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SLS380 Bilingual Education

Final Portfolio

Makiki Christian Church: A Bilingual Community

In the world there are a number of bilingual communities that exist. Some communities are based entirely in the L2, in an L1 country. For example, immersion schools, neighborhoods, and restaurants are sometimes based in a foreign language. One bilingual community that I am very familiar with is Makiki Christian Church, a church founded during the plantation era of Hawaii. It was founded by Takie Okumura, a Japanese missionary, who looked to help the lost Japanese plantation workers of Hawaii. Now it is a church with both an English and a Japanese division, working both separately and together to create an impact in Hawaii's community. The English division consists of mainly Japanese Americans who speak little to no Japanese, and the Japanese division consists of speakers of varying proficiency. Japanese national parents have Japanese-American children who grow up speaking Japanese to their parents and at church, but speak English outside of those contexts. Japanese exchange students are also plentiful, who are looking to improve their English but feel an attraction to the warm Japanese speaking community. International marriages are also numerous, so some members of the church do not speak Japanese at all. This bilingual community is evidence for many concepts of bilingualism, and should be further examined. The community provides an influential environment that impacts learning and bilingual acquisition.

This paper will examine the impact of a Church-based Japanese community on language learning and maintenance. It will examine the linguistic profiles of a number of participants, regarding the vitalness of the Church community to their language learning. It makes for an interesting analysis because the church is not a place normally used for language learning, or in other words, the church is not a classroom setting.

Education of language in the classroom has recently been a point being challenged in the field. In Kinoshita (2006) article regarding classroom language teaching, she says, “half the students who entered the first semester course in Japanese never started the second semester, and half of them never started the third. Three-fourths dropped out before they learned to use Japanese” (Kinoshita, 2006, p. 317). This questions the effectiveness of language teaching in the classroom. Does teaching inside four-walls actively promote motivation to learn? Kinoshita encourages language teachers to “think outside of the box in terms of our future in Japanese language education. *“The box is the classroom, which is surrounded by walls”* (Kinoshita, 2006). The article goes on to say that sociocultural approaches to learning language are key to facilitate learning. Learning in general takes place regardless of being in a classroom or not, as the learner is “surrounded by people who serve as models for skills and values.” The church is one location that is *outside of the box*. It serves as a place to not only to deepen religious views, but a place to congregate and fellowship with people who are of the same ideology. Makiki Christian Church has a Japanese congregation, bringing together speakers of Japanese, providing that sociological approach to the learner. It motivates learners to acquire skills in order to understand, relate, and create utterances in the second language. Having

learners learn at Makiki Church, a setting that is outside of the box, puts them in contact with people who are models of Japanese, who will also promote learning. It seems that the few language learners who make their way into Makiki Church have a prime environment for Japanese language acquisition. Langager (2010) mentions that Japanese sojourners (Japanese students who are spending time temporarily abroad) need the the minority heritage language communities, in this case *hoshikos* (schools that maintain the development of education in Japanese), are crucial to keeping the Japanese language. Langager mentions that students enjoy these bilingual environments and maintain their language skills in what is otherwise a English dominated community (Langager, 2010).

The research also covers heritage learner participants who have been raised in a bilingual home, and how the church community contributes to their advanced Japanese learning and maintenance. Heritage learners vary in language proficiency when learning from only their parents in another language community. These children have varying experiences in bilingualism, and so some students have balanced environments (which is rare), while most have greater exposure in one over the other. (Place, 2011). For instance, the amount of time spent in school may be much greater than the amount of time spent at home, and the languages spoken may be different. Also Place says, that the functional significance of each language for the child and that heritage language maintenance requires the language to have a separate function and its own context of use, which touches on the idea of language use and importance. The heritage language is not always additive, but and sometimes, individuals tend to leave their 'weak' group in order to assimilate with the stronger group (Brown, 2011). Language speakers may lose

their heritage identity and assimilate into the more common one, and lose language in the process, after having losing the functional purpose.

Muranaka's (2002) study on parental input entails that parental input is not necessarily the main source of input for a child. The study looked at the idea of code switching, and whether the child would pick up the same code switching patterns as the adult, but in the end, there was not enough empirical evidence that pointed to parental input making a large impact on the language ability of the child, further emphasizing the need for bilingual communities (Muranaka, 2002).

Makiki Church provides a place for such heritage learners to not only rely on their parent's for language learning but also on their peers at church. The church setting gives these heritage learners a place of use, as well as giving them a reason to use it. The bible studies, sermons, worship, and fellowship are all conducted in Japanese, and these are the contexts that are given to these heritage learners. By being a part of this environment, it prevents the minority language from being overtaken by the majority language. The minority language gains more power, context, and function, promoting the maintenance of the language.

Procedure:

The evidence was gathered through single interviews with various members of Makiki Christian Church whom I felt fell into certain categories. The requirements were:

1. They have to be bilingual
2. They must have a stronger (or equal) English proficiency than Japanese
3. They have to have been coming to Makiki Church for longer than one year.

The reasons behind these questions are, for #1, this paper is researching the effects of Makiki Christian Church, a bilingual community upon individuals who are bilingual. Anybody who speaks an L1 and a L2 are considered to be bilingual. Being a balanced bilingual or passive bilingual does not matter. As long as they fall into the second category, having stronger or equal proficiency in English over Japanese. The reason behind this is that Makiki Christian Church is a Japanese community within a bigger English-majority community. Second language speakers of Japanese must intently use their Japanese in order to keep it, because outside of the community, there is little opportunity to practice. The time constraint is given again because the effects of the community are being measured, and thus, the length of time within the Church is very important. The interviews are very impersonal, but a list of questions kept on hand to make sure that certain topics were touched upon.

The crucial pieces of information that I looked for were as follows:

1. Personal Biography - Place of birth, place raised, parent's languages, etc.
2. Rate your English proficiency on a 1-10 scale. 10 being native, 1 being none.
3. Rate your Japanese proficiency on the same scale.
4. Other environments of Japanese input (home, school, work, media)
5. Where do you use Japanese the *most*?
6. If you had not gone to Makiki Church, would your Japanese level be the same?

The general background of the subject is crucial to assessing factors that do not involve (or possibly highly involve) Makiki Church. The language that the parents spoke, and how they were raised speaking the two languages (if applicable) is an important factor

that needs to be addressed when looking at the effects of Makiki Church on their language development. As a fairly balanced bilingual in English and Japanese, I can accurately rate the proficiency of the subjects, but I felt that it was important for the subjects to rate themselves, in order to help them critically think about themselves regarding their proficiency in language. Issues like one language being more dominant than the other, or having growing proficiency in one language, and possibly even losing proficiency in another. It was important to make sure that all of these subjects felt that their dominant language was English and that Japanese was the weaker of the two. Other environments of language use are also very important because it again factors in the other variables that are definitely apparent in the language learning of these subjects. Most of the subjects that will be covered are taking Japanese courses in school, and a lot of them speak Japanese outside of the Church. Media is a key factor as well, as Japanese media such as anime, manga, television, and music is readily available, providing input, on the internet. Based on complete speculation, I felt that most of these subjects spoke the most Japanese at Makiki Church, and if it was not, then the effects on Japanese learning will be minimal. And in the end, I would like the students to mentally assess their views on how exactly Makiki Church influences their bilingualism.

Case Studies - Bilingual Identities:

Heritage Learners of Japanese:

There is a group of Japanese-Americans who are completely bilingual at a very young age, as well as Japanese-Americans who have very limited proficiency in their second language.

Case Study: Kumi Matsutake (16)

Kumi was born in Tokyo, Japan, but was soon brought to Hawaii at the very young age of one. Her mother is a native Japanese immigrant, with native-level Japanese and at the time, no proficiency in English. Kumi was put through the traditional education system in Hawaii. She has also been part of Makiki Church since she was 4 years old. She is now 16 years of age. She felt her English proficiency was an 9, but after asking her to rate her Japanese proficiency, she changed her English rating down to an 8, while bringing her Japanese proficiency up at 9. She feels this way even if she has never attended formal Japanese education. Places of Japanese use include church, school, and at home. She also reads a lot of manga, listens to Japanese music, and watches Japanese TV. She says she feels that manga is her greatest source of Japanese knowledge, in terms of language learning. When asked the last question, where her Japanese level would be without being influenced by the church, and she said that it would not have been the same, that she felt that she would be less fluent. I asked her why, and Kumi said that she felt that Makiki made her want to use Japanese, and that Makiki and the Japanese members in Makiki were the people she wanted to talk to most, so she continued to try and use her Japanese. When asked what else motivates her to keep speaking Japanese, she mentioned that she wanted to eventually either go to college in Japan or work in Japan after graduating from college.

Kumi mentioned that she feels most comfortable at church. Church is the home that she felt she belonged to, and it was needed because she had a difficult life in her own home. She felt that her family were the Japanese speaking members around her, who made her feel comfortable and loved. These factors kept Kumi in the community,

always maintaining her Japanese language proficiency. Without this language skill, Kumi would have difficulty understanding the expressions of care given by her surrounding members, as well as showing her appreciation and care towards others. Although her desire to maintain her Japanese is not an active one, it is entailed through her desire to stay within the community.

Case Study: Max Ida (23)

Max Ida was born in Redondo Beach California, and has never traveled to Japan until the age of 18. He is now 23. His father speaks very little Japanese, but his mother is a Japanese native. He feels his English proficiency is a 10, and his Japanese proficiency is an 8. His mother used a lot of Japanese, but the language spoken in the household was not entirely limited to Japanese. During his elementary and middle school years, he could only understand Japanese and was unable to fluently converse in Japanese. Until High School, his main input for Japanese was at Makiki Church, on Sundays. Unfortunately, he felt very disconnected with the church and although he attended every Sunday, he did not bother to understand or take part in any discourses that occurred. In High School, Max took his first Japanese class, and thus was introduced to Japanese. What changed his fluency in Japanese, he claims, was his own personal motivation to not lose his heritage language. He was able to fluently understand Japanese, and losing the language, he felt, was a waste.

He claims that in 2006, he had a turning point. After attending a Japanese Church conference, not only did he feel the need to reconnect with the church but also felt the need to use and improve his Japanese fluency. Through his main Japanese input, Makiki Church, he made friends who were proficient in Japanese and made a

large effort to communicate with these people. Through his, he claims his language proficiency rose from a 3 to an 8, hardly being able to form sentences to being able to speak in front of large crowds in Japanese without hesitation. Max made new friends who were Japanese natives, and having difficulty conversing with them made him feel like he was wasting the opportunity to get to know a lot of amazing people. The doors that would be opened, socially and economically would be abundant if he had become bilingual, and Max realized this, pushing his motivation to dive deeper into the community and learn his heritage language again.

Japanese Immersion of L2 Learners:

A number of students use Makiki Christian Church as a place for immersion. Students who are learning Japanese attend bible studies and services to immerse themselves in a Japanese society to improve their input for Japanese. These students have vastly improved their Japanese, over a very short period of time.

Case Study: Brad Tamashiro (22)

Brad is a student of Chinese decent who started studying Japanese in High School. Previous to this he has had no formal Japanese instruction or Japanese input. After high school, Brad took two years of Japanese courses and stopped, after he claimed that he was not progressing. Currently he rates his Japanese at a 6, while his English is a 10. He says that his main motivation to learn Japanese comes from his girlfriend, who is a heritage language learner, and a member of Makiki Church. He has been dating her for three years, and while their main media of communication when they are together is English, there are often times in which Brad and his girlfriend speak to each other in Japanese. After a year of dating, Brad was invited to attend a youth

bible study at Makiki Church, held entirely in Japanese. Brad remembers nervously introducing himself to the entire class, who were proficient speakers of Japanese, minus a few. Brad says that even though his self introduction was in broken Japanese, he remembers the warm welcome that the group gave him, after hearing him try his best to speak Japanese.

Brad mentioned that he does have a love for Japan and it's culture. He loves Japanese animation, comics, and food. In fact, Brad works in a Japanese noodle shop, though he mentions that he speaks little to no Japanese there because his coworkers are mostly Chinese. Now, his main input for Japanese is at Makiki Church, during the Friday bible studies and Sunday Services.

When asked a follow up question: What was your Japanese proficiency before coming to Makiki? Brad replied that it was around a 3. When asked whether his Japanese proficiency 'doubled' during his exposure to Makiki, he replied with a strong yes. Lastly, when asked what his Japanese proficiency would be like without Makiki, he replied with simply, "I believe that 80% of my Japanese improvement came directly through Makiki Church, lets keep it at that." Brad mentioned that being in an environment full of Japanese speakers motivated him to speak Japanese in order to fit in and take part in the laughter that everybody was sharing. Brad says that he feels that the Japanese sense of humor is a lot different from the American one, and learning the nuances by listening to native speakers converse is always an intriguing and invigorating experience.

Case Study: Kaeo Kealoha (27)

Kaeo was born and raised on the island of Maui, and is not of Japanese decent at all. Kaeo was introduced to Makiki Church through his girlfriend, a Japanese native. Previous to dating his girlfriend and coming to Makiki, his Japanese proficiency was zero. He claims that he only knew words that everybody knew and the words listed in a menu at a Japanese restaurant. He claims his Japanese level is a 1, but from my personal observations, I feel that his Japanese is at least a 3. His English proficiency is naturally a 10. His main (and only) sources of Japanese input are from his girlfriend and Makiki Church. At the same time, because his girlfriend is a member of Makiki Church, a lot of the time they spend together is spent at Makiki Church.

Kaeo claims that his Japanese is a 1, but Kaeo is an active participant at the Japanese Bible Study, even at times in which there is no translation. During the rigorous discussion at the Bible Study, Kaeo says he can understand roughly half of the material, and during normal conversation he understands 75%. Until recently Kaeo was unable to produce Japanese phrases, but recently has been introducing himself in Japanese, and replying to his girlfriend in basic Japanese.

Without Makiki, Kaeo claims that his Japanese proficiency would be non-existent. He said that being around people from Makiki, it was only natural that he would slowly learn to pick up and understand phrases. I began to wonder whether or not this Japanese proficiency was due to Makiki, or due to his relationship with his girlfriend. I asked a followup question, asking who had the bigger impact on his Japanese fluency, his girlfriend or Makiki. Kaeo said that the two worked hand in hand, as his girlfriend functioned like a private tutor, and that Makiki was an environment where he could practice and see in practice the concepts that were backed up by his girlfriend's

teaching. I asked another question, if he had to choose between one source, strictly for language learning, which would he choose Makiki, because of the input that he receives when listening to native speakers converse with each other. He mentioned that if it was only him and his girlfriend, he would miss a lot of nuances because he is not a native speaker of Japanese. He mentioned later that if it was only practicing, then he would rather have his girlfriend, as he feels less pressure regarding mistakes and correction.

Conclusion

At Makiki Christian Church there are always new members entering and leaving the Church. Some members enter the Church as teenagers or adults, while some members enter the Church at birth. Existing members having children is very common and new members are brought in this way every year. The data collected can be looked at and extrapolated into a prediction of how children who are raised with a connection to this bilingual environment will turn out in terms of bilingual proficiency. It will be a topic of interest whether these predictions based on previous studies of the members of the Church that also benefitted and help create this bilingual environment.

Case Study: Kanon Matsutake

Kanon is Kumi's nephew, being raised by a Japanese single mother. He was born in Hawaii and just turned two years old. Kanon's father has left the family, leaving Kumi, her sister, and her mother to raise him. Kumi and her sister are native English speakers, being raised in Hawaii, while their mother is a non-native speaker of English. Based on the case studies given previous, Kanon will be a proficient speaker of Japanese. The social linguistic motivation to learn Japanese is right in front of him, which is becoming a part of the minority language community that he has been born

into. All of the members of the church, since Kanon has no father, are putting in their best effort to raise him as part of a minority language village. Kanon's intuitive desire to be a part of the community will be the learning environment that is outside of the box, and drive him to success. This is how this data can be extrapolated onto new subjects that enter the community. Kumi's desire to be part of the family, Max's desire to create bonds with friends, Brad's desire to bond and laugh, and finally Kaeo's desire to understand and analyze the nuances of the language will all be instilled in Kanon, because he is part of this community. Kanon will most likely undergo a lot of the same experiences that the subjects in this study underwent, and Kanon will most likely develop in very similar fashion.

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