Growing Up as Vietnamese-Japanese Bilinguals: Vietnamese Heritage Children in Yokohama

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About 1.5% of the elementary school children are ethnic minorities.

SOURCE: Yokohama-City Board of Education (2008)
From Vietnam to Japan

1975.5.12

9 Vietnamese people arrived at the Port of Chiba.

9 more at the Ports of Yokohama and Nama within the month

Japan has accepted more than 13,000 Vietnamese refugees by the end of 1995.

Vietnamese Community in Yokohama

One of the two settlement centers for the Indo-Chinese refugees was opened in Yamato-City in 1980. (The center was closed in 1998.)

Heritage language education for Vietnamese children in Yokohama

Many of the Vietnamese children in Yokohama are the second generation of the Indo-Chinese refugees. Many of them are more proficient in Japanese than in Vietnamese; however, it is important to foster their language heritage.

How bilingual are these children to start with?
The study

- Bilingual oral interviews in Vietnamese and Japanese (language acquisition research)
- Today I am presenting part of the findings and discuss educational needs of the Vietnamese and other ethnic minority children in Yokohama.
### Child participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade (age)</th>
<th>L1</th>
<th>L2</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1 (age 7)</td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6 (age 12)</td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Interviewers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>L1</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trang</td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>2007-2009, Teacher Training Program Student, Graduate School of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosono</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>2008–, Graduate Student, Graduate School of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hasegawa</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>myself</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interview & Story-telling task
### OBC Rating Scales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Language Skills</th>
<th>Differentiation of two languages</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pronunciation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sentence production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactional Skills</td>
<td>Grammatical accuracy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sentence types &amp; quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Listening comprehension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>An attitude toward the conversation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fluency of the interaction</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Task accomplishment</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Styles &amp; Politeness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conversational strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Aspects</td>
<td>Consistency in speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rich content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quality of vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paragraph construction and quality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Oral Proficiency Assessment for Bilingual Children (OBC) developed by the Canadian Association for Japanese Language Education*
Vietnamese & Japanese

Max = 70 points

\(r = .560^*\)
Vietnamese proficiency

The three highly bilingual 6 graders were born in Vietnam and/or have attended school in Vietnam.

The rest of the children, who were born in Japan, are less proficient than average age-matched native speakers. Some could barely speak Vietnamese.
Case 1: Grade 6 (age 12)

Age of arrival: 8 years old

Basic Language Skills
- Vietnamese
- Japanese

Interactional Skills

Cognitive Aspects
- Vietnamese
- Japanese
Case 2: Grade 6 (age 12)
Born in Japan

**Basic Language Skills**

- Vietnamese
- Japanese

**Interactional Skills**

- Vietnamese
- Japanese

**Cognitive Aspects**

- Vietnamese
- Japanese

Bar chart showing comparisons between Vietnamese and Japanese students in various language skills.
Case 3: Grade 6 (age 12)
Born in Japan

Basic Language Skills
- Vietnamese
- Japanese

Interactional Skills
- Vietnamese
- Japanese

Cognitive Aspects
- Vietnamese
- Japanese
Loosing one’s home language....

- Wong-Fillmore (1991)

    Immigrant, refugee and native American children in US are losing their home (heritage) languages as they enter school, where English is the medium of instruction.

- The same thing seems to be happening in Japan.

- However, it should be emphasized that none of the Vietnamese children at the school refused to speak Vietnamese or gave up speaking Vietnamese during the interview.
Is it necessary to teach Vietnamese as a heritage language?

YES.

But how?

Teacher

Time

Teaching materials

Classroom

Teaching method

Budget

What are the possibilities of heritage language & culture education for the ethnic minority children in Yokohama?
Fostering Vietnamese identity at school

The school has a lot of activities for the children to learn about other countries, culture, language, etc.

Can YNU students do anything to help the school?
YNU international students introducing their home countries at the school

Vietnam, 2008

(Some pictures are deleted from the original presentation file.)
YNU international students introducing their home countries at the school

(Some pictures are deleted from the original presentation file.)
YNU international students introducing their home countries at the school

Korea, 2008

(Some pictures are deleted from the original presentation file.)

http://www.mitsumura-tosho.co.jp/kyoka/kokugo/kokugo_s/S_spice/number/s_02.asp
YNU international students introducing their home countries at the school

Russia, 2008

(Some pictures are deleted from the original presentation file.)
What potential do these ethnic minority children have?

Their heritage language proficiency varies. Many of them have (very) limited proficiency (written language as well as spoken language).

Nevertheless, they have better understanding of the language and culture of their countries of origin (compared to monolingual/monocultural Japanese children).

Japanese children are learning a lot from these ethnic minority children at school.
When these children grow up....
Special thanks go to:

- **Hoang Le Que Trang**
  2007-2009 Teacher Training Program, Graduate School of Education, Yokohama National University
  2009- Nguyen Chi Dieu Junior High School, Hue City, Vietnam

- **Naoko Hosono**
  2008- Graduate School of Education, Yokohama National University