

# 「一親一言語」使用は有効か？

## Does the "one parent-one language" principle work?

山本 雅代 YAMAMOTO, Masayo

● 関西学院大学 Kwansai Gakuin University



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### ABSTRACT

両親が異なる言語を母語とする家庭に育つ子どもは、自然に両方の言語を習得し、バイリンガルになると考えられることが多いが、現実には、産出能力を伴うバイリンガルになる子ども、受容能力のみについてバイリンガルになる子ども、あるいは主流言語のモノリンガルになる子どもと多様な状況が見られる。

こうした潜在バイリンガル能力の顕在化に差が生じる要因はどこにあるのか。これまでの先行研究から、言語環境的、社会文化的あるいは家庭環境的視点から多くの要因が指摘されてきたが、その一つに「一親一言語」使用がある。「一親一言語」使用とは、各親が子どもとのコミュニケーションにそれぞれ異なった言語を使用する言語使用の一形態を指すが、一部の研究において、この形態が子どもの産出バイリンガル能力習得を促進するという説が主張されている。

本論では、活発な言語使用が言語能力の発達を促進するとの前提に立ち、「一親一言語」使用と少数言語母語親に対する子どもの言語使用との関係を、日本語母語親と英語母語親からなる 118 の家族を対象に筆者が実施したアンケート調査からのデータをもとに考察した。データ分析から、「一親一言語」使用が必ずしも子どもの活発な少数言語使用を保証するものではなく、むしろ、子どもと少数言語との関わりが多ければ多いほど、子どもはこれを使用する可能性が高い—「少数言語との最大の関わり」とでも呼べるような原理が働いていることが示唆された。この原理の有効性については、今後、さらに多くのデータの集積、分析が必要である。

## Introduction

Children raised in families in which parents have different native languages are commonly believed to become naturally and spontaneously bilingual<sup>1)</sup>, acquiring both of the parental languages, just as monolingual children acquire their parents' shared native language as their own native language. Great variation, however, is found in the degree of bilingual ability which children acquire. Some children attain an active command of both languages and become active bilinguals. Some children, on the other hand, develop only passive abilities, becoming only passive bilinguals. Others even become monolingual, commonly in the language of the mainstream society.

It would be of great interest to researchers of bilingualism as well as to many parents to discover what causes such differences and, in particular, what promotes children's active bilingual acquisition. Many influential factors have been heretofore suggested from linguistic environmental, sociocultural, or familial points of view. Among the factors are parental language choice (De Houwer, 1999), the pattern of parental language use (Döpke, 1998; Hoffmann, 1985), parental discourse strategies towards child language mixing (Lanza, 1997), parental and societal attitudes towards bilingualism itself and towards the particular languages involved (Lyon, 1996), differences in status between the two languages (Harding & Riley, 1986), and the presence or absence of siblings (Döpke, 1992).

This paper will focus on one of these salient factors, namely the one parent–one language principle, and examine whether it promotes children's active use of the minority-status language, which is assumed to enhance

children's active bilingual acquisition.

## The one parent–one language controversy

The one parent–one language principle is a type of parental language use in which each parent speaks a different language to the child. It has been actively debated whether or not the one parent–one language principle promotes children's active bilingual acquisition (Billings, 1990; Döpke, 1998; Lyon, 1996; Romaine, 1995; Shang, 1997).

Proponents of the principle claim that it promotes children's active bilingualism. In their monolingual-bilingual comparative study, Bain & Yu (1980: 313), for example, concluded that “[i]f the languages are kept distinctly apart by the parents over approximately the first three and one-half years of the child's life, native-like control of both languages tends to accrue.” Döpke (1998: 42), an enthusiastic proponent of the principle, ensures that “there is ample evidence that this strategy *can* [emphasis in the original] succeed with installing active competence in two languages in young children.”

Other researchers, on the other hand, are more cautious about the efficacy of the principle. Romaine (1995) finds that the principle does not necessarily guarantee active bilingualism. Although admitting that some successful cases exist, she argues that “[a] very common outcome of the ‘one person–one language’ method was a child who could understand the languages of both parents, but spoke only the language of the community in which they lived” (p. 186).

Both De Houwer (1990) and Lyon (1996) reserve their conclusions regarding the effects

of the principle over bilingual attainment of children. Lyon (1996) did find in her study that all the families who adopted the principle succeeded in raising bilingual children, but they represent only 11% of all the children who attained bilingual competency. With this finding, Lyon (1996: 212) admits that “it is not clear from the present study . . . whether or not the ‘one person–one language’ strategy is the best way to encourage bilingual language development.” De Houwer (1990) also expresses her skepticism over the efficacy of the principle, saying that “so far there is no evidence that other ‘methods’ should fail, be more ‘difficult’ for the child, lead to language delay, or otherwise have disadvantageous results” (p. 54).

### **Does the one parent–one language principle promote children’s active use of the minority language?**

Although not always clearly articulated in the one parent–one language argument, one underlying assumption is that certain types of parent-to-child language use provide, more than other types, an optimal linguistic environment, which promotes the child’s use of a minority language, which in turn enhances the likelihood that the child will attain active bilingual proficiency.

By extension, it can be inferred that proponents of the one parent–one language principle would claim that it is the one which best promotes the child’s use of a minority language and is thus the one most likely to result in her or his active bilingual acquisition. On the other hand, those who are more cautious or skeptical about the effect of the principle would probably

think that it may not necessarily encourage the child’s use of a minority language, and, therefore, her or his active bilingual proficiency may not necessarily be attained.

Under this underlying assumption, I will examine the relationship between the one parent–one language principle and children’s active use of the minority language, with the data that I collected in a questionnaire survey of 118 families of a native Japanese-speaking parent (hereafter, pJ) and a native English-speaking parent (hereafter, pE) with at least one child who is three years of age or older (Yamamoto, 2000).

Table 1 shows descriptive data on the distribution of child language use to the pE in relation to the language use of both parents to the child.

It was found that the pJ using both languages and the pE using English ( $n = 61$ , 29.2%) was the most commonly adopted pattern, followed by both parents using both languages ( $n = 54$ , 25.8%), and then by the one parent–one language principle, i.e., the pJ using Japanese and the pE using English, ( $n = 46$ , 22.0%).

Regarding the language use of children, it was found that all the children whose parents both use English in their parent-to-child communication use English to the pE ( $n = 12$ ), whereas all the children whose parents both use Japanese in their parent-to-child communication use Japanese to the pE ( $n = 9$ ). Under the one parent–one language principle, it was found that out of 46 children whose parents employ the principle, 25 were speaking to the pE in English monolingually, and 21 were not, with 13 speaking in both languages, and 8 speaking in Japanese monolingually.

The data seem to show that, in general, the

higher the ratio of English usage to the whole parental language input (i.e., both parents using English = the highest ratio of English and both parents using Japanese = the lowest ratio of English) and the less the Japanese usage by the pE (i.e., the pE speaking English = the least usage of Japanese and the pE speaking Japanese = the most usage of Japanese), the greater the chance of the child using English to the pE.

### The principle of “maximal engagement with the minority language”

These findings suggest that in regard to children’s language use to the minority-status parent, a certain principle, which may be termed the principle of “maximal engagement with the minority language,” is at work. In short, the more opportunities the child has with the minority language, the greater her or his likelihood of using it to the minority language parent.

In a linguistic environment characterized by this principle, the child receives not only more input of the minority language, but also a subtextual message from the parents that the minority language is expected to be the means of communication in the family. On the other hand, when the minority language parent uses the mainstream language, the child is likely to receive the opposite message, not to mention less input of the minority language.

In light of this principle of maximal engagement, the one parent–one language principle does not seem to provide the most optimal linguistic environment for promoting children’s active use of the non-mainstream language in families of parents with different native language backgrounds. The data in the present study showed that the one parent–one language principle was not the most commonly adopted pattern of communication, and even when it was adopted, it did not guarantee the child’s exclusive use of the minority language to its native-speaking parent. We detect a strong influence of the mainstream language upon the child’s language use.

**Table 1: Parental language use to the child and the child’s language use to pE**

to C		n = 209 (100.0%)		to pE		
pJ speaking in	pE speaking in			C speaking in English	Both	Japanese
English	English	12 (5.7 %)	→	12		
Both	English	61 (29.2 %)	→	45	16	
Japanese	English	46 (22.0 %)	→	25	13	8
Both	Both	54 (25.8 %)	→	4	46	4
Japanese	Both	27 (12.9 %)	→	3	13	11
Japanese	Japanese	9 (4.3 %)	→			9

\* pJ: native Japanese-speaking parent    pE: native English-speaking parent    C: child

## Final remarks

Because the present study only examined the relationship of parental language use to the children with children's language use to the pEs, not with children's bilingual proficiency itself, the descriptive data presented in the paper cannot be used as evidence to resolve conclusively the one parent–one language controversy, but they do clearly reveal that this principle does not guarantee a child's active use of it. Instead, the study has suggested that another principle, the principle of maximal engagement with the minority lan-

guage, seems to be at work.

To resolve the controversy and establish the validity of this proposed principle, further investigation with more subjects of different language backgrounds is needed.

## Note

- 1) Unless otherwise specified, the terms *bilingual(s)* and *bilingualism* will be used hereafter as umbrella terms to include *multilingual(s)* and *multilingualism*.

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