Title	Language choice of a multilingual preschooler: parental influence, socialization constraint, and cognitive interference
Sub Title	多言語幼児の言語選択：親の影響、社会的制約と認知的干渉
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Publisher	慶應義塾大学藝文学会
Publication year	2007
Jtitle	藝文研究 (The geibun-kenkyu : journal of arts and letters). Vol.92, (2007. 6) ,p.263(32)- 280(15)
JaLC DOI	
Abstract	
Notes	
Genre	Journal Article
URL	https://koara.lib.keio.ac.jp/xoonips/modules/xoonips/detail.php?koara_id=AN00072643-00920001-0280

Language Choice of a Multilingual Preschooler:

Parental Influence, Socialization Constraint, and Cognitive Interference*

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1. Introduction

While there is a substantial and growing body of research which concerns itself with various aspects of bilingualism and second language acquisition, considerably less attention has been given to the investigation of individual bilingual and multilingual development within a monolingual dominated society. A thorough and extensive study on topics as such requires a careful examination on the overall process of multilingual development.

On that basis, this study examined a multilingual preschooler's production in different discourse context and language development phases from multifarious aspects, typically parental influence, socialization constraint, and cognitive interference on language choice in an attempt to find some answers as to when, why and how a particular language, or a mixture of them, is used, and how the trilingual knowledge is formed within a strongly monolingual society.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Studies on Language Socialization

Language socialization relates to how novices are socialized to be compe-

tent members in the target culture through language use and how they are socialized to use language (Ochs 1996). A basic tenet of sociolinguistics is that language displays its speakers' identity. As Coulmas (2005) claimed, "your language gives you away". Taking a language socialization perspective "allows us to examine the building of multiple yet perfectly compatible identities—identities that are subtle and perhaps have no label, blended identities, even blurred identities" (Ochs 1993).

Language socialization research has shown that children acquire sociocultural knowledge of their native language through participation in language-mediated activities in the home and community (Piedra & Romo 2003). In the wake of modernization, however, parental norms and attitudes become less central to children's post-infancy language development (Luykx 2003). The larger culture which the child is to experience and the circumstances exposed away from home are beyond any parents' control.

Recent studies of language socialization and cognition have also found that peer interactions serve as language socializing processes (Tudge 1990). The primary influence on a child's social development, as Harris (1998) asserts, is not the family setting, but rather the peer group.

2.2 Studies on Code-switching and Code-mixing

Code-switching is a critical issue in studies of the bilingual's language choice. Some studies suggest that bilingual children switch languages according to the cognitive demands of the tasks and the contextual demands such as participants and topics. In code-switching, the linguistic and social restrictions on language choice allow for the concurrent and alternating utilization of different codes (Coulmas 2005).

It has been found that young bilingual children (code-)mix more when they use their less proficient than their more proficient language (Lanvers 2001). There is also considerable evidence that bilingual children's code-mixing is sensitive to contextual variables, including those

related to interlocutor (Deuchar & Quay 2000), topic (Lanvers, 2001), and the purpose of the interaction (Vihman 1998).

Traditionally code-switching was seen by many as a random process that could be explained by interference. Today it is considered more as a rule-governed behavior and a communication strategy. Similarly, code-mixing is regarded as resourcefulness in filling lexical gaps.

2.3 Cognitive Theories on Bilingual Acquisition

The conventional practice of most early cognitive linguists was to examine the intelligence of a bilingual mind. Recent studies are concerned more with the cognitive function in bilingual acquisition, of which 'cross-linguistic influence' is a study focus. There is evidence of cross-linguistic transfer of specific morphosyntactic features from one language into the other (Döpke 2000). A mitigating factor in cross-linguistic transfer could be language dominance. Children might be more likely to incorporate structures from their dominant into their weaker language, than vice versa (Yip & Matthews 2000).

From multifarious accounts for this phenomenon, an influential assertion is that the cross-linguistic transfer effect is conceptual rather than linguistic (Kecskes 1998). It is believed that every visible or invisible transfer on the structural level also involves conceptual doings.

2.4 Summary

Conceivably, close examination of parental influence and socialization dimensions is essential to every study fragment of early language development. "An adequate description of multilingualism must comprise not only crosslinguistic influence, but also the positive cognitive consequences of bilingualism, which become apparent if certain social and cognitive conditions are met" (JeBner 1997).

3. Research Questions

Bearing these in mind, this study is designed to answer the following questions: What factors contribute to a multilingual child's language choice? How does the change of social context influence multilingual acquisition? What factors influence language contact[1]? Taking these points into consideration, the more specific research questions are presented as follows.

     1)What roles do parents play in language choice?

     2)What influence does the speech community[2] have on language choice?

     3)What factors contribute to language choice at the micro-level?

     4)What cognitive factors contribute to language choice?

4. Research Design and Analytical Framework

4.1 Research Subject

The subject, Tomoki (T), 6 years old, was born to a Chinese family in Japan. As the father of the subject, my Japanese language skills are at the conversational level, while T's mother's Japanese language skills are near the native level. Where language education is concerned, our family generally abides by the 'one person, one language' rule. I mainly take responsibility for English, T's mother for Chinese, and the living community for Japanese. T's six-year growth is characterized by shifting between two countries as shown in the following table.

4.2 Data Collection and Analysis Methods

T's natural utterances were collected irregularly from various naturalistic settings, which were recorded mainly on video camera and digital audio recorder. Recordings were made from his birth until the age of 6;0, but only those recordings during his preschooler period are used as pertinent data sources in this study.

Table 1 Language Development Phases

Age period	Location	Caregivers
0-0;6	Japan	Under care of parents and grandmother (both Chinese)
0;6-1;10	Japan	Full-time nursery in a local Japanese preschool *1;0-1;6 also under care of grandmother
1;10-2;6	China	Under care of aunt (Chinese)
2;6-5;1	Japan	Full-time nursery in a local Japanese preschool *2;8-4;6 NOVA[3] Kids (40min. per week) *2;8-5;1 'Sprout Classroom'[4] (45min. per week) *3;6-4;0 also under care of aunt (Chinese) *4;8-4;10 two home stay visitors from the U.S (both English)
5;1-5;4	China	Staying at uncle (Chinese)'s home; full-time nursery in a local Chinese preschool
5;4-6;0	Japan	Full-time nursery in a local Japanese preschool *'Sprout Classroom' (45min. per week) *5; 9-6;0 Shane[5] Global Kids (60min. per week) *5;10-6;0 Abacus School[6] (70min. per week)

Random excerpts were taken from the transcripts that were considered representative of each phase and a number of qualitative analyses were conducted. Any utterance which was in whole or in part unintelligible was eliminated from analysis. As the researcher and the father of T, I was always present at the data collection scene, thus the context could be easily recalled.

5. Findings and Analysis

5.1 An Early Preschooler in Japan

5.1.1 Findings in the Home

Though born in Japan, T lived up in China from the age of 1;10 to 2;6. By the time T returned to Japan, his language was exclusively Chinese. To ensure his quick adaptation to the new environment, we deliberately spoke to him in Japanese and ignored Chinese for a brief time, then resumed the dominant use of Chinese when we felt our help with his Japanese was no

longer necessary. At the same time, I also began to speak to him in English from time to time.

In spite of our effort, Japanese came to be the dominant language for him in the following years. This unbalanced tendency can be seen in his online talks with our kinfolks, in his conversation with our home stay guests and from his narratives.

In the following brief dialogue, T (4;5) was trying to describe a movie scene about dinosaurs to his aunt (A). His intention was to speak Chinese, but it seems that his Chinese expressions were fit in the Japanese frame with its functional words '*wa*' [7]and '*ga*' that buttress the structure of the sentences.

(1) A: **ránhòu ne**? (And then?)

    T: **ránhòu? ránhòu** *wa*, **xiǎo kǒnglóng yīge yǒu.**

    (Then? And then, there is a small dinosaur.)

    A: **xiǎo kǒnglóng bèi dà kǒnglóng chīdiào le**?

    (Was the small dinosaur eaten by the big one?)

    T: **kǒnglóng, kǒnglóng** *ga*...(The dinosaur, the dinosaur...)

A close examination will also find that T's Chinese expression, which is obviously unnatural to native speakers of Chinese, reveals Japanese thinking patterns as discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

In the next talks with his aunt, T (4;8) switched between Chinese and Japanese when she was attempting to teach him a traditional Chinese poem.

(2) A: **zánliǎ zài niàn yībiàn. 'chūnmián bù jú xiǎo'.**

    (Let's read it one more time. 'I awake light-hearted this morning of spring'.)

    T: **'chūnmián bù jú xiǎo'.**

    ('I awake light-hearted this morning of spring'.)

    A: **wǒ tīngbùzháo, dàdiǎn shēng.**

(I can't hear clearly. Be aloud.)

T: *iyada!, mou ikkai iyada!* (No! I hate to read once again!)

(*T felt annoyed and left to fetch a glass of juice, and then put in some ice.)

A: **shénme dōngxi ya, hái jiā bīngkuàir?**

(What's that? You even put ice into it.)

T: *jyu-su!*

(Juice!)

(*He was still in bad mood.)

A: **shénme ya, gūgu tīng bù dǒng.**

(What? I don't understand.)

T: **shì yǐnliào!**

(It's juice!)

It can be assumed that T's abrupt switches are strongly affected by his emotional state. Though he knows that his interlocutor can only speak and understand Chinese, in his passion, he still cannot help bursting out in Japanese, the apparently dominant language for him.

In the following dialogues between T (4;9) and Chris (C), one of our home stay guests, a male junior university student and native speaker of English who understands and speaks little Japanese, T kept on switching from English to Japanese regardless of his interlocutor's objection and mixed the three languages now and again.

(3) T: Where are **bǎobao dìdi**?

(Where is my little brother?)

C: Where's what? **bǎobao dìdi**? I don't know what it is.

T: haha, **bǎobao dìdi** *wa*, **bǎobao dìdi** *wa, koredayo!*

(My little brother is here.)

C: Ah, the baby?

T: Yes, haha, **bǎobao didi** *wa* baby. *a-teru. koredayo.*

(Yes, my little brother is a baby. You said it. This it is.)

(4) C: Do you know what it is this?

T: They are strawberry.

C: Strawberries? OK, what I am...yes, what color are strawberries? Hold on a minute. Ah, I don't think it's a strawberry.

T: Strawberry *wa*, strawberry *wa, koredayo.* (Strawberry is, strawberry is, this one.)

C: English! English! Oh, it's OK.

T: *soudayo*! Strawberry *wa* pink *no iro dayo. kore wa* pink.

(It's true! Strawberry is pink. This is pink.)

T is obviously aware of the fact that he should convey himself to his interlocutor in English only, but Japanese, the dominant language for him, simply creeps into his mind unconsciously.

Similar Japanese dominancy can also be found in T's narratives. Without demand, T would always choose to relate a story in Japanese, and his narratives started in Chinese tend to entail code-mixing and would unfavorably give way to Japanese as can be seen in the following examples.

(5) **xiǎo lǎoshǔ, qù gànshá? ài wánrqu. mao, kàn mao zài diàoyú. bùài.** Two tree. **gǒu** *wa*, **gǒu** *wa*, tree **dong** *simasita. sosite,* **lǎoshǔ** *toraeta.*

(The small mouse, what to do? Like going out to play. A cat. It saw a cat fishing. He didn't like it. Two tree. The dog, the dog shook the tree. Then, the mouse was caught.) (3;8)

(6) **dà lǎohǔ ài chi xiǎomao. lǎohǔ, bù pà ni. mao, qù, qù shuili yǒu. mao, qù, qù mao de jia.** *ittyaimasita. neko no ie, kono* **dà lǎohǔ** *thiyakunarimasita. tsugi,* **dàmao**, *kono ookikunarimasita. sosite,* **lǎohǔ** *nigemasita.*

(The big tiger likes eating small cat. Tiger, I'm not afraid of you. Go, go and find in the water. The cat, go, go to the cat's home, it went to the cat's home. In the cat's home, the big tiger became small. And the cat became big. Then, the tiger fled away.) (4;0)

Clearly, T is capable of telling stories in both Chinese and Japanese, only his Japanese would always be a notch above his Chinese as his choice of language.

5.1.2 Findings in the Preschool and the Outside

T started his full-time nursery at a local Japanese preschool soon after his return. The first days saw some 'silent period' from T, but that didn't last long. He soon familiarized himself to the monolingual Japanese environment. One month or so after his return, the teacher in charge of his group told me there was little language obstacle for him in ordinary communication.

T's space and activity out of home and the preschool were almost confined. Except for taking some lessons (Ref. Table 1) for children, he would always enjoy himself in the children's play areas nearby, where he interacted with many Japanese peers. Naturally, Japanese is the only language they used for proper communication.

Regardless of our effort to educate him multilingually, T was evidently losing Chinese as time went on. Japanese became the dominant language in nearly all his productions. As a result, his frequent switching from Chinese or English to Japanese would at times discomfort his Chinese speaking and English speaking interlocutors.

5.2 The Three-month Home Stay in China

5.2.1 Findings in the Lodging Home

To save from further Chinese attrition, I brought T to China one month after his fifth birthday for a three-month stay at my brother's home. At here, T had a female cousin, one year older than him called Xinyu, who

played with him all the time.

Knowing that no one in the family could speak or understand Japanese, T tried to speak Chinese only. While the daytime saw him mostly as a monolingual Chinese boy, during our bedtime talks T felt like speaking Japanese to me. Soon however he started to respond to my Japanese only in Chinese and even disregarded my request for him to speak Japanese during the last half period of our home stay.

During this period, T seemed to have picked up Chinese mostly from Xinyu, the only playmate for him in the family. Her harsh requirement for him to only speak in Chinese might have made T feel depressed, but it also helped improve his Chinese more rapidly.

5.2.2 Findings in the Preschool

As scheduled, T was sent to a local Chinese preschool and was assigned to a special group called International Class. To be 'International', they gave English lessons everyday in addition to common day care.

T got used to the new environment quickly and abandoned Japanese soon after he entered the preschool. Gradually, except when being asked the matching Japanese words to some Chinese words, or for greetings and formulaic expressions out of curiosity of his teachers and classmates, T seldom uttered Japanese. Before reaching the end of the brief stay, T refused to speak Japanese regardless of who appealed to him to do so. This quick language shift reveals the overwhelming power of the speech community and acclimatization to it.

5.3 A Senior Preschooler in Japan

5.3.1 Findings in the Home

T seemed to have gotten the propensity for speaking Chinese after his three-month total immersion. An obvious change after his return was his attitude toward speaking Chinese in the home setting. Mostly, he chose to utter Chinese of his own accord, and he did not show antipathy upon

request to shift to Chinese in case he was speaking Japanese.

For several months after his return, Chinese remained the dominant language for him at home. However, a slight change of language preference in his production could still be sensed over this period. This was evident when we found it required more prodding to ask him to shift from speaking Japanese to Chinese in our effort for him to maintain Chinese.

5.3.2 Findings in the Preschool

After his return, T was transferred to another local Japanese preschool near our home. Different from the previous one, this preschool was patronized by a local church which preaches Christian doctrine in ordinary nursery. Japanese is the only language available to them when praying or telling religious stories.

Coincidentally, T has a native Chinese peer at the same age group (called Rose Group) with him, a boy who was born in China and brought to Japan by his parents at the age of three. They spoke to each other for a time in Chinese when they were left alone during the first several days T entered this preschool, but soon abandoned it. The interaction between the two bilingual children at the preschool created a very limited environment for them to use Chinese. The overwhelming Japanese environment impelled them to use only Japanese.

5.3.3 Findings in the English School

Six months later after his return, T also began to take English lessons in a class designed for Japanese returnee elementary school students. He had two elder girl classmates, one returning from the U.S., the other from the U.K., both were close to native speakers of English. This provides an ideal opportunity for T to improve his English. He had little problem following the lesson, but for lack of competence in reading and writing, he gradually lost his interest in the school lessons. His classmates complained to me that T sometimes grumbled in Japanese when he was asked to write or read.

5.4 Summary

At around the age of 6;0, when the study was coming to an end, T persisted in speaking Chinese, but the pressure of the vast Japanese environment seemed to be building, and English was almost excluded from his daily speech apart from as a receptive language only.

6. Summary and Discussion

6.1 Language Choice at the Macro-level

Presumably without parental motivation and determination, it is not possible for T to maintain his Chinese and learn to speak English within the monolingual Japanese environment. And without durable effort, both Chinese and English are liable to become only receptive languages for lack of a larger language environment. The extent of parental language knowledge also appears to be an important additional factor. T's multilingual development undoubtedly benefits from the multilingual competence of parents.

The influence from peers, however, seems much more powerful than parents given parallel length of language contact. The preschoolers (including those from both Japan and China), playmates (including outdoor friends and his cousin), and school classmates (referring to all the classes he attended) constitute his peer groups. As can be seen from every language development phase, the dominant language for T was always the one that his peers spoke rather than with what his parents had expected him to say.

On the other hand, the monolingual settings at different phases apparently dominate T's choice of language. In a larger sense, parental influence gradually wanes against the vast social environment. It becomes apparent that the preschools T attended and the particular speech communities at different phases of his language development process will always prevail

over parental endeavors in the competition of language choice.

6.2 Language Choice at the Micro-level

T's choice of language at the micro-level, which is embodied in code-switching and code-mixing, reflects his superior Japanese proficiency to the other two languages. By and large, Japanese is favoured over either Chinese or English for most of T's code-switching purposes and Japanese also tends to be the basis of the functional elements in most of his code-mixing expressions.

T can also track language choices by his interlocutors. A typical interlocutor recognition case is identity awareness. T clearly identifies himself as a Chinese and has close relations with the few Chinese playmates available. However, this emphasis on interlocutor recognition tends to forfeit social appreciation. For example, in an elevator or elsewhere, he ignores the presence of Japanese people when he speaks Chinese to me or his Chinese playmates.

In contrast to the social or external factors upon language choice, the cognitive or internal factors, although less detectable, still definitely play an important role in T's production. This can be detected by examining the morphosyntactic structure of some of T's 'unnatural' Chinese expressions which reflect cross-linguistic interference from Japanese (the dominant language for him by and large). In the following example[8], T apparently transferred the Japanese structure to his Chinese utterance.

(7) a. **ta   bi   zhèige   bù   lihai**.
　　　 he   [than this one]   not   sturdy

　 b. *kare   wa   kore   yori   tuyokunai.*
　　　 he   p. [this one than]   not sturdy

　 c. **ta   méiyǒu   zhèige   lihai**.
　　　 he   not [than   this one]   sturdy
　　　 "He is not as sturdy as this one."

In the following case, despite the fact that only one Japanese word is used, it seems clear that, the underlying syntactic framework is Japanese, rather than Chinese.

(8) a. **ránhòu** *wa*, **xiǎo kǒnglóng yige   yǒu**.

       then   p. small   dinosaur   one   there be

    b. *sosite, chisai kyouryuu ga   ittou   iru.*

       then   small   dinosaur   p.   one there be

    c. **ránhòu,   yǒu   yige xiǎo kǒnglóng.**

       then   there be one small   dinosaur

       "And, there is a small dinosaur."

In some cases, the Japanese structure is realized entirely in Chinese form.

(9) a. **wǒ bèi   nálai le**.

       I   quilt bring p.

    b. *(boku wa) kakefuton wo mottekita.*

       I   p.   quilt   p. bring (pp)

    c. **wǒ   bǎ   bèi   nálai   le**. (Fan 2006)

       I   prep. quilt bring   p.

       "I brought the quilt."

The word order of the sentence (a) is clearly Japanese, since Chinese would require both moving the direct object to a position preceding the resultative verb compound and marking the direct object phrase with the marker 'bǎ'.

Analysis of the various transfer phenomena indicates that cross-linguistic interference reflects conceptual orientation, typically the cognitive control from the language that has reached its conceptual fluency[9] in a bilingual or multilingual mind. As can be seen from the above examples of T's Chinese production, beneath his superficial choice of Chinese is a choice of Japanese. This is typically the case in such situations as when T

was obliged to speak Chinese during his three-month stay in China. He did choose to speak Chinese when faced with overwhelming Chinese circumstances, but even then, underneath was a hidden yet entrenched preference for Japanese.

This hidden choice of Japanese out of conceptual tenacity may be responsible for most of T's unnatural Chinese production, but it is assumed to fade away when his conceptual fluency of Chinese becomes full-fledged if and when his Chinese immersion is carried out persistently and is long-lasting. After all, "cognitive skills and patterns of thinking are the products of the activities practiced in the social institutions of the culture in which the individual grows up" (Vygotsky 1978). The ultimate choice is in due course determined by the socialization scale.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, parental influence plays a decisive role in a preschooler's choice of language. The ways in which parents contribute to the construction of the child's multilingual capacity are of particular importance. On the other hand, parental control gives way to socialization constraints in the long run. Home environment is significant but the outside speech community is more influential. After all, parents' language choice for a child is to subject to the child himself. As it is, socialization constraint on language choice intensifies over time for a child. Additionally, cognitive interference holds powerful control in language choice. Though cognitive activity is all but the upshot of socialization, its function in bilingual and multilingual production is far-reaching.

The empirical analysis of data conducted in this study represents only a single case and equally from the perspective of a single observer only. This introduces many limitations as far as the generalization of the results of the study is concerned. The most important avenue for future research

obviously lies in continuing the observations of the development process as literacy begins. Moreover, the interface between linguistic features and socialization remain important avenues for future research in relation to the theme of this study.

Notes

*   I am greatly indebted to Professor Tosu Norimitsu of Keio University for his insightful remarks on this paper and instruction to me. I would also like to thank Professor Abe Keiko of Kyoritsu Women's University for her invaluable advice. I am also deeply grateful to R Tim Tyler for his kind editing of this paper. An earlier version of this paper entitled "A Qualitative Account of a Preschooler's Choice of Language" was designated to present at the 19th Conference of the Japanese Association of Sociolinguistic Sciences in Nihon University College of Humanities and Sciences, March 3-4, 2007.

1   A situation where, because of geographic proximity or migration, bilingual speakers bring two or more languages into contact with each other. It has long been applied to dealing with the multilingual settings in many parts of the world. In this paper, this term applies to individual language handling strategy of the multilingual subject and also extends to monolingual settings.

2   A group of people who share the same language and/or the same knowledge about the distribution and differential use of a set of languages and varieties. In this paper, this term applies to the outside language environment in contrast to the home setting.

3   A private English teaching company in Japan. All instructors are native speakers. In addition to eikaiwa, NOVA also provides special programs for children, business English, and test preparation. All lessons are given in English only.

4   An intelligence promoting school for children in Japan. All lessons are given in Japanese only.

5   A private English teaching company in Japan. All instructors are native speakers. Shane emphasizes orthodox British English. All lessons are given in English only.

6   A supplementary private school teaching abacus, arithmetic, and Japanese language from senior preschooler level. All lessons are given in Japanese

only.

7   In this paper, Chinese letters and expressions are marked in **bold** types; Japanese are marked in *italicized* types.

8   In (7), (8), and (9), (a) is T's unnatural Chinese expression; (b) is parallel Japanese express to (a); (c) is proper Chinese expression as a correction of (a).

9   Conceptual fluency refers to the extent that bilingual speakers are able to understand and use concepts, knowledge and skills acquired through the channel of either language, and means the level of free access to vocabulary in both languages. It presupposes that the conceptual-semantic interface works properly and, as a result, depending on the level of conceptual fluency, the bilingual person has greater or lesser difficulty finding the right words to express his/her ideas through the channel of either language (Kecskes & Papp 2003).

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