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Navigating the Third Culture: Comparative Case Studies of Japanese Expatriate Students in Singapore and Factors Influencing English Language Development

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Abstract

This study utilises comparative case studies of three Japanese third-culture kids (TCKs) living in Singapore aged 16, each from a different school type (international school, Japanese school, and local Singapore school). It explores if the home language, language used in school, language used in social circles, and language of media consumed of Japanese TCKs in Singapore are enabling or mitigating factors of their development of English language. This study builds on the framework of TCKs established by Useem et al. (1963) and redefined by Pollock and Van Reken (2001), Dewaele et al.'s (2003) definition of bilingualism, and Tokuhama-Espinosa's (2000) ten factors of success in raising multilingual children. Language used in school, language used in social circles, language of media consumed, and individual motivation were found to be enabling factors whereas home language was found to be neither an enabling nor mitigating factor. Differing pedagogies were found between different school types. Most of the findings are in line with the literature reviewed.

Keywords: English mastery, Japanese expatriate children, language learning, bilingualism, third-culture kids

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Since bilateral relations were established in 1967, Singapore and Japan have been on great terms in politics, economy, and culture. Many Japanese companies have set up their regional offices in Singapore and contributed to the technological progress and the labour force expansion of the country (Balakrishnan, 2016). This has led to a considerable pool of Japanese expatriate families living and studying in Singapore, with about 36,200 individuals as of October 2021 (Statista Research Department, 2022). Being a multilingual global city with a predominantly English-speaking culture (Higginson et al., 2019; Maxwell et al., 2019), Singapore offers Japanese expatriate three types of education institutions, namely, Japanese schools, international schools, or Singapore public schools.

The Japanese schools in Singapore cater largely to the educational needs of the Japanese community. These schools are operated based on Japanese values and taught by teachers dispatched from the Japanese Ministry of Education (Befu, 2003). The curriculum in these schools in Singapore is also planned in a way so that it is aligned and standardized with the public schools in Japan. While the depth of the English education in Japanese schools may be sufficient in largely monolingual and monocultural Japan, it is not the case in Singapore. As such, some Japanese expatriates tend to focus on educational ideals and securing an advantage for their children (Ball et al., 1995) by sending their children to international schools or Singapore public schools, which are by far culturally different from Japanese schools. In doing so, these Japanese parents engage in "cultural capital acquisition" (Reay et al., 2011, p. 83), which allows them to secure their status in society back in Japan by equipping their children with skills necessary for a multicultural environment (Groves & O'Connor, 2018). In these schools, Japanese students internalize English through the subject matter and day-to-day activities such as writing journals, reading books, conducting research, or making presentations. Other Japanese parents choose to send their children to public schools run by the Ministry of Education Singapore. These schools allow Japanese children to fully immerse in the local culture and learn English as their first language.

English education in Japan focuses on grammar and text translation because the fundamental aim of learning English is passing entrance examinations of schools. As such, Japanese *kikokushijo*, or returnees, may be highly sought after for their English ability and experiences spent living abroad (Rohlen, 1983). However, they may also have to face readjustment issues, a potential loss of proficiency in their Japanese language and Japanese cultural attitudes and behaviors (White, 1992). Japanese expatriate parents are aware of the risks and benefits attached to Japanese returnees (Nukaga & Tsuneyoshi, 2010) and many struggle with the possibility of training their children to be effectively bilingual (Nukaga, 2013).

By analyzing three case studies of Japanese children from various educational institutions, this study aims to explore the effects of home language, language used in school, language used in social circles, and language of media consumed on their development of the English language. Through understanding the factors that influence their mastery of the English language, more effective solutions can be proposed and implemented to help them improve their English during their overseas stint.

Theoretical Frameworks

'Third-culture Kids'

Japanese children, who are living in Singapore and attending schools here, are an example of 'third-culture kids' (TCKs in short), a phenomenon which has been increasingly studied since the 1980s. Useem et al. (1963) originally developed the term "third culture" to refer to the transnational expatriate culture, whereas the first culture is that of the home country and the second culture is that of their current country of residence (Useem & Downie, 1976; Useem & Useem, 1967). Useem (1973)

pointed out that these TCKs share common subcultures. In this way, the term "third culture" evolves to not only referring to behavior patterns, but also subcultures shared between parent and child. In the extant literature, the discussion surrounding the notion of "third-culture kids" acknowledges the impact of international mobility on the next generation. Pollock and Van Reken (2001) redefine the meaning of the term "third-culture kids":

> "A Third Culture Kid (TCK) is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents' culture. The TCK builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture are assimilated into the TCK's life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background" (p. 13).

Van Reken (2011) highlights the differences between the third culture and the experience of migrants in the past. She emphasizes that the third culture consists of a shared experience of "a cross-cultural lifestyle, high mobility, and expected repatriation" (p. 36), which further define a specific set of characteristics typical of TCKs.

Using this theoretical understanding of third culture, the Japanese children in this study are TCKs who share the same Japanese-Singaporean lifestyle, a high likelihood to relocate to other countries, and an expectation to return to Japan sometime in the unknown future. As such, the cultural identity of a TCK is a multi-faceted and dynamic one. It includes multiple facets such as language, self-definition, cultural belongingness and emotions interwoven together (Tannenbaum & Tseng, 2015). Tannenbaum and Tseng (2015) highlight that TCKs may not perceive their identity as a mix or slide between cultures, but rather based on the languages they use. This suggests serious implications for TCKs who have problems negotiating between the languages of their host country and that of their parent country.

In addition, Tokuhama-Espinosa (2003) highlights the potential scenario where a TCK loses his or her mother tongue language after spending an extended period of time in a foreign country. To prevent this from happening, Tokuhama-Espinosa (2003) observes that some parents employ strategies to support the use of their mother tongue as their home language. She also points out that children are more likely to retain knowledge of a language when they learn it while being immersed in that culture. Being able to apply a newly acquired language in everyday situations allows children to "develop a fluency that escapes most second language learners in a classroom setting in a monolingual culture" (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2003, p. 167).

According to Tokuhama-Espinosa (2003), even if the TCK has only one or two years in the new language environment, the presence of positive motivation in the third culture experience will increase the chances of language retention and retrieval in the long run. In particular, she proposes that TCKs seek out activities such as sports or dance that they like, use English while enjoying the activities, and make friends with people who speak English.

Bilingualism

The idea of being bilingual has been widely debated. From the lay perspective, bilingualism has been regarded as having equal mastery of both languages. This could be traced back to Bloomfield (1965), who thought of bilingualism as "native-like control of two languages" (p. 6). Grosjean has argued that this perception is misguided and erroneous (e.g., 1985; 1989). Such individuals may be common in children, but extremely rare in adults and hence the pursuit of "true bilingualism" is impractical and unrealistic. Similarly, Cook (1991) points out that multicompetence needs to be considered when evaluating bilinguals, which he defined as "the compound state of a mind with two languages"

(p. 103). Based on his argument, the bilingual mind and the monolingual mind cannot be the same due to a constant interaction between Japanese and English within the bilinguals. Researchers have claimed that it is very rare for bilinguals to have close to native level of proficiency in both languages (e.g., Cutler et al., 1992; Grosjean, 1982). Many scholars have also posited various definitions of what it means to be bilingual. In this study, the definition by Dewaele et al.'s (2003) is used. The authors discuss the complexities of bilingualism, noting that it encompasses:

> "…not only the 'perfect' bilingual (who probably does not exist) or the 'balanced' ambilingual (who is probably rare) but also various 'imperfect' and 'unstable' forms of bilingualism, in which one language takes over from the other(s) on at least some occasions and for some instances of language use" (p. 1).

The TCK framework guides the study's analysis of how Japanese TCKs' navigation of their unique identities and cultural fluidity affect their motivation and emotional connection to learning English, and how their interactions within both Japanese and Singaporean cultural contexts affect their retention and fluency in English vs. Japanese. The Bilingualism framework further informs the study by helping to evaluate the nature and nuances of these children's bilingual language competencies, and can be applied to analyse how Japanese TCKs use English in academic and social settings and to what extent they rely on Japanese in personal contexts.

Literature Review

In the extant literature, Cole (2001) was the only study found to have examined Japanese secondary school TCKs in Singapore in learning English. Cole's (2001) study investigated two types of motivation, namely attitudes toward learning English and motivational orientations. She employed a mixed methods study comprising of classroom observation, student survey questionnaire, and interviews with teachers and students. In her study, she found factors such as attitudes of students and parents, gender, level of English ability, and number of English-speaking friends significant in motivating Japanese students to learn English. In particular, Cole (2001) reported that students with more than five English-speaking friends displayed a "significantly stronger integrative orientation than their peers with no English-speaking friends" towards learning English (p. 3).

Raising Multilingual Children

Tokuhama-Espinosa (2000) has conducted a wide range of studies examining language development in children of families who speak two or more languages. In her book published in 2000, Tokuhama-Espinosa outlines a framework of ten factors of success in raising multilingual children in international expatriate families as shown in Figure 1.

Tokuhama-Espinosa (2000) highlights that the age of the child at the time of migration to a foreign country plays a key role in determining how proficient the child is in the foreign language. In her framework, she terms it as the Window of Opportunity. She defines the three windows of opportunity as such:

> The First Window is from birth to nine months old. A Window-and-a-Half is from nine months through to age two and can be used by those children who are auditorily inclined (they have a "good ear"). The Second Window of Opportunity is from four to seven years old. The Third Window of Opportunity is from "Old Age and Back": it always exists and is categorized as from eight years old through to adulthood (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2000, p. 14).

1. Timing and The Windows of Opportunity
2. Aptitude for Foreign Languages
3. Motivation
4. Strategy
5. Consistency
6. Opportunity and Support: the Home Role, School Role, and the Community Role
7. The Linguistic Relationship between the First and Second Languages
8. Siblings
9. Gender
10. Hand Use

Figure 1 *Ten key factors in raising multilingual children (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2000).*

One major difference between the Second and Third Window that Tokuhama-Espinosa (2000) has pointed out is that a child in the Second Window "makes his first connections in the brain while he learns to speak" (pp. 18–19), but a child in the Third Window has to "make the first connections while learning to speak and write simultaneously" (p. 19). The multitude of processes the child has to be engaged in in a later Window affect the ability of the child to gain effective competence in mastering the language within the same amount of time.

Tokuhama-Espinosa (2000) characterizes the Second Window (between four to seven years old) as a honeymoon stage, where children are less self-conscious and regard language learning as a game. They are not hurt when others correct them on their use of the language, and they have many opportunities to practice the language in school, where they gain friends as a benefit of using the language.

Children in the Third Window, however, require support from parents in their foreign language acquisition. Harris' (1998) group socialization theory explains that children and adolescents in this age group learn the language of a particular group of peers in order to be included in it. This is manifested especially in students in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, maintaining that identity throughout school, and when they are promoted to main classes of English, they have to struggle with defining their identity all over again. To these students, learning English becomes a process that is unpleasant and that they wish to avoid (Harris, 1998). As such, the role of support the home and school play becomes more important.

In particular, Tokuhama-Espinosa (2000) advises parents to take advantage of the windows of opportunity and cultivate positive motivation in the child. She also suggests that parents exercise consistency in their strategies with the child and ensure available support to the child in the home, school, and community environment.

To facilitate the review of the extant literature and thereafter the analysis of each of the possible factors identified earlier, this section will be divided into four parts: home language, language used in school, language used in social circles, and language of media consumed.

Home Language

The dynamics of the multilingual family and the language use of the parents have been discussed by many researchers in the last few decades to be significant factors of the child's language development (Hakuta & d'Andrea, 1992; Portes & Hao, 1998; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2000) and as important support in the child's home (Bronfenbrenner, 1944, 1979; Cairns & Cairns, 2005). Multiple studies have also shown the importance in having the ability to negotiate the language used in the environment they live in, without which brings serious consequences to them and their children (Bochner, 1981; Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Lauring, 2008; Selmer, 2006; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001).

There exist several schools of thought on the amount of mother tongue language that should be used at home. Tokuhama-Espinosa (2000) highlights that the language used at home for expatriate families results from a combination of the languages the parents speak and that of the foreign environment. Yamamoto (2001) maintains that when the mother tongue language is spoken by one or both parents in a family, there is a significant decrease in the child's use of the foreign language instead. Some studies posit that the languages used by parents at home do not affect the language learning of the child. For instance, De Houwer (2007) claims that the expatriate child will be able to master the foreign language regardless of the languages the parents used. On the other hand, some studies suggest that only the mother tongue language be used at home. In Siren's (1991) study, the likelihood of a child becoming bilingual was found to be unexpectedly higher when only the mother tongue language was used at home. This suggests that the child has to speak the mother tongue language at home and the foreign language at school, thus developing skills for both.

The different findings reported in the various studies above call for a need in revisiting the impact of languages used at home, in the case of this study, English or Japanese, on the resulting language abilities of the expatriate children of the family.

Language Used in School

School is another environment that TCKs spend a large part of their day. As such, the role the school plays in developing the language of TCKs is undeniable (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2000). Compared to the home environment, the school environment differs in many ways. Snow (1983) claims that whilst the interactions at home are about matters of the present, interactions at school are decontextualized most of the time. Studies by Crago et al. (1997) and Heath (1983) have found that a large part of school interactions with teachers involve questions where the child knows that the adult knows the answer (for instance, how much money does he have left?), but such is not always the case with interactions with parents at home. Last but not least, school is also a place where the child experiences the use of English that shows proper vocabulary and grammar (Hoff, 2006).

In a qualitative study by De Sivatte et al. (2019), interviews with expatriate children reveal that school experiences influence their adjustment to the foreign country. Children attending international schools interact less with the local culture of the foreign country and hence face fewer identity struggles. This makes it easier for them to adapt to life in the new country and learn its language. However, De Sivatte et al. (2019) also report that adjustments can be difficult with differences in academic systems in the new schools compared to those of their home countries. This is especially true for Japanese TCKs as the Japanese education system is unique in that it emphasizes "communication, collaboration, emotional stability, and other qualities forming the total child" (Tsuneyoshi, 2014, p. 2) over rigorous content knowledge. The solution that most Japanese expatriate parents turn to is enrolling their children in

jukus, or cram schools. These institutions can be found all over the world, with at least 15 *jukus* in Singapore. According to Yamato and Zhang (2017), *jukus* have played a central role in education of Japanese children since the 1960s. These *jukus* typically operate after school hours and help students prepare for their school examinations at a price (Bray, 1999).

While Japanese schools and non-Japanese schools share a common aim in the English education of their students, the underlying principles of how education is carried out are very different. It is thus interesting to examine how Japanese children think of learning English in the various school contexts and how they perceive the effectiveness of the instruction.

Language Used in Social Circles

Regardless of age, all TCKs interact with their peers from school, after-school classes, and during sports training. Therefore, it is inevitable that a TCK learn some forms of language, both good and bad, from his or her peers. Ervin-Tripp (1991) contends that interactions with peers allow opportunities to acquire unique language that cannot be learned elsewhere and hence peers are powerful agents of language socialization. Pellegrini et al. (1997) also argue that friends are sources of advanced language use that can help a child overcome difficulties and conflicts.

Many studies based on the bioecological model of development have looked at how social contexts where children live in shape their language development (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1944, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Tudge et al., 1997). These studies found that social contexts such as cultures and ethnicities influence the proximal systems such as the child's schools, friends, and environments in the childcare centers, which are the source of the child's direct interactions with the world. These interactions directly affect the child's language development and are referred to by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) as "engines of development" (p. 996).

In particular, Hoff (2006) argues that the relationship between environmental contexts and language development exists on two layers. The environment support first allows a child to learn language for the purpose of communication and provides him or her with the motivation to do so. On top of that, the environment also provides the child with opportunities to listen to speech, and from there, make sound-meaning mappings.

As explained by Vygotsky's (1978) social network theory, the networks of relationships of a child provide social resources that facilitate the learning and practicing of new languages. Krackhardt and Hanson (1993) make a distinction within the different types of social networks, namely, advice networks, trust networks, and communication networks. Japanese TCKs learning English have to depend on their advice network for guidance, their trust network for support in times of difficulties with English or the process of learning it, and their communication network for clarifications on the details of what they are learning (Palfreyman, 2011).

Interactions in the TCKs' social circles alone are not sufficient for the mastery of English; guidance by teachers in schools is still necessary. While there is no doubt that the social environments of TCKs play an indispensable role in shaping their use of the English language, it remains to be seen whether they are enabling factors or mitigating factors. As Japanese TCKs with lower English ability may experience difficulties in establishing social networks facilitated using the English language, the language barrier may hinder the TCKs' forming of social circles. As such, this study aims to ascertain and provide further insight into this phenomenon.

Language of Media Consumed

In the last decade, mobile devices and media have become increasingly prevalent in young children's environment (Rideout, 2017). With children spending more time using media than any other leisure activity (Bianchi et al., 2006), it is inevitable for children's language development to be influenced largely by what they hear on social media or the internet.

Past research has shown the benefits of how media use can improve a child's language. Fraser (2001) posits that non-native learners of English find it hard to conceptualize, differentiate, and organize in their mind the sounds in the English pronunciation. Hence, hearing English words through media and real situations is useful for these learners (Kartal & Korucu-Kis, 2020). Messum (2012) also highlights that the key to spoken English is the production of sounds and not the internalization of meanings, and therefore teaching through repetition in schools is less effective than listening to real conversations where the language is used. The incorporation of media into the language classroom is also becoming increasingly prevalent. Information being taught is presented on media sources in ways that prove to be more exciting and easily understood by beginners. This way of digital instruction allows for a more student-centric approach which became popular with students and teachers very quickly (Collins et al., 2000).

On the other hand, it is possible that an increase in the use of media can hinder language development in children, by displacing the time spent on other activities such as shared reading or interactions between the parents and the child, which are found to be related to language ability (Fiorini & Keane, 2014; Payne et al., 1994). Khan et al.'s (2017) study reveals that four-year-olds who spent more time watching television ended up spending less time reading books with their parents. Also, the quality and quantity of speech and interactions between the child and his or her parents when watching television are found to be much lower than other activities (Lavigne et al., 2015; Nathanson & Rasmussen, 2011; Pempek et al., 2011). At the same time, excessive consumption of digital media and overreliance on media devices can also lead to children losing basic skills like spelling and handwriting (Francke & Sundin, 2012).

Most of the extant literature on the effects of media use and language development focuses on pre-schoolers, as the preschool years is a crucial period for language development. During this time, there are more neural connections formed due to the presence of early experiences (Huttenlocher, 2002). There are also quite a large number of studies conducted on the effects of media use and language learning for adolescents. For example, a study by De Wilde et al. (2020) found young Dutch learners increased their proficiency in all four skills of English through using English in gaming, social media, and oral communication. Similarly, Puimege and Peters' (2019) study of 10-, 11-, and 12-year-olds reported positive effects of video streaming and gaming.

For TCKs, Long (2020) contends that multimodal input (e.g., use of visual and audio concurrently) allows learners to detect a language without being consciously aware of it, through a process known as incidental learning. Studies have also shown that watching videos or movies with captions in the mother tongue language increases comprehension skills, vocabulary, word order, grammar, and pronunciation (e.g., Gass et al., 2019; Lee & Révész, 2021; Pattemore & Muñoz, 2020; Peters & Webb, 2018; Pujadas & Muñoz, 2019; Wisnieska & Mora, 2020). Even watching videos and movies without captions can benefit TCKs by training aural recognition of word forms (Sydorenko, 2010).

Compared to toddlers, parents of older children are more likely to be concerned about their children's excessive screen time usage and are less likely to believe that the use of media is beneficial in their learning (Rideout, 2017).

Research Question

Based on the TCK and bilingual frameworks discussed earlier and with the review of extant literature, this study explores how the four factors of home environment, school environment, social circles, and media consumption influence the development of the English language of Japanese expatriate students in Singapore through the following research question:

> RQ. To what extent are the factors home language, language used in school, language used in social circles, and language of media consumed enabling or mitigating factors for the mastery of the English language of Japanese children living overseas in Singapore?

Methodology

In this study, a case study research design was used. As there are few existing studies, there is a need to gather empirical data. The case study research design was chosen as it provides "particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic" data from which relationships can be drawn and analysis can be made (Mills & Gay, 2016, p. 419).

The decision was made to recruit one participant each from an international school, a Japanese school, and a local school in Singapore. This would provide the most variation across language used in school, social circles, etc. One of the authors of the current study has taught English to Japanese children in Singapore, first in a Japanese cram school, then in a privately-run business. In his many years of experience, he has seen considerable differences in the development of English language abilities depending on the type of school his students are enrolled in, thus corroborating this decision. All three participants were personal contacts of the author. Clearance from the Institutional Review Board was obtained before participants were invited for the study. Izumi (international school), Juri (Japanese school) and Lisa (local school) were selected by means of purposive sampling and invited to take part in this study. All participants were 16 years of age at the time of recruitment and have both Japanese parents. For a detailed profile of the participants, please refer to Appendix A. Pseudonyms were used to hide the identity of the participants. A consent form explaining what the study would entail was sent to the participants and their families. As all the participants were underage, parental consent was obtained before data collection was carried out.

Semi-structured interviews, which lasted for about an hour, were carried out for each of the participants over Skype and were voice-recorded for transcribing purposes. The online platform of Skype encourages self-disclosure without participant bias and voice-recording is not as intrusive as camera recording in face-to-face interviews. Participants were instructed to have their cameras turned off so that they could express themselves freely. In order to capture authentic responses and experiences, participants were given a choice to have the interview conducted in either English or Japanese. Only Juri opted to do it in Japanese.

Fifteen sets of questions were asked to find out participants' background and their use of English language in their home, school, out-of-school environments, and their motivation in learning the English language. Please refer to Appendix B for the interview questions. Depending on the responses the participants provided, more in-depth questions were asked to follow up on any possible salient themes that came up.

All interviews were first transcribed and the data from the Japanese interview was translated into English. Words or phrases that allow identification of the participants were replaced with

non-identifiable ones to preserve confidentiality of sources. The data was then analyzed using content analysis, in a two-step process. First, similar responses were grouped under a code. Then, these codes were analyzed into broader themes through a process of constant comparison. The emergent themes are discussed vis-à-vis the literature review in the discussion section.

Results and Discussion

In this section, we will have a thematic discussion of the factors laid out in the study's research question, supported with excerpts from the interviews and artifacts provided by the respondents. For the full transcripts of the interviews, please refer to Appendix C.

Home Language: Not an Essential Enabling Factor

One of the surprising things I had found was that none of the participants speak English with their parents at home, even though almost all of their parents were fluent in English. Lisa, who was required by her parents to speak Japanese at home, is a successful example of how a TCK can be bilingual when only Japanese is used at home and English is used in school, a claim that Siren (1991) posits. Lisa was able to become fluent in both English and Japanese because she practices Japanese with her parents at home and English with her friends at school. In this way, she had opportunities to develop both languages.

With Izumi and Juri, their home situations are a little different compared to Lisa's. Izumi uses only Japanese at home out of fear of making mistakes in English. He also found it "embarrassing" to talk to his dad, a native English speaker, in English, because "[he knew] he [was] gonna spot mistakes that [he was] gonna make". He admitted it was strange why he did not do so: "Yeah, it's weird. I should be able to [talk to my dad in English] but yeah, I don't. I just realised I don't."

Similarly, Juri has always imagined Japanese to be the sole language for her. Despite her parents being fluent in English, Juri had never talked to them in English. She had never thought about why there was a need to converse with her parents in English. Since both her parents and her were born and raised in Japan, Juri felt that using Japanese to communicate was the obvious choice. Her parents had never initiated a conversation with her in English, either:

> "All three of us have our first language as Japanese. Normally I have never thought about why … well, because normally we were born and brought up in Japan, so I feel we use Japanese."

This shows that the languages spoken at home is not an essential enabling factor. Instead, how well Izumi and Juri pick up English would depend on other more significant factors.

Self-fulfilling Prophecy and the Idea of Bilingualism: A Potential Mitigating Factor

With a predetermined mindset of their mother tongue being the dominant language for them before they start to learn a foreign language, English, TCKs are unknowingly limiting their own potential in acquiring it. This phenomenon is in line with the self-fulfilling prophecy, a term coined by Merton and Merton (1968), which is defined as "a false definition of the situation evoking a new behavior which makes the originally false conception come true" (p. 477).

The presence of an inherent self-fulfilling prophecy can be seen in the case of Izumi. Although he has achieved a relatively high level of proficiency in English, he is still unsure and unconfident of his abilities, and believes that "it will never be better than [Japanese]". He felt that Japanese was wired in him since birth:

> "I started learning English when I was two. But I already knew a few Japanese words in Japan until two, so maybe my original setting, the language was set as Japanese, so that's why it will never be better than … I don't know."

This reinforced the idea that Japanese would always be his dominant language, and that his English would never be on par with Japanese. He also expressed doubt on whether this dominant language can be changed later on in life. This shows that it is crucial for educators to be aware of learners' internal self-fulfilling or self-defeating prophecies.

It is also important to note that having a dominant language within oneself does not and should not impede bilingualism or multilingualism. As TCKs decide the appropriate language to be used with different groups of people and in different settings, they set the dominant language for those particular situations, and any subsequent changes made to the language used would come across as weird or forced. This is best illustrated in Lisa's experiences of toggling between English with her local school friends and Japanese with her friends from the Japanese supplementary school. This also explains why Juri found the idea of speaking to her parents in English an unimaginable one.

As discussed earlier, researchers have claimed that it is very rare for bilinguals to have close to native level of proficiency in both languages, and so it would be highly unrealistic for Izumi to expect that his English language be as good as his Japanese language, or better. An overemphasis on unrealistic goals could result in low morale and a lack of confidence, as seen in Izumi's case. A similar parallel can also be seen in Juri's case, due to her being consistently ranked below other classmates with more native-like English proficiency in grades. As such, she was unable to see the fruits of her labor:

> "In English, because the people who are ranked on top of me are almost fixed, so no matter how hard I work, it is hard to see the results of my effort, so well, I have hardly any motivation."

It is possible that Juri had perceived these classmates as 'balanced bilinguals', be it knowingly or unknowingly, and had come to the conclusion that it would be near impossible to be as good as them.

Setting unrealistic goals for oneself can trigger in TCKs a self-defeating prophecy, reinforcing in them the inability to do well in English, and in turn causing them to abandon actions which can help themselves. Instead, it is important to focus on more realistic goals such as being able to express oneself confidently in English.

Varying English Curriculum Boosts Different Aspects of English Development

The interviews reveal that the English curriculum in international and local schools is more structured towards learning the language in context and training students to relate what they learnt to the real world. At the international school Izumi attended, he had Language and Literature classes for four hours each week. In his lessons, he read texts and learned how to analyse them by looking at hidden themes, motives and messages conveyed. Izumi also participated in group reading sessions once a

week for 15 minutes in class, where he joined other classmates to discuss their insights of a book. He would then submit his understanding of the book in the form of a sketch:

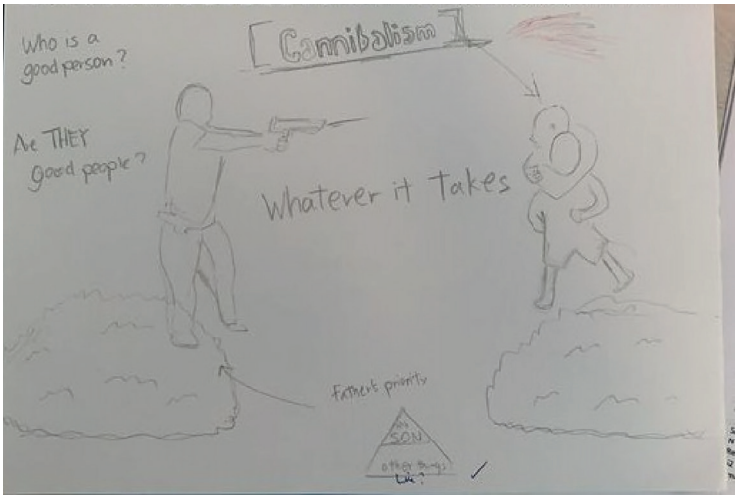

Figure 2 *A sketch showing Izumi's interpretation of a book.*

Izumi's situation shows that international schools teach English in context of the current society, unlike what De Sivatte et al. (2019) contends. This allows TCKs in international schools to learn about their new environment and see how they fit in the larger picture.

On the other hand, English curriculum in the Japanese schools emphasizes more on the technicalities of English language. At the Japanese senior high school which Juri was attending, English was divided into four modules: English Expression (EE), Communication English (CE), English Conversation (EC), and a choice between the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC). EE focused on grammar and paragraph writing while CE focused on reading comprehension, taking up five to six hours a week, and EC focused on speaking, taking up around two hours per week. As part of her CE assignments, she has to read English newspaper articles and pen down her thoughts about the article, as well as vocabulary items:

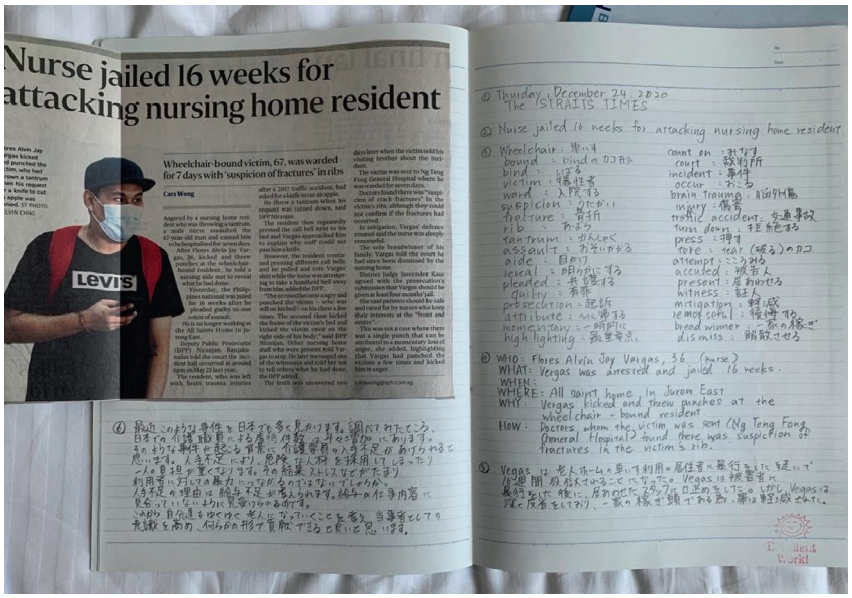

Figure 3 *Juri's reading homework.*

Juri's experiences support Hoff's (2006) argument that the benefits school provide as compared to the home environment are the experiences where proper vocabulary and grammar of English are used. However, her experiences do not seem to agree with Tsuneyoshi's (2014) point that the Japanese education is holistic and emphasizes non-academic skills over content knowledge. For instance, Juri's English classes focus more on English grammar. Therefore, the English curriculum in Japanese schools is still very much rooted in linguistic knowledge instead of application to understanding the world. It could also be possible that Japanese schools in Singapore employ a method of teaching that is unlike the pedagogical strategies used in schools in Japan, in order to cater to Japanese TCKs' unique situations.

Language Used in Social Circles is a Large Enabling Factor in English Language Development

Izumi shares that he uses English all the time with his friends, even with his Japanese friends from school. However, he also describes that the Japanese friends don't form a social group in his school. He has many friends from all over the world:

> "I mean, all the Japanese kids in our school [are] like, just in different friend groups. So they don't even sit together and I don't sit together. So my friends, the friends I usually sit with, they are from Lebanon, France, and Canada. And then another friend is from Switzerland. Another friend is from India, and the last one is from Armenia."

Common topics of conversations would include Formula One, football, martial arts, boxing matches, TikTok videos, and school teachers. Izumi mentions that he used to hang out more with Japanese friends in the past, but his English improved after he started to be friends with non-Japanese kids:

> "I think I learned much more stuff, in terms of like speaking English, from friends than from the teachers. It's just because I'm more exposed to them to talk to them and, and, like I spend so much time with them. So that's perhaps why it's so influential."

He would also call and talk on the phone with his best friends from Germany and Scotland once a week.

This finding is aligned with the findings of Cole's (2001) study where the number of English-speaking friends is found to be significant in predicting high motivation in learning English for Japanese students in Singapore. Izumi's experiences also support Hoff's (2006) argument that the social circles of the child provide a purpose for communication and hence the motivation to use the language. On a similar point, Juri shares that there are English-speaking groups and Japanese-speaking groups in her Japanese school. The Japanese-speaking groups speak no English at all and the English-speaking groups use Japanese only about 20% of the time. Interestingly, Lisa brings up the idea of adapting to friends' needs when they meet up in their groups. She feels that it is important to toggle between languages so as to assimilate to the needs of different social groups. She highlights how the choice of language used is defined by the setting that calls for it. Lisa talks about how strange it is to use a language different from the perceived default in a given situation. She uses Japanese with her friends from her Japanese supplementary school who mostly attended international schools, because of the Japanese environment in the supplementary school:

> "I feel like also because of like the environment that we met in, in the Japanese supplementary school 'cos all the teachers and everyone around us are speaking Japanese, feels like kind of weird to switch languages [to English]."

Proactive Consumption of English Media is Important in English Language Mastery

Izumi, Juri, and Lisa all describe having used English media, despite their differences in English language abilities. What is enlightening is that the act of taking self-initiative to actively search or follow-up on English media is the key to making positive changes in language learning. In particular, Izumi shares that he repeats watching BBC Sherlock Holmes on Netflix with subtitles to learn new English words or phrases. He takes the trouble to stop the video, search up the words, and record them in his notebook. It could be possible that the setting and situations in Sherlock Holmes allow Izumi to create a stronger impression of what the meanings of the words are and this may help him in remembering them. This supports Fraser's (2001) and Kartal and Korucu-Kis's (2020) argument that learning English words through real situations via media is more useful. Similarly, although Juri watches English movies and videos with Japanese subtitles, she takes the initiative to actively search up the English lyrics of songs to understand their meaning. Juri is therefore more motivated in learning the English used in songs because of an inherent personal interest. This explains Collins et al.'s (2000) argument that making use of media in teaching results in a more student-centric learning environment and is popular with students.

The experiences shared by the Izumi and Juri also showed that past findings that apply to pre-schoolers may not be relevant to older children. As teenagers are generally more independent, there may be less parent-child interaction regardless of how much media is consumed. However, Francke and Sundin's (2012) argument about losing basic skills like spelling and handwriting due to overdependence of media could still hold true. Even then, it could be easily prevented with a proactive use of media, similar to Izumi's practices of writing words down instead of watching the show passively.

Motivation in Developing English Ability is Mainly Academic

Izumi, Juri, and Lisa all agree that the main motivation for learning English is to get good results in school. In particular, Lisa feels that English is only a tool of communication, and there is no need to master English as long as she can communicate well. As she felt that she could already communicate in English effectively, she did not see the need to improve her English further. She felt that "if it wasn't like a compulsory subject in school, [she] wouldn't even take it." Juri shares similar views. She mentions that motivation of learning English exists only when the results can be seen. Izumi highlights that improving English also helps him improve his grades for other subjects. Like Juri, he also points out how being able to see the fruits of his efforts is important to him.

Likewise, Cole's (2001) study has revealed that prior success in the language is significant in predicting high motivation for learning English in Japanese students in Singapore. The more success an individual has with English, the more likely he or she will be motivated to continue learning English. On a similar note, Izumi also shares how he is motivated by his curiosity of what mastering English can give him. He compares developing English skills to exploring a cave:

> "Like imagine you go inside a cave, like dark, and you're going forward and forward, and you don't know what's inside? Like, you're just curious what's to know what's inside the cave. So it's like exploring, unlocking the new level or in gaining new stage. I am just so curious. What's going to be the next and like, every time I get better in writing and reading, like, I will, I just wonder how this gonna lead me to the future that I and this is, I see so much potential in learning English."

Izumi possesses high intrinsic motivation to want to learn what there is to know about English. This high intrinsic motivation may have stemmed from his realization of how limited and precious his time

abroad was when he went back to Japan for a few months when he was 12. He also points out that confidence and motivation is an intertwining and spiral process:

> "Because every time I get better at [English], I instantly see that as a result, and I can see that my grades are getting better and better. Maybe my English was something like insecure, something that I wasn't really proud of, like, maybe something I felt embarrassed back then. But seeing it really getting better, it's just like, feels like, taking away those insecure things that I hold, you know, like yes, maybe build my confidence as well."
>
> [Interviewer: "Like it makes you feel more motivated to study and then the more motivated you get, the better you get, the more confident you get?"]
>
> "Yes, exactly, yeah, yes."

Conclusion and Future Implications

This study examined factors in the English language mastery of Japanese TCKs in Singapore, namely, the home environment, the school environment, social circles, and use of media. Through comparative case studies of Izumi, Juri, and Lisa, this study uncovered insights on how Japanese TCKs develop English language. The research question of this study sought to discover the enabling and mitigating factors for the mastery of the English language of Japanese TCKs in Singapore. Although interactions at home and the English capabilities of parents may not be significant factors of English language development, the school and social environment as well as individual motivation are strong factors to be considered. In addition, the proactive consumption of English media can enhance language development.

The results of this study bear several implications for parents and educators of Japanese TCKs in developing their English language. To begin with, the home environment was found to be an insignificant factor for English language development. This means that it is possible for parents to converse with their child in Japanese at home and not affect the child's mastery of English. This is mainly because the child depends on other enabling factors such as school classes, friends, and the use of media to learn English.

Next, schools are found to be enabling factors of Japanese TCKs' English development. Lessons in schools were found to develop English skills academically. Local schools and international schools in Singapore focus more on learning the English language based on context such as what is happening in the world whilst Japanese schools focus more on imparting linguistic knowledge of the English language. This difference in pedagogy meets the needs of TCKs in different ways: local and international schools prepare TCKs for further education in foreign countries whereas Japanese schools prepare TCKs for re-entry into the education system in Japan.

The social circles of Japanese TCKs are found to be a huge enabling factor of their English development. Having English-speaking friends provide a purpose of mastering English and hence it is crucial for Japanese TCKs not to form Japanese-only cliques where English is not used. As such, schools and parents also play an important role to help the child initiate forming relationships with non-Japanese-speaking peers.

The proactive use of media in English is also a significant enabling factor of developing the English language. Instead of merely watching or listening to English media, Japanese TCKs must be encouraged to engage in post-watching activities. These may include searching up and learning about the lyrics of English songs, answering questions or writing reviews of newspaper articles, or learning new words or

phrases in context of dramas or movies. As it may be difficult for the individual to do these activities unless he or she has high intrinsic motivation, schools can incorporate such activities in their lessons. Since it has been found in this study that Japanese TCKs' motivation of learning English is mainly academic, anchoring such activities as part of their academic learning process can help to kick-start some habits which they could continue on their own in the future.

Last but not least, parents and educators of Japanese TCKs need to understand the way they perceive themselves on the spectrum of bilingualism and help them form realistic goals in achieving bilingualism. A failure to do so can result in a self-defeating prophecy. Parents and educators must be mindful of the way they communicate and teach these children so as not to instil this mindset in them. At the same time, TCKs should be encouraged that being bilingual is not having equal mastery in both English and Japanese, which is rare and an impractical goal to work towards.

A limitation of this study is that the participants may have had varying experiences prior to coming to Singapore, their current English proficiency levels may not entirely be attributed to the few factors examined in this study. It is also worth noting that the factors may not be independent of one another and hence it may be difficult to isolate a more prominent factor. Going forward, future studies can involve more informants and examine in more detail the enabling and mitigating aspects of each of the environments, taking into account the TCKs' acquisition of English prior to formal education and the interaction between the environments. Due to the high expectations and intensity of education in Singapore, it may also be useful to compare Japanese TCKs in Singapore and America, where the education system is more fluid and less demanding.

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