

ORIGINAL RESEARCH: Attitudes and beliefs of students toward bi-/multilingualism at an international university in Japan

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Abstract

This study examines the topic of bi-/multilingualism from the perspective of Japanese as well as non-Japanese students at an international university in Kyushu, Japan. In order to understand their attitude toward learning second/foreign (or additional) languages and what values are placed on it, a questionnaire was designed and administered to a group of 122 students. Comparisons were made between responses offered by Japanese and non-Japanese students with respect to factors such as age and self-rated second language (L2) ability. In addition to the overall findings of a primarily quantitative study, the results of a qualitative analysis of written comments from the survey are also presented. Overall, participants tend to view bi-/multilingualism in a positive light, both in a personal sense and with regard to its broader influence within Japanese society. A tendency was also discovered in which bi-/multilingualism is valued more as ‘additional language’ ability increases. Most participants believe a bi-/multilingual person speaks English; this is contrasted with a relatively small number who associate the languages of ‘Japanese’ and ‘Chinese’ with their image of bi-/multilingualism. The analysis of comments on the question “when may a person call himself/herself bilingual?” reveal that key ingredients of their definitions include: ‘speaking,’ ‘communicating’ and ‘using;’ mentioned with somewhat less regularity is the ability to ‘understand’ the L2 from both linguistic and cultural perspectives. The connection between bi-/multilingualism and global society, with its persistent need for language skills in business and international relations, was strongly voiced by respondents, many of whom suggest it is in Japan’s interests to pursue bi-/multilingualism seriously.

Keywords: Bilingualism, Japan, multilingualism, second language (L2), and additional language (L2+).

Introduction

Young people in Japan and other parts of Asia who, for whatever purposes, desire to build skills in a second and/or additional language, quite simply, need help. Most are, from the outset, straight-jacketed by the system, where instructors adhere to difficult-to-oppose assumptions about how a language ought to be taught. The target language, which in Japan is of course, predominantly English, ends up being ‘learned’ from a purely linguistic standpoint. It becomes an object of study, not all that different from subjects like math or science, where memorizing formulas and focusing on rubrics are primary to mastering the content and thus achieving a high score on highly weighted paper tests. This issue will not work itself out overnight; second language researchers and teachers have been lamenting the flawed system for decades (Yoshida 2001; Reedy 2001; Takahashi 2000; McVeigh 2004). As Seargeant states,

“Indeed, one of the most frequently voiced opinions about English in Japan is that the high profile of, and immense interest in the language is not matched by an equally high level of communicative proficiency among the population.” (2009, p. 3)

In order to offer help, it is advantageous to acquire a better understanding of the perceived benefits among students themselves of becoming bilingual or multilingual. These ‘benefits’ are not always self-evident. Students normally have little choice – they must study a second and/or foreign language to meet academic requirements, so it is quite possible many do not see positives at all – only a ‘necessary evil.’ But

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L2 learners do not start out this way. Primary school aged children, who first begin to learn an additional language, are motivated by the freshness of the endeavor. It is usually ‘fun’ or ‘cool’ to be able to communicate in a totally different language, but how long does this sentiment last?

After 20 years of experience teaching English in Japan in conversation schools, junior high schools, and universities, and as a result of interactions with language instructors of all persuasions, I have come to the inescapable conclusion that many, though not all students, in a matter of time, lose this vitality, which is replaced by a sense of extreme urgency to pass tests and further their academic and career goals. Some, however, it would seem, either maintain a strong affinity to the language, or revive their initial attraction to it within themselves as a new truth comes to light – the realization: “this language is actually very useful!” This point lies at the heart of language learning.

The primary purpose of Foreign Language Acquisition (FLA) in schools should be to first of all instill within young people an innate interest in learning a language so that they may then *use* it in their daily lives, whether for personal reasons (e.g. socially, academically), or for the sake of enhancing future career options. This requires an empowering strategy to help learners visualize L2 mastery more in terms of ‘process.’ In one sense, becoming ‘bilingual’ may be seen as a natural *goal* for language learners. However, expanding the term ‘bilingual’ so that it encompasses more than just a ‘goal,’ but what students now *are* and will continue to become, is advantageous. Anyone, who begins to develop effective skills in a second/foreign language and can see the usefulness of doing so, is unlikely to lose motivation to continue studying the language for the purpose of developing higher levels of fluency.

Do foreign and domestic students at an international university in Japan believe bi-/multilingualism is an objective or a pathway? Is it highly valued on individual and social planes, or is bilingualism considered nonessential within what is traditionally considered to be monolingual/monocultural Japan? With these thoughts in mind, the present study attempts to uncover new insights on students’ perceptions of bilingualism and multilingualism in Japan.

History of bilingualism/multilingualism in Japan: When we consider the topic of bilingualism or multilingualism in Japan, it may first be noted that Japanese speakers have historically used Chinese, Dutch and presently English to interact with outsiders. A deeper analysis, however, reveals that multilingualism characterized Japan centuries ago, when speakers of numerous dialects were required to find means by which to communicate. The gradual rise of the earliest form of Japanese came about as migrants from the north (e.g. Korea, Russia) and south (e.g. Malaysia, Polynesia) interacted culturally and linguistically over centuries. Starting from about the fifth century A.D., Chinese acquired a degree of prominence much different than what it has today. It was more than just a foreign language for promoting commerce between Japan and its neighbor. Chinese was necessary for various higher functions in society such as record keeping, religious literature and other forms of higher writing while Japanese was the language of the commoners (Loveday 1996). As we approach modern times, Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch were all part of the mix as Japan made industrialization its goal, so as not to fall behind and become another colony of one or some of the European imperial powers. Along the way of Japan’s nation-building agenda, English became and still is the first and foremost language being used to help Japan keep in step with the outside world.

Throughout the history of bi-/multilingualism in Japan, languages were acknowledged and appropriated out of necessity. At the dawn of the Meiji Era, new foreign language education policies were initiated, which in 1871 led to adding English as a subject tested in the university entrance examination system. Interestingly, as early as then, there had been calls to elevate English and even to have it essentially replace Japanese (Hagerman 2009). This idea was of course not followed up on, nor was the suggestion to grant English official status in a report posted during the administration of former Prime Minister Obuchi in 2000, taken seriously. The issues surrounding the status English ought to be given are complex, with rather passionate voices representing both sides. There is a strong desire among policy makers of all persuasions, it seems, to

use English for the purpose of making Japan stronger, but how far they ought to take the country down that path is still hotly debated (Matsuura et al. 2004). One might say, on an individual basis, Japanese-English bilingualism is not discouraged, although it is not promoted as a goal in a universal sense since fluency in English is not considered necessary for all citizens (Hashimoto 2007). The importance of English learning, not necessarily bilingualism, remains.

Current issues: This paper explores the phenomenon of bilingualism in Japan as indicated by the title, but also uses the more inclusive term, ‘multilingualism.’ There are various reasons for doing so, but most salient is a need to include and appreciate those who have developed a linguistic repertoire of more than one additional language or dialect. The term is also understood to express the linguistic state of all human beings, as Weber & Horner claim:

“Multilingualism is a matter of degree, a continuum, and since we all use different linguistic varieties, registers, styles, genres, and accents, we are all to a greater or lesser degree multilingual” (2012, p. 3).

This is a useful way to approach multilingualism, although the evidence gathered from this study and from personal experiences suggest university students in Japan gravitate to the standard and literal “many languages” designation.

Following the assumption that ‘multi’ differs from ‘bi’ primarily in terms of number we will attempt to offer a definition for bilingualism. It is regularly noted, however, that there simply is no agreement on a common definition (Baker 2006; Myers-Scotton 2006). In fact, Yamamoto devotes an entire study to assessing how the term bilingualism is perceived in the minds of Japanese university students (2001). Perhaps the fuzziness associated with ‘bilingual’ or ‘bilingualism’ and the precise meaning conveyed has to do with the fact that a continuum exists. In other words, subjectivity abounds. If it were possible to rank one’s true language proficiency on say, a scale from one to one hundred, what number would be necessary to reach the ‘bilingual’ threshold?

Other questions arise, such as the necessity of possessing all four skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening), or some more than others. Recognizing that many factors, whether apparent or unforeseen, require us to be flexible in selecting a definition, the present study will for the most part, follow the lead of Myers-Scotton who define bi-/multilingual as: “*the ability to use two or more languages to sufficiently to carry on a limited casual conversation*” (2006, p. 44). However, in light of comments made earlier regarding the utilitarian nature of languages, Myers-Scotton’s expression, “limited casual conversation” will be replaced by: “meaningful and purposeful communication.” My argument is, as long as the meaning of words normally *spoken* and/or *written* between two parties using a second/foreign language is understood and the purpose of communication is achieved, then the interlocutors should consider themselves ‘bilingual/multilingual.’ However, since varying perceptions of what ‘sufficient’ is may pull this definition into the murkiness of subjectivity, limitations remain.

The term ‘bilingual’, a loan word pronounced *bairingarū* in Japanese, undoubtedly carries a meaning different from the purely linguistic definitions discussed above. The predominant assumption within the nation of Japan, as evidenced in a study by Yamamoto (2001), is that a bilingual person speaks Japanese first, followed by the language used to communicate with the world outside (at present, English). This prevalent viewpoint overlooks the wide spectrum of linguistic diversity within a country not as monolithic as many assume it to be (Noguchi 2001; Kanno 2008). Indigenous cultural-linguistic minority groups, immigrant workers, and ‘returnees’ (Japanese nationals who have grown up overseas and return to Japan with a first language other than Japanese) all factor into the equation. The truth is that this atypical minority is growing. More and more young people who live in Japan do not speak Japanese as their first language and/or do not

speak English as their second. However, it appears that the majority maintains the mindset that *bairingaruru* equals Japanese plus English.

Methodology

Design: The themes examined in this study spring from the foundational question of “What attitudes and/or beliefs do both Japanese and foreign students attending an international university in Kyushu, Japan hold toward bi-/multilingualism?” Based on the earlier discussion pertaining to general attitudes in society toward English language learning in Japan, and in light of the rather unique environment the participants of this study are in, it is hypothesized that all students will demonstrate positive attitudes and beliefs toward bi-/multilingualism, and agree that in general, bi-/multilingualism ought to be valued and possibly promoted within Japanese society. It is also hypothesized that compared to foreign students, Japanese students will perceive bi-/multilingualism to be more of a ‘goal’ than a ‘process,’ based on the fact that the context is Japan where the necessity of using an L2 or L2+ is less severe for L1 = Japanese students.

Insights were gathered through the administration of a questionnaire (N=122) about how bilingualism is defined and what the perceived values are of being able to communicate in additional languages, with particular focus placed on how English is weighted in proportion to other tongues. Through mostly quantitative but also qualitative methods, data were collected for analysis. The questionnaire included 24 likert-scale items and two open-ended comment boxes, and was first piloted on third-year English majors at a university in Western Japan. Discussion of the results with another researcher led to further refinements in order to enhance face validity. Using SPSS software, a statistical check for reliability produced favorable results regarding conceptually similar items on the questionnaire. The final version of the questionnaire was prepared and administered in the fall of 2013; its items appear in Table 1.

The participants were from an opportunity sample, selected in accordance with a cooperating teacher’s classes and their size and cultural/linguistic make-up. With regard to the quantitative data, the means of the responses for each item were first studied, and then correlation tests were made among a variety of factors. The open ended comments on the questionnaire were examined qualitatively; themes that stood out were categorized and explored all within the interpretive framework of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin 1998).

Table 1: Questionnaire items (bil/mul stands for bilingual-multilingual)

#1. A bil/mul person is internationally-minded	#13. A bil/mul person is good at translating
#2. A bil/mul person is intelligent	#14. A bil/mul person speaks Chinese
#3. A bil/mul person speaks Japanese	#15. Bil/Mul Japanese people are respected in Japan
#4. A bil/mul person has lived in more than one country	#16. I am a bil/mul person
#5. Typically, a bil/mul person is not Japanese	#17. (r) I do not want to be a bil/mul person
#6. A bil/mul person travels abroad a lot	#18. Bil/Mul Japanese people are necessary in Japanese society
#7. A bil/mul person is a good at communication	#19. Japanese students in Japanese universities should be bil/mul
#8. A bil/mul person is cool	#20. Bil/Mul Japanese university students in Japan will be successful
#9. A bil/mul person has parents who speak multiple languages	#21. Japanese who graduate from Japanese universities are bil/mul people
#10. A bil/mul person speaks English	#22. From primary school in Japan, producing bil/mul students should be a main goal
#11. A bil/mul person is a foreigner	#23. A bil/mul society would be beneficial for Japan
#12. A bil/mul person studies hard	#24. Japanese high school students want to enter a university where they can become bil/mul people

Table 2. Linguistic diversity of sample (N=122).

Language	No. of L1 speakers	No. of L2+ advanced learners (self-rated '8-10')	No. of L2+ intermediate learners (self-rated '4-7')	No. of L2+ beginning learners (self-rated '1-3')
Japanese	25	9	64	17
Korean	17	0	2	9
Thai	17	0	0	0
Indonesian	12	0	2	2
Chinese	10	2	7	20
Vietnamese	9	0	0	1
English	8	74	33	3
Nepali	5	0	0	0
Uzbek	5	0	0	1
Sinhala	3	2	1	0
Bangla	2	0	0	0
Burmese	1	0	0	0
Icelandic	1	0	0	0
Khmer	1	0	0	0
Mongolian	1	0	0	0
Tamil	1	1	0	0
Tagalog	1	0	0	0
Russian		4	1	1
French		2	4	0
Hindi		2	1	0
Norwegian		1	1	0
Cantonese		1	0	0
Tadjik		1	0	0
Spanish		0	5	6
German		0	1	6
Portuguese		0	1	1
Arabic		0	1	1
Italian		0	1	0
Danish		0	1	0
Greek		0	0	1

Sample: The 122 participants speak 17 different first languages and 30 additional languages at varying levels of proficiency. Students were asked to state their mother tongue and list all other languages they speak and self-rate their proficiency in these additional languages on a scale of one to ten. Table 2 lists the language groups and frequency of usage by the participants in the study. Their self-ratings were separated into three groups: 8-10 (advanced), 4-7 (intermediate), and 1-3 (beginner).

To briefly offer a synopsis of the data found in Table 2, this sample is composed of university students from a wide variety of linguistic backgrounds and interests; they mostly come from East Asian countries and on average speak English at an advanced level, have intermediate skills in Japanese, and are pursuing additional language studies, the more popular ones being Chinese, Korean and Spanish.

Findings and Results

Quantitative: This section will begin with the presentation of mean scores for the likert-scale items on the questionnaire (the items are listed in Table 1), to be followed by the results of independent T-sample tests for correlations between factors. Table 3 compares the means of all 24 items on the survey. Since the Japanese sub-sample is relatively large (N=25), the means of Japanese-only participants (Table 4), followed by non-Japanese participants (Table 5) are posted as well for sake of comparison. Shaded in and underlined areas on the charts become the focus of discussion in the pages that follow.

Table 3. Mean scores of Likert-scale items – whole sample.

Item#	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	120	1.00	5.00	3.8333	.975303
2	119	1.00	5.00	3.3697	.91007
3	118	1.00	5.00	2.3814	1.18336
4	120	1.00	5.00	3.2750	1.07658
5	120	1.00	5.00	2.9000	1.13315
6	121	1.00	5.00	3.5207	.97553
7	120	2.00	5.00	3.8667	.85929
8	120	1.00	5.00	3.5000	1.10004
9	121	1.00	5.00	3.1488	1.13035
10	120	1.00	5.00	4.0667	.91425
11	120	1.00	5.00	2.9583	1.11065
12	121	1.00	5.00	3.3471	1.05444
13	119	1.00	5.00	3.1681	1.05219
14	121	1.00	5.00	2.4091	1.02470
15	121	1.00	5.00	3.5289	1.04940
16	120	1.00	5.00	3.7333	1.22806
17 (r)	118	1.00	5.00	4.5339	.91224
18	121	1.00	5.00	3.9256	1.02604
19	120	1.00	5.00	3.6417	1.00248
20	121	1.00	5.00	3.6529	.94614
21	121	1.00	4.00	2.3140	.83699
22	121	1.00	5.00	3.2975	1.12283
23	121	1.00	5.00	4.0248	.93508
24	120	1.00	5.00	3.2417	.91666

Overall the sample scored high on the following three items: #17: “I do not want to be a bi-/multilingual person” (note: values reversed), #10: “A bi-/multilingual person speaks English” and #23: “a bilingual society would be beneficial for Japan.” These high rankings of #17 and #23 support the main hypothesis of the study. The lowest scored item is #21: “Japanese who graduate from Japanese universities are bi-/multilingual” followed closely by #3: “A bi-/multilingual person speaks Japanese” and #14: “A bi-/multilingual person speaks Chinese.” This would seem to inform us that English, not Japanese or Chinese is equated with the loaded term ‘bilingual’ which students understand to mean much more than simply the ability to speak (any) two languages.

Separating the sample into sub-groups (Japanese and non-Japanese) serves the purpose of comparing the attitudes of Japanese students with their international counterparts. Although the next point may be explained partly by the small sample size, the Japanese group (Table 4) is characterized by a few items with low standard deviation values. Please note the highlighted values for items #6, #10, and #14. We will first address #10: “A bi-/multilingual person speaks English” and #14: “A bi-/multilingual person speaks Chinese.” The high mean score for #10 is contrasted with the low mean score for #14, which supports our claim that Japanese adhere to the *‘bairingarū’* loan word definition of bilingual, which is firmly set within the Japanese psyche. A typical bilingual person speaks English (and Japanese), not Chinese and Japanese – as Yamamoto also noted in her study (2001).

The other standard deviation value we have mentioned is #6 “A bi-/multilingual person travels a lot.” We are compelled to interpret this result as being due to the fact that the island nation of Japan views bilingualism as something foreign, not naturally occurring at home. Thus, those who desire to become bilingual normally travel to locations where bilingualism can be better achieved.

Since the two sub-groups are ‘Japanese’ and ‘all the rest,’ the limitations for comparison are obvious. The data can tell us something about L1 = Japanese speakers, not the others, which are lumped together.

What stands out immediately from the non-Japanese group (Table 5) is #16: “I am a bi-/multilingual person.” With a mean score of 4.0211, it is one of the most highly ranked items. Indeed, having come from a foreign country to study in both English and Japanese at an international university in Japan, it might seem obvious that these foreign students ought to think of themselves this way.

The point to be made is that the Japanese students, on average, have a much different self-image as seen in Table 4, item 16. With a notably low mean value of 2.6400 and a standard deviation of 1.43991 (the highest of all 24), we get the impression that overall Japanese students are unsure exactly if it is okay to think of themselves as bilingual even though they are using both English and Japanese academically and in some cases, socially, on a daily basis. This finding is in support of the second hypothesis, which theorizes that Japanese perceive bi-/multilingualism not so much as their present reality, but as an objective not yet fully achieved.

Correlation tests were applied in light of some of these preliminary findings. Initial analyses on gender produced no salient relationships between the factor of male/female and any of the 24 items. Age, however was different. Among international students, significant correlations were discovered between age and four of the factors as shown in Table 6. For the sake of brevity, only significant correlations are presented here and in the tables that follow.

The negative value for #17 might result in some confusion. Since the item is negatively worded in the questionnaire, after entering the raw data into SPSS, the values were reversed before any statistical analyses were carried out. Therefore it is indeed a negative correlation, though the others (#4, #10, #21) are all positive. To sum up, as foreign students increase in age, they hold ever-stronger beliefs that: a bi-/multilingual person has lived in more than one country (#4), a bi-/multilingual person speaks English (#10) and that Japanese who graduate from Japanese universities are bi-/multilingual people (#21). However, quite interestingly, as age increases, foreign students feel less and less that they want to be bilingual (or multilingual) (#17).

Table 4. Mean scores of Likert-scale items – *Japanese* sub-sample.

Item#	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	25	1.00	5.00	3.640	.95219
2	25	1.00	5.00	2.840	.85049
3	25	1.00	4.00	1.9167	1.01795
4	25	1.00	5.00	3.0000	1.08012
5	25	1.00	5.00	2.6800	1.21518
6	25	2.00	5.00	3.8800	.72572
7	25	2.00	5.00	3.9200	.81240
8	25	2.00	5.00	3.8000	.86603
9	25	1.00	4.00	3.0800	.95394
10	25	3.00	5.00	4.2000	.64550
11	25	1.00	4.00	2.9200	.81240
12	25	2.00	5.00	3.6000	.95743
13	25	2.00	5.00	3.0800	.99666
14	25	1.00	3.00	2.5200	.65320
15	25	1.00	5.00	3.8800	1.05357
16	25	1.00	5.00	2.6400	1.43991
17 (r)	25	1.00	5.00	4.5417	1.14129
18	25	2.00	5.00	4.1200	.92736
19	25	1.00	5.00	3.6800	1.1455
20	25	1.00	5.00	3.1200	.92736
21	25	1.00	3.00	1.8800	.78102
22	25	1.00	5.00	3.5200	1.15902
23	25	1.00	5.00	4.0000	1.04083
24	25	1.00	5.00	2.9600	1.05987

Table 5. Mean scores of Likert-scale items – *non-Japanese* sub-sample.

Item#	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	96	1.00	5.00	3.8842	.97700
2	94	1.00	5.00	3.5106	.87676
3	94	1.00	4.00	2.5000	1.19812
4	95	1.00	5.00	3.3474	1.06958
5	95	1.00	5.00	2.9579	1.11007
6	96	1.00	5.00	3.4271	1.01302
7	95	1.00	5.00	3.8526	.87481
8	95	1.00	5.00	3.4211	1.14464
9	96	1.00	4.00	3.1667	1.17578
10	95	1.00	5.00	4.0316	.97252
11	95	1.00	4.00	2.9684	1.18009
12	96	1.00	5.00	3.2812	1.07315
13	94	1.00	5.00	3.1915	1.07039
14	96	1.00	3.00	2.3802	1.10202
15	96	1.00	5.00	3.4375	1.03428
16	95	1.00	5.00	4.0211	.98908
17 (r)	94	1.00	5.00	4.5319	.85134
18	96	1.00	5.00	3.8750	1.04881
19	95	1.00	5.00	3.6316	.96814
20	96	1.00	5.00	3.7917	.90515
21	96	1.00	3.00	2.4271	.81750
22	96	1.00	5.00	3.2396	1.11208
23	96	2.00	5.00	4.0312	.91137
24	95	1.00	5.00	3.3158	.86619

Table 6. Correlations between age and questionnaire items among foreign students.

	#4	#10	#17	#21
Pearson Correlation	.233*	.264**	-.274**	.208*
Sig. (2-tailed)	.023	.010	.007	.042
N	95	95	94	96

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

It might be assumed that older students with arguably more overseas experiences see an obvious relationship between living abroad and being bilingual. In other words, they may feel that one cannot live abroad and *not* be bilingual. Although the correlation found between age and #10 appears surprising, it may go hand in hand with the previous comment on #4; it is likely those who live in multiple countries are exposed to English more than any other additional language. The older one becomes, the more English is assumed to be the second language of ‘bilingualism’. According to the findings concerning #21, older students feel more strongly that Japanese university graduates are bi-/multilingual. This might suggest a more holistic definition of bilingualism is emerging among students over time, where ‘bilingualism’ involves more than just the ability to communicate with ease and relative fluency.

In other words, younger students might perceive bilingualism to be more of an ever-elusive goal, whereas the older ones could perhaps be developing a more practical definition of it. This means that older foreign students might perceive that Japanese university graduates are relatively capable of functioning as bilinguals though the majority may not be fluent speakers.

The final survey item (#17) that positively correlates with age is: “I do not want to be a bi-/multilingual person.” Is it because older foreign students attending Japanese universities have given up on becoming bilingual? Another possibility is to assume these students feel they *already are* bilingual, and therefore

wanting to be bilingual is irrelevant. Younger students, on the contrary, are expected to think of themselves as ‘in the process’ of becoming bilingual, which would explain the negative correlation. A slightly negative, though not significant correlation coefficient of -0.071 for #16 (“I am a bi-/multilingual person”) lends minor support to this claim. Older students may thus be convinced that bilingualism is no longer a goal but a way of life.

The most informative findings uncovered via correlation testing concern students’ perceptions of their L2 ability and the 24 items. Table 7 provides correlation values between L2 ability rating and two items on the questionnaire which produced strong positive correlations.

Table 7. Japanese students’ self-rating of L2 ability and questionnaire items

	#1	#16	
L2 ability			
	Pearson Correlation	.582**	.627**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.001
	N	24	24

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The questionnaire simply asks students to rate their English ability on a scale of 0-10, with ‘1’ signifying ‘just started’ and 10 meaning ‘fluent’. Table 7 demonstrates that as students rate themselves more highly, two of the 24 factors correlate significantly with L2 ability. #16 states: “I am a bi-/multilingual person.” This is a straight-forward finding and additional discussion is not warranted. High self-rating students will obviously be more apt to call themselves ‘bilingual’. Item #1 (“A bi-/multilingual person is internationally-minded”), however, is worth investigating further. ‘Internationally-minded’ suggests the idea of thinking beyond the borders of Japan. Interestingly, students who rate their L2 level low do not seem to feel being bilingual means being internationally-minded. It would likewise appear that Japanese students, who self-rate their L2 ability highly, understand that English allows them to become more of an international thinker. Perhaps low L2 self-rated students feel they can be internationally-minded without becoming bilingual. If so, our data show that they may change their minds once they develop stronger L2 skills.

The results of L2 ability self-rating correlation tests differed for foreign students. Table 8 provides the data from another Pearson correlation test, which compares L2 ability among foreign students and the 24 questionnaire items. Five of the items were found to display varying degrees of correlation. For the same reasons as those noted earlier, #16 results are to be expected.

With regard to #11 (“a bi-/multilingual person is a foreigner”), participants were instructed during the administration of the surveys to apply the term ‘foreigner’ in a generic sense, to anyone who is not in his/her home country. A slightly significant negative correlation advises us to consider that foreign students with high L2 abilities do not feel one must be a foreigner to be bilingual. Equally possible of course is the assertion that foreign students in Japan, who self-rate their L2 ability low, feel more strongly that a bi-/multilingual person is a foreigner. This finding suggests that as students acquire stronger L2+ skills, the belief that one can function as a bilingual/multilingual in one’s own country increases.

Table 8. Foreign students’ self rating of L2 ability and questionnaire items.

	#11	#16	#18	#22	#23	
L2 ability						
	Pearson Correlation	-.257*	.465**	.249*	.291**	.224*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.013	.000	.015	.004	.030
	N	93	93	94	94	94

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Items #18, #22 and #23 are relatively similar (see Table 1) so they will be discussed as a group. In short, the results suggest foreign students who are arguably more bi-/multilingual than others perceive there is a real need for changes in language education in Japan. We are left with the thought that bi-/multilingual foreign students living in Japan see bilingualism as a positive goal the nation ought to be pursuing more diligently in its schools. Once again, our main hypothesis is supported, and as this correlation suggests, it is not students with lower L2 ability necessarily who feel this way, but those who claim to already have advanced L2 proficiency.

Qualitative – When is a person bi-/multilingual? We now proceed to the results of an analysis of the comment boxes, which was undertaken according to the principles of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin 1998). Grounded theory involves an inductive process of reading the raw data repeatedly, and then allowing salient themes to arise in the process. As these themes arise, a coding process then takes place, which is similar to categorization of thoughts and ideas that flow from the inductive process. The end result is the presentation of theories the researcher has developed throughout the entire procedure.

To begin, we will look at the main themes that emerged from the non-Japanese sub-group as a result of analyzing the first open question: “At what point do you feel a person can truly say: “I am bilingual now”. Below are the main themes that emerged:

Can speak fluently in another language; this typifies a large portion of the responses. ‘Speaking’ is probably the most frequently used verb the participants offered. ‘Fluently’ was also commonly found within the comment boxes, along with less regularly used expressions that augment ‘speaking,’ such as ‘confidently’, ‘without worries’, ‘comfortably’, and to a lesser extent, ‘properly’ and ‘spontaneously’. No respondents stated that speaking ability must equal the level of a native speaker; the level of ‘fluency’ appears to be what most foreign students feel is required to become bi-/multilingual.

Can communicate (converse) with foreigners and/or native speakers; the term ‘communication’ appeared almost as regularly as ‘speaking’ and it is believed by most that this communication takes place between not just ‘others’ but ‘outsiders’. Some expressions used by participants that flesh out this theme include once again: “with fluency,” “for expressing thoughts,” and “without difficulties or problems”. The term ‘communication’ is relatively synonymous with ‘speaking’, though the main difference lies with the added concept of ‘interaction’. This suggests that interaction may be most important, though in order for it to happen, speaking (rather than just smiling and nodding, etc.) must come into play.

Uses another language; this simply-worded theme of course draws us back to the utilitarian nature of ‘bi-/multilingual’ discussed earlier. A smaller number of participants, though still noteworthy, chose the word ‘using’ instead of ‘speaking’ or ‘communicating’. Further insights were offered by this minority on the topic of ‘using’ an L2. First of all, it was found that especially among self-acclaimed ‘bilinguals’ from the sample, daily use of an L2 qualifies them as bilinguals. One participant mentioned he is bilingual since he had been using the language for a long time. Another student made the following comment:

“I guess a person can say that he/she is bilingual when the frequency of other language(s) he/she uses is at least the same with his/her mother language.”

Therefore, we must also consider that students may feel they are bilingual by virtue of the fact that the target language is ‘used’ as opposed to only being ‘studied’ or ‘practiced’.

Understands another language; suggesting that linguistic production itself is not an absolute necessity to be ‘bilingual’. The number of participants commenting on this theme is similar in number to those supporting the previous theme. The idea coming through is that ‘understanding’ an L2 is essential. To this general category, there were added details of “with fluency,” “academically,” “conversations,” “jokes,” and “each other.” The idea that bi-/multilingual individuals, by definition, possess *both* active and passive communication skills, as noted by Li Wei (2008), is borne out by the evidence here. As expected, however,

the proportionately fewer comments that fall within this theme suggest productive skills play a more substantial role than receptive skills in defining, in students' minds, the point at which one becomes bi-/multilingual.

Understands the culture of the L2; though mentioned last, this theme was by no means the least significant. In order to be bilingual, many students express a belief that the culture of the L2 matters. Respondents who added comments on this topic thought it was necessary to be “interested in the L2 culture,” “be open,” “make friends,” and “experience new things” in order to be able to relate to the culture the L2 arises from. Since the majority of students who participated in this study are certainly ‘bi-/multilingual’ in varying degrees, we are reminded of the fact that language encompasses much more than academics and business opportunities; we need to know the people we are talking with.

An analysis of comments made by Japanese respondents provides evidence that the same themes noted above are also indicative of this smaller sub-group. However, it proved to be advantageous to analyze their comments separately. All the Japanese agree that speaking, communicating, using and understanding the L2 are necessary, but more pronounced here were comments about speaking “like” and communicating “with” native-speakers. One student, for instance, wrote the following in her comment box: “When a person can speak like a native.” Considering that Japanese participants comprise just under one-fifth of the entire sample, proportionately speaking, their comments in this regard were more than ten times more prevalent. It would appear that the idea of becoming native-like, though still mentioned by far less than the majority of respondents, remains among Japanese university students.

Qualitative – Thoughts on bi-/multilingualism in Japan: Of the 122 participants, 18 foreign and 3 Japanese left this comment box blank, so roughly 83% of respondents offered their thoughts. The question asks students how important they believe bi-/multilingualism to be in Japan, and requests practical suggestions to help Japan move in a positive direction with regard to bi-/multilingualism. The qualitative analysis of the data is thus broken into two sections in accordance with the dual nature of the question.

The themes were virtually all positive with respect to promoting bi-/multilingualism in Japan. Only three participants among the Japanese sub-group and five from the international cohort had critical comments to make about the topic. The opinions centered around the idea that Japan does not need to pursue bi-/multilingualism since most citizens do not care about L2+ fluency, have no need for it and can easily survive without it. However, the majority of responses gravitated toward a few popular themes.

A bi-/multilingual Japan is important! It should be noted that among the international students, approximately one-third who made comments in this box stated explicitly that bi-/multilingualism is important for Japan, and as a few individuals noted, it is even “very” important, “vital” and “absolutely necessary.” The expectations of foreign students, mostly from other Asian countries, upon entering Japanese society may have been of a country that is more committed to advancing foreign language education; the data suggests many felt Japan needs to do more in this regard.

Global connections require a bilingual Japan; one theme that clearly stood out was the call for Japan and its citizens to interact with others for the purpose of development, intercultural communication and pursuing stronger international relations. Apparently the participants felt that English was necessary to do this. Many foreign students at this international university in Kyushu and a few Japanese nationals too held the belief that Japan needs to make its voice heard by communicating with the outside world with the language spoken there.

Global business requires a bilingual Japan; this goes hand in hand with the previous point as its ‘economic’ counterpart. Bi-/multilingualism is considered key not just to communicate with others but to gain wealth. All forms of international business and trade, not to mention the introduction of new technologies and promotion of travel and tourism, rely on a common language to facilitate money-making endeavors. This is understood to be a trend that shows no signs of diminishing; therefore, for Japan’s future,

becoming more bi-/multilingual would help it achieve greater financial success. These first two themes were the most prevalent among the data. The influence of globalization and internationalization does not shrink, but only expands as each year goes by and there is no refuting the axiom that for the time being, English is the language that links peoples and cultures from around the world.

Japan lags behind; a sizeable number of respondents offered insights into the English speaking abilities of the average Japanese and the open-mindedness of society as a whole. Overall, their impressions could not be labelled ‘favorable’. The theme of Japanese people being poor English speakers came up repeatedly. Some judged the English levels of Japanese students to be much lower than those of students in other Asian countries, which seemed to be disillusioning to them. Four students began a sentence with “even though Japan is a developed nation...” when decrying the English-speaking skills of its people. Connected to this is a complaint voiced by both Japanese and internationals about the conservative nature of Japanese society, which may include not only the realms of business and politics but other social/cultural spheres. Quite simply, the criticism came through that the “Japanese way of doing things” stifles creativity among the Japanese and restricts open, global-minded exchanges. Interestingly, in this regard, Kharkhurin (2012) proposes that a link exists between flexibility in thinking and creativity – traits which occur with more frequency among bilingual children than monolingual. These comments by the respondents therefore mirror some of the findings within bilingualism research.

Idea – L2 education must improve; many respondents felt that to improve bi-/multilingualism English should be taught in schools, and indeed it is, though the number of comments made in this regard suggests improvements are necessary. Several comments focused on the seriousness of the issue, asserting that teaching English effectively is crucial and must become a focal point in schools. Other comments that were coded as ‘practical advice’ include: “speak *more* English,” “learn *in* English,” “learn *practical* English,” “learn English to teach the outside world about Japan,” “hold classes that are conversation-based and fun,” and “teach culture with language.” One suggestion voiced by a few participants was that students begin learning foreign languages at a younger age. On the whole, comments pertaining to this theme convey the idea that respondents feel some sort of change would be beneficial.

Idea – More interaction; A final theme that arose from the data was the call for interaction among Japanese and L2 speakers. This includes suggestions that more international students and/or foreigners in general be available in order to interact with Japanese people. An influx of non-Japanese residents into the country was considered a means to promote the process of multilingualism, be it in schools or society. Gottlieb notes that within the context of globalization wherein population flows affect the cultural fabric of nations, Japan “has begun to face the prospect of reinventing itself in terms of its self-image as a one-nation, one-language polity” (2007, p. 198). Unless trends are reversed, this inevitable evolution toward plurality in the once singular nation called ‘Japan’ will lead its citizens to think anew about multilingualism and/or ‘multicultural coexistence’ (Heinrich 2012, p. 23). Participants of this study for the most part viewed this positively, as it leads toward greater opportunities for Japan to become multilingual and a more pronounced player in international business and affairs.

Conclusion

The times we live in are characterized by the movement of people, ideas, goods and services across the globe; language skills are thus necessary to confront the challenge of maintaining order and positive relationships between people of all backgrounds and cultures. At an international university in Kyushu, Japan, students from Japan and other parts of the world shared their perceptions on the theme of bi-/multilingualism. This topic is of particular relevance to them in their personal lives as students and as emerging citizens of a

global society. Their insights were investigated via a questionnaire containing 24 likert-scale attitude-measuring items, and two open comment boxes.

The opportunity sample chosen for this study, as expressed in Table 1 is a mixture of students from various backgrounds, which provide a unique blend of voices; however, it is necessary to note that the size and make-up of the pool of participants should also be considered a limitation of the study. A relatively small number of Japanese students (N=25) form the domestic group, and since the 97 individuals comprising the overseas cohort represent numerous countries and regions of the world, this “international students” group is not assumed to be representative of all international students in Japan.

To summarize first of all the quantitative findings, an analysis of the data showed that virtually all students wish to be bi-/multilingual, and their definition of it predominantly makes English one of the bi-/multilingual languages. A sizeable portion of participants also believe Japanese society would benefit greatly by becoming more bi-/multilingual. Both of these findings are in support of the main hypothesis of the study. Further statistical analyses yielded additional findings, such as Japanese ranking themselves much lower than other nationalities with regard to the statement: “I am a bi-/multilingual person.” This finding suggests the second hypothesis is supported as well. Japanese students are inclined to envision bi-/multilingualism more as an aspiration in life than as an element of their present identity as language learners. In addition, Japanese students who self-rate their L2 ability highly are more likely to label bi-/multilingual people as being “internationally-minded.” Within the ‘foreign student’ sub-group, those who rank their L2 ability highly are more likely to express the belief that Japanese society ought to become more bi-/multilingual.

Qualitative data from comment boxes were analyzed in order to answer questions pertaining to a definition of bi-/multilingualism and beliefs about the role it ought to play within Japanese society. A definition of bi-/multilingualism, arrived at via analysis of the data from the first topic, would be: “to use an L2 to speak and converse fluently with foreigners and/or native speakers, while understanding both linguistic input and cultural aspects of the L2.” The majority of both Japanese and international students expressed a common belief that bi-/multilingualism is important for Japan in light of globalization, and that the nation’s educational policies ought to take this into account in order to make improvements to the system and provide more opportunities for interactions between Japanese and internationals in order to promote a bi-/multilingual society.

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