

A BILINGUAL'S LINGUISTIC SKILLS AND LANGUAGE DOMINANCE : A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

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Abstract

This paper presents a case study of a Japanese/English bilingual with the purpose of determining the subject's (Natsuko) dominant language. To achieve this goal and over a period of three months, a number of tests (the Stroop procedure, a cloze test, among others) are conducted to evaluate the subject's proficiency in syntax, semantics, reading comprehension, pronunciation, and formal and informal style of language use. The paper concludes with a discussion about the nature of Natsuko's bilingual behavior, and it provides implications for language testing in classroom setting.

İKİDİLLİLİK BECERİSİ VE HAKİM DİL: AÇIKLAMALI BİR ÇALIŞMA

Öz

Bu makale, iki dilli (Japonca ve İngilizce) bir yetişkinin (Natsuko) dilinin daha baskın olduğunu tespit etmek amacıyla yapılmış olan bir durum çalışmasını sunmaktadır. Bu amaçla, Natsuko'nun cümle yapısı, anlam bilgisi, okuma-anlama, sesletim, resmi-gayri resmi dil kullanımı açılarından yeterliliği bir takım testler (Stroop yöntemi, çıkartmalı sınav gibi) kullanılarak ölçülmüştür. Makale, Natsuko'nun iki dillilik davranışının niteliğini tartışarak sona erer ve sınıf ortamında dil yeterliliğinin ölçülmesiyle ilgili bir takım göstergeler sunar.

1. Introduction

Did you wake up one day and feel that you are unable to use your second/foreign language as you used to in the previous day? Did you feel tongue-tied and could not remember simple words when talking in your second language? Well, you are not alone. This could happen to not only less fluent but also to the most competent users of a second/foreign language. As Romaine (1989) reports, this phenomenon is usually referred to as language dominance. One way to understand language dominance is by describing the linguistic skills of a bilingual. This paper presents a description of the linguistic skills and language use patterns of a Japanese/English bilingual in order to delve into her linguistic ability and determine her dominant language. It focuses on the subject's (Natsuko) linguistic skills in English since (1) the researcher's knowledge of the Japanese language is limited and since (2) the main focus of the paper is on the dominance of the bilingual's foreign language over her native language or vice-versa.

The paper first gives an overview of Natsuko's sociological background and linguistic skills. Second, it discusses the domains of her language use both in Japan and in the United States in order to have a clear idea about her linguistic skills. Then it uses a number of tests in order to determine the bilingual's proficiency in syntax, semantics, reading comprehension, pronunciation, and style of language use. The paper concludes with a discussion about the nature of Natsuko's bilingualism and suggests implications for language testing.

2. Method of analysis

Two types of methods are used in this paper to describe Natsuko's linguistic skills and determine her dominant language: (1) ethnography and elicitation technique and (2) testing.

On the one hand, ethnographic and elicitation methods, such as interviews, self-report, and self-evaluation, are used to present an overview of Natsuko's sociological background and linguistic skills. Where and how did she acquire English and Japanese? Which language does she consider to be her mother tongue? What are the other languages or varieties known by her?

On the other hand, testing is used as an objective tool to measure Natsuko's linguistic proficiency in syntax, semantics, reading comprehension, pronunciation, and style of language use in order to determine her dominant language. For example, the Stroop procedure was used to assess her capability to "gate out" a language in a condition where the information in the stimulus was given in a similar or a different language. To provide further evidence for the subject's dominant language, the free word-association test was conducted. Also, a cloze test was utilized to evaluate her overall proficiency in English syntax and semantics. The same test was employed to detect the informant's text comprehension. Natsuko was asked to read aloud a short passage from a newspaper in English. Her reading was recorded and analyzed in order to establish some of the difficulties she faced in pronunciation. Some portions of her naturally occurring conversation were also recorded and analyzed for the same purpose. Finally, to evaluate her ability to perform in different levels of style in English, the subject was asked to answer some questions which require formal and informal answers according to the situations described in the questions.

3. The subject: Natsuko

3.1 Ethnographic profile

Natsuko is a Japanese female, who comes from a small town named Gunma, which is located in the center of Japan. She is 26 years old. She was born to a middle class family of native residents of Gunma. Her mother is a teacher at an elementary school, and her father is a public servant. She considers Japanese her

native language. Since Japan has 47 prefectures, Natsuko believes that there are at least 47 varieties of the Japanese language. She also adds that these varieties were not mutually intelligible a century ago, but thanks to literacy and mass media, as she states, they have become almost mutually intelligible. Natsuko asserts that she did not have any problems with the Standard Japanese Dialect (SJD) at school because her parents, and specifically her father, insisted on talking with her in SJD when she was a baby. With the exception of Okinawa dialect, which she finds difficult to follow, Natsuko affirms that she does not have any major problems in understanding Tokyo, Tohoku, or any other Japanese dialects.

Natsuko can be considered a “sequential bilingual” (Lightbown and Spada 1999: 3) since she started learning English in junior high school. She also regards English to be her second language because she specialized in English as an undergraduate student and studied it for a total of 16 years. When this study was conducted, Natsuko was a graduate student majoring in linguistics in North America. Hence, I did not have any problems in explaining the tests and the terms involved in them. Indeed, she was aware of the difference between a coordinate and a compound bilingual (see Grosjean 1982 and Romaine 1989) and considered herself a coordinate bilingual, as explained below.

3.2 Self-rating

To have a clearer idea about Natsuko's linguistic competence in Japanese and English, she was asked to rate herself in both languages on a scale of five points. Natsuko's self-rating is summarized in table 1.

Table 1. The informant’s self-rating in Japanese and English.

SKILLS	LEVELS				
	Phonological	Grammatical	Lexical	Semantic	Stylistic
LISTENING					
Japanese	5	5	5	5	5
English	3	4	4	4	4
READING					
Japanese	5	5	5	5	5
English	(4)	5	4	3	4
SPEAKING					
Japanese	5	5	5	5	5
English	2	3	2	3	2
WRITING					
Japanese	5	5	5	5	5
English	5	5	4	4	3
Scale:	1. Poor	2. Fair	3. Good	4. Very good	5. Excellent

A simple calculation of Natsuko's rating of herself in Japanese shows that the total score in all the skills and levels adds up to (100), whereas in English it amounts to only (72) with a difference of (28) points in favor of her Japanese linguistic skills. It is, of course, possible that she may have exaggerated by giving herself full score in the Japanese language; however, such an assumption suggests that she thinks Japanese is her dominant language.

Significant also here is that Natsuko's self-rating in English demonstrates that her speaking skill rates the lowest among all the levels and skills. Note, for example, in grammatical knowledge she rates herself 5 in both reading and writing, 4 in listening, and 3 in speaking skills. Similarly, she rates her vocabulary level only 2 (fair) at the speaking skill, whereas she evaluates herself 4 (very good) at listening, reading, and writing skills. In fact, a horizontal look (table 1) at her self-rating in the speaking skill and in all the linguistic levels ranges only between 2 'fair' (in phonological, lexical, and stylistic levels) and 3 'good' (in grammatical and semantic levels). This demonstrates that she thinks her weakest proficiency area in English is at her productive skill of speaking.

What is problematic about self-rating, however, is that it depends partly on the bilingual's attitude towards his/her second language. Since Natsuko asserts that English is a beautiful language (positive attitude), her self-rating may suggest that she exaggerates in assessing her linguistic skills in it. This, however, does not seem to be the case here. A brief glance at her TOEFL score (table 2) would support this assumption.

Table 2. *The informant's TOEFL score*

Section	Score	Certified	Certified with honor
Listening Comprehension:	56	53	60
Structure & Written Expression:	65	53	60
Vocabulary & Reading Comprehension:	62	53	60
Total Score	603		

It is striking to see the similarity between Natsuko's self-rating and her score in an official international test. This resemblance suggests that rating herself the way she did is correct to a large extent if one assumes that the TOEFL score is accurate. What is problematic about TOEFL score, however, is that it does not assess an examinee's speaking skill, including pronunciation.

Natsuko's TOEFL score exhibits that she is relatively more competent in grammar (65) and vocabulary and reading comprehension (62) than in listening comprehension (56). However, her listening comprehension ability in English is

not low at all if one takes into consideration that an examinee that scores 53 in each section is eligible to obtain a certificate as proof of his or her proficiency in English from TOEFL testing headquarters. Furthermore, an examinee can obtain a document which is certified with honor if s/he scores 60 in each section, and Natsuko is almost qualified to get such a certificate.

In the remainder of this paper, Natsuko's domains of language use as well as the results of numerous tests are discussed in order to evaluate her communicative competence and language dominance.

4. Domains of language use

To obtain a good idea about the extent of Natsuko's involvement in using English in Japan, she was given a sheet of paper in which seven domains of language use were listed. She was requested to fill in the language used, with whom, and about what, as shown in table 3.

Table 3. *Domains of language use in Japan*

Domain	Language	Topic	Participants
Home	Japanese	Daily events	Parents & sister
	Japanese	My work	Parents & sister
	Japanese	My work	Guests & on the phone& English
Street	Japanese	Greetings	Neighbors
	Japanese	Just directions	Strangers
	English	Directions	Foreigners
Occupation	Japanese	What I'm teaching	Students
	Japanese	Current events	Colleagues (Japanese)
	English	Current events	Colleagues (Foreigners)
School	Japanese	My work	Teachers (Japanese)
	English	My work	Teachers (Foreigners)
Politics & Government	Japanese	Current affairs	Friends, Parents, and Colleagues
	English	Current affairs	Colleagues (Foreigners)
Religion	Japanese	Prayer & discussion	By myself, students, family
	English	Attitudes of Japanese towards religion	Colleagues (Foreigners)
Print & Mass media	Japanese	Talking about an article, a book or a movie	Family, friends, colleagues

Important in table 3 is that Natsuko had a very limited chance to practice her English with native English speakers in Japan. She adds that the number of native English teachers is one to twenty Japanese English teachers at her school. The domains in which English is used are noticeably very limited. Therefore, in

terms of language use, it is obvious that Natsuko employs Japanese more than English in Japan. In fact, a careful look at table 3 indicates strongly that Natsuko is a coordinate bilingual. For example, she employs English with foreigners only at formal contexts: in the street to give directions and at work to discuss politics, work, and religion. She, however, discusses the same topics with her Japanese colleagues using the Japanese language. In other words, her linguistic departmentalization is mainly influenced by her co-participants (foreigners versus Japanese) in conversational interaction. Furthermore, Natsuko learned English (at school, as indicated above) in a separate context than Japanese, a point that identifies a coordinate bilingual as first indicated by Lambert, Havelka, and Crosby (1958).

In contrast, Natsuko was asked to fill out table 3 as it applied to her in North America. This task is meant to examine her pattern of language shift in different domains from Japanese to English, if any. Her answers are summarized in table 4.

Table 4. *Domains of language use in the U.S.A*

Domains	Language	Topic	Participants
Home	English	Everyday activities	Roommate
	Japanese	Everyday activities	Friends on the phone
	& English		
Street	Japanese	My work	Family on the phone
	English	Everyday activities & Greetings	Neighbors & friends
Occupation	English	Directions, Small talk	Strangers.
	Japanese	Teaching materials	Students
School	Japanese	Topics about teaching	Colleagues
	English	Subjects	Professors
	& Japanese	Work/others issues	Friends in class
Politics & Government	English	Current affairs	Roommate, host family
	Japanese & English	Current affairs	Friends
Religion	English	Attitudes of Japanese people towards religion & religious events	Host family, roommate
Print & Mass Media	English	Talking about an article in <i>the Washington Post</i>	Roommate, friends.

As expected, table 4 proves that in the United States Natsuko utilizes English more frequently than Japanese, simply because she has more opportunities to interact with Americans. Japanese becomes restricted in her interaction to her family and Japanese friends. She uses Japanese mostly in the domain of occupation

because at the time of the study she was teaching Japanese to American students of Japanese descent. Hence, her pattern of language use shows that there is a shift from Japanese to English and that English dominates her Japanese. However, it is questionable if her communicative competence in English is dominant over her Japanese as well, an issue which is examined by utilizing both the Stroop procedure and the free word-association test in the next section.

5. Language dominance

So far, relatively subjective criteria have been applied to assess Natsuko's linguistic skills with the purpose of determining her dominant language. Still, interesting patterns of language use emerged through the elicitation technique, which is worth documenting. In what follows, objective tests will be employed to establish Natsuko's linguistic skills and dominant language.

Bloomfield (1933: 55) refers to bilingualism as the "native-like control of two languages." In fact, such bilinguals are rare, a point which led researchers to distinguish between balanced and unbalanced bilinguals. Unbalanced bilinguals usually refer to those individuals who are "more fluent or dominant in one language (Grosjean 1982: 233)" than the other. The Stroop procedure and the free word-association test are commonly applied to find out the dominant language of a bilingual.

5.1 The Stroop procedure

Romaine (1989: 89) reports that the Stroop procedure is frequently used as experimental evidence for the idea that "the input switch (is) hypothesized to be data-driven." This means that a bilingual cannot ignore the language in which s/he is addressed and that the response of the bilingual will be affected by the input stimulus.

To test the above hypothesis, Natsuko was given (1) a set of four color words in Japanese script and (2) another set of four color words in English. Each of the four color words was written in the color which corresponds to the referent of that color word. She was also given (1) six color words in English and (2) six color words in Japanese script in which each of these color words did not correspond to the referent of that color word. Also, four Japanese words, borrowed from English, and four English words were written in roman letters on separate cards. Having the cards shuffled, Natsuko was first asked to provide the color of the ink in which the color words and the other words were written. Second, she was requested to read what was written on the cards.

In the first task, Natsuko made three mistakes by naming different colors of the ink in which the color words were written. It is not surprising that these errors

were made with the colors which were written in English. This finding implies that she faces more difficult in "gating out" Japanese than English. It additionally provides evidence that she is more comfortable with Japanese than English, which consequently means that Japanese is her dominant language.

In the second task, Natsuko did not make any mistakes in reading what was written on the cards. However, she hesitated and took a longer time to switch from Japanese to English than vice-versa with a difference of about 2-4 seconds in each switch. Furthermore, she took less time to read the cards which were written in Japanese script (20 seconds) than those written in English alphabet (28 seconds). In other words, she was able to retrieve Japanese words more easily than English ones. Once again, these findings establish further evidence that Japanese is her dominant language and that she is not a balanced bilingual.

5.2 Free word-association test

The free word-association test constitutes one of the proficiency tests in which a bilingual is asked to utter as many words as possible in a limited time. The language in which the bilingual provides more words is judged to be the dominant language or the language in which s/he is most fluent. This test was administered on two levels: oral and written. The results of this task are summarized in table 5.

Table 5: *Results of the free word-association test*

Language	No. of words	Time
1. Japanese Written Kanji	11	60 seconds
2. Japanese Written Hiragana & Katakana	18	60 seconds
3. Japanese Oral test	31	60 seconds
4. English Written test	16	60 seconds
5. English Spoken test	20	60 seconds

Note, for example, in the written version of the free word-association test, Natsuko was able to write 11 words in Kanji Japanese writing system, which is fewer than what she wrote in English (16 words) within the same amount of time (60 seconds). When asked about the reason that she had fewer words in Kanji than in English, she replied, "It takes a longer time to write one word in Kanji than in English." Therefore, one cannot assume that her writing ability in English is dominant over her Japanese. Part of the reason for such a supposition is that she produced 18 words in Hiragana and Katakana Japanese writing systems, which exceeds the number of words she wrote in English by two words within the same amount of time.

In the oral version of the free word-association test, Natsuko produced 31 Japanese words and only 20 English words, a point which strongly indicates that her Japanese dominates her English in the oral use of language. This observation can be substantiated if one knows that when asked to give her phone number, she first uttered the number to herself in Japanese and then produced it in English. In addition, Natsuko stated that she felt more comfortable counting in Japanese than in English. She often shifted from English to Japanese in the middle of a conversation to utter formulaic expressions such as, "so ne," which means 'let me see'.

On the other hand, every time the researcher used in his conversation with the subject the formulaic expression, "You know what I mean?" she replied, "Yes, I understand very well." At one time, the researcher said, "I don't question your ability to understand well when I say 'you know what I mean?'" She replied again, "Yes, I understand very well." Later on, Natsuko was caught on several occasions saying to herself, perhaps not consciously, "soka" which means 'I understand, or does it?' It is possible that her repetition of "I understand very well" in her conversations with the researcher is the result of transferring the meaning of the expression "soka" from Japanese to English. This phenomenon seems to be a case of "negative transfer" (Littlewood 1984:17) which results from differences between the two languages. This example, together with the above mentioned ones, strongly suggests that Japanese is Natsuko's dominant language and that she is an unbalanced bilingual.

It is also important to mention that Natsuko felt more comfortable talking about music in Japanese than in English. She claims that she does not know all the vocabulary related to music in English. This linguistic behavior seems to be due to the fact that she learned about music in Japanese and not in English, a remark which again substantiates the supposition that she is not a balanced bilingual.

6. Text comprehension

The cloze test is simply a text in which the first couple of sentences are left intact. Then every fifth, sixth, or seventh word is systematically deleted, and a blank space is left in its place. The reader is required to fill in the blanks with words which seem to fit best the context. The purpose of this test is to assess the syntactic, semantic and lexical proficiency of a bilingual. It is also used, as Nida and Taber (1982) aver, to assess the reader's comprehension of a text. Although cloze test has recently been criticized for basically measuring language form, McNamara (2000: 16) observes that it is "still widely used today."

Natsuko was given a text with thirty-five blanks. She managed to provide 31 words which, more or less, fit the context of the text. She left two blanks empty and made mistakes in the other two blanks which need specific information about a

Japanese interpreter. Her ability to predict the appropriate words from the context and the structure of the text provides evidence for her good comprehension of the text as well as proof of her syntactic, semantic and lexical proficiency in English, a point which further confirms what has already been established above.

7. Phonetic and phonological performance

In order to evaluate Natsuko's phonetic and phonological performance, she was asked to read aloud a short passage from a newspaper. Her reading and some parts of her naturally occurring conversation were recorded and analyzed. The analysis demonstrates that Natsuko faces a tremendous difficulty in pronunciation as shown in table 6.

Table 6. *Phonetic difficulties in the informant's oral performance*

<u>Stops</u>	<u>Pronounced</u>
[p]	[p], [b], [f] (Jap. "β" as in 'hurui' which means 'old')
[b]	[p], [b], [f] (Jap. "β" as in 'hurui' which means 'old')
<u>Fricatives</u>	<u>Pronounced</u>
[f]	Jap. "β", [v]
[v]	Jap. "β", [f]
[θ]	[s] as in 'something' where [θ] changes to [s]
[ð]	[z] as in 'there' where [ð] changes to [z]
[s] in 'music'	is changed to [ʒ] as in 'pleasure'
Lateral [l] as in 'level' is changed to [r].	
<u>Vowels</u>	
1. Voiced high front unrounded vowel as in 'feet' is changed to lower high front unrounded vowel as in 'fit' or 'bit'.	
2. Voiced high back rounded vowel as in 'put' is always unrounded.	
3. Voiced low back rounded vowel as in 'bomb' is changed to voiced lower mid back rounded vowel as in 'bought'.	

One of Natsuko's major difficulties in pronunciation is that she mixes (negative transfer) the bilabial fricative [β] in Japanese with English bilabial stops and labiodental fricatives. The Japanese bilabial fricative [β], which is the first sound in the word 'hurui' which means 'old', is pronounced by forcing the air through the lips which are close enough to each other to produce turbulence in the

air. In uttering the sound [β] in Japanese, the lips are not closed as it is the case in uttering the bilabial stops [p], or [b] in English. It is also not uttered as English labiodental fricatives as [f] or [v] by using the lower lip and the upper teeth. If one imagines for a minute that bilabial stops and labiodental fricatives in English are uttered as the bilabial fricative [β] in Japanese, one can easily realize how difficult it is to follow the conversation of such a bilingual. It is not surprising that the researcher had to ask her to repeat her utterances most of the time to understand what she said. In response she used to react by apologizing, "I am sorry for my bad pronunciation."

The second major difficulty Natsuko encounters in her pronunciation of English is that she unrounds high back rounded vowel as in the name 'Natsuko' and changes it to a sound which is close to schwa [ə]. For example, 'put' [put] becomes [pə t]. This vowel change, together with the change of the voiceless alveolar sibilant sound [s] to voiced alveopalatal sibilant sound [ʒ], makes the word "music" pronounced as [məʒlk] extremely difficult to be intelligible in the context of her utterances.

Furthermore, Natsuko observes that English consonant clusters are problematic for her in terms of pronunciation. The word "milk", for example, has a CVCC syllable pattern, while in Japanese it becomes "miruku" with a CVCVCV syllable pattern. She tends to insert vowels between consonant clusters in English following the Japanese syllable structure. In other words, Natsuko's speaking skill, as reflected in her phonetic and phonological levels of proficiency in English, is her weakest linguistic area in terms of performance. This point can also be detected in her self-rating, in which she gives herself 2 (fair) in phonological ability in speaking (see table 1 above).

On the other hand, it is interesting to note that Natsuko is able to distinguish all these sounds theoretically. She states, for example, that in order to distinguish between voiceless bilabial stop [p] and voiced bilabial stop [b] in English, one should hold a piece of paper in front of her mouth and utter [p]. As a proof for correct pronunciation, the paper should move while uttering [p], but not [b]. Of course, this is the general conception about the voiceless bilabial stop where most teachers and learners do not distinguish between aspirated and non-aspirated [p]. Such clear theoretical knowledge about pronunciation presents evidence that Natsuko has passive competence of correct pronunciation. However, it is unfortunate that she is not capable to activate her passive phonetic and phonological knowledge in actual performance.

8. Formal and informal style of interaction

In a brief conversation with Natsuko, one can easily detect that her conversational style, if posited on a continuum, tends to be closer to the formal

rather than the informal end of it. However, to document this observation, Natsuko was asked to answer some questions which required formal and informal responses. The questions were put to her orally rather than in a written form in order to influence her responses to be more informal than formal. The questions and her responses are shown in table 7.

Table 7. *Responses of the informant to formal and informal situations*

Give as many responses as you wish to the following situations:

1. You are face-to-face with your professor in front of the library. You greet her by saying:

Response: A. Hello B. Hi C. Hello or Hi Doctor...

2. You are coming out of the library. You open the door to go out. You notice a student coming behind you. You hold the door for him or her. S/he says, "Thanks." You reply:

Response: A. mhm. B. You're welcome.

3. You invite your classmates and friends to your home for dinner. After the dinner, everyone says to you, "It was a great dinner. Thanks for inviting us." You reply:

Response: A. Thank you for coming. B. I am glad you had a good time.
C. I am glad you enjoyed the dinner.

4. You have bought a new handbag. A friend of yours sees it and says to you, "Wow! What a nice handbag!" You reply:

Response: A. Thank you. B. Thank you. Do you like it?

5. Your professor asks you to see her in her office. In the office, she hands back your paper by commenting, "You've done a good job." You reply:

Response: A. Really! I am glad to hear that.

6. You work in your school's library. You check out some books for a student patron. He says, "Thanks." You reply:

Response: A. mhm. B. Sure. C. You're welcome.

7. You are working in a company as an executive manager. Your colleague, who is also an executive manager, sends you an invitation for a party. You reply to thank him by saying:

Response: A. Thank you for your invitation. B. That's very nice of you.

8. You are walking in your school. You meet your classmate. You greet him or her by saying:

Response: A. Hi. B. Hi. How are you?

9. You are walking in your school. You meet your classmate. S/he greets you by saying, "Hi, What's up?" You reply:

Response: A. I'm fine, thank you. How are you?

The situations described in the questions in table 7 ranges from formal to informal ones. They include greetings in 1 and 8, reply to a greeting in 9, thanking in 7, reply for thanking in 2 and 6, reply for a compliment in 3, 4, and 5. These nine situations are not by any means sufficient to give a good picture of Natsuko's formal and informal style of interaction in English. However, they provide the reader with a reasonable sense of her interactional style in face-to-face encounters

It is interesting to note, for example, that Natsuko never utilizes the short form (thanks) instead of (thank you) in her responses as in 3, 4, 7 and 9. In fact, the use of the short form (thanks) in the body of question 3 does not influence her response at all. Instead, she produces the full form (thank you) in her answer to the same question. Moreover, in informal situations with equals as in 3, 4 and 9, she uses the formal form (thank you) instead of producing the informal in-group response (you bet) in order to show solidarity. The same thing happens in greeting her classmate in 8b (Hi. How are you?). She starts with the informal greeting (Hi) and instead of continuing with the informal (What's up?), which is usually used among students in North America, she shifts to the relatively formal formulaic greeting (How are you?).

Despite the fact that the researcher had known Natsuko for over six months by the time he conducted this study, it was surprising to observe that she never employed the expression, "What's up?" to greet him. However, it is fair to say that she has some command of the informal use of English as indicated in the use of (Hi) in 8a and the use of (mhm) as an acknowledgement response in 2 and 6. Furthermore, Natsuko is also aware that situations 1, 2, 6 and 7 are vague and could be both formal and informal as her responses reflect. She chooses through

her responses to treat 7 as a formal situation, while 1, 2, and 6 as both formal and informal ones. This awareness of formality in situations where she could easily respond informally indicates that she prefers formal rather than informal responses. Perhaps, this preference reflects the traditional norms of interaction in Japanese society (see Yamada 1989).

9. Discussion and conclusion

As Grosjean (1982: 239-240) observes, “Describing a person’s bilingualism is thus a difficult enterprise, which one should be careful not to simplify by using one or two tests of language fluency.” Such a stance is also taken by Hoffmann (1991: 152) who states that “measuring bilingualism remains notoriously difficult.” Yet, people who work in bilingualism suggest many ways to consider describing the linguistic skills of a bilingual. Hoffmann (1991: 31), for instance, proposes to set up a bilingual profile which contains nine aspects: (1) language development, maintenance and/or loss, (2) sequential relationship of L1 and L2, (3) language competence, (4) functional aspects of language use, (5) linguistics features, (6) attitudes towards L1 and L2, (7) internal and external pressures, (8) environmental circumstances surrounding the bilingual, and (9) biculturalism.

Applying Hoffmann’s bilingual profile to Natsuko, one can find out that she demonstrates a clear linguistic development and shift in employing more English than Japanese as revealed in the domains of language use in table 4. In terms of sequential relationship of L1 and L2, she is a sequential bilingual because she learned English (L2) in junior high school. Regarding her degree of proficiency in L1 and L2, her self-rating in table 1 indicates that she is more proficient in L1 than L2, a point which has been proved in language dominance tests as well. Her functional aspects of language use are presented in the domains of language use both in Japan and the U.S.A. (tables 3 and 4 respectively). Interference as a linguistic feature is detected phonetically when she mixes the Japanese bilabial fricative with English bilabial stops and fricatives, when she unrounds the high back unrounded vowel, and when she utters voiceless alveolar sibilant as voiced alveopalatal sibilant (see table 6). Her attitude towards L2 (English) is clearly stated by her when she said that English is a beautiful language. Her motivation to learn English is evident since she is pursuing her Master’s degree in linguistics. As for the aspects eight and nine, Natsuko was living in the States during this study, and therefore she was being exposed to the target language culture.

On the topic of linguistic competence, Kessler’s (1984) theoretical framework for communicative competence comprises of grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic types of competence. Natsuko’s linguistic skills in English are excellent in terms of writing, reading, and listening as discussed above. Her weakest linguistic skill is her pronunciation (grammatical

competence). However, it is fair to say that she is well aware of the correct pronunciation, but unable to activate her passive knowledge in actual performance. The second area in which Natsuko faces little difficulty in English is her ability to function in informal style (sociolinguistic competence). She tends to use more formal than informal style in situations where informality is appropriate to show solidarity.

Concerning discourse competence, the cloze test reveals her good competence in discourse. Even though no specific tests were assigned to measure Natsuko's strategic competence, she showed no signs of failure in this aspect of language use in her many interactions with the researcher during this study, a period which lasted for more than three months.

On the subject of domain analysis, that is, who speaks (person) what (topic), where (place), and to whom (addressee), sociolinguists identify different types and numbers of domains. Greenfield (1972), for example, suggests locations such as home, beach, church, school, and workplace. However, Parasher (1980) mentions seven domains of language use: family, friendship, neighborhood, transactions, education, government, and employment. Such analyses are meant mainly to find out the variables which affect and determine language choice (for a detailed discussion, see Fasold 1984).

As Hoffmann (1991: 178) observes, the topic of interaction is an essential element in establishing language choice, and speakers usually prefer one language over another when talking about a certain topic. The "preference can become particularly clear when the discussion of a topic leads the speaker(s) to switch from one language to another." As shown in tables 3 and 4 above, Natsuko's choice of language differs in Japan and in the States. Overall, English becomes her dominant language in the States. However, what seems to determine Natsuko's pattern of language choice is the addressee rather than the topic. She chooses to use English whenever she speaks with foreigners only, whereas she employs Japanese even when talking to her Japanese colleagues who know English. This pattern changes in the States where she utilizes English when talking with Americans as well as Japanese friends, but not colleagues. In the States, Japanese becomes her choice in interaction mainly in the domain of occupation when talking with the students and colleagues about teaching and teaching materials, a language preference which can be due to the fact that she worked at the time in teaching the Japanese language to American children of Japanese origin.

Topic still plays a role in Natsuko's choice of language. The fact that Natsuko states to the researcher that she feels comfortable counting and talking about music in Japanese strongly suggests that she does not have linguistic experience in English related to these topics. In fact, she maintains that she does not know all the vocabulary related to music in English, a statement which is considered as a subtle suggestion of her dominant language.

No doubt, dominance is closely related to language exposure in different contexts and situations. This has been noticeably pointed out by a simple comparison of domains of language use in tables 3 and 4 above. The results of more objective tests given to Natsuko corroborate this conclusion. The Stroop procedure shows that she is quicker in retrieving words in Japanese than in English, a finding which indicates that Japanese is her dominant language. Also, the free word-association test provides further evidence for Natsuko's dominant language, which is reflected in her ability to produce orally more words in Japanese than in English in the same amount of time.

If one measures Natsuko's linguistic behavior according to the strict classification of bilingual people as the "true", the "ideal", the "balanced", or the "perfect" bilingual, she exhibits signs of an unbalanced bilingual, simply because her Japanese dominates her English as repeatedly suggested above.

If, however, one measures Natsuko's bilingual behavior according to Grosjean's (1998) functional definition of bilinguals as individuals who use both languages on a regular basis, regardless of whether they are equally fluent in both, one can conclude that Natsuko is a proficient functional bilingual who has unbalanced but functionally good command of English. Indeed, as Fabbro (1999: 107) eloquently observes, "Bilingual individuals have differential needs for their two languages or ascribe to them different social/emotional functions (what a language is used for, with whom, where, etc.)." Therefore, Fabbro adds that bilinguals are not necessarily required to develop the same level of competence in both languages, an observation which reflects Natsuko's case to a large extent.

Yet another way to examine Natsuko's bilingual behavior is to consider the relative nature of a bilingual's abilities as suggested by Bloomfield (1933) and further developed by Baetens Beardsmore (1982). Bloomfield (1933: 56) indicates that "one cannot define a degree of perfection at which a good foreigner speaker becomes a bilingual: the distinction is relative." But the relative nature of bilingual abilities suggests more than one interpretation. On the one hand, it rejects the strict classification of bilingual people as balanced bilinguals. On the other hand, it promotes Grosjean's functional definition of bilinguals. Indeed, one can even suggest that the very concept of "dominance" in individual bilinguals seems to be elastic and changeable as the bilingual proceeds in the process of learning more about the target language. Hence, Natsuko at the time of this study appears to have Japanese as her dominant language. Perhaps, after she finishes her Master's degree in linguistics in the States, English is very likely to become her dominant language. It is doubtless that Natsuko presents a very interesting case of a bilingual whose poor performance in pronunciation seems to inhibit her interactional skills.

As a final note related to language assessment in a classroom situation, one can suggest that two important implications emerge from this descriptive study. First, as the discussion in this paper demonstrates, to make an informed decision

about the dominant language of a bilingual is very demanding. In addition, teachers should be aware that the concept of language dominance is volatile. That is, it can be influenced by the surrounding contextual factors as proposed above. Therefore, teachers should not penalize students based on poor performance on one occasion, simply because at that particular day the student's foreign or second language dominance may not be turned on. In other words, the student's native language could be the dominant one on that particular situation. Consequently, the discussion about language dominance provides further evidence for the fact that teachers should follow the performance of their students over a period of time to make a correct judgment about their progress.

Second, parallel to the case in describing the linguistic skills of a bilingual, teachers cannot appropriately decide the performance of their students by giving them one or two tests in a semester. Indeed, as Harris and McCann (1994) rightly suggest that different methods of testing such as, informal, formal, and self-assessment (similar to the tests in this paper as well as others) should be employed to determine properly the students' progress and achievement.

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