preference for a similar language background playmate. By the end of the year the child was commenting or correcting his own language but not that of others. The teacher

commented that he was whinier in Japanese and used Japanese more when upset or angry. The teacher commented that he hadn't made the progress she had hoped. During the autumn a new baby was born in this house and the child showed some of the normal types of "regression" associated with this event. He tended to be upset easily and to be more argumentative than usual. By the end of the year the child seemed to be making progress again.

C 9. The teacher started out repeating fifty percent of utterances in Japanese for this child. The child responded in English only two percent of the time and in Japanese ninety-eight percent. Playing alone the child also used only about two percent English and didn't use it at all with other children. He did learn some English words and loved to shout, "No" and, "Don't", but unfortunately, after much trial and trouble on the part of the child, parent and teacher, the child withdrew from the program.

## CONCLUSIONS

It is very hard to draw any conclusions from this study because of the difficulty of controlling all the variable factors, and the fact that three of the children dropped out of the program. Also the sample is very small. There are however some interesting facts that do emerge from the study.

The teacher tries to use English as much as is possible and repeats in Japanese rather than substituting Japanese. This strategy appears to be effective as she has to do this less and less throughout the year.

With the exception of C 9 all the children make progress in the English language, and C 1 also manages to learn some Japanese. Other children with their questions are input providers for her. (Kore nani) etc. It is important to remember that the children are not having language lessons, they are just using English as a means of communication. This demonstrates Krashen's theory that children will naturally learn language if there is available input at the right level. This is a stage of a child's development when he or she is still developing the mother tongue, coming to grips with pronunciation, difficult grammar features and increasing vocabulary very rapidly.

C 3, C 4, C 5, and C 7, are all able, by the end of the year to switch languages and distinguish between a Japanese and an English situation. These children seem to have the highest level of bilingualism. Only C 4 starts out at three years of age, the others are already four, and it is possible that this ability is age related. By the end of the year some of the children are showing a preference for same language background partners. This

may indicate more language awareness, but also probably demonstrates the increasing importance of language in play. Younger children tend to play alone, side by side, but gradually they start to interact more and especially in imaginative play or games, language becomes more important. In the first questionnaire the teacher comments: "They tend to play with anyone with whom they can have fun, but if communication is a necessary part of their play, they will choose language partners, but if communication is not important, they don't seem to worry about it, and just play alongside each other, jabbering away, each to him/herself."

The children grow in metalinguistic awareness. The teacher comments about C 6 :

"She knows she can "please me" by speaking English."

Many of the children are making choices about which language to use and five of the children involve themselves in some kind of correction or translation of their own or other's language. Bilinguals appear to understand at a very young age, that language is a tool that they can manipulate and make choices about. The children also demonstrate different strategies, for example C 6 inserts Japanese nouns and verbs into her English but C 7 uses avoidance and says nothing if he doesn't know the English word.

It is interesting to compare the children that come from Japanese families, (both parents are Japanese.) These are C6, C7, C 8 and C9. Is it possible to predict which of these children will do well in an English environment? It is necessary to consider several factors. Age, experience and motivation could be strong predictors of which children will do well. In this study C 6 and C 7 made steady progress, C 8 made some progress and C 9 failed to continue. C 6 and C 7 live in Japan but both spend vacation time in Hawaii. They both probably associate English with meeting family members, holidays, good weather and the beach. These two children probably have a very positive image of English. C 7 has an older sibling in an English school and so is used to seeing English books and hearing English spoken in Japan. C 8 has a much more limited experience of English. He attends English speaking church once a week and in the year previous to the preschool year he attended English playgroup five mornings per week. This was a very positive experience for him. He was very fond of his teacher and was used to hearing English and playing with English speaking children. C 9 had experience living abroad, but as a baby. This may be recorded somewhere in his brain, but he appears to have lost any understanding of the language. He attends English speaking church once a week. For practical purposes, this was his first major encounter with English and also his first group experience. He was the youngest child of the four Japanese children. His situation



may be similar to that of C 8 the previous year. However this program may have been more demanding than the playgroup. The child would say each morning that he didn't want to go and he wasn't able to participate in the activities or follow instructions with the other children. Children often get used to the situation and start to enjoy it, but C 9 showed signs of severe stress and suffering. In April he start at a Japanese kindergarten and is doing very well. He still remembers this preschool experience and does not want to go to an English speaking playgroup now. It is possible that there is a threshold level of English ability, even receptive ability that is necessary in order to benefit from this kind of experience. Age could also have been a factor. C 9 may not have been developmentally ready for the social situation. Positive experiences appear to have a drastic effect on motivation and C 9 remains very averse to English. It is therefore crucial to make sure that early 2nd language experiences are positive ones.

## APPENDIX

### QUESTIONNAIRE

- Q 1 How much of your speech directly to this child is in English and how much is in Japanese?
- Q 2 How much of this child's speech directly to you is in English and how much is in Japanese?
- Q 3 How much of your speech does this child respond to as if he/she understands?
- Q 4 How much of this child's speech is in English when playing alone?
- Q 5 How much of this child's speech is in English when playing with other children?
- Q 6 Does this child graduate towards others of the same language background?
- Q 7 Does this child correct or translate his/her own speech?
- Q 8 Does this child correct or translate other children's speech?
- Q 9 Do you observe any changes in behaviour when the child changes languages?  
Aggressiveness etc. Explain.
- Q10 Do you observe any changes in preferred games when the child changes languages?
- Q11 Does the child change languages when angry, upset or sad?
- Q12 Any other comments about the child's language, pronunciation, grammar etc.



QUESTIONNAIRE No.1. OCTOBER. Answers in estimated percentages.

	C 1	C 2	C 3	C 4	C 5	C 6	C 7	C 8	C 9
Q 1	E 100	E 100	E 100	E 100	E 100	E100 (30 repeated in J)	E 100	E 100	E100 (50 repeated in J)
Q 2	E 100	E 100	E 90 J 10 Verbs and nouns	E 100	E 5 J 95	E 100	E 90 J 10 Verbs and nouns	E 2 J 98	Q 3
Q 3	100	100	95	100	100	5	80	80	2
Q 4	100	100	50	50	100	2	40	40	2
Q 5	100	100	50	50	80	0	40	20	0
Q 6									
Q 7									
Q 8									
Q 9			Same	Same	Same	Gentler in J	Same	much whinier in Japanese	
Q10			Same	Ultra m an in J	Same	Same	Same	Same	
Q11			N o ?	N o ?	N o	N o		Changes to J when angry	Uses E to shout "No" "Don't"
Q12	She's picking up and repeating J words. "Kore nani?"		Speaks E first, will switch to J if listener doesn't understand, and responds in J.	Uses E with E speakers and J with J speakers Hard to understand.	Uses E with E speakers and J with J speakers Hard to understand.	Knows she can "Please" me by speaking English.	If he doesn't know the word in E, he just doesn't say anything.	Tries really hard to just use E. Very clever.	Loves to speak his English words.

Comment: They tend to play with anyone with whom they can have fun. Of course, if communication is a necessary part of their play, they will choose, "language partners", but if communication isn't important they don't seem to worry about it, and just play alongside each other, jabbering away, each to him/herself.

QUESTIONNAIRE No.2. FEBRUARY. Answers in estimated percentages.

	C 1	C 2	C 3	C 4	C 5	C 6	C 7	C 8	C 9
Q 1	E 100	E 100	E 100	E 100	E 100	E 90 J 10	E 95 J 5	E 75 J 25	
Q 2	E 100	E 100	E 100	E 100 ?	E 100	E 50 J 50	E 100	E 50 J 50	
Q 3	100	100	100	100	100	75	90	50	
Q 4	100	100	80	50	100	10	10	10	
Q 5	100	100	E with E J with J	E with E J with J	E with E J with J	10	E with E J with J	10	
Q 6	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	
Q 7			Some	No		Some	No	Some	
Q 8			Some	No		No	No	No	
Q 9			No	No		More subdued in E.	No	No	
Q10			No	No		No	No	No	
Q11			No	Yes, an rgry inJ.		No		Yes, an rgry inJ.	
Q12	She has picked up several words, phrases of J.			Pronun- ciation is improv Ying.		Now creates/ uses sentenc- es in E.			

QUESTIONNAIRE No.3. FEBRUARY. Answers in estimated percentages.

	C 1	C 2	C 3	C 4	C 5	C 6	C 7	C 8	C 9
Q 1		E 100		E 100	E 100	E 100	E 100	E100 ( 5 reexplained in J)	
Q 2		E 100		E 100	E 100	E 50 J 50	E 90 10	Q 3	
		100		100	100	70	90	70	
Q 3		100		100	100	70	90	70	
Q 4		100		50	90	10	10	10	
Q 5		100		50	90	20	50	30	
Q 6		Yes		No	No	No	Yes	Yes	
Q 7				Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Q 8				Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Q 9									
Q10				Yes, uses J more of ten.				Yes, uses J more of ten.	
Q11									
Q12				Pronun- ciation much clearer. Often shares thoughts.		Uses E much more. Constr- ucts sentenc- es to share ideas.	Sentenc- es are longer now, at the end of the year.	Less E improv- ement than I had hoped.	

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