

# Developing and Negotiating Bilingual Identities

著者	Noguchi Mary Goebel
journal or publication title	英米文學英語學論集
volume	10
page range	26-43
year	2021-03-19
URL	<a href="http://doi.org/10.32286/00024446">http://doi.org/10.32286/00024446</a>

[研究論文]

## **Developing and Negotiating Bilingual Identities\***

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### **Introduction**

In many countries, including Japan, bilinguals are often regarded as unusual or even exotic. Baker (1995) points out that people who speak only one language tend to think that most people in the world are monolingual, when in fact, people who speak two or more languages are estimated to make up between 60% and 75% of the world's population (p. 210). Grosjean (2013) also notes that many researchers over the years have estimated that at least half of the world's population is bilingual (p. 6).

Moreover, with travel and study abroad steadily on the increase (with the exception of this past year, when they were brought to an abrupt halt by the coronavirus pandemic), and digital technology making international communication via email, texting, video conferencing and the like part of daily life for people all over the planet, the use of two languages is also becoming increasingly common, opening the door to bilingualism to ever larger numbers of people.

In this connection, it is interesting to consider the theory of linguistic relativity (Whorf, 1941), which argues that the language we speak shapes our thought patterns. While this theory has adamant opponents (e.g., Pinker, 1994; McWhorter, 2014), there is an expanding body of research supporting the claim that at least to some extent, thought patterns are shaped by the language the thoughts are expressed in, and that the grammatical structures of different languages can force their speakers to pay attention to certain things (e.g., Gumperz & Levinson, 1996; Gentner & Goldin-Meadow, 2003; Levinson & Wilkins, 2006) or to ignore some things because the language cannot express them (e.g., Everett, 2013).

This may lead to questions about the identity of people who speak two languages: do they have two identities? Can they forge a single identity around their two languages? How do they interact with people from the different cultural groups in which their languages are spoken?

To address these questions, I will offer a synthesis of research I have read and edited, as well as insights from my own research and personal experience, as I try to describe how bilinguals develop and negotiate their identities in this paper. Rather than focusing on one

type of bilingual, I will be including studies of people who became bilingual in a wide variety of circumstances.

I will begin by defining two important terms: bilingualism and identity, including traditional views of identity formation and newer theories based on research involving ethnic identity. I will then move on to summarize research on the development of a bilingual and/or bicultural identity, and finally, describe some of the challenges bilinguals face and approaches that they may take to cope with these difficulties. I hope to help readers get a better idea of how bilinguals develop and negotiate their identities and also what kinds of support systems can help them succeed in this process.

## **Terminology**

### **Bilingualism**

To the layman, a bilingual is usually thought to be someone who has complete mastery of two languages. This common view is similar to one of the early definitions of bilingualism, that given by Bloomfield (1993), who wrote that it involves “native-like control of two languages” (quoted in Baker, 2006, p. 8). In general, this definition is considered too vague for academic use, since among native speakers there is a wide range of proficiencies, and also because many people who are highly proficient in two languages may not have reached “native-like control” in one of their languages but would still be regarded by those who know them as “bilingual.”

In fact, it has proved quite difficult for researchers to derive a workable definition for this term, as evidenced by the wide range of attempts on record. If Bloomfield’s definition may be called “maximalist”, then on the other end of the spectrum lie minimalist definitions such as this one by Haugen (1969): “Bilingualism begins when the speaker of one language can produce complete meaningful utterances in the other language” (quoted in Romaine, 1989, p. 10.). Another minimalist take can be found in Diebold’s (1964) concept of *incipient bilingualism*, which Baker (2006) sarcastically notes “allows people with minimal competence in a second language to squeeze into the bilingual category” (p. 8). The problem is that Diebold’s (1964) concept includes almost everyone in the world who has ever learned any words in a foreign language. In contrast, Valdés (2003) tried to get across the wide range of proficiencies that might be included in this category by describing degrees of bilingualism as falling on a continuum ranging from monolingualism in one language to monolingualism in another, with varying degrees of proficiencies in the two languages in between (cited in Baker, 2006).

What is probably the most practical definition of bilingualism was offered by Grosjean (1982): “regular use of two languages” (p. 236). This is the definition I will be using in this paper.

I will now move on to consider the second important term in this paper: identity.

## **Identity**

The traditional view of personal identity is that each individual has a single identity which he or she develops over a lifetime. In this view, there are certain periods in life, especially during adolescence, in which people struggle to come to terms with their identity. This perspective is typically seen in psycho-sexual analysis in the Freudian tradition. The most prominent example of this take on identity is found in the work of Erik Erikson, which began in the 1940s. Erikson described various stages that people normally move through, each with its own psychosocial crises, radius of significant relations and basic strengths as well as core pathologies (Erikson, 1982 [1997]).

However, since the 1990s, new theories of identity, and in particular, ethnic identity, have grown out of research on bilingualism. Shin (2018) identifies two main streams of this new research. The first she calls the sociopsychological or essentialist view. According to Shin (2018), in the 1990s, research on identity and variations in language use in immigrant communities found that both tend to correlate to pre-established social categories such as age, gender, social class and ethnicity. This approach, which is known as the “sociopsychological paradigm”, tends to assume a direct correlation between language use and ethnic identity (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). One example of such an essentialist view can be seen in the use of Social Network Analysis to explore language shift and maintenance in bilingual communities (Shin, 2018). In this type of analysis, use of the mother tongue in immigrant communities is seen as a key factor in the maintenance of ethnic identities (e.g., Li, 1994; Li & Milroy, 1995, both cited in Shin, 2018).

While this hypothesis has held true in some studies (e.g., Li, 1994), it has not in others (Lanza & Swendsen, 2007; cited in Shin, 2018, p. 115). In fact, a paper by Lanza & Swendsen (2007) highlighted the limits of Social Network Analysis. In their study, even members of a dense social network of Filipinos in Norway did not always use the same language: some prioritized Tagalog and/or English, while others shifted to using Norwegian, and still others spoke Spanish or other Filipino languages (cited in Shin, 2018, p. 115). Thus, the idea that the density of one’s social networks determines whether or not one maintains a specific minority language or variety did not prove to be true.

Similarly, Pavlenko & Blackledge (2004) found that Iranian immigrants to the United States can become fluent English speakers in order to conduct their businesses effectively, and display “high levels of structural assimilation” into American culture, but nonetheless show low levels of identification with American society (p. 5). Thus, Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) argue that it is important to move beyond this kind of “monolingual bias” in examining ethnic identity (p. 5).

Such studies led to two new perspectives on the identities of bilingual populations. In both views, identities are considered to be fluid and constructed in social interaction. Shin (2018) calls one of these the constructivist view. Blackledge and Pavlenko (2001) call the other post-structuralist. However, studies in the former group have also been referred to as post-structuralist, so the line between these two approaches is not very clear.

Shin (2018) includes works by Kanno (2003), McKay & Wong (1996) and Norton (1997, [Norton Peirce] 1995) in the constructivist category. These researchers incorporate Pierre Bourdieu’s (1991, 1999) concept of “cultural capital” and Bourdieu & Passeron’s (1997) concept of “linguistic capital” as a new way to view power relations in society (cited in Kamada, 2010). In particular, immigrants may choose to prioritize the language that gives them the most “cultural capital” (Norton, 2000), that is, that earns them the most respect or offers them the best prospects within their social milieu.

Norton (2000) in particular links her idea of identity very closely to her understanding of power relations in society, which she views in terms of the powerful majority versus the weaker minority. She approaches the concept of immigrant identity in a way that stresses its changeability. The individuals who participated in her study all engage in acts of negotiation, investment and struggle, thus claiming a say in their affairs. Norton (2000) argues that people are not entirely free to create their identities, but they can try to influence them, for example, by developing specific relationships, gaining certain types of employment or deciding to focus on learning one language instead of another. She points out that if an immigrant studies the language of the society to which s/he has moved, this entails an investment in a new identity, that is, a new way of viewing her/himself. It is a decision based on hopes of acquiring benefits such as access to new social networks or employment—that is, acquiring cultural capital. Norton (2000) also states that immigrants are constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. Thus, for them, identity becomes a “site of struggle” (Norton, 2000, p. 10).

A study by Kanno (2008) took a different tack on the issue of bilingualism and identity. She conducted an ethnographic study of five schools in Japan: a school with an English immersion program, an international school, a Chinese ethnic school, and two public

schools with large numbers of immigrant children—one with many from China and Southeast Asia, and the other with many from South America. Using the concept of “imagined communities”, she argued that these schools provide their students with different access to bilingualism, and as a result, far different prospects for the future. The two socially prestigious schools help their upper middle-class students achieve additive bilingualism, while the immigrant and refugee children in the other schools are “subtly coerced into replacing their first language” with the dominant language of Japan. In fact, in the two public elementary schools she studied, Kanno (2008) found that children learn to “view their L1 as an illegitimate language” for use in the classroom (p. 171). Most end up either using their L1 only outside the classroom or giving up on using it at all (Kanno, 2008).

Thus, works that take what Shin (2018) calls the “constructivist view” tend to focus on how potential bilinguals forge identities in light of the “cultural capital”—or lack of it—offered by their two languages.

The second stream of research on bilingual identities identified by Shin (2018), the post-structuralist view, began around the same time as the constructivist view. Like the researchers in the constructivist stream, those taking the post-structuralist approach see identities as multiple and changing; in addition, they argue that they need to be negotiated (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001). Rather than seeing individuals as having a single identity that undergoes development throughout one’s life, as Erickson (1982 / [1987]) and other psychologists did, post-structuralists argue that even in the case of ethnic identity, “self-ascription shifts from context to context” (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 251). For example, Giampapa (2001) found that through their choice of language and dialects, Italian-Canadian youths would at times emphasize their Italian cultural background, at others, their Canadian birthright, and in still other contexts, their Italian-Canadian identity.

Similarly, Kristensen, Miwa, Riinbaek & Otte (2012) assert that, “Our identity is a fickle thing that cannot be regarded comprehensively, but rather pertains to our diverse domains. For instance, our body and outward appearance, our workplace and career, our family, gender roles and religious beliefs are all sceneries of our struggle for identity” (p. 22).

Greer (2001) points out that it has long been recognized that bilinguals can change their identities according to the language they are using and to the context. By changing languages, bilinguals can assert multiple cultural identities. He cites Kramsch’s (1998) argument that through their choice of which language to use, bilinguals can show solidarity towards an ethnic group or distance themselves from it (Greer, 2001, p. 9). Spolsky (1998) compared the languages of multilinguals to “guises” with which they can change their identity “as easily as changing a hat” (p. 50; quoted in Greer, 2001, p 9).

While the post-structuralist view of identity recognizes the possibility of choosing different identities, it also acknowledges the fact that identities often need to be negotiated. Blackledge & Pavlenko (2001) pointed out that there is frequently tension between an individual's own assertion of an identity and how the people they interact with in daily life will see them. In this theory, reflective positioning is seen as "the act of asserting chosen identities for oneself" (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 249). For example, a teenager may assert that he is no longer a child and deserves to be treated as an adult by his parents. Interactive positioning, on the other hand, is the way people use language to ascribe certain identities to others in a conversation or other interactions (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001). Thus, Blackledge and Pavlenko (2001) point out that reflective positioning may be contested during interactive positioning, with individuals finding "themselves in a perpetual tension between self-chosen identities and others' attempts to position them differently" (p. 249). For example, in Greer's (2005) study of biracial children living in Japan—so-called "*haafu*"—he noted that the participants in his focus groups said that the ethnic categories others assigned to them were often different from the way they viewed themselves, "causing them to rethink and reshape their identities" (p. 10).

A well-known example of this type of tension can be seen in the way professional golfer Tiger Woods' has tried to assert a multiracial identity as a "Cablinasian" (combination Caucasian, Black, and Asian), while the mass media, and even his late father, insisted on calling him African American.

The story of Susan Matoba Adler (1998) offers more insight into this interplay between reflective positioning and interactive positioning. Adler is a Japanese American professor who grew up in the Midwest thinking that she was very American. However, as she grew older, she was surprised to find that the white men she dated often referred to her as their "oriental' girlfriend". When she later began teaching at the college level, her colleagues tended to identify her "as one of a small group of professors of color" (p. 2). At another point in her life, she was living in a town where there were many Asian "war brides", and she was often asked how she learned to speak English so well (p. 4). In her story, we can see the influence of phenotype (physical characteristics related to racial background) in interactive positioning. This is a topic I will return to later when I talk about the development of bilingual identities.

Another example of reflective and interactive positioning can be found in the recent hit movie *Crazy Rich Asians*. The heroine of this movie, Rachel Chu, is a bilingual Chinese-American who is dating a Chinese-Singaporean young man. Before she goes to meet his family, she expresses some uncertainty to her mother about whether his family will accept

her. She argues that they *should* like her because she is Chinese. In this scene, Rachel asserts her Chinese identity by saying “I’m so Chinese I’m an economics professor with lactose intolerance.” Thus, she points to two stereotypical aspects of herself, one social and one physical, to claim her Chinese identity. Yet, her mother does not accept this. “Yeah, but you grew up here,” she responds. She then switches to Chinese and says, “Your face is Chinese. You speak Chinese. But here (pointing to Rachel’s head) and here (pointing to her heart), you’re different.”

We see similar tension in a later scene, when Rachel meets her boyfriend’s mother. Rachel tries to hug his mother—a culturally American gesture which is greeted with surprise and discomfort by the Chinese-Singaporean mother. Later, when Rachel describes how her mother has supported Rachel’s efforts to “pursue her passion” in choosing a career, her boyfriend’s mother tartly points out that this is very American—“not like here.” Thus, we can see that while bilinguals can assert multiple identities, not all of them will be accepted.

So how do bilinguals navigate such contexts and develop identities that they can feel comfortable with? I’d like to draw on the findings of several studies to illustrate how this is accomplished.

### **Development of Bilingual / Bicultural Identities**

Groundbreaking work on the identity development of ethnic minorities was done in the late 1990s by Tse, who interviewed Asian American adults and also analyzed published narratives by Asian Americans (summarized in Brown, 2003, and Shin, 2018). In 1998, she proposed a 4-stage model of their relationship with their ethnic identity. According to Tse (1998), the first stage of this progression, “Unawareness of Ethnic Identity, is when Asian Americans are not conscious of their ethnic identity. This stage tends to be limited to a short period when they are very young and live in the ethnic minority culture. When they start to go to school, Asian American children tend to enter the second stage, that of “Ethnic Ambivalence or Evasion”. They desire to fit into the dominant group but often feel that they are unable to do so because other children position them as Asians, and thus, foreigners. As a result, they may feel alienated. Because they viewed the minority language as a sign of their membership in a group that they had come to see as inferior, many of Tse’s (1998) participants tried to disassociate themselves from their heritage language (summarized in Brown, 2003, and Shin 2018).

However, Tse (1998) found that oftentimes in their mid to late teens, Asian Americans begin to explore their ethnic identity—the stage she called “Ethnic Emergence”. They may

join ethnic social or cultural groups and take up the study of their heritage language. Through such activities, they may come to accept themselves as belonging to their ethnic minority group and gain an improved self image—entering the fourth stage of development, which Tse (1998) called “Ethnic Identity Incorporation (summarized in Brown, 2003, and Shin, 2018).

Tse (1998) asserted that all members of ethnic minority groups go through these stages in the same order, but some remain stuck in one of the stages and are never able to move on (summarized in Shin, 2018). In a later publication, Tse revised this claim and explained that not all individuals go through these stages (Tse, 2000).

One of the important reasons that Tse (1998) found for the inability of Asian Americans to feel that they fit in with mainstream American culture was their racial difference (Brown, 2003). The importance of phenotype was mentioned in Adler’s (1998) story, too, and also comes up in another study on the identity development of an Asian American child. Brown (2003) conducted a case study of the 11-year-old son of Japanese immigrants who was born and raised in the United States. She found that like the participants in Tse’s (1998) study, her subject felt ambivalent about his Japanese background and language ability, but also did not feel that he was “totally American” because of his physical difference from white Americans (Brown, 2003, p. 11). Thus, this study reveals the complexity of forming a bilingual / bicultural identity.

I saw the same type of 4-stage identity development in my own children, who were born and raised in Japan as English-Japanese bilinguals. Until they went to kindergarten, they did not view themselves as different from the children in the neighborhood except for the fact that they could speak English (Tse’s Stage 1). However, upon entering kindergarten, they were soon made very aware of their racial difference, and were often called “*gaijin*.” This led to a long period of their desperately wanting to fit in (Stage 2). Before the first parent visitation day (*sankanbi*) in elementary school, my son pulled me aside and said, “Mommy, you can come to school but don’t talk English!” At that point, he felt that it was the language which was making him different. However, by late elementary school, both of my children, who have naturally curly brown hair, were constantly expressing a desire to have straight black hair so that they would look more like their peers—thus highlighting the issue of phenotype.

Once they entered junior high school, however, they both came to see the value of their English skills beyond just the ability to watch Disney movies with the original soundtrack or play with neighborhood children when we visited my parents in the U.S. So it could be said that they were in Tse’s Stage 3. Fortunately, they eventually did come to terms with

their bicultural identity and reached Tse's Stage 4. Today, they are adults and speak both Japanese and English fluently and enjoy both Japanese and American cultures. However, like the Asian Americans in Tse's (1998) study, their development entailed a great deal of personal identity struggle and was accomplished only with the help of a lot of parental and community support.

Thus, the Brown (2003) study and this personal narrative illustrate how difficult it can be to develop a bilingual identity for people who do not look like those around them. I'd therefore like to move on to consider the identities of bilinguals who *do* fit in in terms of phenotype.

Kanno (2003) explored the development of bilingual and bicultural identities in a longitudinal study of four Japanese *kikoku shijo* (returnees) while they were living in Canada and after their return to Japan. She found that while they were in Canada and for a while after they returned to Japan, the participants had an either-or view of identity—that is, they felt that they had to be either Japanese or Canadian. Two of the four emphasized their Japanese identity while in Canada, while two tried to fit into Canadian society. After they came back to Japan, two of them made all-out efforts to adhere to Japanese norms, while two played the role of outsiders. Eventually, however, all four learned that they could embrace both of their languages and cultures and still fit in socially, picking and choosing desirable parts of each culture and asserting different identities according to the situation. Thus, they were able to forge comfortable bilingual / bicultural identities.

The relationship between language and identity in multicultural individuals has also been explored in a number of studies cited by Shin (2018). Research by Lee (2002) and Portes & Rumbaut (2006) suggests that proficiency in the heritage language can help individuals develop a stronger bicultural identity. For example, Lee (2002) found that Korean heritage language skills helped her participants develop both a stronger Korean and a stronger American identity. Heritage language learners also tend to have a more positive experience in acculturation in the U.S. (cited in Shin, 2018, p. 110).

However, other studies cited by Shin (2018) do not show such a strong relationship between heritage language and ethnic identity. Research on the ethnic identities of Hopi (Nicholas, 2009) and Navajo Indians (Tiffany S. Lee, 2009) did not find a strong correlation between ethnic identity and heritage language proficiency. Shin (2018) suggests that the reason for the difference between Native Americans and immigrants is that the American Indians are not voluntary minorities and that they may view speaking their home language as an "emblem of shame". She also mentions that differences in research methodology may have been a factor in these differences (Shin, 2018).

Now that I've explained two patterns of bilingual identity development, I'd like to move on to discuss some of the difficulties involved in this process.

## **Challenges in Developing Bilingual / Bicultural Identities**

### **Pressure to Choose One Culture or the Other**

As seen in Kanno's (2003) study, many young bilinguals may feel that they have to choose one cultural or ethnic identity over the other. This is partly due to the common perception that people normally only have one identity, as opposed to the post-structuralist view that identities can be multiple and changing. Monolinguals may therefore find it hard to accept a bilingual's choice to move between two languages and cultures and pressure them through interactive positioning to choose one or the other.

In addition, minority ethnic groups often pressure people to choose: "You're either one of us, or you're one of them." Thus, those who wish to develop bicultural identities may have to confront a refusal on the part of others to accept the fact that you *can* have two cultural identities and pick and choose from both. This refusal reflects a monolingual bias that Blackledge & Pavlenko (2001) say is "most evident in the unidirectional perspective which posits the necessity to abandon one's first language and culture in order to learn the second language and acculturate to the target language (T1) group" (pp. 244 - 245).

This pressure can be particularly strong for people who are perceived to be part of a cultural group to which they do not necessarily belong. For example, people of Japanese ancestry who come to Japan are often expected to "be Japanese." Dorrine K. Kondo explains this pressure in the introduction to her (1990) study, *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses in a Japanese Workplace*. Kondo had arranged to do her research through access to Japanese homes and workplaces, and later realized that those who agreed to this arrangement assumed that she would "act Japanese". Things went smoothly when she was able to meet their expectations, but when she made cultural or linguistic mistakes, she was met with expressions of "bewilderment, incredulity, embarrassment, even anger, at having to deal with this odd person who looked Japanese and therefore human, but who must be retarded, deranged, or—equally undesirable in Japanese eyes—Chinese or Korean" (Kondo, 1990, p. 11).

Even though this dissonance was stressful for both Kondo and those around her, her coworkers and Japanese host family did not reconsider their positioning of her. Instead, they continued to treat her as a Japanese: "sometimes an incomplete or unconventional Japanese, but a Japanese nonetheless" (p.13). Moreover, they ignored Kondo's efforts to

reposition herself as an American. Kondo (1990) stresses that, “in order to reconstitute myself as an American researcher, I felt I had to extricate myself from the conspiracy to rewrite my identity as Japanese” (Kondo, 1990, p. 17). Thus, we can see the tension between her reflective positioning and the way she was positioned in interaction.

Similar issues were reported by the Nikkei Americans living in Japan whom I surveyed in 2005 (Noguchi, 2005b; Noguchi, 2006). Their answers to my survey questions suggested discomfort in two major areas. One was their perceived inability to conform to cultural expectations or their resistance to doing so. In some cases, their resistance to following Japanese cultural norms arose because they felt these norms were too restrictive. In others, it was gender expectations that frustrated the participants in the study, who felt that Japanese expectations of women were unacceptable. The participants’ answers suggest that a common response to their discomfort was to reflectively position themselves as North Americans, rejecting their Japanese cultural heritage (Noguchi, 2005b; Noguchi, 2006).

### **The Power of Phenotype**

In addition to pressure from ethnic communities and members of the majority cultural group to choose one culture or the other, bilinguals may also face challenges due to the power of phenotype. As we saw in Adler’s (1998) story and Tse’s (2000) and Brown’s (2003) studies, Asian Americans may have a hard time asserting American identity.

In contrast, looking like everyone else can make things easier for immigrants. For example, most of the Nikkei Americans living in Japan who took part in my study (Noguchi, 2005b; 2006) said they felt a fair degree of comfort living in Japan. One explained: “It is nice to look like everyone else, to be able to blend in” (Noguchi, 2005b, p. 323).

However, as described above, their answers to the survey questions suggested that because they *look* Japanese, they are expected to *act* Japanese—again, being pressured to choose one culture over the other (Noguchi, 2005b; Noguchi, 2006). This is the same kind of pressure that Kondo (1990) experienced. Thus, a similar phenotype to the members of the majority culture may help immigrants blend in, but can entail other problems in terms of establishing a bicultural identity.

However, as I have already shown, in many cases phenotype works against integration into one of a bilingual’s cultures. This is true both for Asian Americans in the U.S. and for so-called *haafu* in Japan.

Kamada’s (2005; 2010) study of multiracial adolescent girls living in Japan highlighted many instances in which the young women struggled with their looks, which were quite

different from their schoolmates'. In one poignant excerpt of a focus-group discussion, one of the participants, speaking in fluent Kansai-dialect Japanese, stresses that even though she dislikes *gaijin*, **intends to be** Japanese (“*nihonjin no tsumori*”) and has a Japanese mindset, when she looks in the mirror, she sees that she’s **not** Japanese, and that really bothers her (Kamada, 2010, p. 183).

Greer (2005) puts forth a similar argument:

Phenotypical appearance of the biracial participants in this study played a major role in determining the way others reacted to them in first contact situations.

Those participants who looked more like their foreign parent reported that they were more often treated as non-Japanese, making it difficult for them to assert a Japanese identity. .... For those who looked more like their Japanese parent, the reaction from Japanese people was less extreme.

(Greer, 2005, p. 11).

In another paper, Greer (2001) points out that because many Japanese tend to judge people’s ability to speak Japanese by their physical features, they often assume that *haafu* who have foreign-looking features cannot speak the language. This can lead to their being marginalized. In an effort to avoid this seeming rejection, they may refuse to speak their foreign parent’s language in public—or at all (Greer, 2001, p. 12), thus depriving themselves of possible advantages of bilingualism.

### **Non Acceptance of Reflective Positioning**

Nor is it only mixed-race bilinguals who can face problems in asserting an identity based on one of their languages. As we saw in the movie *Crazy Rich Asians*, Rachel’s assertion of Chinese identity was not accepted by her own mother, nor by her boyfriend’s mother.

Another example of such rejection of an identity assertion can occur with resident Koreans—so-called *Zainichi*. In two studies I made of people who attended North Korean schools in Japan (Noguchi, 2005a; Noguchi, 2015), I found that even though the Korean community has undergone language shift and most of the current generation has grown up speaking Japanese as their first language, Japanese society in general does not accept them as Japanese, even if they have taken on Japanese citizenship. This means that unless they learn the Korean language and develop a Korean ethnic identity, they may be unable to comfortably assert any ethnic identity in Japan (Noguchi, 2005a; Noguchi, 2015). In personal dealings with ethnic Korean students, I have found that those who went to

Korean schools tended to be open about their background and comfortable with asserting a Korean identity, while those who had gone only to Japanese schools tended to hide their ethnic background or only reveal it to trusted individuals as a kind of “coming out”.

One of the participants in my study of the impact of Korean schools on the identity of Zainichi (Noguchi, 2015) had the following to say:

“being able to use Korean in and of itself allows you to be conscious of the fact that you are a foreigner.” Without this skill, “You would only just be able to think that you were not Japanese....”

“Of course. Even if you think of yourself as Japanese, in the end, you’re not one, really, are you? I think you need—what can I call it?—the resolve to live as a foreigner—you need to find that in order to live here.”

(Noguchi, 2015, p. 77)

It is not only Zainichi who face rejection of an assertion of Japanese identity on the basis of bloodline. One of the participants in Greer’s (2005) study was a young Japanese woman whose grandfather was Russian and whose Caucasian father was a Japanese citizen. This young woman also had Japanese citizenship, but since she looked white, her assertion that she was Japanese was often contested in interactive positioning. She had developed a standard response to such denials of her Japanese identity: “Believe me, I am. I have papers” (Greer, 2005, p. 12).

The same kind of dilemma may be faced by others who have “foreign” physical features as well as those whose families are foreign but who grew up in Japan and went to Japanese schools. No matter how hard they try to assert Japanese identity or even show that they are proficient speakers of Japanese, they often are met with strong resistance to these claims.

### **Successful Negotiation of Bilingual Identity**

Yet all is not lost. A number of studies have shown that despite the challenges of developing and negotiating a bicultural identity, bilinguals are often able to do this successfully. For many, the teen years can be filled with tensions, but as Erikson (1982 [1987]) pointed out, adolescence is generally a time of identity confusion (p. 72). Moreover, Tse’s (1998) model and Kanno’s (2003) study of returnees suggest that bilinguals often

reach a stage where they are comfortable with their minority ethnic background or their bicultural identity.

There has also been research showing that communities and groups with many bilingual individuals tend to develop hybrid cultures that serve as what Homi Bhabha has termed a “third space” (Rutherford & Bhabha, 1990). Members of such multicultural groups may come to think that it is good to “collect and appreciate” diverse cultures (Rutherford & Bhabha, 1990, p. 208). While the majority society may see a need for “cultural containment”, that is, to confine other cultures within the majority culture’s norms, and may also suffer from rampant racism, multicultural groups may develop hybrid cultures that articulate and embrace differences (Rutherford & Bhabha, 1990).

For example, Greer (2001) cites several studies that show that groups of bilinguals in Japan on American army bases and in international schools have developed their own “blended culture and customs through their language to produce a ‘third culture’, and that part of this culture often involves code-switching” (p. 13)—that is, switching between their two languages within a conversation. He goes on to point out that “for bicultural children, knowledge of both Japanese and English linguistic conventions and non-verbal communication cues, as well as of how to mix them properly, is seen as proof of the right to bicultural group membership” (Greer, 2001, p. 15).

Greer (2005) went on to investigate one such group at an international school in Hokkaido. He formed focus groups of multiethnic Japanese teenagers, most of whom had a Japanese mother and an American father, and got them to discuss how they viewed themselves, how they were positioned in society, and how they tried to position themselves. The “participants themselves routinely reported that they felt alternately (and/or simultaneously) Japanese and non-Japanese” (p. 7). Greer’s (2005) analysis depicts the multiethnic elements of the participants’ lives “not in terms of two distinct oppositions, but as co-existent, dynamic facets of an individual’s complete view of self” (p. 1).

Another group of Japanese-Caucasian adolescents was studied by Kamada (2005; 2010). These girls were all born and raised in Japan, and although they went to different schools, they had known each other through their foreign parents’ network of friends and associations since preschool. Kamada (2005) found that the participants were able to distance themselves from “ethnic discourses of powerlessness” while discovering and learning to celebrate their multiethnic “cultural capital” within “alternative discourses of empowerment”.

Kamada (2005, 2010) shows how these young people struggled to come to terms with their “hybridity” and gradually learned to appreciate their double ethnicity and even their

mixed racial attributes. In their discussions, the girls found cultural capital in their access to two languages with their different worlds of literature, in their friendships with other children like themselves outside of school, and in the possibility of better jobs and a greater range of opportunities in the future. By the end of the study, they had even begun to realize that the physical differences that had for so long bothered them because they were different from their peers may actually end up making them more attractive. The young women eventually started to celebrate their “exotic” looks (Kamada, 2005 p. 36), with their deep-set eyes and their curvaceous, more “ideal” (Western-like) figures (Kamada, 2010, p. 221).

## **Conclusion**

Thus, we have seen that developing a bilingual identity can be a challenge for many reasons. First, the conventional concept of identity as singular can impart expectations to the bilinguals themselves and also cause pressure from those around them to choose an identity based on one of their cultures. Second, if one of their languages is a low-status minority language, the bilinguals may distance themselves from it unless they are helped to see its value. In addition, phenotype and national views of ethnicity based on bloodlines may lead to reflective assertions of national identity being rejected by others.

Probably the best path forward for bilinguals is the development of a hybrid identity based on elements of both of their cultures—a third culture, if you will. This kind of perspective can be promoted in groups of similar people, whether they live near an American base, attend an international or a Korean school, go to a Filipino church, or are involved in networks of multiethnic families.

Parents and teachers of bilinguals can also help them learn to see themselves in positive ways and appreciate the value of knowing two languages and two cultures. In this way, bilinguals can be supported as they learn to negotiate their bilingual identities, and perhaps, even change some of the views of those around them.

## **Note**

\* This paper is a revised version of the keynote talk given at the Bil1 Roundtable (Bil1第21回研究会), online conference, October 25th, 2020.

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