

A Research of the Advanced Japanese Students' Writing at an International School.

Mariko Akino

Abstract:

It is believed most children at international schools located in Tokyo communicate mainly through English or other languages other than Japanese. However, some of them speak Japanese outside of school, especially at home as their mother tongue. It is true that their speaking ability is fairly in Japanese good compared to their reading and writing skills, such as composing essays and understanding Kanji (Chinese characters). Why is there a big difference between speaking and writing among these children? The reason is that daily conversation (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skill, BICS) consists of certain contexts and words but ability of literacy (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency, CALP) is acquired through education. Therefore, BICS and CALP should be considered separate.

The research question is 'If students who receive education in English and use Japanese outside of school as their mother tongue write two compositions in Japanese and English, is there a difference among the compositions?'

This paper is about a study of the Japanese and English writing ability of 5th and 6th graders who are regarded as being bilingual at an international school in Tokyo, and the purpose of this paper is to find out the effective way to improve the students' writing in Japanese .

The concrete method of this research is composition tasks in Japanese and English for students. The subjects are 5th and 6th graders at the international school in Tokyo who have attended an advanced Japanese language class and most of them are believed to be Japanese native speakers. They were asked to write two compositions of which one was in Japanese and the other in English. The researcher thought that those compositions would help to evaluate the students' CALP, and the topics were, 'The Life-Cycle of a Butterfly.' in Japanese, and 'Why Hot-Air-Balloons go up?' in English. Finally the tester also had distributed questionnaires to the children's parents to find out their languages at home and living environments.

According to the results of the compositions showed that some students who were able to write good compositions not only in English but also in

Japanese tended to use Japanese outside of school. Moreover, their parents have been pressing the child to use Japanese at home and English at school. Also, there was a tendency that those students who had been studying Japanese for a certain time and the total number of correct Kanji (Chinese characters) could assist in evaluating a subject's writing ability. The answers from parents indicated that the parents' hope for the children could be divided into two groups. Some parents hoped the children to become a biliteral of the Japanese and English languages, and other parents wanted them to acquire a higher level of English.

To apply the Microscopic model, it seems possible to raise Japanese and English balanced bilingual students in an artificial environment such as sending a child from a Japanese family to an international school. According to the Interdependence of L1 and L2 hypothesis, Japanese learning which needs CALP can improve not only Japanese but also English if a student's Japanese ability is high enough because CALP is a common proficiency to both languages. There are several points to improve their Japanese ability. If there is a Japanese native speaker at home, he/she had better use Japanese. Also, one person should try to use the same language, and not mix more than two languages. This rule is called One person - One language. Qualities of Japanese inputs and outputs outside of school are also important. To sum everything up, the cooperation of the family and school is indispensable for bilingual students.