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**The Process of Japanese-Heritage Language Learners' Bilingual  
Writing Proficiency Development:  
A Case Study of a German-Japanese Child Learning Japanese as a  
Heritage Language at a Japanese Supplementary School in Germany**

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There are many children of immigrant families and families with parents of different nationalities who go to local schools on weekdays, and to weekend classes in their native language or their heritage language in order to develop their multilingual skills. For Japanese, there are supplementary Japanese schools (*hoshuu jugyoo koo*) in many countries, whose main function has been to enable Japanese children who are attending local schools while living with parents who are temporarily posted overseas to smoothly reintegrate into the Japanese educational system upon their return to Japan. In recent years, however, there is a need to provide instruction in Japanese to children of parents who have established permanent residence overseas, or who have a Japanese parent in an international marriage. For such children, the Japanese language is a heritage language given less priority than the local language, and they may find it especially difficult to acquire writing skills. Further, there is a lack of research into how writing proficiency develops in Japanese as a heritage language, and as a result supplementary Japanese schools have to struggle to meet these children's needs.

This study examines the case of the child of a German father and Japanese mother, attending school in Germany, whose dominant language is German and whose heritage language is Japanese, and analyzes how his writing proficiency develops in the two languages. A total of twenty-four compositions were elicited over a six-year period from the fourth year of elementary school to the third year of middle school (ninth grade), written in Japanese as well as German, and in two genres, one narrative and the other explanatory.

The youth is currently attending a gymnasium where he can obtain the qualification to attend university, which is a common situation for supplementary Japanese school attendees in the country. In many states of Germany, marks given in elementary school from the fourth grade on determine the middle school in which the youth may enroll, so the pressure to get good marks increases at that time. As a result, the effort devoted to the heritage language may be reduced. The youth at the center of this study was in such a situation. On the other hand, the local school especially stressed development of writing skills in German, which provides an opportunity to see how that affects the

acquisition of written proficiency in Japanese, which has very little resemblance to German.

Children with Japanese as a heritage language show a wide range of proficiency in Japanese. In order to get an accurate and multi-dimensional picture of the changes in this youth's writing proficiency, the following three stratagems were employed.

First, the same composition task was given to two contrastive groups: one of native Japanese children living in Japan, and the other of children at the supplementary Japanese school attended by the youth at the center of this study. Over eighty percent of this group were the children of international marriages, and thus had Japanese as a heritage language.

Second, all the compositions were analyzed at three different levels: orthography/vocabulary, syntax, and discourse. For the discourse-level evaluation, we developed a rubric based on the curriculum guideline that informs the Japanese language textbook used at the youth's supplementary school.

Third, attention was paid to the youth's intellectual resources, such as proficiency in his dominant language, his cognitive abilities, as well as knowledge and experience. He was given standardized tests each year to measure his vocabulary and reading proficiency in German and Japanese, and data to shed light on his daily language activity was also obtained from field work and a daily log kept by his mother. This background information was employed in our analysis, to enable a multi-dimensional approach to the development of his writing proficiency.

Here we will explain the results of our analysis of the compositions by the youth and the two contrastive groups, and outline the development process of the boy's writing proficiency in the two languages.

First, the development at the orthography/vocabulary and syntax levels shows a continuous increase of variety in the characters, vocabulary and grammatical structures employed, albeit somewhat delayed compared to the group of native Japanese children. This trend may be seen as well in the group of students at the supplementary school. At the discourse level, however, regarding the structure and contents of the compositions, relatively little difference was seen between the compositions of the youth and other supplementary school students, and those of the native Japanese children.

A longitudinal examination of the compositions in both languages was made to answer the question of how the youth, with relatively limited vocabulary and syntactical means, could write compositions in Japanese showing a proficiency in structuring discourse nearly at the level of native Japanese children. It was found that discourse proficiency in Japanese developed in tandem with the same ability in German. This process occurred in the following two stages. First, from the fourth to sixth grade logical connections became more explicit due to the acquisition of connective expressions and complex syntactic structures. The use of connections between clauses for advancing narrative lines, and for expressing cause-and-effect relationships in explanatory compositions, appeared first in German, the dominant language, which led to improvement in the Japanese compositions. Second, from the sixth grade on to the ninth grade overall structure and contents reach a high level. Discourse structures inspired by the reading of German texts first appeared in the

German compositions and next in the Japanese compositions as well.

Further, from the fifth and sixth grade less time could be devoted to acquiring Japanese, and the youth's kanji repertoire increased very slowly, but reading proficiency in Japanese continued to show some progress. Reading proficiency in German, measured with the standardized tests, made good progress, so the increasing cognitive abilities with German as a base seem to have contributed to the development of Japanese reading proficiency, which in turn facilitated the use in compositions of elements contained in Japanese language textbooks from the supplementary school. Also, the youth made creative use of his limited expressive resources in Japanese to skillfully portray the main character's feelings in writing Japanese compositions at a level close to his German compositions. In explanatory compositions in Japanese, he succeeded in employing knowledge and concepts obtained via the dominant language, along with techniques such as nominalization of verbal phrases that were covered in German language instruction.

On the other hand, among the characteristics seen in his use of Japanese as a heritage language are the frequent occurrence of grammatical errors when attempting to explain complex matters with limited proficiency compared to his dominant language, as well as the difficulty in writing in an elevated style due to insufficient knowledge of kanji compounds.

The developmental characteristics noted above suggest the following considerations. In local schools, focus is placed entirely on proficiency in the local language and on academic ability, while in the supplementary schools there is a tendency to focus only on Japanese language proficiency. The development of multilingual writing proficiency, however, is a process in which multiple layers are inter-related, and it is necessary to recognize children growing up multilingually as actors who can employ a wide range of abilities in their writing.

The effectiveness of instruction in Japanese as a heritage language may be improved by adjusting the timing of interventions according to when different aspects of writing proficiency are observed to develop. For example, improvements in logical connections that take place from the fourth to sixth grade call for attention to connective expressions and complex syntax, while the period from the sixth grade on to the ninth grade provides an opportunity to employ discourse structuring proficiency acquired in the dominant language, supported by instruction in the expressions necessary to deal with high-level topics.

Finally, for children living outside the kanji sphere the acquisition of kanji tends to be a severe hurdle to overcome, but it is possible to shift the emphasis from kanji acquisition in isolation, and, making use of the fact that knowledge of kanji is closely related to vocabulary, to foster an awareness of kanji compounds as a resource for expressing the high-level topics that they wish to write about.

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