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BILINGUAL CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE CHOICE IN TWO LINGUISTIC CONTEXTS*

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Abstract

Bilingual children growing up in homes where they are exposed to different languages used by each parent need linguistic input to acquire each parent's first language. However, such input from one parent may simply not be enough under circumstances where each parent's consistency in his/her language choice varies greatly. Differences and similarities in patterns of children's language choices in different contexts may illuminate an essential component of bilingual children's linguistic behavior as it is related to patterns of parental input practice.

This paper examines discourse samples from two bilingual families. These samples were drawn from longitudinal case studies of four children growing up in English/Japanese-speaking families living in the US (Kasuya, 1997). Discourse samples to be analyzed here were collected during mother-child dyadic free play and at family mealtimes at two time points when the children were 3;6 and 4;1. First, the absolute and relative frequencies of the languages used by the parents and children in the dyadic free play and mealtime contexts are shown in order to see if there are any differences between the two mothers' input in the minority language (Japanese) which might help account for the children's language use. Then the children's language choice is investigated by focusing on the children's initiations in English or Japanese when they addressed each parent in either context. The findings suggest important implications for the extent to which the linguistic input pattern in the home should emphasize the minority language.

Key Words: bilingual children, language chice, parental input, different linguistic contexts discourse samples

Introduction

It is fairly obvious that if a child is to acquire a given language, he or she must have ample opportunity to hear that language as well as to engage in communicative interactions with an interlocutor. Parents of the child then can play a significant role in young children's language development. Researchers are, however, still not in agreement

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on what minimum absolute frequency of input is required in order for young children to be able to learn to speak a language. Bilingual children growing up in homes where they are exposed to different languages used by each parent also need parental linguistic input to acquire each parent's first language but such input from one parent may simply not be enough under circumstances where each parent's consistency in his/her language choice varies greatly. The relative frequency differences between the input of the two languages have an effect on children's language choice, as Pearson and others (1998) point out. A rich language environment, which features plenty of input in each of two languages, seems to be one of the important factors which separates success from failure in raising children to be active bilinguals (Arnberg 1987; De Houwer, 1998; Kasuya, 1998; Saunders, 1988; Taeschner, 1983).

In such a bilingual environment, however, children do not seem to use two languages all the time. Similarly, a stylistic choice in monolingual situations is made only for specific contexts in daily interactions with others. There are different contexts such as dyadic free play with a mother who speaks language A as well as multiparty mealtimes with both parents where language A as well as language B are used. The former context tends to induce more monolingual conversation adhering to one language only and the latter more bilingual interactions involving switching languages with each parent (Lanza, 1992). Differences and similarities in patterns of children's language choice in such different contexts may illuminate an essential component of bilingual children's linguistic behavior as it is related to patterns of parental input practice.

In this paper, therefore, I examine discourse samples from two bilingual families. These samples are drawn from longitudinal case studies of four children growing up in English/Japanese-speaking families living in the US (Kasuya, 1997). First, I present the absolute and relative frequencies of the languages used by the parents and children in two contexts (dyadic free play with a Japanese-speaking mother and family mealtimes with both parents) in order to see if there are any differences between the two mothers' input in Japanese which might help account for the children's language use. Then I examine the children's language choice by focusing on the children's initiations in English or Japanese when they are addressing each parent in either context.

Method

Subjects

The two male subjects in this study are first-born preschool children from English-Japanese bilingual families in which the father's first language is English and the mother's Japanese. The parents of the two families claimed that they had practiced the "one parent/one language" input model but with different degrees of adherence. For the children, exposure to Japanese, which was not the societal language, was mainly limited to the home. The mothers were bilingual and the fathers were fundamentally monolingual with some production capacity in Japanese.

Procedure

Discourse samples to be analyzed here were collected at two time points when the children were 3;6 and 4;1 during mother-child dyadic interactions (e. g., free play and

lunch time talk) as well as family mealtimes with both parents present. The last 30 minutes of each interaction at the two time points were used for the analyses in this paper. All the discourse samples were fully transcribed. Each transcript was divided into utterances based on intonation contours. All transcripts were formatted according to the CHILDES (Child Language Data Exchange System) method (MacWhinney, 1995; MacWhinney & Snow, 1990). For the Japanese utterances, the JCHAT (Japanese Codes for the Human Analysis of Transcripts) format was used (Oshima-Takane & MacWhinney, 1995).

Coding

To assess language choice, I coded all child and parent utterances according to language type—1. an utterance containing only Japanese (J), 2. only English (E), 3. at least one morpheme from each of the two languages (Mixed), or 4. an utterance attributable to either or neither language (Non-language specific). Since Non-language specific utterances were mostly onomatopoeia, sound effects, or unintelligible speech, they were excluded from the analyses in this study. Also, although many loan words or words borrowed from English have been incorporated into Japanese, these are usually pronounced in the Japanese way and used by monolinguals who do not know any English. The decision as to whether a word was English or not was, therefore, generally very straightforward.

The addressee and the language of the immediately previous utterance have been reported to be the major factors in a child's language choice (Fantini, 1987; McClure, 1977; Saunders, 1988; Taeschner, 1983). To test this in the two contexts, I further coded the child's utterances when addressing the parent for conversational move—initiation, response, or other. The language of child initiations tends to be less constrained by the language of the immediately preceding adult utterance and more constrained by the addressee, while for child responses, a category which will not be addressed here, the opposite should be true. In many cases children's initiations were used to initiate a conversation or interrupt an on-going conversation (e.g., attention-getters such as "Mommy, look" and "See?") and to ask questions such as requests for information or confirmation (see Appendix for an example of a coded transcript).

Coding reliability

An independent bilingual rater coded 20% of the data to see whether the coding schemes for language type and conversational move were reasonably reliable. Cohen's kappa statistic (Bakeman & Gottman, 1986) was used to calculate inter-rater reliability, correcting for chance agreement between raters. Cohen's kappa for the language type coding was .97 and for the conversational move coding .82, both well above acceptable levels.

Results

Languages used in the two contexts

The findings presented in Tables 1 and 2 show that the frequency of the mothers' use of Japanese in both contexts is different and that this input factor might be associated with

Table 1 Languages used by the children and the mothers (%)

	ENG	JPN	MIX	Total number of utterances
Ray	76.0	19.6	4.4	342
Mother	31.6	67.6	0.8	136
Sho	45.6	49.1	5.3	753
Mother	4.0	92.9	3.1	326

Table 2 Languages used by the children and the parents in mealtimes (%)

	ENG	JPN	MIX	Total number of utterances
Ray	88.4	7.9	3.7	190
Mother	40.0	57.8	2.2	135
Father	87.7	10.5	1.8	171
Sho	52.6	40.4	7.0	285
Mother	9.5	87.8	2.7	262
Father	86.0	7.4	6.6	136

ENG=English JPN=Japanese MIX=Mixed utterances

the children's choice of language. Even in a Japanese-context which was an interaction with only a Japanese-speaking parent, Ray's mother's use of Japanese represented 67.6% of the total number of utterances, while the figure for Sho's mother was 92.9%. Accordingly, Sho used Japanese (49.1%) more than twice as often as Ray (19.6%) in a Japanese context and 5 times more often (40.4%) than Ray (7.9%) in a bilingual context (family mealtimes). Also, considering absolute frequency of language input, Ray's mother talked much less than Sho's mother in both contexts.

As for linguistic input patterns at mealtimes, the two families are different as well. In Ray's family, Ray's proportional use of English (88.4%) was much higher than his use of Japanese (7.9%), which is similar to his father's pattern (87.7% for English and 10.5% for Japanese), while Ray's mother's relative frequency of use of the two languages was more balanced than that of the other two members of the family (40.0% for English and 57.8% for Japanese). In Sho's family, however, the parents seemed to practice the 'one parent/one language' input pattern fairly consistently as the patterns of relative frequency of use of the two languages when comparing the parents are quite inversely proportional (mother, 9.5% for English and 87.8% for Japanese; father, 86.0% for English and 7.4% for Japanese). Sho's proportional use of Japanese (40.4%) was a little lower than that of English (52.6%) but much higher than Ray's use.

Child initiations

I have found that both parents and children studied spoke two languages, with English being the dominant one in Ray's family and with an approximately equal amount from two languages in Sho's family. These findings, however, do not indicate which

Table 3 Child's language choice in initiations in interaction with the mother (unit=utterance)

		Mother
Ray	Initiation in ENG	158 (89.3)
	Initiation in JPN	19 (10.7)
	Total	177
Sho	Initiation in ENG	236 (61.8)
	Initiation in JPN	146 (38.2)
	Total	382

Table 4 Child's language choice in initiations in mealtimes (unit=utterance)

		Mother	Father
Ray	Initiation in ENG	49 (92.5)	42 (97.7)
	Initiation in JPN	4 (7.5)	1 (2.3)
	Total	53	43
Sho	Initiation in ENG	31 (47.0)	22 (91.7)
	Initiation in JPN	35 (53.0)	2 (8.3)
	Total	66	24

ENG=English JPN=Japanese (%)
Total=Total number of Initiations

language the child chose when he addressed each parent; these utterances were categorized as child initiations. Child initiations presented in Tables 3 and 4 are the utterances in English or Japanese which are clearly not responses to the previous utterances and are immediately followed by the parents' responses.

Ray initiated mainly in English in both contexts (89.3% for a Japanese context; 92.5% for a bilingual context), whereas his proportional use of Japanese initiations was a little higher in a Japanese context (10.7%) than in a bilingual context (7.5%) when he was addressing his mother. This proportional use of the two languages is quite natural and expected because of the nature of the participants in each context. Sho's relative frequency of initiations in Japanese, however, did not follow the same pattern and his proportional use of Japanese initiations was higher in a bilingual context (53.0%) than in a Japanese context (38.2%). Sho seemed to differentiate between the roles of each parent by choosing the father's or mother's language in interacting alternately with both parents, while he might have been careless about this distinction when he was only with the mother. Nevertheless, Ray's preferred language was English regardless of the addressee, while Sho's preferred language was determined by the person to whom he spoke, although he still used quite a lot of English with his Japanese-speaking mother.

Furthermore, the total number of English and Japanese utterances in initiations addressing two parents during mealtime conversation was 96 for Ray and 90 for Sho, which accounted for about a little less than half of all Ray's utterances and a little more than one third of all Sho's utterances. Considering that Sho talked more than Ray, it could be speculated that Ray's turns were shorter because they were produced in the

context of a dialogue, with alternate utterances from the child and parent, while Sho's were longer and more resembled a monologue without parental interruption. Of course there were some other factors to explain this such as frequency of responses to each parent. The following excerpts (Examples 1 and 2) show such different discourse patterns.

Example 1: Ray's family at the dinner table (Ray, 3;6)

1 Mother: Kyo, ojii-chan kara denwa attamon ne, Ray?
Eng: You got a phone call from your grandpa today, didn't you, Ray?
2 Ray: Ojii-chan ...
Eng: Grandpa...
3 Father: What did your grandpa say, Ray?
4 Ray: He's fine.
5 Mother: Hokani wa nante itteta?
Eng: What else did he say?
6 Ray: He's gone.
7 Mother: He's gone?
8 Ray: He's gone xxx to pick up the mail.
9 Mother: Did he say that?
10 Ray: (Looking at the plate) # I want grapes.
11 Mother: Moo ii wa, Ray
Eng: That's enough, Ray.
12 Ray: want grapes.
13 Mother: Ray, mama said no.
14 Ray: 0 [making noise].
15 Father: Ray, man, stop it.
16 Mother: Honey, no more no more, takusan tabetaja nai moo.
Eng: you had enough already.

(utterances in bold face = Initiation)
xxx = unintelligible speech, # = pause

In Example 1, Ray's mother used Japanese for the first two utterances (lines 1 and 5). Then she switched to English (lines 7 and 9) except for a short utterance in Japanese (line 11) and a mixed utterance (line 16) at the end. Ray started to say something in Japanese at line 2 but this was an incomplete utterance which sounded like a repetition of a part of his mother's utterance. In Ray's family, family terms such as ojii-chan (grandpa) and obaa-chan (grandma) are often used to distinguish Japanese grandparents from American ones. He used all English for the rest of the conversation. In line 10, instead of replying to his mother's question, Ray initiated a new topic in English. He also repeated his own initiation utterance at line 12. This example shows shorter turns; that is, alternate utterances from the child and parent. Such a discourse style continued to be observed when he was 4;1 as well.

Example 2: Sho's family at the dinner table (Sho, 4;1)

1 Mother: (Bringing tea) Sho, kore atsuikara ne.

Eng : Sho, this is hot, you know
2 Sho : What is it ?
3 Mother : O-cha.
Eng : Green tea
4 Sho : I like o-cha.
5 Mother : Soo, dozo, demo ki o tsuketene, atsui kara.
Eng : So have some, but be careful, okay, ' cause it's hot.
6 Sho : I know, you said it already.
7 Father : Sho, remember mom said the same thing before ? xxx you know but you still knocked it over, didn't you, remember ?
8 Sho : No, I didn't. Mom had ... lots of o-cha and xxx I got one of them. Mom said it's hot it's hot and it was not. Then something and ... xxx uh I drank it.
9 Father : Then you knocked it over.
10 Sho : No, dad.
11 Mother : Sho-kun sa, yoku kobosukara ne, oboeteinan ja nai no ?
Eng : Well, Sho, since you knocked things over very often, you don't remember it, do you ?
12 Sho : Oboeteru yo, itsumo.
Eng : I remember always.
13 Mother : Soo, (pointing at the noodle plate) ja kore totte ageyou ka ?
Eng : Yeah, well, do you want me to get this for you ?
14 Sho : Boku nuudoru suki damon.
Eng : I like noodles.
15 Mother : Hai, soo ne.
Eng : Yeah, right.

By contrast, in Example 2, Sho's mother used Japanese all the time. Sho used Japanese twice : once in line 12 Japanese was used as a response in a protest against the mother's comment on his forgetfulness while the other is in line 14, an example of initiation. The word, " nuudoru ", is a foreign loan-word from English, which Sho pronounced somewhat differently from the English word, noodle. It is interesting to see that he used English one time (line 4 : I like ...) and Japanese the other (line 14 : ... suki damon) when he expressed his preference while addressing the same person. Line 8 is an example of a monologue that Sho produced. In CHAT (Codes for the Human Analysis of Transcripts) formatting (MacWhinney, 1995), line 8 consists of four separate utterances. Sho's turns were longer and more resembled a monologue, a pattern which was often observed even when he was 3;6.

Discussion

Parents in bilingual families admitted that they used the non-native language because of extralinguistic variables such as the number of other people who were present while the parent was addressing the child, the languages they spoke, the linguistic context in which a given conversational topic occurred, and the parent's degree of fluency in each

language (Goodz, 1994). For instance, a Japanese-speaking mother, alone with her child, typically spoke entirely in Japanese (monolingual context), switching to English only if English speakers were present. This was particularly the case if the mother's fluency in English was superior to the Japanese competence of the others present, which is most likely the case in the US. In this context, when the mother is alone with the child, however, the child seems to be more encouraged to use only an addressee's (mother's) preferred language than in interactions with more than one parent as long as the addressee keeps using that language.

In contrast, family dinnertime is one of the few regular time frames for a bilingual and intergenerational gathering in which children can both listen to adult talk and participate in collaboratively produced discourse. This situation induces switching languages depending on who is being addressed. It can be speculated through referring to other studies (Fantini, 1987; Lindholm & Padilla, 1978; McCulre, 1977; Saunders, 1988; Taeschner, 1983) that the addressee could be one of the major factors in determining a child's language choice. However, the present study does not confirm that a single parameter seems to be capable of predicting language choice consistently.

Although both Sho's and Ray's language preference when addressing either parent appeared to be English at most times, the results have shown some differences between the two children's language choice; one difference is that the child of the mother who was less talkative and who used less Japanese showed very low relative use of Japanese in addressing the mother in both contexts. On the other hand, the child of the mother who was more consistent in using Japanese used more Japanese than English in addressing the mother in mealtime conversation but used more English than Japanese in dyadic interaction with the mother. It should be noted, however, that these interpretations assume a bidirectionality between mother and child: that is, it may be that the mother of the child who used less Japanese had been discouraged from using Japanese by the child's language choice rather than the other way around where the child had been discouraged from using Japanese by the mother's use of English.

In conclusion, the findings suggest important implications for the extent to which the linguistic input patterns in the home should emphasize each of the two languages to which the child is exposed. The results also showed a great difference between the two families in the amount of talk in 30 minutes of dyadic interactions and in mealtime conversations at the two time points. Differences in the parents' interactional styles as well as factors related to the children's personalities need to be addressed further to account for this difference. These particular children's acquisition of Japanese is associated with traditional values or seen as an "extra" skill and not immediately associated with educational achievement and social and economic mobility, according to the parental reports. This attitude regarding language and language learning may also affect young children's bilingual acquisition (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1995).

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Appendix

Example of a coded transcript

Mother (MOT) and child (CHI=Sho, 2;11) are talking about a picture book

*MOT: okaasan wa nani siteru no kore?
%lan: $J
%eng: what is the mother doing here?
*CHI: coffee.
%lan: $E:R
*MOT: koohii ne.
%lan: $J
%eng: coffee, isn't it
*CHI: yeah.
%lan: $E:O
%com: saying softly, backchanel
*MOT: otya nonderu no otya ne.
%lan: $J
%eng: she's drinking tea, tea indeed.
*CHI: I-'ll try+...
%lan: $E:I
%act: looking at mother
*MOT: soo otya tte ieru?
%lan: $J
%eng: yeah, can you say tea?
*CHI: a: tya xxx.
%lan: $NL
*MOT: otya otya tte tea no koto desyoo.
%lan: $J
%eng: tea, otya means tea, doesn't it?
*CHI: I want otya.
%lan: $M:I

%lan=language type, %eng=English translation, $J=Japanese; $E=English; $NL=Non-language specific; $M=Mixed, second level codings; :R=Response; :I=Initiation;; O=Other, xxx=unintelligible speech, for other symbols and morphemicization rules, see MacWhinney (1995) and Oshima-Takane & MacWhinney (1995).