The Relationship Between Bilingual Experience in a Host Country and Educational Readjustment in One's Home Country: A Case of Japanese Children Returning From the U.S.

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This paper examines the relationship between Japanese children's bilingual experience in the United States and the process of readjustment to schooling after their return to Japan. To clarify the language status in a bilingual environment, James Cummins' distinction between BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) and CALP (Cognitive / Academic Language Proficiency) was used for the two languages involved, i.e., home language (L1) to be maintained, and host language (L2) to be acquired.

The subjects chosen were Japanese returnee children from the United States with at least one-year experience in an American local school. Their parents were asked to respond to the questionnaire regarding maintenance of communication skills in L1 (BICS L1), maintenance of schooling in L1 (CALP L1), acquisition of communication skills in L2 (BICS L2), adjustment to schooling in L2 (CALP L2) in a host country, and the educational readjustment process in their home country. Correlational studies were conducted on the data collected for long-stayers and short-stayers respectively.

The results suggest that: (1) there are no direct relationships between the maintenance of BICS L1 and/or CALP L1 and the readjustment process, (2) level of CALP L2 attained is a contributing factor to successful readjustment, and (3) a combination of CALP L2 and BICS L1 seems to be a multiple factor contributing to successful readjustment particularly for long-stayers.

1. Introduction

A bilingual environment poses a problematic area of study in connection with first language (L1) maintenance and second language (L2) acquisition. When school-aged children are involved, schooling perhaps is the most immediate and practical issue. In the United States, issues surrounding their acquisition of L2, and the long-term effects of educational treatment...
have been examined by many researchers in terms of many factors such as: (1) age of arrival and length of stay (Ramsey and Write 1974, Oyama 1976, Snow and Hoefnagel–Hohle 1978, Cummins 1980a), (2) socio-economic and socio-cultural factors (Schumann 1976, Gardner 1980), (3) intelligence (Ianco–Worrall 1972, Genesee 1976, MacNab 1979), (4) school and home language (Mackey 1972, Sarmad 1976), (5) language dominance (Burt and Dulay 1978), (6) maintenance and loss of L1 (Ramirez and Politzer 1975, Okamura-Burchard 1985), to list a few. As America has a wide variety of diverse cultures and languages, the scope and gravity of the issues vary a great deal.

The number of school-aged Japanese children temporarily residing in the United States has been steadily increasing. According to the latest statistics available, 20,077 Japanese children (elementary and junior-high school children) were staying in the United States in 1989. Among them, 781 (412 elementary school children and 369 junior high school children) attended full-time Japanese schools and 15,571 children (11,997 elementary school children and 3,574 junior high school children) attended Japanese week-end schools throughout the United States. (Monbusho 1990) The statistics reveal that a significant three-fourths of the Japanese youngsters maintain access to schooling in L1, while attending the local school in L2. It is quite appropriate here to consider some of the group specific characteristics underlying these figures. In the discussion of socio-economic status, Japanese children in the United States are mostly “sons and daughters of white-collar workers and professionals” who are regarded as “mainstay in the Japanese society”. (Okamura-Birchard, 1985: 63-64) In addition, their stay in the United States is definably temporary, and "not only the parents but also the children themselves are very aware” of it. (Okamura-Birchard, 1985: 64) As a result, the maintenance of L1 plays a very important role in their bilingual environment. Since the Japanese educational structure is quite competitive and rigid, the goal of maintenance of L1 is set at helping them in attaining skills necessary for immediate readjustment to Japanese schooling after returning. In sum, the maintenance of L1 is more educationally-oriented than culturally or linguistically-oriented. As varying degrees of exposure to L2 in the host country is inevitable in their daily life and school setting (Tojo 1991), the confrontation of two languages gives very intricate problems to bilingual children in various degrees of intensity. The question to be asked is, how effective is it for these students to be involved in Japanese-style schooling in a totally different environment, where another language is involved.

Back home in Japan, where returnees from abroad form a sizable population (11,445 in 1989, including elementary, junior high and senior high school students)(Monbusho 1990), much attention has been drawn to their educational readjustment. It is quite unfortunate, however, that their linguistic confusion, especially immediately after their return, is usually given a negative evaluation by teachers and other educational personnel. In an attempt to view the positive and additive side of the issue, a longitudinal examination of their bilingual experience is much in need. The purpose of this paper is to relate Japanese children's bilingual experience in
a host country to the process of readjustment to schooling back in their home country, and to examine factors which contribute to successful social re-entry and educational readjustment.

For this task, clarification of student's individual language status in their host country is the starting point. To clarify the language status which children have in their respective bilingual environments, James Cummins' distinction of language proficiency is of great use. (Cummins 1980b) He analyzes language proficiency into two factors: BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills), and CALP (Cognitive / Academic Language Proficiency). BICS, he contends, is a "manifestation of language in interpersonal communicative contexts", which includes accent, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and overall oral fluency. It is assumed that everyone is able to acquire certain communicative aspects of L2 regardless of IQ or academic aptitude. CALP, on the other hand, he says is "a manipulation of language in decontextualized academic situations", and determines cognitive/literacy skills and academic achievement. The idea of distinguishing between those two dimensions of language proficiency has been shared by other researchers, since BICS corresponds to "natural communication tasks" (Burt and Dulay, 1978) and CALP corresponds to "global language proficiency" (Oller, 1979), "linguistic manipulation tasks" and "metalinguistic awareness" (Burt and Dulay, 1978). In sum, BICS is a factor which represents one's performance in interpersonal communication, while CALP is a factor which represents one's performance in academic tasks or school work.

Although these two dimensions of language proficiency have been discussed by many researchers, no attempt has yet been made to measure them. This paper attempts to measure interpersonal communication skills and cognitive / academic proficiency, and examine the relationship between them. When Cummins' notion is applied to the two languages involved for Japanese youngsters staying in the United States, it allows us to present four factors to be examined: BICS L1 (maintenance of Japanese interpersonal communication skills), CALP L1 (maintenance of academic ability and schooling in Japanese), BICS L2 (acquisition of English interpersonal communication skills), and CALP L2 (adjustment to schooling in English). In this paper, how these four factors relate to the educational readjustment process of Japanese students back in Japan will be examined, in attempt to discover important educational or linguistic principles which may have relevance to improving both ESL and EFL instruction.

2. Method

40 Japanese children who recently returned from the United States after at least one full-year of experience in American public schools were chosen for the present study. Most of them were sons and daughters of professionals, and their relocation was entirely due to their parent's temporary job assignment in the United States. A majority of the subjects resided in eastern states such as New York, New Jersey and Massachusetts. 45 percent of them attended a Japanese weekend school during their stay, and none attended a full-time Japanese school.

Their age of arrival in the host country ranges from 2 years to 9 years old (mean=6.3 years
old) and their length of stay varies from 15 months to 7 years (mean = 25.8 months). They have been back in Japan for 11 months to 3 years now (mean = 24.6 months), and attend local public schools scattered throughout Japan.

The questionnaire was sent to the subjects in July, 1991. To increase the reliability of the answers, parents of the subject were asked to respond to the questions on behalf of the subject.

The questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first part was devoted to the subject’s linguistic status in the host country, and the second part concerns their readjustment to Japanese schooling after their return. In the first section, questions were made up regarding these four scales: BICS L1, CALP L1, BICS L2 and CALP L2. For each scale, sub-categories were carefully chosen from the available literature and research results relating to this issue.

Responses were made by respondents choosing a value from 0 - 4 on graded scales for each statement, ranging from “to a great extent” (counted as 4 points), to “not at all” (counted as 0 points). Each scale is explained in detail below.

(1) BICS L1: The scale consists of 10 positively worded items about the maintenance of interpersonal communication skills in Japanese during their stay in the United States. A high score on this measure (maximum = 40) indicates that the subject was intensively engaged in the maintenance of interpersonal communication in Japanese.

(2) CALP L1: The scale consists of 10 positively worded items about the maintenance of schooling (academic work) in Japanese. A high score on this scale (maximum = 40) indicates that the subject was engaged in cognitive / academic work in Japanese. Engagement in cognitive /academic work was not limited to formal settings such as correspondence education or a week-end school. It was also extended to include informal settings such as home-instruction by parents.

(3) BICS L2: The scale consists of 8 positively worded items about the acquisition of interpersonal communication skills in English. A high score on this scale (maximum = 32) indicates that the subject was in a second language acquisition-rich environment, and was supposedly very successful in the acquisition task.

(4) CALP L2: The scale consists of 8 positively worded items about their adjustment to schooling in English. A high score on this scale (maximum = 32) indicates that the child was successfully engaged in school work in English, and his/her cognition in L2 had been established.

In the second part, the readjustment process in Japan was examined. The readjustment scale consists of 15 positively worded items about the process of readjustment to schooling in Japan.

A high score on this “Readjustment Index” scale (maximum = 60), indicates that the child has been very successful in readjusting to schooling in Japan. To consider overall readjustment to schooling, in this section, social and disciplinary factors as well as cognitive and academic factors were included. To control the data, all subjects were asked about their language and readjustment situation approximately one year after the return.

Using a computer program, correlational studies were conducted between these four factors
and students' performance in readjustment process. As the effect of length of stay is usually a discriminating factor (Ramsey and Wright 1974), the subjects were divided into "Long-Stayers" (more than 2 years' stay), and "Short-Stayers" (less than 2 years' stay).

For sample questions, see Appendix.

3. Theoretical Framework

Practically speaking, there are numerous possible combinations due to having five factors in the present correlational study. In order to examine only the meaningful correlations, the following theoretical framework were constructed.

First of all, it is not very difficult to assume that if the maintenance of L1 is done well, and if the child practically looses none of L1 proficiency during his/her stay in the host country, their readjustment is usually considered to be very easy. Thus, the first assumption goes as follows:

(1) The maintenance of interpersonal communication skills (BICS L1) and/or cognitive/academic proficiency (CALP L1) is assumed to be a contributing factor in ensuring successful readjustment to Japanese schooling after return. So, meaningful correlations to be examined are: the relationship between BICS L1 and the Readjustment Index (referred to as the "R-Index"), CALP L1 and the R-Index, and BICS L1 & CALP L1 and the R-Index.

Secondly, attention should be drawn to the effects of involvement in L2. On this matter, a most powerful and persuasive discussion is made by James Cummins under his "Interdependence Hypothesis". He says that CALP in one language(Lx) is partially a function of the level of CALP in another language(Ly), and that CALP Lx and CALP Ly are interdependent. He contends that one's proficiency in Lx is transferred to one's new proficiency in Ly, provided there is adequate exposure to Ly (either in school or in the general social environment), and provided there is adequate motivation to learn in Ly (Cummins 1980b). In other words, if cognitive and academic proficiency is fully established and developed in one language, cognitive aspects of that proficiency can be transferred to the other language. This hypothesis applied to the present study, if the child has established and already developed cognitive/academic skills in English during his/her stay in the United States, that proficiency would be transferred to similar areas in Japanese after their return, which is considered to help to ensure their successful educational readjustment. So the second assumption goes as follows:

(2) Cognitive/academic language proficiency in L2 (CALP L2) is assumed to be a contributing factor in ensuring success in the process of readjustment. It is also assumed that the longer the stay in the host country is, the better chance the child has to establish CALP L2. So, the relationship between these two factors is assumed to be significant, particularly for long-stayers. Thus, a meaningful correlation to be examined is that between CALP L2 and the Readjustment Index or R-Index.

Lastly, if we assume that CALP L2 is a contributing factor to successful readjustment, the following multiple factors deserve correlational examination. They are: BICS L2&CALP L2
and the R-Index, CALP L1&CALP L2 and the R-Index and BICS L1&CALP L2 and the R-Index.

The results are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Results of Correlational Study#

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>X</th>
<th>Y</th>
<th>Total Sample Short Stay (≤24 months)</th>
<th>Long Stay (≥24 months)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N=40</td>
<td>N=25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>BICS L1</td>
<td>.082</td>
<td>.045**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>CALP L1</td>
<td>.145*</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>BICS L1 &amp; CALP L1</td>
<td>.137*</td>
<td>.121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>CALP L2</td>
<td>.652*</td>
<td>.541*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>BICS L2 &amp; CALP L2</td>
<td>.415*</td>
<td>.401**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>CALP L1 &amp; CALP L2</td>
<td>.396*</td>
<td>.304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>CALP L2 &amp; BICS L1</td>
<td>.534*</td>
<td>.464*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>(Supplementary)</td>
<td>BICS L1</td>
<td>CALP L2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# Comparing X and Y factors listed, in terms of Pearson r correlation coefficient values derived. **=*p<0.01, **=*p<0.05

## 4. Results

(1) There were no significant correlations found between BICS L1 and the R-Index, CALP L1 and the R-Index, or BICS L1&CALP L1 and the R-Index. Contrary to assumption (1), mere maintenance of L1 in a bilingual environment does not prove to be a contributing factor to ensure successful re-entry and readjustment to the Japanese educational system, at least not for the subjects chosen.

The age of arrival may be responsible for these findings. Considering that the average age of arrival for the subjects is only 6.3 years old, it is the age when a child usually just starts engaging in cognitive / academic work. Being in a bilingual environment when the establishment of cognitive / academic proficiency is initiated is not a very favorable situation. The findings may be due to this important reason. Further study should be done with older subjects who have established cognitive / academic proficiency in Japanese before their entry into a host country.

(2) There is a significant correlation between CALP L2 and the R-Index. Correlation is especially impressive with long-stayers. This endorses Cummins' Interdependence Hypothesis. Cognitive / academic proficiency developed in English can be transferred into Japanese, which helps promote the readjustment process.

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(3) Among multiple factors, the combination of BICS L1&CALP L2 shows a significant correlation with the R-Index for long-stayers. On the other hand, the combination of CALP L1&CALP L2 does not indicate any significant correlation with the R-Index. From these two findings it is suggested, first of all, that when the stay is prolonged, it may be more effective for Japanese children to do their cognitive/academic work in one language, rather than doing it in two languages simultaneously. Secondly, it is suggested that the effort to maintain L1 should focus on interpersonal communication skills. Supplementary data (correlation between BICS L1 and CALP L2) confirms that the maintenance of L1 interpersonal communication skills does not interfere with the development of cognitive/academic skills in L2 for long-stayers. Interestingly enough, the data suggests a negative correlation with short-stayers, which indicates that excessive efforts at maintenance of one’s home language in a host country may delay the establishment of cognition in the target language.

5. Discussion

One limitation of the present study may be its small sample size. A bigger sample size is certainly favorable, but the advantage of larger size is often offset by heterogeneity of the group, which may in turn hinder the obtaining of consistent data.

The descriptive nature of the questionnaire which gives parents' observations of situational linguistic data rather than purely linguistic data may require further improvement. Obtaining objective test scores would be the alternative. Then, however, the long-term treatment becomes extremely difficult, since researchers have to be in contact with the subjects for a relatively long period of time. Also, when tests are given, very careful treatment must be done to clearly distinguish between the two dimensions of proficiency (BICS and CALP).

The major significance of the present study lies in the fact that long-term examinations give quite a different evaluation based upon children's bilingual experience in a host country. The face value of the mere maintenance of CALP L1 in a host country does not prove to be effective as sufficient preparation for re-entry and readjustment. Also, the "cross-lingual dimension" of CALP, by which once—attained proficiency in a cognitive/academic area in one language can be transferred into another language (Cummins 1980b) is a totally new notion which has yet been examined adequately. To what degree CALP is transferrable from one language to another can only be noticed and studied effectively when two different language environments and educational settings are considered and related by careful examination.

These findings suggest that when there is a choice regarding one's child as to which language he/she uses for school work, the best choice may be to do that schooling in the target language of the host country. Justification for this choice is especially strong when the length of "......" is long enough for the child to develop L2 cognitive proficiency. When parents choose to......ke their child engage in schooling in two language simultaneously, potential confusion in dealing with two languages should be carefully considered and treated. This discussion of CALP, of
course, does not in any way seek to demean the importance of efforts at maintaining one's native language. Rather, it is clear now that practice in maintaining L1 should focus upon interpersonal communicative skills to prepare for the readjustment task. Duplicating academic work in L1, thereby complicating and confusing young children, may delay their acquisition of L2 in terms of both communicative and cognitive development, and also discourage their smooth re-entry into the Japanese educational orbit.

Appendix

Questionnaire Regarding Bilingualism (K. Tojo, 1991)

The following are translations of questions asked in the questionnaire. In the questionnaire, questions were randomly placed rather than categorically listed. Due to a restriction in space, only part of the questions are shown here.

Section 1. During stay in the U.S.
(1) BICS L1: He /she used Japanese to communicate with his /her parents.
    He /she used Japanese to communicate with his /her siblings.
    He /She had a chance to play with Japanese friends using Japanese.
    He /she had a chance to enjoy watching Japanese TV /video programs.

(2) CALP L1: He /she read Japanese books.
    He /she regularly spent time studying Japanese subjects.
    Parents taught Japanese subjects at home.
    He /she was willing to study Japanese subjects.

(3) BICS L2: He /she had a command of native-like spoken English.
    He /she used English to communicate with his /her parents.
    He /she used English to communicate with his /her siblings.
    He /she had a chance to play with American friends.

(4) CALP L2: He /she could read and write English as well as his /her peers.
    He /she did not feel handicapped with the classroom language.
    He /she was willing to study in English.
    He /she got positive teacher evaluations on his /her school work.

Section 2. Readjustment after return: referred to as "R-Index"

He /she could communicate with teachers.
He /she could communicate with peers at school.
He /she did not feel handicapped with the classroom language.
He /she could manage to follow the class work.

References


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