The Potential Benefits of Adopting Immersion Style Language Education in Japan

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> The degree of proficiency children have in the second language will be good after immersion education but it will not be perfect. Nonetheless, immersion education is much better than learning how to conjugate verbs, n'est ce pas ? (Lotherington, 2000, p. 63)

Introduction

It is well documented that immersion style programs have provided the most effective form of language education during recent decades (Berthold, 1991, 1995 a ; Clyne, Jenkins, Chen, Tsokalida, & Walker, 1995 ; Hughes, 1996 ; Krashen, 1999 ; Lotherington, 2000 ; Smedley & Gofton, 1999). The model for many modern immersion programs was originally developed in Canada in 1965, when English-speaking parents living in French Quebec established immersion classes in order to promote their children's bilingual ability (Lotherington, 2000). The immersion programs involving native English-speaking children undertaking their schooling in French aimed "to achieve maximum language proficiency, and, ideally, to achieve bilingualism" (Berthold, 1991, p. 26) and were regarded as highly effective in terms of the results they achieved (Berthold, 1991 ; Hughes, 1996).

Australia also has an extended history of bilingual education programs. There

were as many as sixty English / German bilingual schools operated by the Lutheran church in 1916, and the Australian-born children attending these schools were reported as successfully achieving bilingual competence (Kynoch, 1993). However, the German programs were soon abandoned on account of the First World War, and the foreign language education program in Australia subsequently reverted to traditional teaching methods which were not focused on learning a language for communicative purposes (Berthold, 1995 a). Modern forms of bilingual programs commenced more recently in Australian primary schools in 1981 (Fernadez, 1995), and in 1985 the first secondary school immersion program was launched in Queensland (Berthold, 1995 c). The Australian immersion programs have also been regarded as successful in terms of the language outcomes achieved, and as a consequence immersion education is now firmly established in many Languages Other Than English (LOTE) programs in Australian schools.

Immersion programs tend to take a variety of forms in different institutions, with different versions being offered according to the resources that can be allocated to this purpose by each school. The critical factors in achieving bilingual proficiency appear to include how early the immersion program is commenced, and the proportion of the school curriculum provided in the alternative language (Berthold, 1991). Common forms of bilingual education provided in the Australian LOTE programs include immersion classes in alternative subjects (e. g., Maths, Social Science, Music) for three to five hours per week, and partial immersion programs in which at least 50% of the education program is presented in the LOTE (see : Berthold, 1995 c). Based on the different versions of immersion programs currently available, immersion education is generally classified in terms of two primary areas. First, the stage of commencement during elementary school is indicated according to three categories :

EARLY IMMERSION — beginning in Kindergarten or Year 1

DELAYED (MIDDLE, INTERMEDIATE) IMMERSION— beginning somewhere midway through primary school

LATE IMMERSION — beginning in Year 6 or 7

Second, the proportion of the school subjects taught in the target language (TL) is also indicated according to two categories :

FULL IMMERSION— which entails the teaching of all subjects of the school's curriculum in the TL

PARTIAL IMMERSION— where not all subjects are taught in the TL

(Berthold, 1991, p. 26)

Immersion programs are consequently differentiated according to a description involving the two primary factors, for example as "a delayed partial immersion program" or "an early full immersion program," so as to accurately represent the version of immersion education being provided in programs at different institutions.

Benefits of Immersion Programs

Research studies have found that immersion schooling provides major benefits over traditional methods of language education. Early studies of immersion programs found that : "The success of Canadian early immersion programs is demonstrated by evaluations which show pupils performing better in all skills than cohorts taking 'normal' second language programs, with no (or hardly any) deficit in cognitive or subject skills or in English" (Clyne, 1983, p. 6). Clyne provides more detail about the types of learning outcomes being achieved during his

discussion of an early partial immersion program in German which was provided at a Melbourne school. The immersion students developed "significantly superior" listening comprehension skills as well as higher levels of speaking skills with their language production being "more fluent" and "more creative in their use of German" (Clyne, 1983, p. 9). The students also demonstrated improved pronunciation and "far more advanced" grammatical knowledge compared to learners in the traditional language programs (p. 10). Practically no language attrition occurred during the vacation periods, and the language improvement was achieved more consistently by classes of students (p. 10), as compared to the higher degree of individual variation evident in regular language programs which appears to be more closely related to the students' language acquisition abilities.

The National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia (NLLIA) reviewed the Canadian research on immersion education prior to introducing bilingual education programs in Australia. The Chief Executive of the NLLIA, Joseph Lo Bianco, discusses the implications of the early immersion research for Australian education programs: "By the early 1970s it had become clear that the experiments in immersion were producing very important educational gains: the 'immersed' children were significantly superior to matched groups of other English background learners in their acquisition and use of French" (Lo Bianco, 1995, p. 1). Subsequent research projects investigating the effects of immersion programs in a range of contexts have repeatedly confirmed the positive reports on immersion education, as well as finding substantial additional benefits including: "a greater level of student motivation and higher results for *all* students" (Hughes, 1996, p. 16). Studies have also recently examined the factors underlying the improved learning outcomes achieved by immersion programs:

Since the mid-1970s research has consistently confirmed the success of

immersion methodologies and begun to explain the reasons for this success. Among these reasons are straightforward matters such as the much greater amount of exposure to the language that immersion programs offer learners. There are also more complex factors involved such as the nature and types of linguistic interactions called for in these programs which make the target language the medium as well as the message. The interactions and the focus on messages rather than linguistics form also assist the mastery of the target language. (Lo Bianco, 1995, p. 1)

The effects of the different types of immersion programs being offered particularly in Canadian schools have also now been investigated. The results of these studies provide specific feedback on the learning outcomes that are likely to be achieved in the different versions of immersion programs, which is extremely useful to schools planning or considering implementing bilingual programs in future years. A summary of the major findings on the different forms of immersion program is provided by Clyne et al :

The evaluations of the Canadian programs have shown overwhelmingly that :

1. children perform better in all L2 skills than comparable children in traditional second language programs ;
2. total immersion students outperform partial immersion students ;
3. early immersion students perform better than those who have been in late immersion programs ; and
4. there are no long-term adverse effects on either the English or the subject skills imparted in L2 (Clyne et al, 1995, p. 10)

Applications of Immersion Teaching in Japan

The successful results achieved by immersion programs in other countries suggest that immersion education could also have potential applications in Japan. The primary advantage of immersion teaching over traditional forms of language education involves the major increase in the amount of comprehensible input provided in the target language, which appears to result in substantially improved learning outcomes being achieved by the majority of students taking immersion classes. However, the likely impact of new education techniques should always be evaluated prior to implementation in different learning contexts, and there are also a number of issues that should be addressed in relation to the situation in Japan. The limited resources typically allocated to foreign language education programs, for example, suggests that full immersion programs are unlikely to become commonplace in Japan in the near future. Consequently, we will concentrate our ensuing discussion on considering the potential benefits that could be provided by developing partial immersion programs in Japanese schools.

The number of classes taken each week in the target language in partial immersion programs appears to be critical to the results achieved, with higher numbers of classes providing the most beneficial results (Clyne et al, 1995). There may also be a minimum threshold level of classes required to be taken for partial immersion programs to be considered successful. One source has suggested a minimum number of two hours of immersion instruction per week in order to ensure that positive results are achieved: "Less than two hours per week exposure to the target language may provide some benefits but will have very limited language outcomes" (Catholic Education Office, 1998, p. 21). We believe that an immersion system involving at least five hours of immersion instruction per week would be significantly more effective and could be effectively introduced in Japan

without requiring major changes in school programs. Rather, the immersion subjects should be selected on the basis of being subjects that can be effectively taught in a foreign language, so that the immersion students can achieve the same learning outcomes in those subjects as students in standard (non-immersion) programs.

Another critical question to be considered involves the appropriate time for commencement of immersion education in the Japanese school system. While the Ministry of Education is currently in the process of adopting immersion trials in some secondary schools across Japan, research suggests that more effective results can be achieved by providing partial immersion programs that start during the early years of primary school. The best results have currently been achieved by early immersion programs commencing at the Kindergarten or Year 1 primary level (Clyne et al, 1995), although it is not clear whether such a system could be effectively introduced in Japan without requiring major restructuring of the present education system. Although foreign languages are sometimes introduced at the elementary school level in Japan, languages more typically become serious subjects for study at the middle school level. While late immersion programs have been shown to be effective overseas, they have tended to commence in the final years of elementary school rather than during middle school. Further research consequently needs to be done to establish the extent to which delaying immersion education until middle school will negatively impact the learning outcomes. Given the higher competition for curriculum resources at the middle school level, it is clearly significant to also consider whether it may be more appropriate to develop foreign language programs at the elementary school level.

There are also issues concerning the form of teaching methodology required in immersion education programs. Foreign languages are commonly taught in Japan using a traditional grammar-translation methodology through the first language,

whereas immersion education requires more direct exposure to the target language and communicative teaching methods. While Japanese students typically gain exposure to communicative language teaching methods through native speaker Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs), the quantity of communicative language instruction provided in the school program prior to university entrance is usually very limited. As a consequence of the current teaching methodology, the students develop skills primarily in reading English and translating sentences into Japanese. They also achieve a basic knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, but appear to expend considerable energy during their secondary education preparing for university entrance examinations rather than learning to communicate in the foreign language. The standards of linguistic attainment that are expected of the students are also relatively high, so that many secondary students are required to supplement their regular education by attending cram schools in order to boost their English scores for the purpose of gaining entry into preferred universities. Consequently, in the current context of foreign language education in Japan, there appears to be major reforms necessary to both school programs and to the teaching methodologies that are employed for foreign language instruction. It is also likely that the reforms required to achieve beneficial results from immersion programs could be considered by some schools to be major as well as difficult to implement with limited resources (both in terms of staffing and financial resources).

While the most effective immersion results in recent decades have been achieved in Canada, major differences are evident between the language learning contexts in Japan and Canada. In Canada, for example, French is one of the two official languages, whereas in Japan English is a foreign language. On this account, the learning context in Japan more closely resembles the situation in Australia, where a single official language is dominant. Similarities have consequently been drawn between the foreign language environments in Japan and

Australia, which suggest that the results achieved in immersion programs in Australia would be relevant to the effects that are likely to occur in Japan. For example, Berthold argues that learner motivation is a critical factor in any foreign language program. In one research study, he found that the Australian students lacked an appropriate level of motivation to effectively learn a foreign language because of geographical and linguistic isolation (Berthold, 1989). Similar reasons for low motivation also clearly impact the results achieved by Japanese students when they are studying foreign languages, as many teachers are familiar with the general disinterest shown by some students in learning a foreign language. Poor learning outcomes achieved by traditional education programs were also cited by Berthold as a major factor in the introduction of a partial late French immersion program in Queensland in 1985, which commenced on the basis of: "disappointment, with both the traditional approach to language learning and with the low levels of language acquisition of the students" (1989, p. 13). A similar rationale for introducing new language teaching methods could be applied to the present situation in Japan since the traditional approach to language education has been recognized as providing unsatisfactory results, often on account of the prevailing teaching methodology.

The results achieved by primary school immersion programs in Australia consequently appear to be worthy of consideration in relation to the possibility of developing similar programs in Japan. Successful learning outcomes, for example, were achieved in a delayed immersion program at Newton Primary School in South Australia, where the following subjects were studied in Italian in the Year 2/3 class: Oral Language (morning talks), Maths, Written Language, Social Studies, Health, Reading, and Spelling (Languages and Multicultural Unit, 1992). Classes were also provided in Italian at the Year 4/5 level in the same immersion program in: Oral Language, Maths, Spelling, Written Language, Social Studies, and

Reading. The teaching team used in this immersion program consisted of a class teacher, a bilingual teacher, and a bilingual assistant (Languages and Multicultural Unit, 1992). It would appear likely that similar immersion programs could be effective if they were introduced in primary schools in Japan. Specific subjects on the school curriculum (e. g., Physical Education, Maths, Science, Art, Music, Social Studies) could be effectively taught in a foreign language with no detriment to the students' learning in those subjects, based on the experience of the immersion systems implemented in other countries. The teaching team used in the Newton Primary School program also seems to be an effective use of teaching resources that could be effectively introduced in Japan.

In summary, it is likely that improved foreign language learning outcomes could be achieved in Japan if immersion education programs were studied in other countries and similar systems devised to match the needs of the Japanese learning context. While there are differences apparent in the situations in different countries, the relative success of the immersion programs in other countries and the present results being achieved in foreign languages in Japan suggest that benefits could be derived by adopting techniques currently used in the overseas programs. However, it is also necessary to consider the significance of differences in the learning contexts and to evaluate whether it is possible for immersion methods to be successfully applied in the Japanese education system. In the next section of this paper, we consequently consider problems with immersion programs that have been encountered in some learning contexts and discuss whether similar effects are likely to occur in Japanese schools.

Limitations of Immersion Education Programs

Problem areas have been identified in immersion programs overseas that could

have a significant impact on similar programs in Japan. A number of areas relate to the effectiveness of language acquisition processes generally, while others relate to problems encountered in implementing immersion programs in specific contexts. We next consider these areas more closely with particular reference to whether similar effects are likely to impede the learning outcomes achieved in immersion programs in Japan.

The Effectiveness of Language Acquisition

A number of major factors have been identified in the success of the language acquisition occurring during immersion education programs. These factors are often significant to language acquisition processes generally, and become of increased importance in immersion programs that are aiming to accelerate the acquisition process.

Language Distance

Language distance between the native language (L1) and the foreign language (L 2) being studied has long been recognised as a major factor in second language acquisition. Languages that are similar in structure and form are more rapidly acquired than languages that are dissimilar in form, so that language distance is a major factor in second language acquisition. In relation to the current research on immersion programs, the highly successful results found in the Canadian programs have been achieved between two languages (English and French) that are closely related. French and English are cognate languages and consequently share related forms, vocabulary, and usage. By contrast, it is significant that the situation in Japan more often involves languages that have high distance (e. g., Japanese and English) and are entirely different. Hence it is necessary to question the degree to which the Canadian results are likely to be replicated in Japan. It is even possible

that, since acquisition processes are somewhat different between cognate and non-cognate languages, the success of the Canadian immersion programs could be considered irrelevant to the implementation of immersion programs in Japan, although this conclusion is likely to be overstating the significance of language distance as just one factor occurring in the highly complex process of language acquisition.

Language distance is regarded as a major factor contributing to the success of immersion programs in Australia. Berthold, for example, recognises the difficulty of high language distance when he comments that more successful immersion programs involve languages "that have a linguistic kinship with English to facilitate the transfer of information to the students" (1989, p. 14). In a subsequent study, he argues that content instruction should only be provided at an early stage in immersion programs featuring similar languages, and that language proficiency should instead first be developed in the case of programs involving dissimilar languages :

> I shall go on record as saying that one can teach some content areas in Germanic and Romance languages from day 1, but that this would not be possible in languages such as Korean, Japanese and Chinese, without the students having achieved a basic proficiency in the language before they begin their content studies. (Berthold, 1995 b, p. 259)

The differentiation between immersion programs involving cognate languages (e. g., English and French) and non-cognate languages (e. g., Japanese and English) is clearly significant to the situation in Japan. However, Berthold suggests that immersion programs involving non-cognate languages can still achieve successful results, although they require more intensive language support and cannot proceed as

directly to stages of content instruction. The initial stages of immersion education in Japanese / English programs should consequently be focused on establishing basic language proficiency to provide a communicative foundation for content instruction at later stages in the program.

The significance of language distance to the success of second language acquisition has also been recognised in relation to the demands of different literacy systems. Lotherington (2000, p. 22) argues that while specific languages are not intrinsically more difficult to learn than other languages, higher distance from the native language accounts for relative difficulty. Referring to the Australian context, she suggests that intensive preparation is required in the area of literacy support in the early stages of programs involving non-cognate languages :

> Factoring in Chinese or Japanese literacy as an essential component of a content -based bilingual program will require more language and literacy preparation than will the same program in a related Indo-European language written in the Roman alphabet, such as German or Danish. (2000, p. 69)

The results of research into the acquisition of different second languages are also relevant to the development of immersion programs in Japan. Brown, Hill, and Iwashita (2000), for example, undertook a comparative study of Year 8 Australian learners of French, Indonesian, Italian, and Japanese. They found that the productive skills (speaking, writing) were highest for the students learning Indonesian, and lowest for the children studying Japanese : "Levels of achievement are typically lower on all skills in Japanese than on the other three languages" (p. 55). It is likely that these findings are related to the higher language distance between English and Japanese. The results also strongly suggest that research into immersion programs involving English and French cannot be directly applied to

programs involving English and Japanese, since the learning outcomes are likely to be negatively impacted to a substantial degree by the higher language distance. Languages with high distance (e. g., English and Korean, Japanese, and Chinese) typically involve major differences in grammar and vocabulary, as well as the complete dissimilarity in orthographic representation. It also appears likely that high language distance acts to impede learning in both directions, so that immersion classes in English for Japanese-speakers are likely to involve similar difficulties to immersion classes in Japanese for English-speakers. While Japanese learners of English would not experience as much difficulty as English learners of Japanese in decoding the written system on account of the greater orthographic complexity of Japanese, the difficulties in grammar and vocabulary acquisition are likely to be similar in both situations.

Relative language distance also clearly affects the choice of subjects provided in immersion programs. Berthold argues that in the Australian programs, "the further from English the L2, the more restricted is the choice of subjects you could reasonably expect to make comprehensible to the students" (1995 b, p. 262). He concludes that the best subjects are those which "are easiest to demonstrate physically, graphically or symbolically" (p. 262). Due to the higher language distance in programs involving English and Japanese, it follows that a more restricted range of subjects should be offered than immersion programs involving cognate languages.

Language Transfer

A factor which is related to language distance and also has a significant bearing on language acquisition processes is the effect of language transfer between the L1 and L2. Languages which are similar have common features that can be recognised from knowledge of the native language, and as a consequence acquisition can occur

more rapidly through transfer of the similar features. However, language transfer may also result in negative effects (referred to as 'interference'), which occur when students incorrectly deduce L2 forms based on knowledge of the L1. Language transfer is hence usually discussed in terms of both 'positive' and 'negative' effects. Languages which are essentially dissimilar (i. e., have high distance) do not receive the benefit of positive transfer.

The effects of language transfer are one area where the processes of second language acquisition differ markedly from the processes of first language acquisition. Immersion programs are also likely to encounter various transfer effects, although the extent of transfer depends on the nature of the languages being studied. In the case of immersion education involving closely related languages, the more frequent occurrence of positive transfer is likely to assist the development of language proficiency. In the Canadian immersion programs, for example, the English-speaking students were found to positively transfer linguistic forms from English into French (Lapkin & Swain, 2004). Similar transfer effects have been found to occur in other immersion programs. The proximity of German and English is illustrated in an example of Year One structures for students in an Australian immersion program: "Q: Wie ist das Wetter im Winter? ('What is the weather like in winter?')" (Tisdell, 1999, p. 28). By contrast, it is likely that the acquisition of unrelated languages will not benefit from transfer, and this suggests that generalisations about the success of immersion programs based on cognate languages cannot be directly applied to non-cognate languages. It also appears likely that positive transfer effects will not occur between English and Japanese since the vocabulary is dissimilar and the word order is also divergent.

Negative transfer effects have been observed to occur in some immersion programs. Transfer of English pronunciation to written German occurred in an early immersion program in Australia at the Year 4 level. The students

demonstrated good German communication skills during the first three years of the program (prior to the introduction of literacy), but Tisdell describes "regressive language behaviour" as occurring at the Year 4 level :

> They tend to use English pronunciation patterns when they see words and sentences written in German .... Perhaps because of their concentration on mastering English reading skills, their English pronunciation and English reading patterns inhibit the correct recall of German. Recall based on aural intake does not appear to fit any longer into Year 4 learning styles when reading and writing in German. As a result, interviews with Year 4 learners show that they prefer to revert to those German words and phrases that they learnt *before* they tried to read and write German. (1999, p. 30)

In this situation, the influence of first language literacy appears to have inhibited second language acquisition, and a similar effect may occur in Japanese programs where katakana is likely to impede the acquisition of English pronunciation. The significance of negative transfer effects from first language literacy deserves to be investigated further in relation to the acquisition of foreign languages in Japanese immersion programs.

Language Input

The increased language input provided in immersion programs has been shown to provide significantly improved learning outcomes over other forms of language education. However, some criticisms have been made in relation to the nature of the input provided in these programs. First, the additional volume of language input delivered in these programs appears to have limitations. Immersion programs, for example, do not match the language input or the depth of interactions that are

obtained by students experiencing a homestay situation in the second language. Researchers studying the French immersion programs in Canada observed the superior results achieved by homestay students and comment that: "The difference may reflect the fact that families provide a richer and more intense opportunity to learn the language than FSL [French as a Second Language] programs where non-native speakers from the same language background are grouped together and interact frequently together" (Uritescu, Mougeon, Rehner, & Nadasdi, 2004, p. 352). Uritescu et al. consequently emphasize the benefits of supplementing immersion programs with forms of extra-curricular exposure to French. It consequently appears that the increased language input provided in immersion programs cannot be expected to match the rich input associated with one-to-one interaction with native speakers, which occurs in homestay situations and overseas travel.

Another area where the language input in immersion programs has been questioned involves the superficial nature of discussions that are often achieved in the target language. In a study of a Year 7 Indonesian language immersion program in a secondary school in Melbourne, Read observes that it was "really not possible to have very valuable discussions of issues and ideas" (1999, p. 6). Furthermore, in contrast to the mainstream Indonesian class there was little discussion of socio-cultural issues, because the learning was focused instead on studying the relevant language forms. Read concludes that a discussion of Indonesian culture would require a higher level of proficiency than had been achieved in the immersion class. This observation appears to be consistent with Berthold (1995b), who argued that content instruction should only be provided after establishing a sufficient level of language proficiency to serve as a foundation for communication in the foreign language.

Issues with Program Implementation

Attrition Rates from Immersion Programs

One critical aspect of implementing immersion programs involves the high dropout rates that can occur in the early years of a program. In one study, the attrition rate from a French language early immersion program in Canada was estimated to be as high as one third of the students by the end of Grade 3 (MacCoubrey, Wade-Woolley, Klinger, & Kirby, 2004). High attrition rates have generally been explained in terms of the difficulties experienced by some students with academic skills (especially reading) in the early years of schooling. While a causal relationship between immersion programs and reading difficulties has not been established, some parents were concerned that the immersion program may have impeded the development of their children's academic skills. While this type of concern is highly significant to the families involved, lack of home support in the second language and the slower development of proficiency (relative to the first language) have been suggested as other likely causes for the high dropout rates occurring in the Canadian programs (Smedley & Gofton, 1999). The high attrition rates also clearly indicate that immersion programs cannot be perceived of as being universally beneficial, even in Canada where the most successful programs have been established.

Numbers of Skilled Teaching Personnel

Clyne (1983) discusses the importance of teachers having the requisite language skills to provide effective immersion education. He argues that teachers on immersion programs should have an adequate level of language proficiency, should be competent in the language area of their content subject, should be able to develop relevant curricula and materials, should be aware of current teaching methodologies, and should be able to liaise effectively with mainstream teachers. Indeed, since

immersion programs require teachers to have a higher level of language skills than standard language classes, the implementation of an immersion program may require the recruitment of additional teachers, although providing professional development for current teachers who already have expertise in the foreign language is another option. A successful staffing system developed in Australian primary schools has involved teachers working in collaboration with bilingual teaching assistants. The teachers maintain responsibility for the classes and are provided with a level of language support by the assistant. The teaching assistants, in turn, often lack the teaching expertise, professional training, or formal registration that is necessary to be employed as a language teacher, and can benefit from the teaching experience gained in actual classroom environments (Languages and Multicultural Unit, 1992).

Current Immersion Programs in Japan

Immersion education has been implemented at a number of schools in Japan, with some programs now being firmly established. One English language early immersion program has been operating since 1992 at Katoh Gakuen, which is described as a hybrid immersion program (Bostwick, 2001). At this school, a form of immersion has been developed between partial immersion (in which 50% of the course is taught in the foreign language) and full immersion, in which 100% of the course is taught in the foreign language (Bostwick, 2001). The advantage of this system is that it makes more allowance for differences in the English and Japanese writing systems than a full immersion program. Parents are informed about the immersion system and offered the choice whether to enrol their children in regular classes or in the immersion program. Between Years 1 and 3 all classes in the immersion program are taught in English apart from Japanese Language, Arts, and some music classes. The subjects taught in English from Year 4 are Maths,

Science, Physical Education, and Computer Skills. The school is formally accredited so that students in either program are eligible to enter Japanese universities upon graduation.

While full immersion programs involving cognate languages (e. g., French / English, Spanish / English) have been shown to cause no detriment to literacy skills in the native language, programs involving non-cognate languages may produce different results, particularly in the case of languages with orthographically unrelated scripts. However, a recent study conducted at Katoh Gakuen found that the English immersion students did not experience any impairment of Japanese literacy skills (Bostwick, 2001). This result appears to have been achieved by providing instruction in Japanese literacy from Year 1, rather than delaying instruction in Japanese literacy as typically occurs in a full immersion program. Indeed, it appears possible that Japanese written skills may have suffered if instruction had been delayed on account of the high distance between the two languages. Bostwick's conclusions concerning the form of hybrid immersion program developed at Katoh Gakuen are consequently encouraging :

> The results of the study would suggest that the intensive immersion experience develops much higher levels of second language ability in students with less emotional stress and more personal enjoyment than a typical 'drip feed' foreign language class that meets only once or twice a week. (2001, p. 301)

The results of another immersion program are also worthy of consideration. Takagaki and Tanabe (2004) provide an account of content-based English instruction in two courses (Home Economics, Politics and Economics) provided at Onomichi Higashi High School in 2002. These courses were offered as fifty minute lessons eleven times a week in the second semester, and supported with the equivalent time

of lessons in Japanese. This type of content-based program is probably unique in Japan in that it was taught by non-native speakers of English ; the Home Economics course was taught by a Filipino teacher and an Indonesian assistant, and the Politics and Economics course was taught by a Dutch teacher. Interestingly, the students' satisfaction and listening comprehension was much higher for the Home Economics course (73.9% and 70.8%) than the Politics and Economics course (55.4% and 49.5%), and the authors attribute this result to the benefit of "hands-on experience" which the students enjoyed in the former course. Takagaki and Tanabe (2004) consequently argue that content-based instruction is better suited to courses with "less cognitive load" (p. 70). Content-based instruction delivered in partial immersion programs certainly appears to be more suited to practical subjects with a high rate of student involvement. However, the brevity of the course may also have contributed to the low level of listening comprehension. The Catholic Education Office (1998) has argued that less than two hours a week of content-based instruction is an insufficient basis for achieving language outcomes in primary schools, an argument which is likely to be relevant to similar programs at high schools. Perhaps the satisfaction and listening comprehension of the students at Onomichi Higashi High School would have improved if there had been more time devoted to the course, both in terms of the number of hours per week and extending the duration of the course over several years.

Immersion programs have also recently been established at a number of other schools in Japan, although it is generally too early to determine the results of these programs. One program commenced in April 2004 at Tokyo Jogakkan, a junior and secondary private school for girls (Luyckx, 2004). Over half the students in the international class are returnees. Immersion classes are offered in the following subjects : English, Home Economics, Art, Physical Education, and Music. The other subjects at Tokyo Jogakkan (including Japanese, Maths, Social Studies, and

Science) are taught according to a standard Japanese program. Another English immersion program commenced at Gunma Kokusai Academy in April 2005, in the city of Ota. This school has been designated by the government as a Special Educational Zone and will offer English immersion classes from Years 1 to 12 in all classes other than Japanese. Immersion English classes have also been offered at Linden Hall Elementary School since 2004, and immersion Chinese is currently being offered at the Yokohama Overseas Chinese School (Parents more keen, 2005). In all of these situations early immersion programs are being trialled at private schools, and it will be interesting to observe the results of these programs in future years. If immersion education is successful at these schools, early immersion could be more extensively introduced throughout the public school system in Japan, as is the current practice in Australia.

Further Issues for Immersion in Japan

Language Acquisition by Immersion Students

Students in immersion programs are likely to develop greater proficiency with greater ease and enjoyment than those in traditional language programs. However, research has also shown that there are limitations to their level of language acquisition. It appears unlikely, for example, that students will develop into balanced bilinguals on the basis of an immersion program without additional forms of language support. Canadian studies indicate that the students in immersion programs outperformed students in traditional language programs, but usually did not achieve native-speaker standard in the immersion language since they tended to make significantly more frequent grammatical mistakes. Hence the expectations of the outcomes for immersion students in Japan should be in line with what has been achieved in similar programs overseas.

Mixed native-like and non-native results were observed in an early partial immersion program in French at a Melbourne primary school (De Courcy, Burston, & Warren, 1999). French instruction was provided for 40% of the classes taken, with the following subjects being taught in French: Maths, Physical Education, and Art. Many of the Year 2 children achieved native-like pronunciation, but were non-native in areas of their language production including gender agreement and the use of English word order (p. 17). De Courcy et al. conclude that:

> Many scholars have advocated a return to a focus on form in the language classroom. We can only recommend that this trend in language teaching in general and immersion teaching in particular be considered by teachers and time be set aside, on the one hand to focus on form and on the other to work a little more with written French. (1999, p. 19)

Some teachers involved in immersion education have voiced concerns about the types of errors made by the students which support the call for an increased focus on form to be provided in the classroom. Denise Gofton, a teacher of immersion French in Canada, contends that despite the students having a wide vocabulary "their sentence structure was quite bizarre" (Smedley & Gofton, 1999, p. 20). Furthermore, "[t]hey still make the same basic errors over and over again, no matter how many times they have things explained, and because they often create their own way of expressing something, they see little need to learn the rules" (p. 23). These observations appear to be indicative of the significance of a lack of peer support from native speakers, since the teacher appears to be an insufficient source of language input.

It is also important that immersion programs do not automatically produce higher proficiency than mainstream classes, since factors in the implementation of a

program appear to also be critical to the results achieved. An Australian study of late partial immersion in Indonesian indicated an advantage of the immersion students in subject content over the control group, but no advantage in relation to their skills in being able to communicate in Indonesian (Read, 1999). Read attributes the lack of increased communicative ability to missing features in the immersion program considered to be important for successful late partial immersion :

- prior knowledge of the language
- an intensive introductory period
- a generous proportion of instruction time in the target language ...
- encouragement of output
- focus on form-meaning relationships, i. e. learning *about* the language as well as learning *through* the language (p. 9)

Two other issues are relevant to the language acquisition achieved by immersion students in Japan. First, the extent of transfer effects between a child's literacy skills in immersion programs has not yet been firmly established. Studies in the area of bilingual education have determined that literacy skills tend to transfer between a bilingual child's languages and that literacy instruction in the child's first language provides positive transfer to literacy skills in the second language (Krashen, 1999). These findings suggest that partial immersion programs in orthographically related systems such as Chinese and Korean are likely to experience significant positive transfer. However, positive transfer effects have also been shown to apply to orthographically unrelated languages (Wagner, Spratt, & Ezzaki, 1989). Hence, rather than detracting from first language proficiency, immersion education could possibly enhance literacy skills in the case of both cognate and non-cognate languages.

There also appears to be a direct relationship between the amount of time spent in the immersion classroom and the linguistic benefits, with increased hours of immersion resulting in improved learning outcomes. Genesse (cited in Hughes, 1996) has consequently argued that full immersion programs are superior to half-day programs in which the two languages are used over the course of the day. Furthermore, fluency in the LOTE is more likely to be developed if the same language is used during break times with friends. However, it is questionable whether the same conclusions can be applied to the learning situation in Japan, where there are fewer children per capita of different ethnic backgrounds, and significantly more class time is required to be devoted to learning the character based Japanese literacy system. It appears that in the case of Japanese native speakers, acquisition of the first language cannot afford to be either delayed or neglected in the pursuit of second language skills.

Choice of Immersion Language

English is the most commonly studied foreign language in Japan based on its current significance as an international language. It is also significant that English is no longer simply a means of communication with native English speakers, since the global number of non-native speakers of English now outnumbers the number of native speakers (Jenkins, 2000). Since English has become a common language for communication between people from many countries, it is evident that English skills are useful for Japanese in a range of contexts. The significance of English as an international language has also been recognised at an official level in Japan, and in the *Prime Minister's Commission on Japan's Goals in the 21st Century,* it was proposed that English should be adopted as a second official language in Japan (Matsuura, Fujieda, & Mohoney, 2004).

Despite the current trend towards globalization, a number of disadvantages have

been identified with adopting English as an international language. Foremost, English is not truly a neutral means of communication, even though it is the only language approaching a lingua franca in the present age : "Like 'global English', the notion that English serves as a *neutral* lingua franca is a dangerous myth. Natives and non-natives do not perform on a level playing field" (Phillipson, 2002, p. 14). However, while adopting English as an international language is clearly to the disadvantage of Japan because of the high language distance from Japanese, the adoption of a "neutral lingua franca" would require the development and establishment of a new language system, and such a step appears unlikely in the current global environment. Phillipson also argues that the promotion of English as an international language serves the vested interests of the countries where English is spoken as a native language. One of the present goals of the English as an International Language movement is consequently to dissociate it from the culture of native English speakers. And given the increasing importance being attached to English in Japan, it is unlikely that the current position of English as the predominant foreign language will change in the near future.

However, there is also a case for arguing that several different languages should be offered in immersion programs at Japanese schools, as currently occurs in Australia. Japan's domestic needs and geographic location in Asia, for example, suggest that the development of foreign language skills in Chinese, Korean, Russian, or Indonesian would be highly useful. This direction would be determined not solely on the obvious trade benefits that could be achieved, but there are also various political purposes for engaging with Japan's neighbours in their own languages. Hence an alternative path to accepting the predominance of English as an international language would involve recognizing the importance of the languages of Japan's neighbouring countries. A similar rationale for program development has recently been employed in Australian schools. Since Australia is located in the Asia

-Pacific region, the study of LOTE in Australia has been focused on Chinese (Mandarin), Indonesian, Japanese, and Korean. Previously the choice of foreign languages in Australian schools was largely based on economic reasons, but more recently there has been a move to stress cultural and educational factors because of the need for engagement with neighbouring countries (National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools Taskforce, 1998). A similar direction could hence be determined for Japan, particularly given its proximity to a number of countries with other languages. Furthermore, the study of several alternative languages in schools would serve to bolster Japan's present linguistic resources by affirming and developing the linguistic skills of minority and bicultural children currently resident in Japan.

Conclusions

The most successful models for bilingual education programs have been provided in Canada, although few countries can reproduce the learning environment found there. The optimal situation appears to involve immersion schooling occurring in the context of an officially bilingual country where considerable advantages to attaining a high level of bilingualism are apparent. Also the distance between the native language and the immersion language appears to be critical to the learning outcomes achieved. The French immersion programs in Canada are attended by English-speaking children, so it is likely that a high level of positive transfer occurs on account of the close relationship between the two languages. While it is important to learn from the Canadian experience of immersion education, more similarities appear to exist between Japan and Australia in their situations as foreign language education contexts. Japan and Australia, for example, both have a single dominant language (compared to Canada being an officially bilingual

country）and as a consequence significantly lower levels of motivation tend to occur in students undertaking foreign language study.

Japan is currently in the fortunate position of being able to benefit from research on immersion programs undertaken in Australian learning contexts. Given the significance of the language distance between Japanese and English, the most relevant immersion programs in Australia would also involve high distance languages. Research on Japanese language immersion programs provided at Australian schools would appear to be closely relevant to the learning situation in Japan, although allowances should be made for the significantly more complex orthography of written Japanese. Immersion schooling in English provided in Japanese contexts is likely to infringe on the lengthier time needed to establish Japanese literacy skills as well as academic skills in other subjects, and as a consequence fewer resources are likely to be allocated to immersion programs in Japan. Partial immersion programs are probably more appropriate in Japanese schools, although the learning outcomes and attainment levels will not be as high as those achieved in the full immersion programs established in Canada.

The choice of subjects for immersion education also appears to be critical in achieving successful learning outcomes. Berthold recommends specific subjects for immersion education, according to the rationale that concrete（rather than abstract）subjects are more highly accessible through a foreign language :

> What one could very quickly lead into would be those subjects which are the most easily demonstrated or are quite symbolic, such as Mathematics, Physical Education, Visual Arts, Manual Arts, etc. More linguistically complex content areas would gradually be introduced into the program as the students' linguistic competence increases.（1995 a, p. 259）

The immersion program currently being provided by Tokyo Jogakkan is based on a similar rationale and consequently appears to be a good model for bilingual education in Japan, with the following subjects being offered in immersion classes : English, Home Economics, Art, Physical Education, and Music.

It will be interesting to view the results of other immersion programs recently implemented in Japan. Depending on these results, it is possible that partial immersion programs will be adapted on a larger scale in Japanese schools in the future, and eventually even replace the present traditional methods of language instruction. Forms of immersion programs should also be developed to address specific areas and to supplement any known weaknesses in learning outcomes (e. g., grammatical knowledge). While immersion programs also tend to be limited in the level of language attainment, their results are clearly preferable to the current form of mainstream language education being practised in Japan. It would also appear to be beneficial to maintain a focus on form in foreign language education programs, but traditional grammar study would be more effectively combined with the considerably greater amount of meaningful input that can be achieved with immersion education.

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