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"I'm Still Japanese"

A look into bilingual identity

Having studied Japanese as a second language for over 4 years and delving into the field of second language studies for a little over 1 year, it has always been interesting to note how much learning a new language is tied to a person's identity. Over time, a learner of a second language produces certain learning strategies to aid him or herself in mastering it. The target language's culture is naturally supplied within the language structure, as it is a nation's culture that molds a language. A language learner then will eventually integrate himself or herself into that language, adjusting a dimension of their psychological and social self. This paper will look into the relationship between a language learner's identity and the languages they know and learn, and if bilingual identity can be achieved. Also, this paper will try to tie in how much a person tries to associate their personal identity with the target language.

Whyte and Holmberg (1956) discovered in their four concepts of language learning that some immersion and activity in the target language's culture is integral to SLA; making human contact with the language community is necessary. They also found that an extensive variety of experience and ability (or language aptitude) is required to develop skills in all aspects of the language. However, it is their fourth finding that was deemed most important; forming the learner altogether is the ability for that learner to identify their psychological self. An individual's sense of identity will determine the kind

of lens or outlook he or she will have in his or her own culture as well as the culture of the target language.

However, it is here that one can note a possible problem that can raise a red flag. It is a myth that when learning a second language, language learners adjust a certain amount of their psychological self towards the target language, consciously or unconsciously identifying himself or herself as part of that culture, of that particular group of people. This transition can vary based on the individual's personality, motivation, and exposure to the languages within the community. Some students may show a slight interest whereas other students may take on a 'transformation' into the target language and culture.

For my research, I am interested in learning more about the difference between a simultaneous bilingual person and a consecutive/sequential bilingual person. Therefore, a case study between the two could determine certain differences in the way the two bilinguals think, but more importantly, how they connect themselves with the language (psychological self). I am interested in this research for two major reasons. First, I would like to prove that identifying with the language does not replace a person's true culture or background. Second, I am interested to see how much of a person's culture is integrated in their life between a simultaneous bilingual and a consecutive bilingual, if there is any major difference to pinpoint at all.

I named the title of my research paper, "I'm still Japanese", because this was an actual phrase that a young woman told me while experiencing first-hand culture clash in Hawai'i. I am interested to know just what that is supposed to mean on an academic scale, using as many tools and as much research as possible to pinpoint where the culture

clash affects a bilingual most. I feel like this would also give a language learner and an aspiring language teacher such as myself, a justified opinion in the ongoing debate about bilingualism in the classroom. The psychological self and the concept of culture clash play huge roles in the foundation of not just language learners, but in any individual exercising multicultural awareness. If I can produce a general idea of how much a student integrates their second language with the way they behave in a given society, then it can help me, as a teacher or tutor to understand their level of motivation and adjust my teaching methods toward their learning style.

In order to do this, I looked into Karmela Liebkind's article on Bilingual Identity. Liebkind (1995) starts off her article with a very strong point, "Identity is psychological. It has to do with the way in which we define ourselves, how we experience ourselves, and with what other individuals and groups we identify ourselves." (p. 80). Identity in this regard establishes a relationship with our personal self and the interaction we have with other people. A small portion of motivation is also involved in understanding more about our personal self. However, according to the Baker text, Del Valle (2003, 2009) believes that "only relatively unchangeable characteristics essentially define particular groups, such as gender." (p.398), supporting the idea that there is a wide array in how we identify others and ourselves.

In regards to becoming bilingual, integrative attitude (an attitude one has when they desire belonging to particular language group) is required. Moreover, Liebkind believes that bilingual identity can only be achieved when one has a simultaneous integrative attitude to not just the native language, but the second language as well. She claims that linguists determine someone is a bilingual if:

(1) according to origin, someone learned both languages from your parents or since you were born, (2) according to language proficiency, if one becomes fluent in both languages, (3) according to language function, if one can use the different languages according to the demands of society or (4) according to attitudes, if one believes to be bilingual and is identified as bilingual by other people (Liebkind 1995, p. 80).

Everybody has a perception of themselves and of others. As individuals we tend to identify others based on the way they act, the way they dress, the type of people they associate with, and of course the language they use with those people, among other things. People generally desire a sense of belonging and so comes the battle between "who" or "what" we are versus our self "worth" in society. Baker (2011) believes that "language is one of the strongest symbols and boundary markers in a group, regional, cultural or national identity." Considering that 'value' appears to be a factor in identity for people regardless of the language and culture that is dominant around them, perhaps there is a bias towards one language over another. Reasons for this can include not only belonging to an idolized group or culture, but also to matters of success in life.

In the article, *Affirming identity in multilingual classrooms,* the authors point out a major problem that many English language learners in the United States face, being able to express themselves (and their cultural identity) in a new environment. With the natural struggle students face in things like culture clash and fear of social disapproval, the radical changes made to the educational policy in the form of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) further complicate the integration into the L2 community. While NCLB was designed to speed up the integration of English language learners into mainstream

classrooms, a series of restrictions and penalties were also enforced, limiting the teacher's ability to aid students.

The authors expressed that NCLB, grounded in 'scientific research' has gone on to prove that such limitations critically paralyze a student at his or her essential core; at their identity. Scientific research does little to validate a student's home language and cultural knowledge, and also further spreads the gap between them and their parents (especially if their parents do not speak English efficiently). In response to the negative results of NCLB, the authors propose alternative strategies, validating student's identity in school by way of how they dress, how they speak, and what they share from their home country in the new community.

On a different note, Yasuko Kanno looks into the dynamic changes that Japanese returnees have made from their travels abroad, in regards to how they have associated themselves in the different countries. It is interesting to note that upon return to their home country, many returnees have faced reverse culture shock, realizing that their identities have shifted from a Japanese national to that of a foreigner, albeit they are originally from Japan. While initially a negative notion, many researchers and members of international relations found such returnees as an incredible source of foreign knowledge.

The author, a former high school Japanese teacher, produced a case study on four of her former students who went on to different parts of Canada and the United States, and kept in touch via mail and email with the students. She also made an email-based social network between herself and her students so that they could keep in touch with each other and share relevant experiences. The student's experiences varied from positive

to negative. One student made the eventual conclusion that Canadians thought of themselves as superior to other ethnicities.

Kanno confirms that the returnees are a privileged group, capable of speaking the most famous and critical language, English while being able to share their experiences and other findings in either English or Japanese. While communication has been made, it was nearly unsuccessful in many ways, albeit she persists on her goal to seal ties with other countries. This particular piece of research was especially important to me because it allowed me to see a similar case study that had occurred between the author's students and the young woman from my own experience. The explicit breakdown of the students observations abroad over time have helped me to see a parallel progression that could result in defensive exclamations such as "I'm still Japanese."

While still difficult to define or measure, the concept of motivation in the L2 community has made dramatic change within the last few decades of the 20th century. With the advancements made in technology, the world has become a smaller place as globalization takes its toll interconnecting itself with the increased exposure of foreign languages. Historical movements such as the fall of communism, European reconfiguration, widespread political and economic migration and an increase in mobility have all increased multicultural awareness substantially and with it, brought the exposure of foreign languages (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2009). In order to keep up with the rest of the world's rapid growth in international affairs and worldwide trade & commerce, countries look to strengthen their bilingual and trilingual skills by learning those languages.

As a result, the English language has become one of the most predominant languages around the world. It has gone beyond the smaller roles of English as a Foreign

Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language, but instead more so to (English as a Global Language) EGL. English has been associated with success in developed and developing countries throughout the world. If one can identify themselves as a speaker of English among the languages they speak, then they can associate with belonging to a higher class.

As we've seen, because language is dynamic and changes over time, according to this logic so can a person's identity. Liebkind (1995) also classifies this subject as *identity negotiations,* with a focus on the value of identity in addition to it's content. Perhaps the aforementioned young woman whom I had met noticed that English is perhaps more useful than her own native language, Japanese, thus hailed more valuable (on a global scale). What is important to note is Baker's quick follow-up to this supposedly inseparable connection between language value and identity value.

Baker says, "The sociocultural constructions of our gender, age, ethnicity, race, dress, nationality, region, locality, group membership, status, socioeconomic class, for example, provide us with a host of complementary, diverse, interacting, ever-changing, negotiated identities. A girl can speak English and Spanish, be a Moslem, Democrat, see herself as American, San Francisco Californian and Mexican, with identity as a teenager, trombonist, a school drop-out and lesbian." (p. 398). Perhaps the young woman from my experience felt something similar- that she could incorporate several of her personal aspects to create a genuine identity of a Japanese national who can speak English, but solidly identifies herself as still Japanese… that speaking English does not change her ultimate identity.

In order to articulate my case studies on Japanese nationals and Japanese-Americans, I looked further into Yasuko Kanno's article, "Bingualism and Identity: The Stories of Japanese Returnees. In her article, a case study by Ervin-Tripp (1968: 203-204) revealed how inseparable culture is to language. When asked to complete sentences for the experiments, Japanese-American women gave severely different endings from those of Japanese nationals who have never left the country, reflecting heavily on the culture each language originates from. One such sentence began with "When my wishes conflict with my family…" the Japanese ending answered, "it is a time of great unhappiness" while the English ending answered, "I do what I want." This supports the sociocultural theory on discourse.

When a culture must be formed into words in order to solidify meaning, although the same words could be used by both Japanese nationals and Japanese-Americans, they use words and languages to ultimately portray their true culture. In Japanese society, culture is hierarchal and thrives on a circle or group-based social structure, where people devote themselves as limbs or parts of something bigger and greater. Filial piety, or a devout respect for family's wishes (especially parents and other elders) is heavily exercised. As seen when completing the sentence, someone's own desires come second or are even dismissed altogether if they do not abide with a given circle or family's way of life. On the other hand, a western, English perspective, typically powered by liberty and a desire to be independent as opposed to a part of something bigger, displays what some may perceive a heavily defiant statement, "I do what I want", regardless of what family or anyone else thinks.

Perhaps culture clash is one of the leading causes for identity crisis among bilinguals and aspiring bilinguals, and will be an aspect taken heavily into account for my case study.

Considering these notions of value in identity and language, and the relationship between identity and language, I focused my research on two different types of Japanese people: simultaneous bilingual and consecutive bilingual. The case study consisted of a simultaneous bilingual, born and raised in Hawai'i and a Japanese national from Japan who is a developing bilingual speaker in the English language. To look further into the concept of identity, I performed activities with the students to determine their cognitive and moral development. These activities included riddles and perceptions of stories, where I can determine how they came to a decision and the rationale that they supported for their answers. I thought it was an interesting experiment to see if rationales were from sources of culture or of self-perception/identity. I also interviewed the two separately using the same set of questions designed to acquire a description of themselves as a Japanese-American and a Japanese national, Gary and Olivia Then based on those results, I asked questions to determine how being bilingual associated with their identity and how people perceived them. Questions included "What does being Japanese/Japanese-American mean to you?" or "Did this meaning change when you moved to Hawai'i or go abroad?"

Olivia, the Japanese-American was born and raised in Hawai'i said that because her mother was a first generation Japanese woman (*issei*), that many Japanese customs were implemented growing up, including taking off shoes before entering the house, going to the Obon Festival at the end of summer, and of course speaking Japanese in the

home, with her. Her father however, was a white American man who did not speak nearly as much Japanese as his wife. Because she is the daughter of an interracial marriage, she did not look 100% Japanese. In fact, upon teaching in Japan, many people there could not believe she was Japanese at all, because she acquired much of her father's Caucasian features, including having large eyes and being exceptionally tall for a Japanese girl. In addition, the notion that she had a Japanese father who did not grow up speaking Japanese was almost unheard of.

Hiromi, the Japanese national, being 100% Japanese and originally from the home country, described being Japanese in ways that were much more potent to her interracial counterpart. Being Japanese to her included concepts like filial piety, influence of hierarchy in society, and limitations on physical interaction with others.

In order to analyze the two girls' cognitive development, I gave them a riddle: You are visiting a strange country in which there are two kinds of people- truth tellers and liars. Truth tellers always tell the truth and liars always lie. You hail the first two people you meet and say, "Are you truth tellers or liars?" The first person mumbles something you can't hear. The second says, "He is a truth teller. He is a truth teller and so am I." Can you trust the directions that these two may give you?

Olivia believed that based on the premise of what was given in the riddle; she had to believe what the second speaker said, even though she could not hear what the first speaker mumbled. However, Hiromi believed that she could not trust either, since she could not understand exactly what the first speaker 'mumbled', she could not base it on truth or lie, regardless of what the second speaker said.

In order to assess their moral development, I read a short story about a man named Valjean, a thief who was imprisoned for stealing in order to feed himself and his siblings. One day, Valjean escapes prison and takes on a new name, where he works until he becomes a rich factory owner who took great care of his employees. Unfortunately, he was caught as a tailor recognized him as Valjean, the thief who had escaped from prison.

I asked the girls to imagine that they are the tailor who had recognized Valjean, and to decide whether or not they will let him go or turn him in to the police.

Hiromi's concept of morality is very selfless, making it a strong sense of morals. When I read the story about Valjean to her and asked her what she would do if she caught him at the factory, she said she would report him because it was only fair. He did something wrong in the past and has to pay for his actions, even though he did something good with the money he earned. Her rationale was that there had to be respect for the written law. This concludes that Mimi looks at story from a macroscopic spectrum, and not from Valjean, albeit he is the main character. She made her decision based on justice, using a rule-based principle.

Olivia did not see it this way. She decided not to turn Valjean in because he had done good things with his freedom, albeit self-appointed. He gave his workers enough money to afford food and decent healthcare, the very things he himself could not attain on the streets. She based her decision on a care-based or ends-based principle, believing in the greater good of all people.

Based on the observations that I have made during my case studies and foundations from empirical research, I have realized that cognitive development, bilingualism and self-perception are at least partly independent of each other, and that to

look for rationales in culture for the decisions people make, in the languages they make them would be no different than stereotyping or discriminating not just them, but an entire race or society. Identity is independent of culture at least in that a person is not tied to language or culture completely, and that only a small part of that plays a role in who they are and completely dependent on how much they allow it to affect their life, or support the decisions that they make. Cognitive development is tied to culture, which is tied to language but will alter in variation of people since every person thinks differently; no two are alike. Language is a tool to communicate, to express one's self, one's identity, but is not limited to language alone to do so.

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I learned from writing a research paper that it takes a lot of effort in looking for parallel research findings from researchers across the field. Due to the psychological nature of my topic, I tried to cross reference a lot of psychology-based findings and theories and contexualize them in bilingualism. I found the case studies to be quite interesting, answering life-long questions about culture clash of Japanese nationals and Japanese-Americans. This knowledge will help greatly when I practice exercising multicultural awareness in the classroom, and also helping students adjust to culture clash in the many teaching environments I hope to find myself in the near future.

Some challenges I had with this assignment was finding relevant data for my research, connecting ideas from one research to another, and grasping a full analysis on development with my case studies. I learned of these development analysis techniques from a former psychology class, which made for a strong base in future case studies and did not fail here, either. It was still rather difficult to make a connection between bilingualism and cognitive development.

Thanks to the feedback from my peers, I was able to narrow down my research to a more solid analysis on bilinguals, instead of trying to incorporate so many different issues pertaining to bilingualism. Building the connections between identity and bilingualism was difficult enough.

Overall, this was a very useful and slightly fun assignment, since I have a deep interest in psychology. I hope that in the future, I will be an effective teacher utilizing multicultural awareness, in virtually any learning environment that I find myself in.