

---

# CONNECTING WITH JAPANESE IN THE AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY: A CASE STUDY FROM PARENTS AND CHILDREN OF JAPANESE-AUSTRALIAN INTERMARRIAGE FAMILIES<sup>1</sup>

---

MIYAKO MATSUI

University of Wollongong, James Cook University

## ABSTRACT

This paper explores six Japanese and Australian (English-speaking) intermarriage families' use of Japanese at home and in the community and its impact on children's Japanese language maintenance and cultural identities. Fifteen children including four adults who were raised in such families participated in the study. The research revealed that children who have strong connections with the Japanese community have a stronger sense of Japanese cultural identity than those without these connections. Nonetheless, Japanese parents' use of Japanese in the home with their children was also a strong factor in maintaining children's Japanese language use although there were considerable challenges in committing to using Japanese regularly. It was evident that both the Japanese parents' home practices and commitment, and community connections were vital factors in maintaining the Japanese language and culture with their children. This research aims to contribute to supporting heritage language speakers to maintain their languages with their children in Australia.

## KEYWORDS

intermarriage families, heritage language maintenance, parents' perspectives, children's perspectives, cultural identities

## INTRODUCTION

Australia is a multicultural nation with a significant number of immigrants who speak languages other than English at home. As a school teacher and a parent, I encountered many families living in Australia who are of different cultural backgrounds and speak a language (or languages) other than English. Maintaining one's heritage language (languages) is challenging, especially in countries such as Australia where one language—in this case English—is predominantly used. This article focused on the results of a study that investigates the Japanese language maintenance of six intermarriage families in Australia, where one parent is a Japanese-origin immigrant with Japanese as their first language, and the other is of Australian- (or other-) origin and a speaker of English or other languages. The study explored their use of Japanese at home and the resulting impact on their children's Japanese language ability and use, as well as on their perceived identities as plurilinguals. The children's perspectives in relation to Japanese and Australian cultural influences, and parental attitudes and feelings about the maintenance of the heritage language, and use of Japanese and English, are also explored. As there are increasing numbers of intermarriage families in a world that Vertovec (2015, 2) describes as characterised by "super-diversity," it is important to reform the existing framework of nationality, language, identity, and bilingualism from the perspectives of children (Kawakami 2011). My research aims to understand the complex feelings of children of intermarriage families and find ways to support the needs of immigrant parents and their children in an increasingly inclusive nation celebrating its cultural and linguistic diversity.

## BACKGROUND

This article explores the results of a study that arose from my PhD thesis focusing on the experiences of the six Japanese-Australian intermarriage families' language use in the home and community. I spent four years of primary school in Australia with my family due to my father's work. This was my first experience of moving between cultures, countries and languages, hence the challenges I encountered navigating these shifts that impacted on my sense of identity. I raised my Japan-born children in Australia noticing the language shifts and owned a small private Japanese language tutoring centre, where I observed the interactions between Japanese parents and their Japanese and Australian children's language. Such experiences motivated me to research further the importance of parental involvement in maintaining Japanese in the home and community.

A large number of studies on heritage language maintenance have been conducted in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada, but very few in Australia. Moreover, no studies have focussed on Japanese–Australian intermarriage families' experiences of heritage language maintenance in the field of bilingual and bicultural identity and language use in Australia. With an increasing number of people crossing borders (Kawakami 2011), there is a growing need for such research in recognition of Australia's cultural and linguistic diversity, the significant number (26,890 families) of Japanese-

origin families living in Australia, and the fact that 39.5% of Japan-born immigrants were married to Australian-born partners (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2021). Maintaining Japanese language skills in Australia—a country where English is the dominant language—is complex and challenging, so there is an urgent need to identify how such families can be assisted and to contribute to supporting language education.

The main domain of heritage language maintenance is the home, although the community, including a child's school, also plays an important role in language maintenance. Language exposure, language choice, and language use are the three themes that link all participants (including parents, children, extended families, friends, and community networks) as well as the domains (home, community, and school). Parents' decisions about language choice at home and the motivation of both the parents and children to use (or not) the heritage language are factors that strongly influence language use in the family (DeCapua and Wintergerst 2009).

## METHODOLOGY

A phenomenological case studies research approach (Grant 2008; Henry et al. 2008; Sumsion 2002) was used in this study to explore in-depth participants' experiences of the languages used at home. The aim was to represent the actual voices of the individuals who participated in the study (Heigham and Sakui 2009). Family observation, in-depth interviews, and questionnaires were collected in 2017 as data to provide what some researchers term *thick description* (Croker 2009; Hood 2009; Kervin et al. 2006). This combination of methods was implemented to better understand each participant's perspectives on parents' use of Japanese and its impact on their children's language abilities and identities.

Observations took place at the participating families' homes, which provided a natural research setting (Creswell 2015; Patton 2015) to investigate the language interactions between all family members. Audio and video recordings were made to assist with my analysis and supplemented by recorded field notes taken to capture the experience observed by the researcher (Johnson and Christensen 2019; Kawulich 2005; Kervin et al. 2006).

One-on-one interviews were conducted with parents, children, and adult children of Japanese-Australian intermarriage families and answers were recorded from one participant at a time (Creswell 2015). Semi-structured interviews were used to obtain comparable data across the range of participants (Bogden and Biklen 2003), which provided me with background information about the language use of each individual. Similar interview questions were used for children and adult children of Japanese-Australian intermarriage families. Interview data were analysed by grouping the interview transcripts into segments and labelled to identify common themes and experiences across participants. During this process, I highlighted important points in the interview transcripts and took notes of participants who had similar perspectives as well as different perspectives on the same topic. This allowed me to later reorganise the material into more detailed topics and to use participants' quotes as examples to understand their actual feelings.

Questionnaires were distributed by email to each participating family and adult children of Japanese-Australian intermarriage families. Questionnaires allowed me to obtain a variety of additional information from participants such as "thoughts, feelings, attitudes, beliefs, values, perceptions, personality, and behavioural intentions" (Johnson and Christensen 2019, 192) focusing on what languages are used within the family and their children's abilities in using the Japanese language. This was achieved by using checklist responses where participants select one of the presented alternatives (Burns 2000). Furthermore, closed questions were used to gather data about participants' backgrounds and ethnic identity (relevant to children and adult children of Japanese-Australian intermarriage families), and open-ended questions were used to gather additional detailed information and to gather descriptions of the circumstances of language use in the family.

The use of multiple sources of data allowed me to consider a range of perspectives from the interviews when compared with the other data sources; this was achieved by cross-checking information and drawing conclusions through the use of multiple interpretive procedures, based on thematic analysis (Bogdan and Biklen 2003; Burns 2000; Creswell and Poth 2018; Glesne and Peshkin 1992; Johnson and Christensen 2019; Kervin et al. 2006; Yin 1993).

## RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question discussed in this article is “How does the involvement of intermarriage parents in Japanese language maintenance impact on their children’s language ability, for Japanese, English, and hybrid language use; and on their identities?” This question was derived from the findings that focused on Japanese parents’ perspectives and children’s perspectives on Japanese language and culture maintenance.

## PARTICIPANTS

Six Japanese-Australian (or Japanese-Swiss) families who are currently raising their children in a bilingual environment and four adult children of Japanese-Australian intermarriage families are the participants of this study. Of the six families, three Japanese-origin fathers and three Japanese-origin mothers participated in the study. My PhD study also investigated the genders of parents in relation to the use of Japanese with their children; however, this will not be explored in this paper. All six families live in a large regional city adjacent to a capital city in Australia and two of the four adults were raised in the same regional city whereas the other two adults were raised in the capital city. It can be more challenging if the local heritage language community is small, unlike in large capital cities where many speakers of community languages live and have opportunities to connect (Clyne 2005). Pseudonyms are used for all participants.

### SIX JAPANESE-AUSTRALIAN (OR JAPANESE-SWISS) INTERMARRIAGE FAMILIES

An overview of the backgrounds of the participants from the six families is provided in Table 1.1. The first three families in the table have a Japanese-origin mother, and the next three families have a Japanese-origin father. All English-speaking parents are of Australian-origin except for the father of the Berna family who is Swiss. The Berna children were born in Canada and moved to Australia in 2013. Lucy (from the Kitajima family) was born in Japan but came to Australia at the age of one. All the other participating children were born in Australia. The children range in age from six to thirteen. Except for two children who attended secondary school, all were primary school-aged children. Data was collected in 2017.

*Table 1.1*

### OVERVIEW OF THE BACKGROUNDS OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE SIX FAMILIES

Family	Japanese-origin parent (mother/father, birthplace)	Australian- (or other-) origin parent (mother/father)	Children (age)	Children’s birthplace
Brown family	Fukie (mother, Japan)	Darren (father)	Max (10)	Australia
Berna family	Chie (mother, Japan)	Martin (Swiss father)	Lorenz (11) Markus (7) Trina (6)	Canada Canada Canada
Bradley family	Yoko (mother, Japan)	Jason (father)	Adam (13) Tessa (10)	Australia Australia
Uchimura family	Tomoki (father, United States)	Louisa (mother)	Lachlan (13) Jasper (10) Sienna (7)	Australia Australia Australia
Kitajima family	Riku (father, Japan)	Josephine (mother)	Lucy (7) Joel (1; not a participant)	Japan
Okuda family	Yasuhiro (father, Japan)	Sharon (mother)	Hibiki (6)	Australia

### FOUR ADULT CHILDREN OF JAPANESE-AUSTRALIAN INTERMARRIAGE FAMILIES

Table 1.2 provides an overview of the four adult children of Japanese-Australian intermarriage families: one male and three females. Yamato and Sara were raised in the state capital city whereas Sonia and Samantha were raised in the same regional city as the six families studied. All adult participants have a Japanese mother and at least one sibling. Samantha was the only adult participant who was born in Japan but she relocated to Australia at the age of four.

Table 1.2

## OVERVIEW OF THE BACKGROUNDS OF PARTICIPATING ADULT CHILDREN OF JAPANESE-AUSTRALIAN INTERMARRIAGE FAMILIES

Adult children (age)	Participants' birthplace (current residence)	Japanese-origin parent	Australian- (or other-) origin parent	Siblings
Yamato Burgess (23)	Australia (state capital city, Australia)	Mother	Father	2 older brothers
Sonia Stevens (47)	Australia (large regional city, Australia)	Mother	Father	1 older sister
Sara Crowley (18)	Australia (state capital city, Australia)	Mother	Father	1 younger sister
Samantha Alford (25)	Japan (large regional city, Australia)	Mother	Father	1 older brother

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SIX JAPANESE-AUSTRALIAN (OR JAPANESE-SWISS) INTERMARRIAGE FAMILIES

Six Japanese-Australian (or Japanese-Swiss) intermarriage families will be introduced separately focusing on their language use at home and connections to Japan, the amount of exposure in the community, and children's perspectives towards their parents' use of Japanese and their identity. Although this is a very brief summary of each family's experiences on their use of languages in the home and community, it provides some insights into the challenges each family encounters and how their language use impacts children's language abilities and identities.

Table 2.1

## BROWN FAMILY

Language used by Japanese parents and children English (E), Japanese (J)	Children's Japanese proficiency	Exposure in the community or school
Mother (Fukie) → Max (E & J) Max → Mother (Mostly E)	Max: greetings and routine words.	Playgroup, Japanese language centre, local Japanese families, culture in the home.

## LANGUAGE USE AT HOME AND CONNECTION TO JAPAN

The Brown family consists of a Japanese mother, Fukie, an Australian father, Darren, and their ten-year-old son, Max. Fukie uses a mixture of English and Japanese within the one sentence and uses more English if she finds it difficult for Max to understand her Japanese. Max responds mostly in English. Darren understands Japanese but only has basic communication skills so he uses mostly English with his family. Fukie revealed that she cannot communicate and feels emotionally distant from him due to her limited English ability and her son's limited Japanese ability. Fukie wishes her husband spoke more Japanese but on the other hand, she feels she may exclude her husband if she were to speak only Japanese with Max. Moreover, she feels pressured by other Japanese parents who use Japanese to communicate with their children. Fukie's mother sends gifts to Max from Japan and the family visits Japan every two years. The family celebrates various Japanese cultural events at home and watches Japanese anime and TV programs.

## EXPOSURE TO THE JAPANESE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN THE COMMUNITY

The Brown family is actively involved in the Japanese community such as attending a playgroup, my Japanese language centre, and organising regular playdates with children of Japanese background. Max plays *kendo* once a week. Max takes *origami* to his class and demonstrates it, and he feels proud when his teacher and peers show interest.

## CHILD'S PERSPECTIVES ON LANGUAGE USE AND IDENTITY

Max can understand his mother's Japanese but cannot express himself using contextually appropriate Japanese, which leads him to respond to her in English. However, he reacts when he sees Japanese popular children's characters and tends to become friends with children of Japanese background. Regardless of his limited Japanese proficiency, he has developed a strong sense of pride towards Japan and Japanese culture. Regular exposure to Japanese culture and connecting with

people of Japanese backgrounds in the community may have contributed to developing his sense of identity as Japanese-Australian.

Table 2.2

BERNA FAMILY

Language used by Japanese parents and children English (E), Japanese (J)	Children's Japanese proficiency	Exposure in the community or school
Mother (Chie) ↔ Lorenz (E & J) Mother ↔ Marcus (E & J) Mother ↔ Trina (E & J)	Lorenz: converse freely. Markus: converse freely. Trina: basic conversation.	Local school in Japan (Lorenz & Markus), local Japanese families.

LANGUAGE USE AT HOME AND CONNECTION TO JAPAN

The Berna family consists of a Japanese mother, Chie, a Swiss father, Martin, and three children who were born in Canada. Martin's first language is Swiss-German and he is a fluent English speaker. He understands Japanese but only has basic communication skills so he uses English as the main language to communicate with his family. The family moved to Australia in 2013. Chie uses a mixture of English and Japanese without mixing the languages within a sentence. Children respond in the language spoken by Chie; that is, if Chie speaks Japanese, they respond in Japanese. The family visits Japan every two years and each stay lasts for two to five months. Chie's language choice was to use English with their children; however, as the children developed their Japanese proficiency, she began using more Japanese with them. All three children use Japanese textbooks and workbooks to study Japanese at home in preparation for their next visit to Japan. They all watch Japanese anime and YouTube programs in Japanese without subtitles and read manga.

EXPOSURE TO THE JAPANESE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN THE COMMUNITY

The Berna family socialises with some Japanese families in the local community in Australia. Chie organises playdates with other children of Japanese background and they all communicated using Japanese when they were young. During their stay in Japan, the two older sons, Lorenz and Markus attend a local Japanese school. The youngest daughter, Trina did not attend school as she was too young. The two older sons can communicate freely using Japanese as they were immersed in the Japanese school. However, Trina cannot communicate as well as her brothers.

CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVES ON THEIR LANGUAGE USE AND IDENTITIES

Lorenz and Markus did not find any negative aspects of using Japanese and do not find it difficult to speak Japanese with their mother and relatives in Japan. Trina, however, finds it difficult to speak Japanese and feels that she cannot speak Japanese as fluently as her brothers. Lorenz identifies himself as Japanese-Swiss whereas Markus and Trina identify themselves as Canadians.

Table 2.3

BRADLEY FAMILY

Language used by Japanese parents and children English (E), Japanese (J)	Children's Japanese proficiency	Exposure in the community or school
Mother (Yoko) → Adam (Mostly J) Adam → Mother (Mostly E) Mother → Tessa (Mostly J) Tessa → Mother (E)	Adam: basic conversation. Tessa: greetings and routine words.	Playgroup, Mothers' group, Japanese community language school, local Japanese families, Japanese study at secondary school (Adam), culture in the home.

LANGUAGE USE AT HOME AND CONNECTION TO JAPAN

The Bradley family consists of a Japanese mother, Yoko, an Australian father, Jason, and their two children Adam who attends high school and Tessa who is in upper primary school. Yoko uses mostly Japanese to communicate with her children. Yoko's sister lived with the Bradley family when Adam was in preschool so Japanese was used predominantly at home. The language gradually shifted to English when Yoko's sister returned to Japan before Adam entered primary school. Both her children refused to speak Japanese during the early years of primary school. Yoko recognised the

decreased use of Japanese at home so she decided to increase her use of Japanese with her children when they were in middle to upper primary school. During the family observation of this study, the mother used mostly Japanese but her children responded mostly in English. The family was having a Japanese traditional breakfast during the observation. Yoko continues to use Japanese despite Jason, who only has basic Japanese communication skills, being present. Yoko has very strong connections with her family in Japan and not only do the Bradleys visit Japan every two years but her parents also visit Australia.

## EXPOSURE TO THE JAPANESE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN THE COMMUNITY

Yoko has strong connections to the local Japanese community in Australia. She established a Japanese community language school in the local area with other Japanese parents. Yoko teaches Japanese at the community language school and her children attend there as students. Yoko joined the mother's group as well as a playgroup for her children when they were young. Adam studies Japanese as an elective subject at secondary school.

## CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVES ON THEIR LANGUAGE USE AND IDENTITIES

Adam seems to have more confidence in his Japanese than his sister, Tessa. This may be due to more exposure to Japanese he had as a young child and taking Japanese as an elective subject at his school. Tessa has anxiety about speaking Japanese in front of her Japanese relatives and prefers to have her mother by her side. While Adam can respond to his mother in Japanese, which was not observed during the data collection, Tessa understands her mother's Japanese but has difficulty responding in Japanese. Yet, she still wishes her mother to continue using Japanese with her. Both children identify themselves as Japanese-Australian.

Table 2.4

### UCHIMURA FAMILY

Language used by Japanese parents and children English (E), Japanese (J)	Children's Japanese proficiency	Exposure in the community or school
Father (Tomoki) ↔ Lachlan (Mostly J) Father ↔ Jasper (Mostly J) Father → Sienna (Mostly J) Sienna → Father (E)	Lachlan: basic conversation. Jasper: basic conversation. Sienna: greetings and routine words.	Japanese language centre (Lachlan & Jasper), Japanese study at secondary school (Lachlan).

## LANGUAGE USE AT HOME AND CONNECTION TO JAPAN

The Uchimura family consists of a Japanese father, Tomoki, an Australian mother, Louisa, and three children, Lachlan, Jasper, and Sienna. The oldest son, Lachlan attends secondary school and Jasper and Sienna are in primary school. Tomoki was born in the United States where his father was working but returned to Japan when he was ten months old. He is very determined to use Japanese with his children and made the decision to use Japanese with them before they were born. He uses Japanese to communicate with his children and the two older sons respond to him in Japanese. The youngest daughter, Sienna either responds to him in English or ignores him when Japanese is spoken to her. Their mother, Louisa has very limited Japanese so only English is spoken with her. Tomoki's commitment to using Japanese is inspired by his older sister who insisted he raise his children bilingually. Tomoki believes that his wife is against his use of Japanese with their children; however, she shared in the interview that she was glad that Tomoki has been using Japanese with them. Regardless of how he thinks she may feel, Tomoki continues to use Japanese with them. The family visited Japan three times in total due to the consideration of Louisa who might think, "Japan again?" although Tomoki wants to visit Japan more often.

## EXPOSURE TO THE JAPANESE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN THE COMMUNITY

The two older sons Lachlan and Jasper learnt Japanese at my Japanese language centre for over three years. Since the start of secondary school, Lachlan withdrew from the Japanese language centre and took Japanese as an elective subject at school. Other than these connections to their Japanese learning, the family hardly have any connections with the Japanese community. Although Tomoki wishes to connect with Japanese people in the local community, he does not want Louisa to feel excluded. Sienna does not have any exposure to Japanese besides her father's use of Japanese.

## CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVES ON THEIR LANGUAGE USE AND IDENTITIES

Regardless of their Japanese proficiency, all children responded that they were glad that their father continued to speak Japanese with them. The second son, Jasper speaks Japanese most fluently among his siblings; however, he identified himself as Australian whereas Lachlan and Sienna identified themselves as Japanese-Australian. Lachlan and Jasper have more exposure to Japanese than their sister as she spends more time with their mother than her father. The older two sons spend more time with their father when he is at home although he works full-time during the week.

Table 2.5  
KITAJIMA FAMILY

Language used by Japanese parents and children English (E), Japanese (J)	Children's Japanese proficiency	Exposure in the community or school
Father (Riku) ↔ Lucy (Mostly E)	Lucy: greetings and routine words.	Japanese language centre, Japanese community language school, local Japanese families, favourite pop culture.

## LANGUAGE USE AT HOME AND CONNECTION TO JAPAN

The Kitajima family consists of a Japanese father, Riku, an Australian mother, Josephine, and two children, a seven-year-old Lucy and a one-year-old Joel. Lucy was the only child participant in this family. Lucy was born in Japan and moved to Australia when she was one year old due to the evacuation caused by the nuclear power plant in Fukushima. Riku and Josephine agreed to use English in Japan and Japanese in Australia so English was used mostly at home in Japan. After moving to Australia, they were unable to adhere to their original decision and the use of Japanese gradually decreased. Riku wanted to use more Japanese with Lucy; however, the pressure from his wife and daughter forced him to use more English. Nevertheless, Josephine has basic Japanese communication skills and is positive towards Lucy being bilingual but she feels frustrated if she cannot understand the Japanese that Riku uses or express her feelings in Japanese.

Riku is absent from home three days during the week due to his work. During his absence, Josephine spends time with their children using English. These factors cause reduced exposure to Japanese. The family visited Japan once since relocating to Australia due to the fear of radioactivity. During their visit, Riku and Josephine noticed that Lucy spoke Japanese outside the home and on their return to Australia, she renewed her interest and was inspired to maintain Japanese. Riku's parents visited Australia a few times, and Japanese was used during their visits. Josephine feels the pressure when her mother-in-law (Riku's mother) constantly tells the family, "Speak Japanese! Speak Japanese!" Yet, Lucy has a good relationship with her Japanese grandparents.

## EXPOSURE TO THE JAPANESE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN THE COMMUNITY

Lucy attended preschool when the family lived in Japan. Even though English was used at home, she was exposed to Japanese in the community. In Australia, Lucy attended my Japanese language centre for six months when she was three years old. Later, she moved to a Japanese community language school which was set up by Yoko Bradley. Lucy tends to become friends with children of similar backgrounds (Japanese-Australian) and has a few friends of Japanese background whom she has met through her parents. These connections with the community show her parents' wish to provide opportunities for more exposure to Japanese.

## CHILD'S PERSPECTIVES ON THEIR LANGUAGE USE AND IDENTITIES

Lucy mentioned that she wished her father did not speak Japanese in front of her friends as it made her feel embarrassed. On the other hand, she wishes her father spoke more Japanese with her as she wants to learn more Japanese. She realises that her father does not use as much Japanese with her as before. Lucy identifies herself as Japanese-Australian.



Table 2.6  
OKUDA FAMILY

Language used by Japanese parents and children English (E), Japanese (J)	Children's Japanese proficiency	Exposure in the community or school
Father (Yasuhiro) → Hibiki (E & J) Hibiki → Father (E)	Hibiki: greetings and routine words.	Japanese language centre, local Japanese families, Japanese pop culture, karate.

## LANGUAGE USE AT HOME AND CONNECTION TO JAPAN

The Okuda family consists of a Japanese father, Yasuhiro, an Australian mother of Indonesian heritage, Sharon, and a seven-year-old son, Hibiki. Sharon is a fluent speaker of Japanese and she and Yasuhiro use mostly Japanese. Yasuhiro usually begins a conversation using Japanese with Hibiki, however, he often gets ignored or Hibiki replies back in English. Although Yasuhiro is keen to use more Japanese to communicate with Hibiki, he gives up and uses English instead. Hibiki seems to understand Japanese as he was able to respond appropriately through his physical movement when his parents asked him to do something in Japanese, which was evident during the observation. Yasuhiro works as a plumber and travels far from home and occasionally returns home late. During his absence, Sharon speaks English to Hibiki, although she can speak Japanese. This results in an increase in exposure to English. Hibiki has some connections to Japanese culture, such as having a strong interest in Pokemon and doing *karate*. The family visits Japan once every two or three years for two weeks to visit Yasuhiro's family. During their visits, Hibiki is immersed in Japanese as his cousins and relatives do not speak English. However, according to his mother, Hibiki responds to them in English and learns "naughty Japanese words."

## EXPOSURE TO THE JAPANESE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN THE COMMUNITY

Hibiki attended my Japanese language centre with Lucy Kitajima for six months. They were neighbours at that time and have known each other since the Kitajima family moved in as their neighbour sometime before. After leaving my Japanese language centre, Hibiki did not attend other community groups in the local area. Hibiki has connections with children of Japanese background through their neighbourhood or from his parents. Learning *karate* also promotes his connections with Japanese culture.

## CHILD'S PERSPECTIVES ON THEIR LANGUAGE USE AND IDENTITIES

Similar to Lucy, Hibiki does not like his father speaking Japanese outside the home in front of his friends, as he feels embarrassed. He tells his father to speak English. However, he did not say that he himself was embarrassed to speak Japanese. As Hibiki was young at the time of the interview, it was difficult to capture his identity; however, he responded that he feels Japanese-Australian.

## FINDINGS FROM THE SIX JAPANESE-AUSTRALIAN (OR JAPANESE-SWISS) INTERMARRIAGE FAMILIES

The families faced considerable challenges in trying to maintain Japanese. The challenges described by the families are only a few of the many challenges they face. Although all Japanese parents wished to maintain Japanese with their children, various social and practical factors such as pressures from family and absences from home added to the difficulty in the continued use of Japanese at home. It was evident that children whose Japanese parents committed to using Japanese at home or were immersed in Japanese at a Japanese school were able to communicate in Japanese. Nevertheless, children who have considerable exposure to Japanese culture regardless of their Japanese proficiency seem to develop strong Japanese identities. On the other hand, if children have limited exposure to Japanese culture or connections with the Japanese community, their Japanese identity does not develop much even if Japanese is used at home.

Although some children were embarrassed by their Japanese parents' use of Japanese outside the home or found it difficult to respond in Japanese, all the children were positive towards their Japanese parents' use of Japanese. In short, an exposure to both the Japanese language and culture at home as well as connections to a local Japanese community are crucial to maintaining children's Japanese language and identities.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FOUR ADULT CHILDREN OF JAPANESE-AUSTRALIAN INTERMARRIAGE FAMILIES

Four adult children of Japanese-Australian intermarriage families shared their perspectives on their Japanese parents' use of language, their own Japanese proficiency, and their cultural identification. Each participant's experiences will be explored separately.

*Table 3*

### PERSPECTIVES ON JAPANESE USE AND IDENTITIES OF PARTICIPATING ADULT CHILDREN OF JAPANESE-AUSTRALIAN INTERMARRIAGE FAMILIES

Adult children (age)	Language used with Japanese parent	Japanese proficiency	Feelings about Japanese use by Japanese-origin parents	Cultural identity
Yamato (23)	Japanese	Very good	Glad	Japanese–Australian
Sonia (47)	English	Very limited	Wishes she could speak	Australian
Sara (18)	Mostly Japanese	Very good	Glad	Japanese
Samantha (25)	Mother to Samantha: Japanese and English Samantha to Mother: mostly English	Limited	Wishes she could speak	Japanese–Hungarian

#### YAMATO

Yamato is a twentythree-year-old man who works as a researcher at a finance-related company involved in the Japanese market. His mother is Japanese and his father is Australian. His mother, who is a Japanese-English interpreter, used Japanese with him since he was born. He spent a lot of time with his mother when he was a child and communicated with her in Japanese. He rather feels awkward using English with her. Yamato mentioned that his two older brothers speak more fluently than him. His father cannot speak Japanese much so when all the family is present, they use English; however, when talking to his mother, he switches to Japanese.

Yamato lives in a state capital city and attended the Japanese community language school from Kindergarten to Year nine, as his mother was a teacher there. He did not enjoy attending the Japanese community language school as most of his classmates' parents were Japanese, which caused him to feel inferior. The family visited Japan once a year and he likes watching Japanese TV programs. Yamato identifies himself as Japanese-Australian.

#### SARA

Sara is an eighteen-year-old secondary school student who lives in the same state capital city as Yamato. She was born to a Japanese mother and an Australian father of British heritage. She now communicates using Japanese with her mother although she felt disconnected and refused to use Japanese during her early primary school years.

As opposed to Yamato, Sara found a strong connection with the Japanese community language school. She made a special bond with her classmates and their encouragement motivated her to learn Japanese with them. She played an active role in organising annual Japanese festivals in the capital city.

Sara visits Japan once a year and she attended a local Japanese school when she was younger. She likes Japanese picture books, anime, and manga. She identifies herself as Japanese.

#### SAMANTHA

Samantha is a 25-year-old woman who was born in Japan but moved to Australia when she was four years old. She was born to a Japanese mother and an Australian father of Hungarian heritage. Samantha moved to Australia with her father and older brother, but her mother did not join them until two years later due to her work commitments in Japan. During her mother's absence, her father, who is a fluent Japanese speaker, raised her and her brother in Australia. Although he

planned to continue to use Japanese with his children, English became the dominant language at home. Samantha's mother continues to use Japanese but reluctantly switches to English when her daughter replies to her in English.

Samantha lives in the same large regional city as the six families. During her childhood, there was no local Japanese community language school. She hardly had any exposure to Japanese in Australia other than her mother's use of Japanese. She visited Japan less than five times but during their visits, they saw their cousins and relatives. Samantha has a strong connection with her Japanese grandmother. Samantha was enrolled in a Japanese course at the university, which shows her interest in learning Japanese. She wishes she could speak Japanese and identifies herself as Japanese-Hungarian.

## SONIA

Sonia is a 47-year-old woman who works as a researcher at a university library. She has a Japanese mother and an Australian father. She lives in the same large regional city as Samantha and the six families. Sonia's mother worked full-time outside the home and her father was mostly at home due to health issues. She spent most of the time with her English-speaking father while her mother was absent and English was mostly used at home even with her mother. She had the opportunity to listen to Japanese when her mother talked to her Japanese friends on the telephone.

As Sonia spent her childhood in the 70s and 80s, there were hardly any Japanese programs or resources easily accessible. Similar to Samantha, there was no Japanese community language school in the local area. There was a very limited exposure to Japanese for Sonia and she mentioned in the interview many times that she wished she could speak Japanese. Sonia has visited Japan five times since she was born until the time of the interview. Due to the lack of exposure to Japanese both at home and community, she identifies herself as Australian.

## FINDINGS FROM THE FOUR ADULT CHILDREN OF JAPANESE-AUSTRALIAN INTERMARRIAGE FAMILIES

Important results were identified from the interview data provided by the four adults whose language use and identities were affected by the language spoken at home. In the case of Yamato and Sara, their Japanese parents' use of Japanese seemed to have helped them develop their use of Japanese. Additionally, they perceived stronger Japanese identities, as they were provided with opportunities to attend Japanese community language schools and access Japanese resources. On the other hand, Samantha and Sonia, who both have limited Japanese proficiency, not only had a lack of local opportunities within their regional city but also in the era in which they spent their childhood; access to Japanese resources was limited compared to children of the six families. It is therefore highly likely that the combination of fewer opportunities and less cultural support to learn heritage languages impacted their language learning activities and inclinations.

## CONCLUSION

This study uncovered various challenges and some emotional turmoil caused by the gap between the ideal of using Japanese with their children and the reality of not being able to use much Japanese experienced by Japanese-origin parents striving to maintain the Japanese language and culture for their children. All the children are proud of Japanese culture, reflecting their Japanese parent's efforts to retain their heritage language for their children. Their experiences of difficulties in speaking Japanese, and eventually resisting the learning of Japanese, reminded me of myself as a child who grew up in Japan and Australia moving between cultures, countries, and languages.

The most immediate environment for heritage language maintenance that parents can provide for their children is through their own use of Japanese in the home and with grandparents or relatives in Japan (Cruickshank 2015; Kasuya 1998). As there is a limit to the influence of parents' use of Japanese on their children, the local Japanese community also helps facilitate heritage language maintenance (McCabe 2014; Pauwels 2005). Parents' use of Japanese and the exposure to Japanese that the children receive from the Japanese community impacted the children's Japanese abilities. Furthermore, parents' use of Japanese and their connections with their Japanese families and the local Japanese community in Australia appears to have shaped the children's cultural identities.

Understanding the benefits of using Japanese and finding opportunities to use Japanese can help children increase their motivation to learn Japanese. I hope that the results of this study will encourage immigrant parents of intermarriage families living in Australia (and elsewhere) to be proud of their heritage languages and to establish positive cultural identities for their children.

## REFERENCE LIST

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). 2021. "2021 Census country of birth, QuickStat—People in Australia who were born in Japan." Accessed November 5, 2023. [https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/6201\\_AUS](https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/6201_AUS).
- Bogden, R. C. and S. K. Biklen. 2003. *Qualitative research for education: an introduction to theory and methods*, 4th ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Burns, R. B. 2000. *Introduction to research methods*, 4th ed. Frenchs Forest, NSW: Pearson Education.
- Clyne, M. 2005. *Australia's language potential*. Sydney: University of New South Wales Press.
- Creswell, J. W. 2015. *Educational research: planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*, 5th ed. Frenchs Forest, NSW: Pearson Education.
- Creswell, J. W. and C. N. Poth. 2018. *Qualitative inquiry and research design: choosing among five approaches*, 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Croker, R. 2009. "An introduction to qualitative research." In *Qualitative research in applied linguistics: a practical introduction*, edited by J. Heigham and R. A. Croker, 3–24. Houndmills, UK, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cruikshank, K. 2015. "Community languages schools: the importance of context in understanding hybrid identities." In *Language and identity across modes of communication*, edited by D. N. Djenar, A. Mahboob and K. Cruickshank, 83–105. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- DeCapua, A., and A. C. Wintergerst. 2009. "Second-generation language maintenance and identity: a case study." *Bilingual Research Journal* 32: 5–24. doi:10.1080/15235880902965672.
- Glesne, C. and A. Peshkin. 1992. *Becoming qualitative researchers: an introduction*. White Plains, New York: Longman.
- Grant, R. 2008. "A phenomenological case study of a lecturer's understanding of himself as an assessor." *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* 8: 1–10.
- Heigham, J. and K. Sakui. 2009. "Ethnography." In *Qualitative research in applied linguistics: a practical introduction*, edited by J. Heigham and R. A. Croker, 91–111. Houndmills, UK, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Henry, A., A. M. Casserly, M. Coady and H. Marshall. 2008. "A phenomenological case study exploring different perspectives on inclusion within one post-primary school in the North West of Ireland." St. Angela's College, College of National University of Ireland. <http://www.stangelas.nuigalway.ie/Downloads/Departments/Education/SEN/Phenomenological%20Case%20Study.pdf>
- Hood, M. 2009. "Case study." In *Qualitative research in applied linguistics: a practical introduction*, edited by J. Heigham and R. A. Croker, 66–90. Houndmills, UK, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Johnson, R. B. and L. Christensen. 2019. *Educational research: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches*, 7th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kasuya, H. 1998. "Determinants of language choice in bilingual children: the role of input." *International Journal of Bilingualism* 2 (3): 327–246.
- Kawakami, I. 2011. "Children crossing borders and their citizenship in Japan." In *Language and citizenship in Japan*, edited by N. Gottlieb, 79–97. New York: Routledge.
- Kawulich, Barbara. 2005. "Participant observation as a data collection method." *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung* 6 (2). <https://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/466/996>.
- Kervin, L., W. Vialle, J. Herrington and T. Okely. 2006. *Research for educators*. South Melbourne: Cengage Learning.
- Matsui, M. 2021. "Parental involvement in second-generation immigrant children's Japanese Language maintenance." PhD thesis, James Cook University. <https://doi.org/10.25903/5t8r-s982>.
- McCabe, M. 2014. "Parental Experiences with Children's Heritage Language Maintenance and Loss: Cases of Eleven Czech and Slovak Transnational Immigrant Families in the Southeastern United States." PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <https://doi.org/10.17615/11vk-ab92>.
- Patton, M. Q. 2015. *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*, 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Pauwels, A. 2005. "Maintaining the community language in Australia: challenges and roles for families." *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 8 (2–3): 124–131.
- Sumsion, J. 2002. "Becoming, being and unbecoming and early childhood educator: a phenomenological case study of teacher attrition." *Teaching and Teacher Education* 18: 869–885.
- Vertovec, S. 2015. "Introduction: migration, cities and diversities 'old' and 'new.'" In *Diversities old and new: migration and socio-spatial patterns in New York, Singapore, and Johannesburg*, edited by S. Vertovec, 1–20. Houndmills, UK, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Yin, R. K. 1993. *Applications of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.