

**Implementing a successful bilingual educational  
program in Japan: support for minority languages  
and the present climate of bilingual education**

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Abstract: Although generally acknowledged as complex and multidimensional, bilingual education, when successful, plays an important role in maintaining and developing bilingualism, resulting in numerous benefits to those who undertake it. This essay will discuss the necessary components and principles of what is required to make a successful bilingual program by defining what bilingualism is as well as critically analysing the benefits and drawbacks of such a program, with pertinent examples relevant to the overall present education system in Japan and what support is offered to foreign students and migrants to assist them in maintaining their first language. This paper will also address the very need for effective bilingual programs and what a bilingual individual is defined as. A number of major theories such as L1-L2 interdependency, critical period hypothesis, and additive and subtractive bilingualism will be explored to substantiate weak and strong forms of bilingual education. Other relevant social, psycholinguistic and cultural factors will also be discussed as will their implications and how they relate to ensuring bilingual programs succeed for minority and majority language students in their aims and objectives.

Cummins and Swain (1986, p. 100) have defined a successful bilingual education program as one that “leads to the development and maintenance of bilingual skills, high levels of academic achievement and personal social psychological enrichment”, governed interestingly by three key principles: “first things first”, “bilingualism through monolingualism” and “bilingualism as a bonus”. Baker (2006, p. 231) also postulates that the aim of such a program is “not to simply produce bilingual and biliterate children,” but also encompasses “multiculturalism” whilst building equality in an enriching environment. In addition, Hamers and Blanc (1983, p. 189) describe bilingual education as “any system of school education in which, at a given time and for a varying amount of time, simultaneously or consecutively, instruction is planned and given in at least two languages”. This naturally excludes curricula in many school settings where a foreign language is taught specifically as a separate subject per se (although some scholars including Baker (2006) see this as a weak form of bilingual education). Besides these three conceptions of bilingual education, the term also refers to “the education of children whose home language is not English,” as in the U.S., or the education in two languages (Bialystok, 2001, p. 235).

Whilst the varying taxonomies, typologies and history of bilingual education are outside the scope of this essay, one particular taxonomy worth briefly mentioning is that of Fishman and Lovas (1970, as cited in Hamers and Blanc, 1983, p. 189), who list the following variables: “intensity, goal and status”, identifying four types of bilingual programs: transitional, mono-literate, partial bi-literate and total bi-literate. Naturally, bilingual programs generally attempt to address the desire of their participants to become bilingual, biliterate and ideally bicultural.

The complex and multidimensional nature of bilingualism presents challenges, yet thanks to increased and continued research in the field, the success of bilingual education in providing a great

deal of benefit is undisputed to its recipients. Complexity, though, has brought about misconceptions (Stafanakis, 1991, p. 139), exacerbated by varying definitions of what constitutes a bilingual person. One such definition simply states “the condition of knowing two languages rather than one”, implying high levels of proficiency in both languages (Valdes and Figueroa, 1994, p. 7).

The definition and classification of bilingualism is generally acknowledged as complex, partly because bilingualism is multidimensional. Moreover, to accurately determine whether an individual is proficient or not, in either one or two languages, needs the distinction of other dimensions, such as the aspect of the language, the macro skill, the languages’ interrelationship and the context in which the languages are generally used. Depending on whether one takes a maximalist or minimalistic approaches, definitions of bilingualism range as greatly as having native-like proficiency in two languages to simply being able to communicate expressions of meaning in another language (Bloomfield as cited in Cummins & Swain, 1986). By the very nature of language, accurately measuring the proficiency and competence of an individual in native and second languages is not a precise science. Psycholinguistic limitations exist in measuring bilingual competence, because in doing so requires an accurate measure of one’s mother language. Even a simple test of competence based on vocabulary alone presents a problem in that a measurement test focussing on simply one area fails to include other relevant areas to bilingualism, according to the various definitions provided.

Although it is acknowledged (Yamamoto, 2001) that children’s bilingual development is dependent on familial, environmental and socio-cultural factors, considerable research (Bialystok, 1991; Genesee, Crago & Paradis, 2004, as cited in Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 25, and Cummins, 2003, p. 63) shows “there is little support for the myth that learning more than one language in early

childhood is a problem for children.” There is also little evidence to suggest that the learning of two languages interferes in the linguistic development of children, not to mention cognitive and academic development. Here, one must consider the interconnectedness of first language acquisition as well as cognition and social awareness. Moreover, a heightened level of metalinguistic awareness has also been acknowledged, with Bialystok (1988, 1997) noting that the two differing channels of input may be beneficial in levels of metalinguistic aspects at a higher level than monolingual peers.

The argument for bilingual programs is inherently straightforward. Estimates on bilinguals and multilinguals throughout the world include numbers that exceed half the entire world population, with English counting for a third of those who speak it as a first or second language (Romaine, 1989; Crystal 1985 as cited in Fotos, n.d.). Such diversity dictates that not only does bilingual education greatly assist children in the contemporary world, but also that the need for ongoing research in this field will undoubtedly assist educators in the development of approaches and strategies to ensure more effective language learning.

Documented benefits abound in research in favour of bilingual programs. Cummins (2003, p. 61) states that bilingual programs bring about “positive effects on children’s linguistic and educational development,” while Skutnabb-Kangas (2000, p. 623) explains that such programs improve “opportunities for doing business, getting ahead, and maintaining privileges.” Cummins (2003) also believes in the benefits of a “deeper understanding of language and how to use it effectively” and assisting children in developing “more flexibility in their thinking as a result of processing information through two different languages.” Empirical evidence seems to sufficiently support the widespread advantages of bilingual and multilingual education programs acknowledged by many,

including Cummins (2003, p. 65), in stating that these programs “are necessary to develop” resources which are linguistic, cultural and intellectual as well as “their educational legitimacy no longer (being) in question.”

Before delving further into what is deemed necessary for a successful bilingual program, it is prudent to acknowledge more specific benefits, including some by Baker (2006, p. 254-255), as nine main advantages (without taking societal, ethnic or community aspects into account):

- 1) Higher levels of competence in both languages enabling effective and wider communication;
- 2) Enculturation
- 3) Biliteracy increasing one’s opportunities for literature, and a deeper understanding of history, traditions and viewpoints (Tse, 2001 as cited in Baker, 2006)
- 4) Increased classroom achievement
- 5) Higher levels of cognitive development
- 6) Increased self self-esteem, especially for minority children
- 7) A more secure identity at local, regional and national levels
- 8) Economic advantages resulting from increased employment opportunities
- 9) Its status as being viewed as desirable in numerous countries by educators, parents and policy makers

Commentators such as Yamamoto (2001) look at slightly different positive aspects of bilingualism that include practicality (for academic and employment advancement), interpersonal communication, cross-cultural understanding, character building and, of course, cognitive development, while Baker (2006) believes bilingualism also results in increased self-esteem, a more secure identity and, again, economic advantages. Others such as King and Mackay (2007) show that bilingualism provides a cognitive, academic and social advantage as well as enhanced creativity while heritage programs in particular go a long way in developing self-esteem and overall confidence.

Notwithstanding the different points of emphasis, it naturally seems sensible to note that a successful bilingual program would also be one that results in additive bilinguality, that is, when the individual “derives maximum benefit” in terms of cognitive development as a result of both languages being valued in the environment of the child (Hamers & Blanc, 1983, p. 264) and for second language education not to have any negative effects on the child’s primary language (L1). Lightbown and Spada (2006, p. 26) refer to this as “maintenance of the home language”, as well as “support and development”, something particularly pertinent in the event of the parents also being learners of the second language, resulting in higher levels of self-esteem and, as mentioned earlier, cognitive development.

Various researchers (Cummins & Swain, 1986; Swain & Lapkin, 1981; Barik & Swain, 1976a as cited in Cummins & Swain, 1986, and Barik & Swain, 1978, as cited in Hamers & Blanc, 1983, p. 201) see numerous other benefits resulting from additive bilingualism, such as superior first language skills, increased metalinguistic awareness, higher IQ and, once again, increased cognitive flexibility and development. Specifically on the topic of cognitive development, Baker (2006, p. 170) states that “information processing skills and education attainment may be developed through two languages”, as well as through the four linguistic macro skills, which “help the whole cognitive system to develop” to the extent that “when one or both languages are not functioning fully, cognitive functioning and academic performance may be negatively affected.”

The role parents play is a major one. In fact, the responsibility of teaching writing and reading in a minority language may fall entirely on the parents, and furthermore can be made challenging coupled with the real possibility of a scarcity and lack of accessibility to suitable resources outside the school system. Yamamoto (2001, p. 33) concurs that “exclusive use of language-X by both

parents promotes the child's active bilingualism," whereas in the event of only one parent speaking a minority language, such as English in a non-English speaking country, this often results in either passive or active bilingualism. Additionally, in the event of no particular strategy being employed by the parents, the result is often passive bilingualism or monolingualism.

The different forms of bilingual education include monolingual, weak and strong types. Before a more detailed look at different forms as well as bilingual education in the context of Japan is provided, it is highly relevant to briefly examine the main forms of weak and strong bilingual education and their societal, educational and language outcome aims. Before providing examples, a general overview is that strong bilingual education is one in which the home language of the student is cultivated whilst weak forms are those in which a student's language is effectively replaced for the purpose of assimilation and education (Baker, 2006). Skutnabb-Kangas (2000, p. 595) says weak forms of bilingual education are "the main pedagogical reason for illiteracy in the world", a particularly bold statement.

Weak forms of bilingual education primarily consist of three main forms, namely transitional, mainstream (with foreign language teaching) and separatist, of which the outcomes seem generally limited to only limited forms of bilingualism and, in the case of transitional, nothing more than relative monolingualism (Baker, 2006). Cummins (2003, p. 62), who ascertains the potential to harm learning as a direct consequence of weak forms, states that "when children are encouraged to reject their mother tongue and, consequently, its development stagnates, their personal and conceptual foundation for learning is undermined."

As far as this paper is concerned, any form of education that results in monolingualism is not a form

of bilingual education, referring to submersion, alternatively known as “sink-or-swim” schooling according to Skutnabb-Kangas (2000, p. 582) or segregationist forms by others. Stronger forms, though, when conducted successfully, result in both bilingualism and biliteracy, and these forms consist of predominately four types: (a) immersion, (b) maintenance/heritage, (c) two way/dual and (d) mainstream.

Although a very detailed discussion of the different weak and strong bilingual programs is beyond the scope of this essay, the main differences and outcomes for the aforementioned forms are relevant. To begin with, transitional bilingual education as the form with the least success in producing bilinguals concentrates on assimilation with minority children exposed solely to the majority language in the class, a classic example of subtractive bilingualism being the case of aboriginal children in the Northern Territory of Australia. Interestingly, transitional bilingual education is the “predominant model for programs in the United States” (Bialystok, 2001, p. 236). Another example of a weak form is separatist education in which minority children, through choice, undertake education in the minority language for reasons of autonomy, resulting in a limited form of bilingualism (Baker, 2006). In summary, differences between bilingual programs are essentially based on the following considerations: i) when the languages are introduced; ii) goals and objectives; iii) legal restrictions that may be in place regarding the program’s implementation; iv) eligibility and enrolment as well as v) whether the L2 is used by the minority or majority of the population (King & Mackay, 2007).

More importantly, educational programs producing successful bilinguals are the strong additive forms, as briefly introduced above. Generally, they are economically valuable according to Baker (2006, p. 288), resulting in “a more skilled, highly trained and employable workforce.” Immersion



programs for instance, whether they are 'early', 'middle'/'partial' or 'late,' depending on the age of introduction, include language-majority children with both languages used in the class with the societal aim of what Baker (2006, p. 216) describes as "pluralism and enrichment," resulting in high levels of both bilingualism, biliteracy and enculturation.

Although definitions differ, Genesee (1987, p.1) states that "at least 50 percent of instruction during a given academic year must be provided through the second language for the program to be regarded as immersion. Programs in which one subject and language arts are taught through the second language are generally identified as enriched second language programs."

In addressing the notion of bilingualism specifically in the context of Japan, one example which is unique in its approach is that of Katoh Gakuen located in Shizuoka. It is also unique in its sheer nature of such schools being few in number. By its own admission, the school offers a "partial" immersion program of between 50% to 80% of classes in English. An important point to note at this point is that immersion programs use the second language as the medium of instruction as opposed to the subject of instruction. Furthermore, immersion programs are generally based on the premise that the acquisition of language is most effective in contexts that are both motivating and meaningful.

Despite general concern as to whether immersion students can manage academically along with the challenges an additional language present, Cummins and Swain (1986, p. 38) explain that "immersion students perform as well as their English-instructed comparison groups." Baker (2006, p. 287) adds immersion "also tends to heighten achievement across the curriculum" and "raise the standards and performance of children." Skutnabb-Kangas (2000, p. 612) goes so far as to state

that immersion programs are essentially the only program in which bilingualism “has been achieved on a really large scale.” In research conducted by Cummins and Swain (1986), the conclusion of immersion was that both social and psychological impacts were positive in many respects including students’ perceptions of themselves and attitudes towards the target language group whilst not discounting their own cultural identity.

For immersion programs to have a high rate of success, a number of essential characteristics need to be employed. With immersion schools in many countries now in existence, research has shown success with characteristics of the ideal duration being between four to six years, the curriculum the same as monolingual students, a minimum allocation of 50% of instruction in L2, students of a similar pre-program proficiency and lastly, as Baker (2006, p. 305) puts it, “teacher enthusiasm and parental commitment.” Teacher enthusiasm is pivotal in their role as models, and with tasks performed in class focussing on authentic communication, the will to communicate is amplified. When dimensions of a shared vision, high expectations, mutual support and encouragement exist amongst the staff, leadership and parents of the school, along with an intellectually challenging curriculum that encompasses lessons “that have coherence, balance, breadth, relevance, progression and continuity”, the sustainability of the program is strengthened (Baker, 2006, p. 315).

Maintenance or heritage language programs (also known as “late exit transitional programs” (Austin, 2011, p. 18)) too are another strong form of bilingual programs with very similar societal and outcome aims to immersion. Similarly dual language programs that include both mixed language minority and majority children also result in success through the use of minority and majority languages in the classroom, with research in Canada showing that “classroom achievement is increased” (Baker, 2006, p. 255). Lastly, another recognised strong form is that of mainstream

bilingual programs where two majority languages are used with language majority children, once again resulting in a high level of bilingualism (Baker, 2006). Lastly, it is relevant to note also the importance of developing cultural awareness that could include “cultural rituals and traditions” “to foster minority language cultural awareness” (Baker, 2006, p. 298).

As for the Threshold Theory, first postulated by Tokunoma and Skutnabb-Kangas in 1977 (<http://www.unavarra.es/tel2l/eng/BilingEd.htm>), this suggests language development for bilinguals being one of moving through levels, i.e. moving from one threshold to another, with advantages of a cognitive type only resulting in the event of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> threshold being crossed. Baker (2006, p. 171) also concurs: “cognition and bilingualism is best explained by the idea of two thresholds”.

Moreover, it seems logical that these thresholds represent with important consequences what is required to avoid negative implications of learning more than one language. In other words, Cummins (1976, 1979, 1981 as cited in Hamers, 1983, p. 53) states that the thresholds are so critical that it is only possible to avoid cognitive deficiency by passing through one’s L1 competence and the “second-language competence threshold must be passed if bilinguality is to positively influence cognitive functioning.” While presenting an interesting concept, Cummins seems though to inadequately touch upon cognitive development and abilities of simultaneous bilingualism. Consequently, what precisely makes up a “cognitively demanding task” remains unclear with respect to language criteria in the discussion of threshold levels, leaving us to question the reasons behind why some attain certain thresholds whilst others do not (Hatoss, 2009). The consensus however is in support of the Threshold Theory, relevant to a clear understanding of measures to implement in bilingual programs (Bialystok, 1988; Clarkson & Galbraith, 1992; Clarkson, 1992; Dawe, 1983; Cummins, 2000b as cited in Baker, 2006).

For minority children though, the story is somewhat different in that by attempting to assimilate the child into the society in which he or she lives, the child's mother tongue abilities may suffer from its benefits being overlooked. Bilingual education, however, from an early age has "been shown to benefit minority children and improve their academic performance" (Hamers & Blanc, 1983, p. 213). It is in fact the goal of this mainstream assimilation that is in stark contrast to bilingual programs for majority children where the objective is bilingualism and biliteracy. Regardless of the aims, ultimately it is acknowledged that the mission of all bilingual schools (in comparison with mainstream education) "is to produce bilingual, biliterate and multicultural children" (Baker, 2006, p. 231), but for minority children, bilingual education is even more imperative, a notion supported by Skutnabb-Kangas (2000, p. 638) as he notes that "high levels of multilingualism and multiculturalism benefit every child, but for minority children, bilingualism is a necessary minimum."

Again, in reference to bilingual education in Japan, to whom may it be asked is bilingual education aimed? One increasingly important group is the growing number of returnees from abroad. Furthermore, the composition of the migrant population, i.e. again referring to minority children, suggests an increasing number of children with backgrounds from Brazil, China and Korea, predominately as a consequence of changes to the Immigration Control Act of Japan in 1990, perhaps resulting in what appears to be a somewhat modest change in ideology and growing albeit slow shift in acceptance and understanding towards the importance of bilingual programs.

Although not necessarily reflective of migrant status in that international students' duration and predominant objective may be purely to obtain a degree in Japan, statistics from the Japan Student

Services Organisation indicate an increasing trend of international students, defined as “a student from a foreign country who is receiving education at any Japanese university, graduate school, junior college, college of technology, professional training college or university preparatory courses and who resides in Japan with "college student" visa status, as defined in Annexed Table 1 of the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act” ([http://www.jasso.go.jp/statistics/intl\\_student/data08\\_e.html](http://www.jasso.go.jp/statistics/intl_student/data08_e.html)). Noteworthy to this essay is that some may extend their stay as immigrants, with the latest numbers obtainable showing 123,829 international students in Japan as of 1<sup>st</sup> May 2008, up 4.5% from the previous year, nationalities of which are as follows:

**Five Major Countries/Regions of Origin**

China	72,766	(2.1% up)
Republic of Korea	18,862	(9.2% up)
Taiwan	5,082	(8.5% up)
Vietnam	2,873	(11.3% up)
Malaysia	2,271	(5.8% up)

Noiri (as cited in Gordon, J. A., Fujita, H., Kariya T. and Tendre, G., 1998) interestingly argues that despite an increasingly diverse number of minority children in Japan, there is both a need and lack of bilingual programs presently in place. Returning to the aforementioned idea put forth that bilingualism is looked upon favourably in numerous countries, research completed by Hayashi (1999) reiterates this is also true in Japan, especially regarding English despite the country’s geographical isolation and the fact that it is a monolingual nation (Yamamoto, 2001, p. 70).

Although this may be presently the case, it is noteworthy to acknowledge that traditionally Japan also is thought of with pride as a culturally and linguistically homogeneous nation. With this in mind, the notion that bilingual education is solely based on English is not the case, though with its status of an international language, mainstream bilingual education in the context of Japan tends to be English.

With relation to the notion of Japan being a monolingual nation, Maher and Yashiro (1995, p. 4-5) believe this is predominately a consequence of a “lack of social-linguistic frameworks”, the Japanese language “a symbol of isolation, a lack of stratification” and in general a climate of “nationalism and singularity”. Interestingly, socio-linguistic studies of Japanese bilingualism are, to this day, somewhat rare, in that historically, bilingualism has been thought of as a field for administrators and policy makers and whilst this is true, further research by scholars could also be beneficial.

It is this homogeneity that is one cause of the reality that few Japanese ever attain true bilingualism or for that matter multilingualism. Interestingly, for comparison purposes, this is a similar situation in fact to the U.S. despite its diversity and widespread presence internationally, supported by Austin (2011, p. 9). Perhaps understandably, one relevant issue in the U.S. that does not apply to Japan is “the spread of English across the world and the growing numbers of English users...affects the widespread perception that learning other languages is not as important because English is ubiquitous”, leaving one to ponder why English bilinguals are not as common in Japan as in other countries throughout Asia and Europe (Austin, 2011, p. 11).

To mention isolation here is relevant. Isolation can potentially contribute to the challenges minority children face, whether it be in Japan or elsewhere, to maintain and develop the minority

language. Furuya and Carlson (n.d., p. 69) argue that “learning to read and write is thought to happen best when there is a community of peers to provide collaboration and incentive”, a notion few would dispute, and whilst in some communities such an issue may not be problematic, in others it is more acute. Hence, the importance of isolation as a consideration of challenges faced by minorities without adequate support for bilingual education is highly relevant.

As mentioned, children with backgrounds in Brazil as well as Brazilians with Japanese ancestry are also an increasingly large minority in Japan, with statistics from the Department of Justice (2010) showing a little over 230,000 registered in Japan, far more in fact than the entire number of individuals from Europe (60,975), North America (64,653), Oceania (13,548), and Africa (12,130) combined. To address the need for Brazilians to maintain Portuguese, numerous schools exist with instruction conducted entirely in Portuguese, a large number of which are located in the prefecture of Aichi, reflective of the fact that a large portion, some 58,000, resides in this prefecture and a similar number in the neighbouring prefecture of Shizuoka. Moreover, other main nationalities worth mentioning include migrants from the Philippines (210,181), South and North Korea (565,989) and the largest minority group being from China (687,156) totalling 2,134,151 foreigners of which it can safely be assumed that the majority have a different native language to that of Japanese. What is considered more concerning, is not that of the larger minority groups in Japan, but more importantly the smaller groups that are often overlooked in bilingual education. This is based on the incorrect assumption that bilingual education is either not warranted or needed, is simply lacking in existence, a lack of fundamentals of what is required for a successful bilingual program as well as accessibility geographically, especially for those outside major centres.

It should be emphasised that reasons for developing bilingual and biliterate skills are of particular

importance for migrants and this is no less so for the abovementioned migrant groups in Japan. The reality of life in Japan suggests societal discrimination with respect to employment and other opportunities often based on literacy levels lower than the average Japanese, leading often to a situation where migrants typically work in less skilled jobs, again a situation mirrored in the U.S. (Austin, 2011, p. 11).

Individual's proficiency in both languages is reliant on a number of factors in addition to the availability and attendance of bilingual education. This refers namely to levels of awareness, social status and identity issues. Psychological issues are also a relevant consideration, research of which conducted by Matsuo (as cited in Kuyama, K., Matsuo, S., Joko, A. T., Sasaki, M., Mitsui, T. & Ishii, E. (Ed.), 2000, p. 44) confirmed, summarised as "Japanese Brazilians seem to experience some psychological pressures with respect to proficiency in Japanese, since people generally think that true Japanese Brazilians should be able to speak Japanese."

However, Hayashi (1999) and others (Omaggio, 1993; Brisk, 1998) believe research undertaken on bilingualism in other countries outside Japan to be inadequate. This is based fundamentally on the linguistic dissimilarities between English and Japanese, namely phonology, syntax and pragmatics. Although such dissimilarities and their influences on success in bilingualism are beyond the scope of this essay, in the Japanese context of bilingual programs, the notions of environment and culture appear to play a somewhat significant role, specifically the school environment and the concept of peer pressure. Furthermore, in line with the generally indisputable correlation of language use and language proficiency, one challenge in the context of monolingual Japan is the opportunity to use the second language on a regular basis, aggravating the balance between abilities in the two languages in question. Hayashi (2005, p. 1028) concurs by stating "students tend to use the stronger language in



any context and, consequently, they lose the balance between the skills of the two languages.”

To elucidate on the role culture plays in Japan, where bilingualism is relatively in its infancy and relatively few speakers are truly bilingual, group society dictates humility. Where speaking competent English or another language could be construed as showing off one’s abilities, such behaviour is frowned upon. Hence, in summary, “the community does not create an environment in which bilingual students can use both languages even though community members have favourable attitudes toward the English abilities of students” (Hayashi, 2005, p. 1028; Yamamoto, 2001). In addition, although again beyond the scope of this essay, a more detailed analysis of bilingual Japanese would undoubtedly need to examine the mindset of bilingual individuals and what role the differences in language and culture play. Finally, another pertinent consideration in success in bilingualism in English and Japanese is that of the written script. Again as Bialystok (2001, p. 177) accurately points out, Japanese “is written as a morphography – the written symbols represent units of meaning and not units of sound” resulting in a different approach of Japanese speakers to the reading of English texts.

In addition to bilingual education students may receive, the role of the media too cannot be overlooked in the influence it plays in terms of exposure, once again confirming the many external factors that contribute to success in becoming bilingual. To elucidate, maintaining one’s L2 as a minority in Japan for instance could be seen as challenging with the mainstream media being conducted in entirety in Japanese, confirmed in research undertaken by Ishii (as cited in Kuyama, K., et al., 2000, p. 136), who conducted a survey through the National Language Research Institute aimed at investigating foreign students’ learning environments in Japan.

Relevant to any discussion and examination of the present climate of bilingual programs in Japan and what support is provided to assist students remaining bilingual warrants clarification that the 2<sup>nd</sup> language is not always and primarily designated as English. Historically, the vast majority of foreign students in Japan have been of Korean descent. At the opposite end of the spectrum in relation to support for other languages at least in mainstream education, the entire issue has been problematic. Noiri (as cited in Gordon, et. al) goes so far as to exemplify “under achievement and exclusion, racial abuse, loss of native language, low self-esteem and identity conflict” as a number of serious problems faced as what she sees as “forced assimilation and inequality”. Moreover, Noiri (as cited in Gordon, et. al) again suggests a tendency amongst Japanese schools to “neglect diversity and inequality” “that reflects their family and community backgrounds” ever since the enactment of a new Education Act by the Minister of Education, Culture and Sports following World War II.

The availability of international schools, of which 25 are presently affiliated with the Japan Council of International Schools (<http://www.jcis.jp/>), may also come to mind in discussions on bilingual education in Japan. It is interesting to note the terminology referring to schools that provide instruction in English as international schools whilst other schools that cater to minorities are referred to simply as Chinese, Korean or Portuguese / Brazilian schools for instance. However, for the overwhelming majority of students including minority children, enrolment in comparison to mainstream schools is low. Yamamoto (2001, p. 63) understandably puts this as a result of “poor accessibility of such schools in regard to number, location, and expense.” As for cost, a survey conducted by the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture in 1997 concluded that at all levels and ages, international schools were considerably more than both mainstream and private (Japanese-medium) schools for the year 1994 (Yamamoto, 2001, p. 66). A final word on international schools warrants comment regarding the somewhat ambiguous status, by prefectural

governments throughout Japan as either ‘miscellaneous schools’ or alternatively “institutions similar to”, resulting in an official status which is disadvantageous in terms of discouraging parents from enrolling for fear of problematic issues that may arise when advancing through the Japanese education system.

There are numerous important factors, though, that shape bilingual education, relevant to this discussion as well as pertinent to an analysis of ensuring success both in Japan and overseas. Some factors are political, economic, demographical, social, ideological, historical, social psychological and of course educational (Hamers & Blanc, 1983). Ultimately though, in deciding priorities for bilingual education and what policies thus dictate curricula, even international bodies such as UNESCO (1953, as cited in Hamers & Blanc, 1983, p. 192) emphasised “the relevance of the mother tongue for children’s development” with every child to have “the right to be educated through his own vernacular”, equally important for minorities and migrants in Japan.

More generally speaking, bilingual education should also take into consideration and establish goals whereby the student is able to achieve proficiency to support their learning in an academic setting. This is not just where language proficiency results in skills that are essential, for instance, in daily life and conversation. More specifically, the concepts of Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) to denote language development pertinent to course related content necessary for success in an educational setting, are relevant issues, first examined by Jim Cummins. Interestingly, research conducted by Thomas and Collier (1995 as cited in Haynes, n.d.) states that CALP skills can in fact take up to 7 to 10 years to properly acquire, the reason being also that such skills require “comparing, classifying, synthesizing, evaluating, and inferring” for context reduced tasks and not just the acquisition of lexicon.

In fact, it is the interdependency theory that the above points correlate to in that according to this theory, L2 development is dependent on the development of L1, with a strong relationship between the two, i.e. “cognitive academic knowledge is held in common storage and underlies the ability to understand or express it in either language given adequate levels of linguistic proficiency in both languages” (Cummins, 1981b as cited in Cummins and Swain, 1986, p. 39) or in other words, the fact that “knowledge and skills transfer across languages” (Cummins, 2003, p. 62). As to what this refers to, Cummins (2003, p. 63) specifically states:

There is transfer across languages in academic and literacy skills such as knowing how to distinguish the main idea from the supporting details of a written passage or story, identifying cause and effect, distinguishing fact from opinion, and mapping out the sequence of events in a story or historical account.

Again, with respect to BICS and CALP, it is believed that skills that are more cognitively demanding, i.e. CALP are more easily transferred whilst BICS are not, these transfers are able to work in both directions. It is in bilingual education especially that BICS and CALP need careful consideration as without ample instruction and emphasis placed on L1, L2 development will occur only at a disadvantage, i.e. “that developing full proficiency in the first language promotes the same in the second language” (Cummins & Swain, 1986, p. 103). In short, when bilingual programs are successful in providing an environment that enables full use of both languages, as Cummins (2003, p. 62) says, “both languages nurture each other”. Therefore, to summarise, it is imperative that bilingual programs ensure the development of both BICS and CALP is undertaken.

By developing proficiency in the first language means skills such as an ability to infer abstract relationships and to conceptualise, something that can be transferred successfully into other

languages. In considering this fully, it is the development of one's first language that actually enhances the same such functions in the second language, requiring sufficient time and effort to developing the mother tongue for positive pedagogic, psychological and sociolinguistic advantages (Cummins & Swain, 1986).

Of particular importance to bilingual education in a pragmatic sense are social psychological factors that have brought about hypotheses to be discussed briefly here. For simultaneous bilinguals, there is the added benefit of already having literacy skills which can simply be built upon. This makes it easier to "develop an additive form of bilinguality" as opposed to monolingual children who when beginning bilingual education have to then "acquire the primary communicative skills in L2 at the same time as the literacy skills in L2" (Hamers & Blanc, 1983, p. 196). It seems in the case of having little exposure to or knowledge of L2 prior to the commencement of bilingual education, less analytic representation would exist and "the task of acquiring literacy skills is harder" (Hamers & Blanc, 1983, p. 196). Ultimately, as Hamers and Blanc (1983, p. 213) appropriately summarise, it seems evident that "for the child to benefit from a bilingual experience, both languages must be valorised around him."

In looking at age and the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH), although it is generally acknowledged that starting to learn a language generally results in more success when measured purely by proficiency, it does not on the other hand necessarily correspond to the notion that children are better learners of language than adults. Research has shown this is the case "on the basis of the interdependence principal that older learners who are more cognitively mature and whose L1 proficiency is better developed would acquire cognitively demanding aspects of L2 proficiency more rapidly than younger learners" with research undertaken by Cummins (1981c), Genesee (1978c) and

Krashen et al. (1979 all as cited in Cummins & Swain, 1986, p. 87) attests to.

CPH makes an argument for language acquisition to ideally occur earlier than later because “beyond the critical period, (language learning) will be qualitatively different from childhood language acquisition” (Hamers and Blanc, 2000, p. 74-75). Ultimately though, regardless of the form of bilingual education, the importance of the child’s first language cannot be underestimated and according to Cummins & Swain (1986, p. 97) is “critically important to his or her psychological, linguistic and cognitive well-being.”

As for the use of languages in the curriculum, in order for each language to be utilised to its fullest, again Cummins and Swain (1986, p. 97) believe they should be used separately as opposed to concurrently, which correlates strongly with thresholds as previously discussed. This is so these thresholds are achieved as well as ensuring a “balance of language use: pedagogically, psychologically and sociolinguistically.” In any event, for bilingual programs to succeed, Cummins and Swain (1986, p. 98) succinctly state: “a strong second programme for majority language children; a strong first language programme for minority language children.”

However, due to the controversial nature of this concept, no definite age has yet been determined from where L2 acquisition is deemed as unrealistic to the extent that native-like fluency becomes therefore impossible. Nevertheless, by the same token, it is generally acknowledged that older learners (generally after the age of puberty) struggle especially with the aspect of phonological features of language, i.e. pronunciation, more so than morphology, syntax and semantics (Spinney, 1999). Lightbown and Spada (2007, p. 68) state older learners need to draw on “more general learning abilities”, that some linguists believe are not as effective as other abilities in the acquisition

of language and others such as Hoffman (1991, p. 35) boldly suggest “it is not possible to find solid proof that children are better than adults at acquiring a second language.”

It is relevant to look at possible reasons for CPH and the seeming decline in adults’ ability in the area of SLA. Cook (2001) cites physical factors from the neurolinguistics standpoint of lateralisation, social factors including interactional differences in adults and children and cognitive differences. Once again though, with its controversial nature, clear-cut evidence and argument one way or the other is debatable, yet it is still contended that age is primarily the most significant factor in the success of SLA. Instead of unequivocally asserting a particular age when the critical period ends, the following idea put forward by Ellis (1997, p. 68) seems indeed sensible:

However, there does not appear to be a sudden cut-off age, beyond which full competence is impossible. Rather, the capacity to achieve full competence seems to decline gradually, becoming complete by about the age of sixteen. Interestingly, age of arrival is a much better predictor of ultimate achievement than the number of years of exposure to the target language.

In order to maintain diversity that is cultural and linguistic, essential in this day and age where language survival is in a precarious situation, careful language planning of bilingual programs is essential (Grenoble & Whaley, 1998 as cited in Baker, 2006, p. 45). Ultimately the responsibility to provide successful bilingual programs and comprehensive education is paramount, no better summed up by Baker (1995, p. 35) in his statement, “Children are born ready to become bilinguals and multilinguals. Yet we deny many children the right to develop bilingually and multilingually.”

Finally, it is highly relevant to this essay to examine general principles of successful bilingual education, regardless of the form. This includes but is not limited to both languages at the school in question having equal status, with the school’s overriding ethos in fostering these languages to be

bilingual, as well as ensuring staff are on the whole bilingual themselves, not forgetting the importance of the languages themselves being taught as specific subjects and not simply as part of the curricula (Christian et al., 1997; Cloud et al., 2000; Lindholm-Leary, 2001, 2005; Soltero, 2004; Gomez et al., 2005, Howard et al., 2005 as cited in Baker, 2006, p. 232-233).

It is with these principles as well as a supportive community and parental group that effective bilingual education can come to fruition. This is also not to discount the fact that to successfully implement a bilingual program also requires socio-political issues to be addressed, just as important as psycholinguistic issues (Cummins, 2003). In summary, a supportive community and parental group, as well as communities and networks of a social nature cannot be overemphasised as crucial elements in the development of bilingualism and biculturalism. It is interesting to note that for bilingual education to result in the greatest development possible of language skills, research points to a minimum length of four or five years (as with immersion), and in compartmentalising each language in instruction, high levels of success in bilingual education are achievable.

Ultimately though, schools should be selected by students and parents alike on philosophy, transparent objectives, a sound curriculum, active use of the languages, the employment of teachers who are well qualified and experienced as well as suitable materials and an open-door policy that encourages prospective parents to observe the school as is.

In consideration of the future in the context of Japan, challenges abound both at macro and micro levels. For the individual migrant for instance, access to bilingual education resulting in additive bilingualism requires a great number of variables, often unavailable or not properly understood. The present odds tend in fact to favour an outcome of subtractive bilingualism as a consequence of a



lack of adequate educational programs in place and overall understanding of what is required for success. In spite of honourable intentions that conversely favour internationalisation including increased immigration in Japan, albeit at comparatively low levels, a need still exists for a better understanding, articulation and examination of bilingual education and what investments at governmental levels are prepared to be made. As Maher and Yashiro (1995, p. 15) attest, “linguistic diversity is a great asset to the global community” and with further research and implementation of bilingual programs based on sound principles as outlined in this paper, Japan will undoubtedly be in a better position to take advantage of such linguistic diversity and foreign language proficiency.

In conclusion, this essay has surveyed the necessary principles and components of successful bilingual programs as well as the implications of strong and weak forms and their relative success in attaining bilingualism and biliteracy. Although bilingualism is acknowledged as a highly complex field with numerous external factors also playing a part, this essay has clearly shown that the majority of research concludes that bilingual education is indeed beneficial through the analysis of major theories that include critical period hypothesis, additive and subtractive bilingualism, BICS and CALP and L1-L2 interdependency. Further discussion in this field would benefit from an examination of proficiency, landmarks for language acquisition, cognition and the role of phonological awareness. Pertinent examples relevant to the present education system in Japan and what support is offered to foreign students to assist them in maintaining their first language have also been examined and critically analysed in addition to an overview of migrants’ bilingualism, again in the context of Japan. Finally, other relevant social and cultural factors have been evaluated in addition to what is required to implement and maintain these bilingual educational programs and ultimately ensure their future success.

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