Language proficiency of Japanese children who have temporarily lived in English speaking countries and their parents' attitudes towards language education

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1. Introduction

This paper examines parental attitudes toward early English education. The main focus of this study is parents who have been to an English speaking country with their children and whose children attend private English schools after coming back to Japan. In Japan, there is an increasing number of children who have been abroad for more than a year during school-age (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2018). Due to the common notion that children are better language learners than adults, most parents think that their children will be fluent in both Japanese and English if they have been to an English speaking country for certain amount of time (Ono, 1994). After coming back to Japan, such parents tend to put emphasis on retaining their children's English ability under the assumption that their children have become fluent in both languages (Ono, 1994).

However, previous studies suggest that it is not always easy for children who have immigrated to another language environment to be balanced bilinguals who are fluent in both languages at a level equivalent to native speakers of each language (Minoura, 2003; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1988). Even in a second language environment, where the language to be learnt is spoken as an official language, it takes 5 to 7 years for children to acquire the second language competence to understand and hold discussions in academic situations, whereas it takes only 1 to 2 years to be fluent in a daily conversation (Cummins, 1979). The length of stay in a second language environment is considered to be the most crucial factor affecting children's second language proficiency (Minoura, 2003; Okamura-Bichard, 1985). There is no

large-scale research on how long Japanese children temporarily stay in foreign countries, but their length of stay is certain to vary. Therefore, their second language proficiency is also likely to be diverse. It is unlikely that all children who have temporarily lived in a foreign country can acquire enough foreign language competence to discuss class content.

Japanese proficiency can be also affected by residency in foreign countries. In a study with Japanese children moving to the US, Minoura (2003) reported that children under 6 rapidly forget Japanese and become more fluent in English, whereas older children tend to retain Japanese proficiency. Based on their vocabulary test results, Ono (1994) suggested many children who have been abroad have lower Japanese proficiency compared with Japanese monolingual children.

Taken together, children who have been to a second language environment are likely to have varied first language (L1) and second language (L2) proficiency. Not all children who have lived in an L2 environment can be balanced bilinguals. Some children may be able to discuss content fluently in the L2 classroom and some may be fluent only for daily conversation. It is also possible that some children fail to learn significant L2 in an L2 environment. In Japan, some children who have been abroad may have Japanese proficiency equivalent to children at the same age, whereas other children may have lower Japanese proficiency and may require linguistic support to fit into a Japanese school after coming back to Japan. However, according to Ono (1994), parents who have been to English speaking countries with their children tend to think that their child has become proficiently bilingual in English and Japanese. These parents sometimes put too much emphasis on retaining their children's English proficiency after coming back to Japan. The author reported several examples in which parents tried too hard to retain their children's English proficiency. One parent prohibited their 3 children from speaking in Japanese at home in Japan. This prevented the youngest child of the three from developing either Japanese or English proficiency. Unlike the other siblings, the child did not attend nursery or kindergarten, had less exposure to Japanese, and listened to English conversations only between the older siblings at home. The child could not utter meaningful sentences in either language before the parent stopped the

regime. The parent meant well for their children, but this case suggests that parents' language education practices can sometimes lead to unexpectedly deleterious results.

It is not always easy for parents to assess what is required for their child's linguistic development. Unlike monolingual children, the language level of children who have experienced more than one language environment can be significantly diverse. Even siblings living in the same house have considerably different proficiency in each language. As it is normally parents who make decisions about young children's education, parental judgement can be highly influential on such children's linguistic development.

The ultimate attainment of first and second languages is known to be affected by the age of first exposure (Hakuta, Bialystok and Wiley, 2003; Hartshorne, Tenenbaum and Pinker, 2018; Johnson and Newport, 1989; Newport, 1988, 1990). If parents obstruct their young children's linguistic exposure during the critical period for language acquisition, there is a risk that these children fail to attain full language proficiency and struggle to develop language competence in later periods of life.

This study is interested in parental attitudes towards early English education, especially with regard to children who have resided in English speaking countries. In the field of second language acquisition, many previous studies have discussed the age constraint (Hakuta et al., 2003; Hartshorne et al., 2018; Johnson and Newport, 1989; Newport, 1988, 1990), length of learning (Minoura, 2003; Okamura-Bichard, 1985) and motivation of learners themselves (Deci and Ryan, 1985). Several studies have consulted the effects of parental attitudes on second language acquisition (Li, 2007; Mushi, 2002). However, there is little discussion about parental attitudes per se. Following a suggestion made by Ono (1994), the focus of this study is how parents estimate their children' language proficiency and to what extent they expect their children to be proficient in both Japanese and English.

In the next section, this paper discusses the likely language status of Japanese children who have temporarily lived in foreign countries. As there are no large-scale studies of such children, this study mainly refers to studies of the critical period hypothesis for first and second language acquisition. Consider-

ing the effects of age and language environment, the likely language status of children who have been abroad is discussed. Several case studies on such children are also cited. The paper then describes the results of a questionnaire on parental attitude towards early English education and their judgements of children's language proficiency. Twenty-five parents whose children attended private English school were recruited. The results of the questionnaire will contribute to this developing field to support the linguistic development of children who have been abroad.

2. Age of exposure and language proficiency

It is commonly thought that children learn a language better than adults (Bialystok and Miller, 1999; Bongaerts, Planken and Schils, 1995; Hartshorne et al., 2018; Newport, 1988). Researchers have mostly agreed on the advantage for young learners on first language acquisition, but not on second language acquisition for different environments and levels of language retainment. The age constraints related to first and second language acquisition involve different considerations. However, in the context of English education in Japan, the critical period hypothesis has been referred to without considering the complexities of different learning acquisition environments. This might have led to a mistaken parental expectation that younger children can be fluent in two languages if they go to a second language environment in their childhood. As we have seen above, it is not always easy for children in a second language environment to be balanced bilinguals.

In this section, the critical period hypothesis for first and second language acquisition are discussed separately. For second language acquisition, learners in second and foreign language environments are also discussed separately. Finally, age constraints on language acquisition among children who have been abroad are examined.

2.1 The critical period hypothesis in first language acquisition

Penfield and Roberts (1959), who studied brain dominance and speech disturbances, introduced the concept of the critical period hypothesis in the field of language acquisition. The hypothesis originally referred to the acquisition of the first language (L1);

that is, which people learn for the first time. The researchers proposed that the brain plasticity of children allows them to recover from injury or diseases which destroy the speech areas in the left cerebral hemisphere. Child patients will generally speak again after months while adults may or may not, depending on the severity of the injury. The researchers suggested age-related constraints on language acquisition.

Also stemming from language disorder studies, Lenneberg (1967) hypothesised that language could be fully acquired only during a critical period, extending from early infancy until puberty. Most children who acquire aphasia before puberty relearn language without residual problems in later life, whereas adult patients rarely recover fully. He suggested that children have a neurological advantage in language acquisition and that the brain loses plasticity after puberty. Both studies have agreed that children have a neurological advantage, and were taken to support the critical period hypothesis in first language acquisition.

The well-known case of an American feral child called Genie (Curtiss, Fromkin, Krashen, Rigler and Rigler, 1974; Curtiss, 1977) also supported the advantage of children in first language acquisition. Genie's father kept her in a socially isolated environment deprived of language until she was found at the age of 13. After seven years of rehabilitation, both her comprehension and production of language remained "abnormally disparate" (Curtiss, 1977). However, as the child was reared in unusual conditions including nutritional and cognitive deprivation, it is uncertain whether her lack of language competence resulted solely from a lack of linguistic exposure during early life (Johnson and Newport, 1989).

Other findings about maturational constraints in first language learning comes from studies on American Sign Language (ASL). ASL is acquired under considerably diverse circumstances of time and input compared to spoken languages (Newport, 1990). Newport (1988) studied ASL acquisition in deaf children, dividing them into three groups: (1) a native group consisting of children born to deaf parents and exposed to ASL from birth; (2) early learners starting to learn at the age of 4 to 6; and (3) late learners exposed after the age 12. She reported that the native group performed the best in both production and

comprehension tests and that the early learners were superior to the late learners. Results showed a linear decline in proficiency with increasing age of first exposure. The findings of the study supported the advantage of early learners in first language acquisition. However, Newport (1988) disputed Lenneberg (1967)'s hypothesis, at least in two regards. First, the decline of ASL performance did not show a sudden drop, which Lenneberg (1967) hypothesised to occur at puberty. Second, post-pubescent learners were still capable of acquiring language proficiency while they did not reach as high proficiency as native or early learners.

Taken together, researchers have agreed that early learners have an advantage in first language acquisition, but that the original critical period hypothesis requires revision. Learners who are exposed to a language from birth are likely to be the most proficient in the language. However, this does not mean that late learners are not able to acquire a language at all. There may be a linear decline in ultimate language performance with increasing age of first exposure rather than a sudden drop at puberty. If children move from an L1 environment to an L2 environment at a young age, that leads to less exposure to L1 during the critical period. Their L1 acquisition is likely to be especially affected by the change of the language environment during this period.

2.2 The critical period hypothesis in second language acquisition

Although the critical period hypothesis was originally proposed for first language acquisition, the theory is often extended to include a critical period for acquisition of second language (L2), a language which is not a first language (L1). Some empirical studies suggest that young learners ultimately achieve a higher level of L2 proficiency in an L2 environment, where the language is spoken as an official language of the community. In a study with native Korean and Chinese speakers who had immigrated to the US at various ages, Johnson and Newport (1989) found that people who had arrived before the age of 6 performed identically to native speakers in a grammar test; those who had arrived between the age of 7 and 15 showed a negative correlation between the test score and age of arrival; and the score of

those who had arrived after age 15 was comparatively low and unrelated to age of arrival. The researchers concluded that the critical period for language acquisition extends to second language acquisition and that the end of the period was 15 years old. Although those who arrived before 6 performed the same as native speakers, there might be ceiling effects; the test might be too easy to tell the difference between native speakers and early arrivers. If different tests are applied, there may be a difference between these groups.

Although this influential study has been criticised by subsequent studies in terms of the critical age and the existence of discontinuity in the regression of English proficiency (Bialystok and Miller, 1999; Hakuta, Bialystok and Wiley, 2003), researchers have agreed on the advantage of early arrival and linear decline on increasing age in second language proficiency. Bialystok and Miller (1999), who conducted a subsequent study, examined three groups of participants with a grammaticality judgement in both oral and written form. The first group consisted of native speakers of Chinese, the second, native speakers of Spanish. The participants in these two groups learned English as an L2 in Canada. Following the study by Johnson and Newport (1989), the two learner groups were divided with the age of arrival into younger and older learners, who arrived before and after the age of 15, respectively. The third group, a control group, consisted of native speakers of English. As Johnson and Newport (1989) only tested English proficiency of the subjects, some of their subjects might be monolingual English speakers (Bialystok and Hakuta, 1994). In the study of Bialystok and Miller (1999), participants were examined with respect to their native language proficiency to show that they were bilinguals.

Bialystok and Miller (1999) found that performance patterns were different between early and late learner groups. Spanish learners who had arrived at younger age outperformed those who arrived later in grammaticality judgement tests in English. The advantage for the early arrival of Chinese speakers was more subtle than those found for Spanish speakers, while there was a negative correlation between age of arrival and level of achievement for all the Chinese learners. For both learner groups, people who arrived up until eight years old performed with the same proficiency as native speakers by the time they

were at least university age. Although this study replicated the findings from Johnson and Newport (1989) using a cut-off age of 7, Bialystok and Miller (1999) were careful enough to suggest that these findings should not be overinterpreted. The researchers mentioned that children who arrive before the age of schooling and receive all their education in a new language have an entirely different experience than other learners. Typical social experiences of young children may affect their L2 proficiency. Also, these results cannot be explained solely in terms of age of arrival as the two learner groups showed different tendencies. The results suggested that other factors than the age of arrival affect learners' L2 proficiency. The researchers concluded that this study has failed to provide sufficient evidence to accept the critical period hypothesis for second language acquisition.

Hakuta et al. (2003), who analysed data from the 1990 US Census, also reported that their study has failed to produce evidence of a critical period. Using responses from 2.3 million immigrants with Spanish or Chinese language background, they found no evidence of discontinuity in the regression of English proficiency on the age of immigration, which is the essential hallmark of a critical period. Instead, the degree of success in second language acquisition steadily declined throughout the lifespan. Another remarkable finding is that socioeconomic factors and particularly the amount of formal education are significant predictors of success in English learning. These findings may be consistent with those from Bialystok and Miller (1999). Together with the age of first exposure, certain experiences in an L2 environment can affect L2 proficiency of learners.

A recent study of Hartshorne et al. (2018) collected valid data from 669,498 native and non-native English speakers and suggested the positive effects of the age of first exposure can be observed even in a foreign language environment, where the second language is not an official language. The researchers found that ultimate attainment is reasonably consistent for learners who begin before age 10 to 12. Immersion learners showed a minimal decline in ultimate performance up until the age of first exposure of 12 years, followed by the significantly steeper decline. Non-immersion learners, on whom there were no similar studies previously, also showed no decline from 4 to 9 years old, after which the decline became steeper. The linear decline in

attainment correlated with the age of first exposure has not been observed to cease after a particular age. Ultimate attainment of immersion learners is constantly higher than non-immersion learner at any age of first exposure. They claimed that their findings contrast with the conclusions of some prior studies because their larger sample size allows for reasonably precise estimates. They confidently concluded that the results support the existence of a critical period, while the closure of the period is later than previously predicted.

Researchers have not come to consensus on even the existence of a critical period for the second language. Although the age of first exposure is not likely to be the sole factor which affects the ultimate proficiency in a second language, researchers mostly agree on the advantage of early learners in second language performance. Other factors, such as socioeconomic factors, may contribute to enhancing L2 proficiency. However, as most studies did not examine the first language proficiency of participants, it is possible that some people might not retain their L1 after immersion in an L2 environment. The advantage of early learners does not necessarily mean that early learners can be proficient in both L1 and L2.

2.3 Bilinguals in a second language environment

Previous studies suggest that even children in an L2 environment cannot necessarily become balanced bilinguals who are fluent in both languages equivalent to native speakers of each language. In a study with native Finnish children immigrating to Sweden, Skutnabb-Kangas (1988) suggested that only children who immigrated age 10 to 12 could achieve an equivalent level of language proficiency to native speakers in both languages. According to this research, other children stayed comparatively low level of proficiency in both languages. As Johnson and Newport (1989), Bialystok and Miller (1999) and Hartshorne et al. (2018) suggested, children who immigrate in an L2 environment at a younger age may achieve higher proficiency in the long run. Participants of Skutnabb-Kangas (1988) may acquire a high level of L2 proficiency over a longer period of time, but some children were likely to have difficulties in L2 at some point. In addition, some children might struggle with retaining and developing L1 in an L2 environment.

In a bilingual context in Canada, Cummins (1979) distinguished two language skills: Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). BICS refers to the basic communicative skills in daily life, whereas CALP refers to the language used in an academic context. Based on his observations in the classroom, Cummins (1979) suggested that it takes 1 to 2 years for typical learners in an L2 environment to develop BICS and that they require 5 to 7 years to acquire CALP. This suggests that children who speak their L2 fluently may have difficulties studying school subjects in their L2. Also, it requires many years to develop language skills even for children in an L2 environment.

Okamura-Bichard (1985), who conducted a study with 48 Japanese children temporarily living in the US, examined the results of the children's nonverbal IQ test, Japanese language test and reading test in English. The results revealed that the years of schooling in the US significantly related to skill level in English. No relationships were found between; (1) the years of schooling in Japan and Japanese proficiency; (2) the level of intelligence and the proficiency in the two languages; and (3) the comparable abilities in both languages.

Minoura (2003) examined the language experiences of Japanese children who moved to the US. She reported that older learners outperformed young learners in L2 proficiency in a short period of time. According to her report, when exposed to an English speaking country, children under 6 achieve a higher level of English proficiency compared with Japanese only in 1 and a half year. According to Minoura (2003), the dominant language of children who move to the US under the age of 9 tend to be English and they tend to be monolingual speakers of English. On the other hand, those who move to the US at the age of 9 and older retain Japanese considerably and some of them become fluent in both Japanese and English.

Taken together, children in an L2 environment can acquire L2 in the long run, but they can lose their first language proficiency at the same time. These studies suggested that early learners in an L2 environment require a certain amount of time to develop second language proficiency. The amount of stay in an L2 environment is likely to be a crucial factor for young learners' L2 proficiency. Also, not all the children in an L2 environ-

ment can become balanced bilinguals. There might be age constraint not only for language acquisition but also for language retainment. Also, children who are fluent in L2 in daily conversation may have not achieved language proficiency enough to cope with school subjects in L2.

As immigrant children are going to stay in the second language environment, they can develop their L2 proficiency as they grow. On the other hand, children who have temporarily lived in an L2 environment may not have enough time to develop their L2 sufficiently. Also, their L1 may be affected by less exposure to L1 in an L2 environment. For such children, earlier exposure to L2 in an L2 environment can not necessarily be an advantage for their linguistic development.

The effect of age and length of stay in an L2 environment on children who have temporarily lived in an L2 environment can be considerably complex. Those who have been to an L2 environment more than 7 years may be very fluent in the L2. Their dominant language is likely to be L2. Their retainment of L1 may depend on the age of arrival in the L2 environment. They may struggle with using L1 there. Such children may choose to live in an L2 environment rather than coming back to an L1 environment. Those who stay in an L2 environment for fewer years are not likely to achieve a high level of L2 proficiency enough to understand and discuss content in the classroom. Even for children who have been to another language environment for fewer years, fewer chances to be exposed to L1 can affect children's L1 development. Their retainment of L1 may also depend on the age of arrival in an L2 environment. Early arrivers are more likely to forget their L1, but they are also likely to relearn L1 after they come back to an L1 environment. Those who arrive in an L2 environment under the age of 8 and come back to an L1 environment over the age of 8 might have more difficulty in learning languages. Their dominant language may become L2 during the stay in an L2 environment, but after they come back to an L1 environment, their dominant language may not easily transit because of an age constraint. If their stay in an L2 environment is not long enough to attain a high level of language proficiency, such children may suffer from a lack of language proficiency in both languages they have learned. Late learners are likely to retain their L1 and it is comparatively easy to reenter an L1

environment.

2.4 Second language acquisition in a foreign language environment

Compared with learners in an L2 environment, those in a foreign language (FL) environment, where the language to be learnt is not an official language of the community, are exposed to considerably fewer amount of L2 input. Also, learners' situation can be more diverse in an FL environment. Learners in an L2 environment tend to have an urgent need to learn the language, and are likely to have a certain motivation to improve their L2 proficiency. On the other hand, learners in an FL environment do not necessarily have contact with L2 communities. Some learners are planning to move to an L2 environment and some have no intention to be involved in L2 communities. Some move from an L2 environment to FL environment. Among those who have been to an L2 environment, the age of arrival in an L2 environment, the age of coming back to an L1 environment and the length of stay in each environment are also diverse. Some have even stayed in more than one L2 speaking location. Therefore, it is extremely difficult to determine the effects of age.

Hartshorne et al. (2018) suggested that an earlier age of first exposure to an L2 contributes to ultimate achievement even in an FL environment. However, results from some studies in Japan showed that there is no difference between early learners and late learners at least in the short run. Shirahata (2002) compared various test results of two groups of children: (1) those started learn English at elementary school which is a model school of Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) and (2) those started learn English at junior high school. The tests were conducted at the tenth month in the first year of junior high school. Although early learners of this study had 105 hours of English activity more than late learners, no difference between two groups was found in the competence of phoneme recognition, pronunciation and a number of spoken words. Shirahata (2002) suggested that this is maybe because children had too little time to be exposed to English in the activities in an elementary school. Takada (2005) examined 12 children who were exposed to English from an elementary school at two different periods in their first year of junior high school. The researcher

concluded that some learners benefited from English exposure in elementary school, whereas others did not.

Early exposure to the target language can be beneficial to learners staying only in an FL environment, but it is not always sufficient to have a positive impact on learners attainment. The previous studies above have not consulted learners who lived in an L2 environment and currently live in an FL environment. Continuous exposure to L2 after returning from an L2 environment to a home country, an FL environment, can lead to a prevention of young learners' linguistic development (Ono, 1994). For children who have been abroad, early foreign language education in an FL environment is not always beneficial, not only for second language acquisition but also for first language acquisition. It is still uncertain how to develop returnee students' L1 and L2 effectively.

In sum, the effects of age of first exposure to an L2 are not constant in an FL environment. It may require a certain amount of time and L2 stimuli to make a difference in ultimate performance. Further studies are required to determine in which condition earlier exposure is effective in an FL environment.

2.5 Anxiety towards loss of languages

In studies with immigrant families, loss of family languages has often been discussed. Studies in this field repeatedly reported that young immigrant children to the US learn English quickly and drop their primary language (Fillmore, 1991: Hinton, 1999; Kouritzin, 1999).

Fillmore (2000) described a story of a Chinese immigrant family. Among 4 children in the family, 3 were doing well in school, and 1 dropped out because of the continuous feeling of an outsider. Only the oldest child of the siblings still spoke her primary language, Cantonese, and the other children communicated with the adults in the family through her interpretation. However, her proficiency in Cantonese was not equivalent to Chinese children in her age, and her dominant language had become English. According to Fillmore (2000), this case appears unfortunate but hardly tragic. Accelerated language loss is a common occurrence in immigrant families, and many families have experienced a similar story.

Zhang (2010) presented data from in-depth interviews with

18 Chinese immigrant families. According to the interviews, parents were aware that their children were losing their primary language as they learned English after schooling. At first, parents were worried about their children's acquisition of English. However, after the children started speaking English, the parents started to be anxious about their children's loss of primary language. Many parents attempted to retain and develop their children's family language and participated in activities in the family language with their children. Nevertheless, most children had lost their family language.

Immigrant children were in different situations compared with children who have temporarily lived in foreign countries. Immigrant children tend to have a powerful motivation to learn their second language to live in the country, whereas children who have been to foreign countries may be aware that they require their first language after coming back to their home country. However, it should be noted that young immigrant children easily forget their first language, and it is also possible for young children who temporarily live in an L2 environment to lose their L1 to some extent. Immigrant parents are likely to be aware of their children's loss of their first language. Parents in the study of Zhang (2010) stated that they were worried about their children's loss of the family language. It is questionable whether parents of children who have been to foreign countries with their children are aware of the possibility that their children have lower L1 proficiency for their age. According to Ono (1994), parents tend to heavily emphasise English education, which sometimes resulted in the prevention of children's linguistic development. This study is interested in how parents of children who have been abroad estimate their children's language proficiency and if they have any worries about their children's linguistic development.

3. Methodology

This study aims to investigate parental attitude towards language education mainly focusing on Japanese parents who have been to an English speaking country with their children. The current study is interested in how such parents estimate their children's language proficiency and if they have any anxiety

about children's linguistic development compared with parents who have never been to English speaking countries.

3.1 Participants

Twenty-five parents whose children attended private English schools were recruited for this study. First, the representatives of two private English schools for children were contacted for access to their students' parents. Then, parents in the schools were given a handout explaining the purpose and the procedure of the study. Parents who agreed to participate in the study were recruited for this study.

The mean age of children was 4.16 (range: 2 to 10 years old; *SD* = 2.01). 14 children had been to an English speaking country, and 11 children had never been abroad. The mean month spent in L2 countries among children who had been to English speaking countries was 20.57 (*N* = 14, *SD* = 17.35).

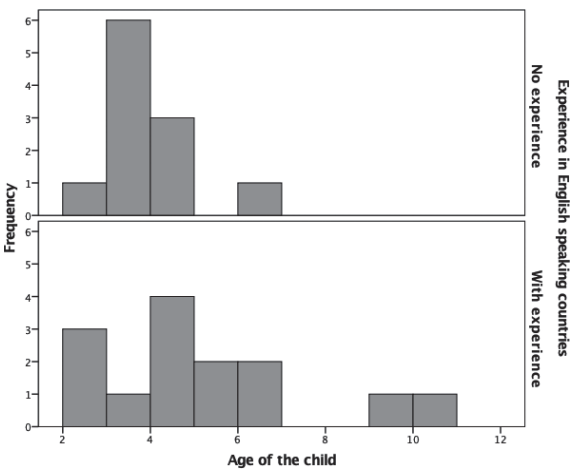

Figure 1 *The frequency of the age of children*

All the children's L1 was Japanese, which was at least one of their parent's L1. All the children's L2 included English. Two children had another L2, which was one of their parent's L1. None of the parents spoke English as their L1. All the children's dominant language at home was Japanese. None of the children were engaged in Japanese activities in which they were explicitly taught Japanese.

Apart from the English lessons, 3 children who had been

to an English speaking country regularly watched English TV programs at home for less than an hour per day. None of the children had English human interaction outside the school. The children received 4 hours of regular English lessons per week. The annual lesson hours for these children were 192 hours.

All the parents rated their own L1 ability as native level, whereas their English proficiency is comparatively varied (Table 1).

Table 1 *Self-judgement on English competence by parents, who have been to English speaking countries (E) and who have not (J)*

Description of each stage	E	J
1. Beginner, can understand basic phrases and everyday expressions	0	2
2. Elementary, can understand frequently used expressions in areas of intermediate relevance	0	3
3. Intermediate, can interact on familiar topics	1	4
4. Upper intermediate, very fluent in one's specialised field	7	2
5. Advanced, can deal with complex and abstract topics with a wide variety of vocabulary	6	0
6. Native/ Equivalent to native	0	1

3.2 Materials

All the participants completed a questionnaire, which contains demographic questions which might affect language proficiency such as child's age, their L1 and L2, time spent in L1 and L2 environments and L1 and L2 of parents. Also, the subjects were asked to judge their children's L1 and L2 ability to read, write, listen and speak on a 6-band scale, which describes what children are capable of in each stage. This band scale was made by modifying and combining the JSL band scale by Kawakami (2011) and Bandscales State Schools (Queensland) by the Queensland Government (2018). The JSL band scale has been developed to assess Japanese proficiency of children who learn Japanese as an L2, while Bandscales State Schools attempts to assess Australian standard English (ASE) proficiency of children who speak ASE as an additional language. Both band scales were developed in the context of a need for a constant scale to assess children's language proficiency to support the linguistic development of children effectively. BICS and CALP (Cummins, 1979) can be roughly divided into listening and speaking, and reading

and writing respectively. Asking the parents to assess their children's language proficiency based on the 4 components, this study attempts to let parents estimate their children's ability for daily communication and academic context separately. The subjects were asked to rate anxiety about their children's development stage of their ability to read, write, listen and speak in L1 and L2 on a 6-Likert scale. The parents may have anxiety about the linguistic development of children like immigrant parents do. It is also possible that parents of children who have been to English speaking countries have no concerns about their children's linguistic development as Ono (1994) suggested.

To assess what they expect from early English education, the subjects were also asked to subjectively assess to what extent they would like their children to become a proficient bilingual (variable: expectation) and to what extent they think that their children were likely to become a balanced bilingual (variable: likelihood) on 4-Likert. Parents who have been to English speaking countries may expect their children to be a balanced bilingual as the previous study suggested (Ono, 1994).

In addition, there was qualitative input in the questionnaire which asked participants to describe why they would like their children to be engaged in early English education and the reason why they rated the expectation and likelihood variables as they did.

3.3 Procedure

The questionnaire was given to parents at the private English schools. The parents took it home and filled it out at their convenience. A week later, the questionnaire was collected at the school. The researcher did not know the children and parents before starting this survey, and the questionnaire was anonymous.

4. Findings

4.1 The children's language proficiency estimated by their parents

The parents were asked to assess at which linguistic stage their children were based on the 6 band-scales (from 1 = new to the

language to 6 = competent). Parents who have never been to English speaking countries with their children highly estimated their children's Japanese speaking and listening ability (Table 2). All the parents in this group stated that their children were at stage 4 to 6 on the band scale. On the other hand, some parents who have been to English speaking countries with their children estimated their children's Japanese listening or speaking ability at stage 1 to 3. Reading and writing ability in Japanese was rated comparatively low in both groups, which may be due to the children's age.

Reading and listening ability in English was also rated low in both groups (Table 3). More parents who have never been to English speaking countries rated their children' listening and speaking ability highly compared with parents who have.

Taken together, the parents who have never been to English speaking countries rated their children's listening and speaking ability in both Japanese and English more highly than the parents who have been to English speaking countries did.

Table 2 *The frequency of the children's Japanese proficiency estimated by parents, who have been to English speaking countries (E) and who have not (J)*

Component	Band scale description	E	J
Reading	1. looks at books, but uses pictures or other contexts to understand	4	2
	2. recognises some letters and words, which they encounter frequently	2	2
	3. attempts to read simple and short texts with repetitive sentence patterns on own	1	2
	4. reads short familiar texts with contextual support	1	2
	5. reads most texts on familiar topics but lacks the depth of comprehension	1	0
	6. reads competently within the range of ability expected at their age	5	3
Writing	1. makes approximations of letters and symbols but does not understand their meanings	7	7
	2. experiments with writing and writes own name, letters or words	0	0
	3. begins to write own very short texts	2	0
	4. writes simple texts on familiar topics but the meaning is sometimes breakdown	0	2
	5. writes with some fluency on familiar written text types	2	1
	6. writes most texts at the level of expected at their age	3	1
Speaking	1. labels some familiar objects	2	0
	2. uses parts of routine and formulaic social language	0	0
	3. combines words into a few but requires a patient listener	1	0
	4. participates in face-to-face interaction on familiar topics with frequent breakdowns	4	0
	5. interacts socially in an informal context and gives a short spoken report	2	7
	6. express more complex ideas at the level of expected at their age	5	4
Listening	1. watches what other ones are doing and interpreting what is meant	1	0
	2. recognises high-frequency words, phrases and greetings	1	0
	3. attempts to understand spoken interaction by combining recognised words	0	0
	4. understands instructions in familiar contexts	3	1
	5. comprehends most topics but lacks precision	3	5
	6. comprehends more variety of topics at the level of expected at their age	6	5

Table 3 *The frequency of the children's English proficiency estimated by parents, who have been to English speaking countries (E) and who have not (J)*

Component	Band scale description	E	J
Reading	1. looks at books, but uses pictures or other contexts to understand	8	3
	2. recognises some letters and words, which they encounter frequently	3	5
	3. attempts to read simple and short texts with repetitive sentence patterns on own	2	3
	4. reads short familiar texts with contextual support	1	0
	5. reads most texts on familiar topics but lacks depth of comprehension	0	0
	6. reads competently within the range of ability expected at their age	0	0
Writing	1. makes approximations of letters and symbols but does not understand their meanings	9	8
	2. experiments with writing and writes own name, letters or words	4	2
	3. begins to write own very short texts	1	1
	4. writes simple texts on familiar topics but the meaning is sometimes breakdown	0	0
	5. writes with some fluency on familiar written text types	0	0
	6. writes most texts at the level of expected at their age	0	0
Speaking	1. labels some familiar objects	2	3
	2. uses parts of routine and formulaic social language	7	4
	3. combines words into a few but requires a patient listener	5	1
	4. participates in face-to-face interaction on familiar topics with frequent breakdowns	0	2
	5. interacts socially in an informal context and gives a short spoken report	0	1
	6. express more complex ideas at the level of expected at their age	0	0
Listening	1. watches what other ones are doing and interpreting what is meant	2	2
	2. recognises high-frequency words, phrases and greetings	6	2
	3. attempts to understand spoken interaction by combining recognised words	5	2
	4. understands instructions in familiar contexts	1	5
	5. comprehends most topics but lacks precision	0	0
	6. comprehends more variety of topics at the level of expected at their age	0	0

4.2 Parental anxiety on their children's linguistic ability

The parents were also asked if they felt anxious about their children's linguistic ability to read, write, speak and listen in Japanese and English. Both parents who have and have not been to English speaking countries with their children were less anxious about their children's Japanese speaking and listening ability compared with reading and writing (Table 4). No parents felt anxious "very frequently" in either component. There were slightly more parents who have been to English speaking countries stating that they were anxious about their children's Japanese reading and writing ability frequently or occasionally compared with parents who have not been to English speaking countries. In addition, parents who have been to English speaking countries felt anxious about their children's English ability in the 4 components more frequently compared with parents who have never been to English speaking countries with their children (Table 5). The parents who have been to English speaking countries seemed to have more anxiety about their children's linguistic ability both in English and Japanese.

Table 4 *Anxiety about their children's Japanese ability stated by parents who have been to English speaking countries with their children (E) and who have not (J)*

Component	Anxiety frequency	E	J
Reading	Very Frequently	0	0
	Frequently	2	1
	Occasionally	2	1
	Rarely	0	2
	Very Rarely	5	4
	Never	5	3
Writing	Very Frequently	0	0
	Frequently	2	2
	Occasionally	2	1
	Rarely	0	1
	Very Rarely	5	4
	Never	5	3
Speaking	Very Frequently	0	0
	Frequently	0	0
	Occasionally	2	0
	Rarely	3	2
	Very Rarely	1	2
	Never	8	7
Listening	Very Frequently	0	0
	Frequently	0	0
	Occasionally	2	0
	Rarely	2	2
	Very Rarely	1	3
	Never	9	6

Table 5 *Anxiety about their children's English ability stated by parents who have been to English speaking countries with their children (E) and who have not (J)*

Component	Anxiety frequency	E	J
Reading	Very Frequently	4	2
	Frequently	2	4
	Occasionally	2	2
	Rarely	2	0
	Very Rarely	4	3
	Never	0	0
Writing	Very Frequently	4	1
	Frequently	2	4
	Occasionally	3	3
	Rarely	1	0
	Very Rarely	4	3
	Never	0	0
Speaking	Very Frequently	2	0
	Frequently	2	3
	Occasionally	1	3
	Rarely	4	1
	Very Rarely	4	3
	Never	1	1
Listening	Very Frequently	1	0
	Frequently	2	2
	Occasionally	1	4
	Rarely	5	1
	Very Rarely	4	3
	Never	1	1

4.3 Parental expectation about their children's becoming proficient bilinguals

The parents were asked if they wanted their children to be a balanced bilingual of Japanese and English. In the questionnaire, a balanced bilingual is defined as a person who is highly proficient in both languages. Most of the parents stated that they strongly agree or agree on the statement (Table 6). In the qualitative part of the questionnaire, the parents stated why they want their children to be balanced bilinguals (Table 7) or they do not (Table 8). Two parents who have lived in an English speaking country stated that their child has a nationality of the country. There were parents in both groups who mentioned the possibility that they might live abroad in the future. Also, parents in both groups stated that English would be more and more important

and that it would be necessary for their children's future success to learn English.

Interestingly, no parents mentioned Japanese proficiency when they described the reason. Apparently, the parents thought it would be a problem for English proficiency for their children to be a proficient Japanese English bilingual.

Table 6 *The frequency of parents' answers to the question asking if they want their children to be a balanced bilingual of Japanese and English*

Options	E	J
Strongly Agree	5	7
Agree	8	3
Disagree	1	0
Strongly Disagree	0	1

Table 7 *The reason why they stated strongly agree or agree on the question if they want their children to be a balanced bilingual*

E	J
-Learning English makes it possible to have more options in life. -That leads to having more options in the future career. -To prepare for life in an English speaking country where we will live. -We might move to foreign countries. -I would like my child to have more options for work. It will be very inconvenient if the child cannot communicate, not necessarily fluent, in English. -It is necessary to catch up the standard of this globalised world. -We parents have learned English through working in foreign countries. I would like my child to trace the same way. -Our child may choose the nationality of an English speaking country. - The child has the nationality of an English speaking country.	-After the child learns Japanese properly, I would like the child to learn English. -As I want the child to have a bond with families of mine and husband's, I would like the child to be fluent in both languages (Japanese and another language of the family, not English). However, I don't insist on the child's learning English. -I want the child to succeed in the future. -Learning English is important for entrance exams in Japan. -English will be increasingly important as the child grows. -Learning English will broaden the perspective, field of activities and thought on everything. -We will live abroad. -I want the child to meet more people and to experience more things, which will broaden the child's perspective.

Table 8 *The reason why they stated disagree or strongly disagree on the question if they want their children to be a balanced bilingual*

E	J
-It is enough for the child to learn English to some extent.	-No need to be like a native speaker.

4.4 Parental expectation about their children's becoming proficient bilinguals

The parents were asked if they think that their children were likely to be a balanced bilingual of Japanese and English (Table 9). All the parents who have never been to an English speaking country chose "probably", whereas more than one-third of the parents who have been to English speaking countries chose "probably not" and the rest of them chose "probably". One of the reasons the parents stated "probably" was early English education (Table 10). Parents in both groups mentioned the importance of the environment for learning English (Table 11). This is also a reason why some parents stated: "probably not". Parents who have been English speaking countries stated that there were fewer chances to use English in Japan, which makes it difficult to develop English proficiency. Japanese proficiency was not mentioned in this section either. An appropriate environment to be a balanced bilingual is referred to as an environment to learn English.

Table 9 *The frequency of parents' answers to the question asking if their children are likely to become a bilingual highly proficient in both Japanese and English*

Options	E	J
Definitely	0	0
Probably	9	11
Probably Not	5	0
Very Probably Not	0	0

Table 10 *The reason why the parents chose "probably" about the likelihood of their children's becoming a bilingual*

E	J
-As the child has learned English since little, I expect the child to remember the sounds and pronunciation of English to some extent. -It depends on the child. -It depends on the environment to which the child has been exposed to in childhood. -As the child lives in Japan, the child will rapidly forget English. We have to seek opportunities for the child to be exposed to English. -As we live in Japan now, it is necessary to make an extra effort to learn English. -Because the child has been attending an English school, and we have been encouraging the child to learn English. -As we did the same. -Everyone can be a balanced bilingual if making an effort. -Because the father of the child could. The child will be a balanced bilingual if we carry on early English education.	-The child is a bit shy but likes to communicate with others. If the child is interested in it, the child will learn English. -The child has no hesitation to learn languages. -We have been enhancing the child's listening ability since birth. Only the child makes an effort in the future. -It is difficult to be a bilingual only living in Japan. An environment is the most important. -The child's ability to acquire language keeps surprising me. It is possible to be a bilingual through training. -It is difficult to have an appropriate environment. -As the child has been exposed to English since little, the child will like English and would like to study English. -There are a lot of balanced bilinguals in the world. There will be more in the future. -If we have an appropriate environment in a foreign country, it is possible. -As the child started learning English at a young age, the child enjoys learning, which will lead to better results.

Table 11 *The reason why the parents chose "probably not" about the likelihood of their children's becoming a bilingual*

E	J
-The child is not so passionate about that. -There is little chance to use English in Japan. It is necessary to study abroad to be a bilingual. -It depends on the child. Also, the environment where the child has to use English is required.	NA

5. Discussion

A previous study suggested that parents who have been to an English speaking country with their children tend to think that their children have become a proficient bilingual through life abroad, and often put too much emphasis on their children's retaining English after coming back to Japan (Ono, 1994). In the current study, some parents who have been to English speaking countries have some anxiety about their children's Japanese proficiency. Some parents rated their children's Japanese ability comparatively low. As the length of stay in an L2 environment is most likely to affect children's second language proficiency (Minoura, 2003; Okamura-Bichard, 1985), children who have been to English speaking countries are likely to be more proficient in English than children who have not. Interestingly, parents who have been to English speaking countries did not rate their children's English proficiency higher than parents who have not been to English speaking countries did. Also, some parents who have been to English speaking countries stated that it is difficult to retain their children's English in Japan as there were few occasions to be exposed to English. It seemed that parents were aware that their children might have lower Japanese proficiency and that they were rapidly forgetting English after coming back to Japan.

In this study, when the parents thought about their children's becoming proficient bilinguals, they tended to focus on how to develop English proficiency. Some parents regarded English as an important factor for their children's future success and

in broadening their perspective. As this study recruited parents whose children attended a private English school, it is likely that the participants were particularly interested in English education. Yet, even though some of the parents had some anxiety about their children's Japanese proficiency and rated their children's Japanese proficiency low, the parents nevertheless decided to send their children to an English school. The actual reason for this decision was uncertain. Investigating this attitude may lead to additional implications as to why many parents put so much emphasis on English education after coming back to Japan. Further qualitative input is required to examine their attitudes towards English education.

As the sample size of this study was considerably small, the subjects did not represent the parents in Japan. The findings of this study should not be overgeneralised. Other populations may show different results.

6. Conclusion

The current study attempted to investigate parental attitudes towards language education in Japan. The main focus was parents who have been to English speaking countries. Some of the parents had some anxiety about their children's Japanese ability and rated their Japanese proficiency comparatively low. Yet, they chose an English school for their children's spare time. Further studies are required to assess why parents choose English education and if there is any difference between children's linguistic proficiency estimated by parents and judged objectively.

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Appendix: List of questions in the questionnaire

About languages of the children and parents
-What is the child's first language?
-What is/are the child's second language(s)?
-What is parents' first language?
-What is/are parents' second language(s)?

About language environment
-In which country has the child stayed?
-How long has the child stayed in each country?
-How old was the child when staying in each country.
-How/where did the child learn L1 and L2?
-How long and how often is the child exposed to each language?

About anxiety on linguistic development of child
-Do you feel anxious about your child linguistic ability
L1
Reading: Very Frequently/ Frequently/ Occasionally/ Rarely/ Very

Rarely / Never
Writing: Very Frequently / Frequently / Occasionally / Rarely / Very Rarely / Never
Speaking: Very Frequently / Frequently / Occasionally / Rarely / Very Rarely / Never
Listening: Very Frequently / Frequently / Occasionally / Rarely / Very Rarely / Never

L2
Reading: Very Frequently / Frequently / Occasionally / Rarely / Very Rarely / Never
Writing: Very Frequently / Frequently / Occasionally / Rarely / Very Rarely / Never
Speaking: Very Frequently / Frequently / Occasionally / Rarely / Very Rarely / Never
Listening: Very Frequently / Frequently / Occasionally / Rarely / Very Rarely / Never

-At which linguistic stage is your child?
L1
Reading
1. looks at books, but uses pictures or other contexts to understand
2. recognises some letters and words, which they encounter frequently
3. attempts to read simple and short texts with repetitive sentence patterns on own
4. reads short familiar texts with contextual support
5. reads most texts on familiar topics but lacks the depth of comprehension
6. reads competently within the range of ability expected at their age

Writing
1. makes approximations of letters and symbols but does not understand their meanings
2. experiments with writing and writes own name, letters or words
3. begins to write own very short texts
4. writes simple texts on familiar topics but the meaning is sometimes breakdown
5. writes with some fluency on familiar written text types
6. writes most texts at the level of expected at their age

Speaking
1. labels some familiar objects
2. uses parts of routine and formulaic social language
3. combines words into a few but requires a patient listener
4. participates in face-to-face interaction on familiar topics with frequent breakdowns

5. interacts socially in an informal context and gives a short spoken report
6. express more complex ideas at the level of expected at their age

Listening
1. watches what other ones are doing and interpreting what is meant
2. recognises high-frequency words, phrases and greetings
3. attempts to understand spoken interaction by combining recognised words
4. understands instructions in familiar contexts
5. comprehends most topics but lacks precision
6. comprehends more variety of topics at the level of expected at their age

L2
Reading
1. looks at books, but uses pictures or other contexts to understand
2. recognises some letters and words, which they encounter frequently
3. attempts to read simple and short texts with repetitive sentence patterns on own
4. reads short familiar texts with contextual support
5. reads most texts on familiar topics but lacks the depth of comprehension
6. reads competently within the range of ability expected at their age

Writing
1. makes approximations of letters and symbols but does not understand their meanings
2. experiments with writing and writes own name, letters or words
3. begins to write own very short texts
4. writes simple texts on familiar topics but the meaning is sometimes breakdown
5. writes with some fluency on familiar written text types
6. writes most texts at the level of expected at their age

Speaking
1. labels some familiar objects
2. uses parts of routine and formulaic social language
3. combines words into a few but requires a patient listener
4. participates in face-to-face interaction on familiar topics with frequent breakdowns
5. interacts socially in an informal context and gives a short spoken report
6. express more complex ideas at the level of expected at their age

Listening
1. watches what other ones are doing and interpreting what is meant
2. recognises high-frequency words, phrases and greetings
3. attempts to understand spoken interaction by combining recognised

words
4. understands instructions in familiar contexts
5. comprehends most topics but lacks precision
6. comprehends more variety of topics at the level of expected at their age

About the current language status
-What is the child's dominant language?
-What type of linguistic ability is required to develop for the child?
For L1
For L2
-Do you want the child to be a balanced bilingual of L1 and L2?
Strongly Agree/ Agree/ Disagree/ Strongly Disagree
-Please describe why you think so.
-Do you think the child is likely to be a balanced bilingual of L1 and L2?
Definitely/ Probably/ Probably Not/ Very Probably Not
-Please describe why you think so.
-What do you think necessary as language education for the child
L1
L2

About parents' language status
-What is your first language?
-What is/are your second language(s)?
-How long have you stayed in L1 and L2 environment?
-How did you learn L1 and L2?
-Please rate your proficiency of each language
1. Beginner, can understand basic phrases and everyday expressions
2. Elementary, can understand frequently used expressions in intermediate
3. Intermediate, can interact on familiar topics
4. Upper intermediate, very fluent in one's specialised field
5. Advanced, can deal with complex and abstract topics with a wide variety of vocabulary
6. Native/ Equivalent to native