

# INTER FACULTY

JOURNAL OF INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH IN HUMAN AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
UNIVERSITY OF TSUKUBA (JAPAN)

<https://journal.hass.tsukuba.ac.jp/interfaculty>

---

*Inter Faculty*, 9 (2018): 139–161

<https://journal.hass.tsukuba.ac.jp/interfaculty/article/view/141>

DOI: 10.15068/00158689

Published: November 27, 2019

## Fieldwork and Research Note

### Invisible Bilingual and Bicultural Groups in Japan

Esther LOVELY, Asuka ANDO

To cite this article:

LOVELY, E. & ANDO, A. (2018). Invisible Bilingual and Bicultural Groups in Japan . *Inter Faculty*, Vol. 9, pp.139–161.

<<https://doi.org/10.15068/00158689>> [Accessed: 2021.12.2]



This is an open access article under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.  
<<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>>

## Invisible Bilingual and Bicultural Groups in Japan

Esther LOVELY

Faculty of Foreign Languages

Kanagawa University (Japan)

Asuka ANDO

Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

University of Tokyo (Japan)

### Abstract

*Japanese returnees and Coda (Hearing Children of Deaf adults) are bilingual and bicultural groups, yet invisible in Japanese society. Both groups have experienced marginalization from their peers in Japan due to their language use and bicultural identity. Coda and returnees alike are shown to be seeking an identity that they can reconcile with their cultural context in Japan. This joint paper aims to develop the concepts of bilingualism and biculturalism by sharing the experiences of these unique minority groups in Japan.*

**Keywords:** identity, bilingualism, biculturalism, returnees, students, Coda

### 要約

本論文は、日本人帰国生とコーダ（聞こえない親を持つ聞こえる子ども）のバイリンガリズムとバイカルチュラリズムについて考察する。2つのグループは、一見関係性のないように見える。しかし、両グループは、彼らのバイリンガリズムとバイカルチュラリズムに日本社会において注目されてこなかったという点において共通している。また、両グループとも、日本において疎外感を感じ、日本の文化的コンテキストにおいて安心できるアイデンティティを求めているという点も類似している。本論文は、日本におけるユニークな少数グループの経験を共有することによりバイリンガリズムとバイカルチュラリズムの概念を広げることを目的とする。

キーワード：アイデンティティ、バイリンガリズム、バイカルチュラリズム、帰国子女、学生、コーダ

## **1. Introduction**

Individual difference is not typically something that is celebrated in Japanese society. Those who are different by choice or circumstances can find themselves marginalized or ostracized by those around them. For example, on the basis of ethnicity, minority communities such as Chinese and Koreans can find it difficult to be accepted in Japan, while NEETs (Not in Employment Education or Training) and Freeters (low-skill workers in highly insecure jobs) may be kept at the fringes of society due to their economic status. This paper<sup>1</sup> discusses two invisible minority groups of Japanese people, returnees and Coda (Hearing Children of Deaf Adult/s), who, while seemingly having little in common at first glance, in fact share this status of difference from the majority of those living around them. Both groups experience marginalization due to their language use and their unique experiences which fall outside the norms of Japanese culture.

This paper aims to draw on interview data from two studies in order to discuss the experiences of Japanese returnees and Coda, focusing on their identities as bicultural and bilingual individuals. The concept of biculturalism was drawn from literature on acculturation (Berry 1997), which generally typifies it as the capacity to maintain connections with and be able to function within two different cultures. However, researchers have also identified a range of different varieties of bicultural identity. Some characterize it as dynamic, with individuals wielding the ability to ‘swing’ back and forth, alternately adopting the behaviours and practises of one culture or another as the situation demands (Toomey, Dorjee and Ting-Toomey 2013). It has also been conceptualised as a synthesis of heritage culture and receiving culture, selected and blended into a ‘truly bicultural’ fusion identity (Benet-Martinez et. al. 2002). In this paper, we view bicultural identity not as a static fixed point, but as a dynamic process that undergoes change in different directions over time. In this view, bicultural individuals are influenced by and have connections with two cultural contexts, with these influences and connections varying over time and circumstance. Regarding bilingualism and referring to individuals as bilingual, we agree with Kachru’s (1982), among others, definition of bilinguals as possessing linguistic repertoire in two languages such that they can effectively communicate and function within certain contexts. This understanding is also useful as it does not restrict the focus of interest to an individual’s proficiency in a language, but

encompasses aspects such as style and register, which are highly relevant when communicating in more than one cultural context. Both Japanese returnees and Coda discussed in this paper fit these definitions of bicultural and bilingual.

In the first section of this paper, Lovely adopts a narrative analysis approach to analyze and discuss the case stories of four Japanese people who are returnees to Japan after undergoing schooling in the U.S.A. Upon returning to Japanese society, most of the returnees had experiences of difference and marginalization due to their language use and experience living outside Japan. Their bilingual identity, particularly their relative lack of Japanese proficiency, and their accompanying bicultural experiences tended to have social disadvantages. Consequently, in some cases participants were still seeking ways of being in and belonging to Japanese society.

In the next section of the paper, Ando discusses ideas of ‘Coda identity’ by analyzing interview data from five adult Coda participants. Coda are not just children of disabled parent/s; they are also often described as bilingual in sign and spoken language and bicultural in Deaf and Hearing culture. However, their language use and unique experiences are often ignored, and only the fact that their parent/s are disabled is emphasized in Japanese society.

Despite the fact that Japanese returnees and Coda are considered as bicultural and bilingual groups in the literature, they are often ignored in discussions at the societal level. This is because there is often the flawed assumption that the term bicultural individuals refers to those who have two different ethnic or national backgrounds, while bilingual people are often understood to mean those who can use two spoken languages, each with the same proficiency as a monolingual individual has in one spoken language. Since their nationality and their appearance are Japanese, the unique experiences and language use of both returnees and Coda are invisible in Japanese society. Therefore, this joint paper is significant in that it contributes to developing the general concepts of bilingualism and biculturalism by sharing the experience of two invisible minorities in Japan: Japanese returnees and Japanese Coda.

## **2. Japanese returnees**

### **2.1 Overseas English study and returnees as bicultural and bilingual individuals**

As government and policymakers increasingly push for internationalization of higher education in Japan (Rose and Mckinley 2018), more and more Japanese university students have the opportunity to study and live overseas. Research has demonstrated that overseas experience produces linguistic and intercultural competencies which can be of great benefit to Japan's society and industry (Fry 2007). Overseas study is particularly promoted for the improvement of English language skills. However, it is important to consider not only the potential for acquisition of language skills, but also the potential for cultural identity change that can occur during an overseas sojourn and can vary widely from individual to individual.

Indeed, returnees represent a considerable range and variety with regards to English proficiency, time spent abroad, and extent of their adjustment to their former host country. This makes it difficult to limit the definition of 'returnee', a problem previously acknowledged by Yoshida et. al. (1999) in their investigation of re-entry problems among Japanese returnees. Moreover, while they partly vyan adult returnee as an individual who has spent a 'significant' part of his/her developmental years living outside Japan, they refrain from defining 'significant', because they acknowledge that period of time spent abroad is not necessarily directly proportional to the impact and quality of overseas experiences. Accordingly, there are studies on Japanese returnees that have included individuals who studied and lived abroad for widely varying periods of time, such as Ford (2009), which examined individuals who had lived outside Japan from three to eleven years. However, literature on returnees has acknowledged them as possessing bicultural and bilingual identities by virtue of their language skills and overseas experiences (Willis, Onoda and Enloe 1994; Yoshida et. al. 1999; Kanno 2000; 2003).

As such, a number of studies on Japanese returnees have found that Japanese students and sojourners returning to Japan struggle with re-adjustment to Japanese society, particularly when returning from cultural environments

considered to be vastly different to that of Japan, such as those in the U.S.A., Canada, and the U.K. (White 1988; Yashiro 1992; Kanno and Norton 2003; Yoshida et al. 2009). This aligns with other literature on bicultural identity which reveals that bicultural individuals often feel a sense of internal conflict, finding it difficult to reconcile different aspects of their cultural identity in everyday life (Boski 2008; Toomey, Dorjee and Ting-Toomey 2013). As discussed earlier, conceptualizations of bicultural identity are still being introduced and refined, thus calling for further investigation into the experiences of returnees, among other bicultural individuals.

## **2.2 The study**

During the period from November 2017 to May 2018 a qualitative study<sup>2</sup> was conducted with a total of six Japanese participants, five of whom had lived outside Japan for a period of at least six months. The participants all received a sheet of information about the aims and procedure of the study, and after gaining their signed consent to participate, five of the participants were interviewed four times, while one participant was interviewed twice. During the interviews, which were semi-structured in nature and lasted from approximately forty-five minutes to ninety minutes each, the participants were asked to talk about their social networks, in particular focusing on their use of communication technologies such as smartphones and online communication tools including instant messaging applications and social networking sites. As a supplement to the interviews, they were asked to fill out timelines of important events relating to their overseas experiences and return. These timelines served as a useful visual and memory aid during the interview period and have been used in other qualitative studies involving young people and children (Bagnoli 2009; Jackson 2013).

The interviews were all voice-recorded, and during the interview period, were listened to multiple times, followed by summaries being written of each interview. Relevant sections relating to participants' engagement with mass media, communication technologies, and their social networks were transcribed word for word. For the purposes of this paper, parts of the data that relate to the themes of bilingualism and different experiences of marginalization in Japan are discussed.

**Table 1: Japanese returnee participants**

<b>Participant<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Demographic</b>	<b>Period spent in the U.S.A. (approx.)</b>
Ami	Female	22	University student	8 months
Misaki	Female	22	University student	1 year
Natsumi	Female	22	University student	7 years
Mayu	Female	22	University student	8 years
Yumi	Female	32	White collar employee Married One child	7 years
Hiro	Male	32	White collar employee Married One child	4 years

The participants were a diverse group, representing a spectrum of overseas student experiences. Table 1 shows relevant information about all six participants, although in this paper only the narratives of four of the participants are discussed, as explained in the following section. At the time of the interviews two of the participants, Natsumi and Mayu, were university students in their final year. Natsumi and Mayu lived in the U.S.A. with their families for about seven and eight years respectively; Natsumi from approximately age five to twelve and Mayu from approximately age one to seven years. They formed friendships with non-Japanese classmates and developed English proficiency from a young age. Their interviews were conducted using English.

The other two participants discussed here, Yumi and Hiro, were adults in their early thirties, both married with young children. They had each completed university degrees in American universities. While Hiro returned to Japan shortly after graduating, Yumi chose to stay longer in America and found a full-time job.

### **2.3 Participants' narratives of language use and marginalization in Japan**

This paper will only focus on the relevant excerpts from the stories of Natsumi, Yumi, Hiro, and Mayu, as despite the diversity in age, experience, and circumstances among the participants, these four all shared commonalities in their stories of their return to Japan. They all had experiences of being marginalized, by their Japanese friends, peers at school and university, and work colleagues, or otherwise feeling they did not wholly fit in. At the time of the interviews these participants were yet to settle into a new, acceptable identity for themselves in Japan. Their experiences in the workplace and with school and university peers left them in no doubt of their difference and misfit status in the society to which they had returned.

Although the participants did not necessarily explicitly attribute their experiences of marginalization and difference to their overseas sojourn, it had impacted their use of Japanese language, which markedly separated them from their Japanese peers.

#### **- Natsumi**

For example, Natsumi's peers during high school had bluntly commented to her that her Japanese was *katakoto* (片言), i.e. broken or halting (Natsumi interview 1). She also remarked during the same interview that she did not know many Japanese honorific terms – *keigo* (敬語) – and was uncomfortable using them. She referenced language use again in the final interview with her when describing the university sports team of which she was a member. The team was known for its demanding schedule – early morning practices five days a week, and its traditional hierarchical social structure among the team members. Honorific language was expected from junior members when interacting with their senior teammates. As a third-year student, Natsumi might have expected to have received her share of deference from the younger students, but this was not necessarily the case. In fact, as she related during her interviews, she instead felt that she was seen as an unusual or 'weird' senior (Natsumi interview 4), someone who did not quite fit in with the rest



of the team. Her teammates told Natsumi that it was difficult to communicate with her as her Japanese was ‘incomplete’ or vague and difficult to understand (Natsumi interview 4).

Initially, Natsumi claimed that it was due not to her time overseas, but instead her natural personality and way of speaking. Almost immediately following that, in the same interview she then partially contradicted herself by saying that she believed her fluent English influenced her way of speaking in Japanese. It was evident from these comments that Natsumi had not yet found a way to fully resolve the impact of her time in the U.S.A. and her English language proficiency, on her identity and place in the Japanese cultural context. She seemed to have resigned herself to being singled out as ‘other’ and different, and preferred reading English literature to forming closer connections with her peers.

While bilingual skills are a useful and marketable trait in the Japanese workforce, the bicultural identity and experiences that accompany it are not always so welcome. For the participants in the study, at the peer-to-peer level, and also from workplace superiors or club seniors, their bicultural identity was a handicap to overcome or fix.

- **Yumi**

After graduating from university, Yumi found a full-time job at an American company that had connections with Japan. She enjoyed her life and her work, but after two years, her visa expiration date was approaching and even though her company offered to sponsor her for a visa extension she decided to resign and return to Japan. When asked why she chose to do so, Yumi explicitly linked her decision to Japanese language use, and a fear of being unable to penetrate the cultural barriers of Japanese workplace culture if she spent any longer in the U.S.A. (Yumi interview 1). She was then twenty-seven years old and had never worked in Japan. She explained that when she interacted with colleagues from Japan at her American company, she saw how differently they spoke and behaved in a business context. She feared being ostracized and thought of as ‘weird’ if at the age of thirty she

was ignorant of the appropriate language and business etiquette in the Japanese context. Indeed, she experienced many language difficulties at her first job when she returned to Japan. Yumi had to communicate with clients at a very ‘old-fashioned, traditional’ firm, and experienced great pressure to improve her use of honorific Japanese language for these situations (Yumi interview 1). Yumi recalled that her husband, who had never lived outside Japan, had also told her that her Japanese was ‘really weird’ when they first met upon her return from the U.S.A. At the time of the interviews, she said that she had already forgotten some of the English she knew but had tried to maintain her language skills by joining an English conversation group organized by her workplace. Her manager had suggested joining the group as a way of working toward being assigned to one of the company’s overseas offices where English was an essential skill. Yumi claimed that she was open to the idea of working overseas in the future, as was her husband. Her friendship with fellow returnee Hiro, and his Chinese wife Mary, was a great help to her readjustment.

- **Hiro**

Hiro was aware of his difference from others in terms of language use and life experiences and embraced it. He married a woman from Hong Kong and as of the final interview, he had plans to continue their international lifestyle trajectory by moving overseas to an English-speaking country. In his interviews, Hiro and his wife Mary both expressed their wish that their son would be able to broaden his horizons by living outside Japan and experiencing an English language environment (Hiro interview 2). In Japan, even their young son was being singled out for his bilingual and bicultural identity. During the interview period, he was assessed by the local ward office and it was recommended that Hiro and Mary use only Japanese in the home, as their son’s Japanese language development was deemed to be suffering from their bilingual household.

- **Mayu**

In contrast to the other returnees, Mayu reported a neutral, bordering on positive experience, of being looked up to by her high school

classmates for her English skills. According to Mayu, her high level of English proficiency was accepted as a normal outcome of her years in America, and a part of her identity recognized by her classmates. As she explained in her first interview, very few of the other students in the school had any kind of international experience. This meant that from the beginning, Mayu stood out due to her English proficiency and overseas experience. She reported that she was admired, rather than ostracized, for her bilingual capabilities (Mayu interview 1).

It would seem that her bilingualism and returnee identity had no negative impact on her social interactions and sense of belonging in Japan. However, Mayu's experiences post-high school also demonstrated how the rapid development of communication technologies in the past decade has added new nuances to the way individuals experience and process overseas sojourns and 're-entry shock' or 'reverse culture shock.' At the time of the interviews, Mayu was undertaking *shuukatsu* (就活), or job-hunting activities. She reached a point where she found it discouraging and stressful to engage with Japanese peers who were involved in the same activities. Instead, she reported that her closest friend was a Korean female student whom she met during her university exchange in the U.S.A. (Mayu interview 1 and Mayu interview 2). They kept in touch (using English) via regular Facebook Messenger voice calls. Despite the distance and time difference, communication technologies enabled Mayu to maintain this connection, which also would not have been possible without her bilingual abilities.

Since 2008 with the advent of the smartphone, and the widespread popularity of internet-based communication, Japanese returnees have gained the ability to maintain transnational communication with contacts outside Japan with greater ease than before. Using these technologies affords them the opportunity to create spaces in which to exercise their intercultural competencies by communicating in languages other than Japanese and expressing other aspects of their bicultural identity (Ye and Uchida 2017). Of course, these technologies also provide the means to communicate with social

networks within Japan while they are overseas, thus potentially resulting in far more complex negotiations of bicultural identity daily with each instance of communication. For Mayu, it was beneficial to be able to maintain communication using English with her non-Japanese friend in the U.S.A. as a form of escape from the pressures she was experiencing in Japan.

## **2.4 Results and findings**

Similar to prior studies on Japanese returnees, for the most part the participants in the present study experienced forms of marginalization and difficulty in readjusting, even years after returning from overseas. Furthermore, while they were an invisible minority, with no distinctive differences in physical appearance, their differences from those around them were revealed by their use of language. Their lack of Japanese proficiency in certain contexts, as well as their proficiency in English, set them apart. In most cases, except for Mayu who was reportedly admired for her difference, this was a negative experience for them. The bilingual Japanese participants in the present study found refuge either in communicating with contacts outside Japan, or with the few fellow returnee friends they were able to find. Natsumi and Mayu also found ‘escape routes’ from their Japanese surroundings through their bicultural and bilingual identities – Natsumi through her love of English literature, and Mayu through her international friendships. For Hiro and Yumi, their future career plans seemed to be set overseas, implying that perhaps ultimately the best coping strategy was to leave Japan altogether.

The experiences of some of the participants in being told that their Japanese language use was unnatural or strange resonates with the experiences of the Coda involved in Ando’s study. Some Coda identify sign language as their first language and have been told by Japanese people around them that their spoken Japanese is ‘strange’. Despite their disparity at first glance, Japanese returnees and Japanese Coda in fact share this common experience: being an invisible minority in Japan and experiencing various forms of marginalization due to their difference in language use and experiences from those around them.

### **3. Japanese Coda**

#### **3.1 What (Who) is Coda?**

The origin of the term Coda is CODA, the non-profit organization for hearing sons and daughters of deaf parent/s established in 1983 by Millie Brother. Coda usually refers to a hearing person with deaf parent/s; CODA refers to the organization. There is only one expression in Japanese. However, there are a variety of expressions for Coda in English; the term Koda is also used to refer to hearing ‘kids’ of deaf adults, HCDA which is the acronym for Hearing Children of Deaf Adults, and ‘mother-father-deaf’ comes from sign language expressions. In the Coda community, there are claims that ‘Coda’ should be used to describe hearing children of Deaf parent/s who identify themselves as culturally Deaf<sup>4</sup> and develop their Coda identity by attending CODA meetings or conferences (Bishop and Hicks 2009). On the other hand, the lower case ‘Coda’ refers to hearing children of deaf parent/s, but who would not identify themselves as culturally Deaf. The need for such terminology arises from the fact that “there are cultural and linguistic differences between hearing adults with Deaf parents and hearing adults with hearing parents” (Bishop and Hicks 2009). Hearing children of Deaf parent/s, Coda, are different from Deaf children of Deaf parents because Coda are able to hear and are culturally Deaf (Knight 2013). Those hearing children of Deaf parent/s who find it difficult to fit into Deaf /hearing categories tend to choose Coda as a ‘third niche’ (Bishop and Hicks 2009). This study uses the term Coda, since it is the most popular way to describe a hearing child of deaf parent/s.

#### **3.2 Coda as bilingual and bicultural**

Coda are often described as bicultural of Deaf and Hearing cultures, and bilingual of sign and spoken languages. The uniqueness of Coda bilingualism is that the two languages have different modalities: visual and auditory. This is called ‘bimodal bilingualism’ (Emmorey et al. 2005; 2008). Bimodal bilingualism allows Coda to code-blend, or to produce speech and sign simultaneously. Coda talk is the type of speech that is influenced by the syntax of sign language, and only used in a Coda-only environment. Code-blending can be included in Coda talk if it is used in a Coda-only environment.

Many Coda grow up being familiar with sign language. However, sign language use of Coda, especially when they are children, is limited to communication with their deaf/Deaf parent/s, or home communication. Therefore, the dominant language of Coda is likely to be spoken Japanese, the language of the majority. This fact leads to Coda becoming minority bilinguals in Japanese society.

When talking about bilingualism among Coda, it is difficult to reach one single conclusion. Since their backgrounds are varied, bilingualism of Coda is quite dynamic. Factors that can impact bilingualism of Coda are: background of parents; family structure; gender; and age. This situation is similar to bilingualism of Deaf people. The language use of Coda depends on whether parents are profoundly deaf, hard-of hearing, or late-deafened. Also, the language use of parents, which is influenced by the educational background of deaf/Deaf parent/s and identity, can have an impact on the bilingualism of Coda. Regarding family structure, the proportion of deaf/Deaf members in the family, which members are deaf/Deaf in the family (both parents, father/mother only), and whether Coda have any siblings or not, can affect their bilingualism. According to Preston (1995), an older female Coda tends to be fluent in sign language because she is likely to play the role of family interpreter. Finally, age also matters because the situation of Coda who were born sixty years ago and those born twenty years ago is different. Compared to sixty years ago, deaf/Deaf people have improved their position in society. Within the past two decades, the educational and job opportunities of deaf/Deaf people have increased and laws protecting disabled people have been enacted. These social movements have increased life opportunities and broadened horizons not only for deaf/Deaf people, but also for Coda.

### **3.3 Coda identity and Deaf identity**

Recently, the term ‘Coda identity’ has emerged (Knight 2013). Few studies have been conducted on Coda identity, whereas studies on Deaf identity have been undertaken worldwide. In those studies, factors influencing Deaf identity have been identified and analyzed. The studies found that educational background of deaf/Deaf people and self-esteem affect how Deaf identity is established. Carter and Mireles (2016) concluded that educational background is related to self-esteem. Highly educated deaf individuals tended to have higher self-esteem, which resulted in forming a stronger Deaf identity. Bat-chava (2000) mentioned if

a deaf/Deaf person has a positive attitude toward deafness, they tend to have higher self-esteem. Family background, such as whether parents are hearing or deaf/Deaf parents, can influence Deaf identity (Ohna 2004). Also, the language used, and acceptance by the Deaf community are factors that influence Deaf identity (Mcilroy and Storbeck 2011). Hearing ability also influences Deaf identity. Hard-of-hearing people tend to have difficulties fitting into the Deaf community because the experiences of deaf/Deaf people and hard-of-hearing people are different. Therefore, some hard-of-hearing people have an identity of hard-of-hearing (Fujishima and Iwata 2018).

Since the term ‘Coda identity’ has only recently emerged and is not fully developed, this study aims to contribute to the definition of ‘Coda identity’. ‘Identity’ in this study means: (1) A sense of belonging to a certain social group (Leigh 2009); and (2) How often Coda consider themselves as ‘Coda’ (Carter and Mireles 2016).

### **3.4 Research on five Japanese adult Coda**

Five adult Coda participated in this study. From March to June 2016 two to four hour-long interviews were conducted two to three times. Interview data was transcribed and analyzed using Kinoshita’s Modified Grounded Theory Approach (2003). Participant background is shown in Table 2. Thirty-three participants were first asked to fill in a paper-based questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed to the Coda community and through the Coda organization in Tokyo. Then five participants were selected based on the information given in the questionnaires. Sign language ability and self-awareness as Coda were self-reported. Participant background was varied because this study aimed at focusing on Coda diversity; therefore the study collected data from Coda who had different backgrounds.

**Table 2: Coda participants**

<b>Participant<sup>5</sup></b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Family background</b>	<b>Sign language ability</b>	<b>Self-awareness as Coda</b>
Ken	Male	58	Deaf parents Younger sister	Relatively high	Weak
Mika	Female	24	Hearing father Late-deafened mother Older sister	Relatively low	Relatively strong
Risa	Female	33	Deaf parents	Relatively low	Relatively strong
Hana	Female	42	Hearing father Deaf mother Younger sister	High	Relatively strong
Takeshi	Male	33	Deaf parents Younger sister	Relatively high	Strong

### **3.5 Results and findings**

#### **3.5.1 What is ‘Coda Identity’?**

The interview found that factors influencing Coda identity were sign language fluency and hearing ability of parents. The result resonates with studies on Deaf identity that demonstrated that identity is influenced by these two aspects (Mcilroy and Storbeck 2011; Fujishima and Iwata 2018). Findings of the interviews identified other aspects that follow the findings of studies on Deaf identity, such as acceptance by the community (Mcilroy and Storbeck 2011) and self-esteem (Carter and Mireles 2016). This study also found that parent-child communication can affect the self-evaluation of sign language ability of Coda. Therefore, this study suggests that parent-child communication affects identity of Coda. The following section provides findings of each participant.



### **3.5.2 Findings in each Coda participant**

- **Ken**

Even though he had both positive aspects of Coda identity, Ken self-evaluated his Coda identity as weak. This result may be affected by his age, and the historical background of deaf people and sign language. Ken was fifty-eight years old at the time of the interviews, and his parents were over eighty-five years old. In his parents' generation (1940s), deaf people were severely discriminated against, and his parents were not able to gain or complete compulsory education. Consequently, Ken held the belief that deaf people are uneducated, and sign language is less prestigious than spoken language. He himself struggled with discrimination, and he has wanted to live as an ordinary person, not as a hearing child of deaf adults. These factors made it difficult for him to accept himself as Coda. He had once attended a CODA meeting two or three years before the interview, but was still unfamiliar with the community, which also made it difficult for him to feel accepted by other Coda. However, during the interviews, it seemed that he started to feel accepted by the interviewer, and that led him to move closer toward an ambivalent Coda identity.

- **Mika**

When communicating with her late-deafened mother, Misa uses lip-reading with supplemental use of signed words. She considers her sign language as sim-coms<sup>6</sup>, not sign language, which led her to self-evaluate her sign language as low. Even though these aspects should negatively affect her self-acceptance as Coda, her active involvement in Coda events for more than five years has led her to feel acceptance by other Coda.

- **Risa**

Even though both of her parents are deaf, Risa seldom uses sign language as a means of communication with them; she uses lip-readings, or sim-coms. Furthermore, she commented that the sign language she is accustomed to using is not Japanese Sign Language. She feels a sort of

inferiority at being unable to use Japanese Sign Language, which caused her low self-evaluation of sign language. However, she had started to attend Coda meetings at the time of the interviews which made her feel accepted by other Coda and she was happy to find common ground with others in the community. These factors have led her towards an ambivalent Coda identity.

- **Hana**

Although she communicates with her deaf mother in sign language and self-evaluates her sign language skills as high, having a hearing father negatively affects her identity as Coda, which made it difficult for Hana to accept herself as Coda. However, Hana often attends Coda events. There, she feels accepted by other Coda. These factors have led her to develop a relatively strong, or as this type of identity is described, 'ambivalent' Coda identity.

In Mika, Risa and Hana's cases, the feelings of being accepted by the community impacted their self-acceptance as Coda to some extent, though their Coda identity is ambivalent because of the negative aspects they have of Coda identity.

- **Takeshi**

As Takeshi uses sign language for parent-child communication, he self-evaluated his sign language skills as high. In addition to this, his parents are both profoundly deaf. These two aspects led him to accept himself as Coda. This 'acceptance of oneself as Coda' can be regarded as 'self-esteem', which is one of the aspects of deaf identity. He frequently attends Coda events, on which occasions he feels acceptance by other Coda. These aspects have led him to have a high self-awareness as Coda, or a strong Coda identity.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In this paper, the interview data of two invisible minority groups, Japanese returnees and Japanese Coda, were analyzed and discussed. In Lovely's study (Part 2), the narratives of four Japanese returnees was discussed. Although the Japanese government encourages its citizens to study abroad and be international,

the bicultural and bilingual identities of Japanese returnees is marginalized in Japanese society. Some feel they are marginalized because of their unique experiences and English language skills. It was found that cultural and language differences made the returnees conspicuous in mostly negative ways, with one exception. Three of the participants experienced their Japanese being called 'weird' and deemed inappropriate at times by those around them. Since Japanese society welcomes conformity, some returnees try to downplay their experiences abroad and fit in. Other returnees plan a future life outside Japan in order to escape this marginalized identity.

Ando's study (Part 3) aimed at identifying and providing further evidence of aspects of Coda identity using interview data with five Coda from different backgrounds. If a Coda has both aspects (sign language fluency and profoundly deaf parents) of Coda identity, s/he is likely to accept him/herself as Coda. If either one of these aspects is lacking, it becomes difficult for a Coda to accept him/herself as Coda and s/he becomes ambivalent. In addition to these two aspects of Coda identity, feeling self-esteem and feeling accepted by the community are also important factors of Coda identity. These findings were consistent with factors of Deaf identity. Bilingualism of Japanese Coda is a relatively new field in the studies of bilingualism, and few studies have been conducted compared to unimodal bilingualism. To society in general, Coda bilingualism and the term Coda itself are still invisible. Not only Japanese society, but also the Coda themselves are unaware of their bilingualism and the term. Therefore, more research must be undertaken in order to make Coda more visible academically and socially.

At first glance these two groups, returnees and Coda, appear to be very different; Coda are born as Coda due to their parents' hearing condition, something over which they have no control, whereas returnees are not born returnees. However, both groups have some element of choice when it comes to developing and embracing their bicultural identity. Returnees can choose to continue to engage with non-Japanese mass media and adhere to certain non-Japanese values and behaviors. In the same way, as Coda grow up, they can choose to live wholly as a part of the hearing community, or they can develop their bilingual and bicultural identity as part of the deaf community. This is a long-term process of change that both groups experience, negotiating their identities as a minority group in

Japanese society. With the widespread push among Japanese universities for globalization, English may become more widely used and prestigious; thus, the status of returnees could potentially improve. In contrast, sign language is not as prestigious as spoken language, including English, meaning that without significant efforts from Japanese government bodies and the wider community, the status of Coda identity is likely to remain invisible and marginalized.

---

<sup>1</sup> This joint paper is based on Young Scholar Presentations, The Linguapax Asia 2018 international symposium on the theme of Bilingualism Now: The Imperative Issues in Bilingualism and Bilingual Education, held at Tsukuba University on June 23rd, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> The study was made possible by the support of the Showa Women's University Mariko Bando Fellowship which enabled the author to complete a year of independent post-doctoral research in Tokyo.

<sup>3</sup> Pseudonyms have been used.

<sup>4</sup> There are two different models to see deaf/Deaf people: 'deaf' focuses on health and oral intervention, while 'Deaf' pays attention to their cultural and linguistic aspects (Leigh and Andrews 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Pseudonyms have been used.

<sup>6</sup> Sim-coms, or Simultaneous Communications, is sign language communication based on the grammar of spoken language.

## **Bibliography**

- BAGNOLI Anna (2009). Beyond the Standard Interview: The Use of Graphic Elicitation and Arts-Based Methods. *Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks, California), vol.9, no.5. <[s3.amazonaws.com/arena-attachments/389644/68bc8e3a1a28d067c4b08517e391dd0e.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/arena-attachments/389644/68bc8e3a1a28d067c4b08517e391dd0e.pdf)> [Accessed: 2019.7.2]
- BAT-CHAVA Yale (2000). Diversity of Deaf Identities. *American Annals of the Deaf* (Washington, DC), vol.145, no.5. <[www.jstor.org/stable/44393234](http://www.jstor.org/stable/44393234)> [Accessed: 2019.6.25]
- BENET-MARTINEZ Verónica, LEU Janxin, LEE Fiona and MORRIS Michael W. (2002). Negotiating Biculturalism: Cultural Frame Switching in Biculturals with Oppositional Versus Compatible Cultural Identities, *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* (Thousand Oaks, California), vol.33, no.5. <[pdfs.semanticscholar.org/281c/863c351de64d68ddd435949abcfeed9d98bc.pdf](https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/281c/863c351de64d68ddd435949abcfeed9d98bc.pdf)> [Accessed: 2019.6.25]

- BERRY John W. (1997). Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation. *Applied Psychology* (Malden, MA), vol.46, no.1.
- BISHOP Michel and HICKS Sherry L. (2005). Orange Eyes: Bimodal Bilingualism in Hearing Adults from Deaf Families. *Sign Language Studies* (Washington D.C.), vol.5, no.2.
- BISHOP Michel and HICKS Sherry L. (2009). *Hearing, Mother Father Deaf: Hearing People in Deaf Families*. Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press. (Sociolinguistics in Deaf Communities Series; 14).
- BOSKI Pawel (2008). Five Meanings of Integration in Acculturation Research. *International journal of intercultural relations* (Amsterdam, Netherlands), vol.32, no.2. <[reader.elsevier.com/reader/sd/pii/S0147176708000072?token=92FA9A23034A1B9CAD573067EFFEB2735F81A8E57356F1D1D09B4CA47EFE230A5E5387C60CB4F52353A1867A01E2A354](http://reader.elsevier.com/reader/sd/pii/S0147176708000072?token=92FA9A23034A1B9CAD573067EFFEB2735F81A8E57356F1D1D09B4CA47EFE230A5E5387C60CB4F52353A1867A01E2A354)> [Accessed: 2019.6.25]
- CARTER Michael J. and MIRELES Danielle C. (2016). Exploring the Relationship Between Deaf Identity Verification Processes and Self-Esteem. *Identity* (Mahwah, NJ), vol.16, no.2. <[www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/15283488.2016.1159963](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/15283488.2016.1159963)> [Accessed: 2019.6.25]
- EMMOREY Karen, BORINSTEIN Helsa B. and THOMPSON Robin (2005). Bimodal Bilingualism: Code-Blending Between Spoken English and American Sign Language. In *Proceedings of the 4th International Symposium on Bilingualism* (Somerville, MA). <[www.lingref.com/isb/4/051ISB4.PDF](http://www.lingref.com/isb/4/051ISB4.PDF)> [Accessed: 2019.6.26]
- EMMOREY Karen, BORINSTEIN Helsa B., THOMPSON Robin and GOLLAN Tamar H. (2008). Bimodal Bilingualism. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* (Cambridge, U.K.), vol.11, no.1. <[www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/4890F40E360EBD90E71447DCE278DBEA/S1366728907003203a.pdf/bimodal\\_bilingualism.pdf](http://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/4890F40E360EBD90E71447DCE278DBEA/S1366728907003203a.pdf/bimodal_bilingualism.pdf)> [Accessed: 2019.6.25]
- FORD Keith (2009). Critical Incidents in the Experiences of Japanese Returnees. *Language and Intercultural Communication* (Milton Park, U.K.), vol.9, no.2. <[www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/14708470902807701](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/14708470902807701)> [Accessed: 2019.6.26]

- FRY Rieko (2007). Perspective Shifts and a Theoretical Model Relating to kaigaishijo and kikokushijo, or Third Culture Kids in a Japanese Context. *Journal of Research in International Education* (Amsterdam, Netherlands), vol.6, no.2. <[citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.921.7144&rep=rep1&type=pdf](http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.921.7144&rep=rep1&type=pdf)> [Accessed: 2019.6.25]
- FUJISHIMA Momoko 藤嶋桃子 and IWATA Yoshinari 岩田吉生 (2018). *Chokakushogaisha no aidentete keisei ni kansuru kentou* 聴覚障害者のアイデンティティ形成に関する検討 [Studies on Identity Formation of Deaf People]. *Shogaisha kyoiku fukushigaku kenkyu* 障害者教育福祉学研究 (Aichi 愛知), vol.14. <[hdl.handle.net/10424/00007641](http://hdl.handle.net/10424/00007641)> [Accessed: 2019.6.26]
- JACKSON Kelly F. (2013). Participatory Diagramming in Social Work Research: Utilizing Visual Timelines to Interpret the Complexities of the Lived Multiracial Experience. *Qualitative Social Work* (Thousand Oaks, California), vol.12, no.4. <[journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1473325011435258](http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1473325011435258)> [Accessed: 2019.6.25]
- KACHRU Braj B. (1982). The Bilingual's Linguistic Repertoire. In: HARTFORD Beverly, VALDMAN Albert and FOSTER Charles R. (eds) *Issues in International Bilingual Education. Topics in Language and Linguistics*. Boston, MA: Springer.
- KANNO Yasuko (2000). Bilingualism and Identity: The Stories of Japanese Returnees. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* (Milton Park, U.K.), vol.3, no.1. <[www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/13670050008667697](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/13670050008667697)> [Accessed: 2019.6.26]
- KANNO Yasuko (2003). *Negotiating Bilingual and Bicultural Identities: Japanese Returnees Betwixt Two Worlds*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- KANNO Yasuko and NORTON Bonny (2003). Imagined Communities and Educational Possibilities: Introduction. *Journal of language, identity, and education* (Abingdon-on-Thames, U.K.), vol.2, no.4. <[https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1207/S15327701JLIE0204\\_1](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1207/S15327701JLIE0204_1)> [Accessed: 2019.6.26]
- KINOSHITA Yasuhito 木下康仁 (2003). *Gurandeddo seorii apurouchi eno jissen: Shitsuteki kenkyu eno sasoi* グラウンデッドセオリーアプローチの実践—質的研究への誘い [Practices of Modified Grounded Theory Approach - Invitation to Qualitative Research]. Tokyo 東京: Koubundou 弘文堂.
- KNIGHT Tracy R. (2013). *Social Identity in Hearing Youth Who Have Deaf Parents: A Qualitative Study*. Doctor of Education. Lamar University, Beaumont, Texas.

- LEIGH Irene W. (2009). *A Lens on Deaf Identities*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- LEIGH Irene W. and ANDREWS Jean F. (2017). *Deaf People and Society: Psychological, Sociological, and Educational Perspectives (Second Edition)*. New York and Oxon: Routledge.
- MCILROY Guy and STORBECK Claudine (2011). Development of Deaf Identity: An Ethnographic Study. *The Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education* (Oxford, U.K.), vol.16, no.4. <[academic.oup.com/jdsde/article/16/4/494/551253](http://academic.oup.com/jdsde/article/16/4/494/551253)> [Accessed: 2019.6.26]
- OHNA Stein E. (2004). Deaf in My Own Way: Identity, Learning and Narratives. *Deafness & Education International* (Leeds, England), vol.6, no.1. <[onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/dei.161](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/dei.161)> [Accessed: 2019.6.26]
- PRESTON Paul (1995). *Mother Father Deaf: Living Between Sound and Silence*. Massachusetts and England: Harvard University Press.
- ROSE Heath and MCKINLEY Jim (2018). Japan's English-Medium Instruction Initiatives and the Globalization of Higher Education. *Higher Education* (Dordrecht, Netherlands), vol.75, no.1. <[link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10734-017-0125-1](http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10734-017-0125-1)> [Accessed: 2019.6.26]
- TOOMEY Adrian, DORJEE Tenzin and TING-TOOMEY Stella (2013). Bicultural Identity Negotiation, Conflicts, and Intergroup Communication Strategies, *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research* (Milton Park, U.K.), vol.42, no.2. <[www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17475759.2013.785973](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17475759.2013.785973)> [Accessed: 2019.6.26]
- WHITE Merry E. (1988). *The Japanese Overseas: Can They Go Home Again?* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- WILLIS David, ONODA Eriko and WALTER Enloe (1994). Kikokusha: Japan's Returnees: Transnational, Transcultural, Challenges of the Late 20th Century to the Traditional Japanese Cultural Identity. In: *Souai Daigaku Kenkyuuronshuu 相愛大学研究論集* (Osaka 大阪), vol.10. <[pdfs.semanticscholar.org/e999/c28f5dce6950515cab00d0b2a465938abd88.pdf](http://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/e999/c28f5dce6950515cab00d0b2a465938abd88.pdf)> [Accessed: 2019.6.26]
- YASHIRO Kayoko (1992). On the Foreign Language Maintenance of the Japanese Returnee Students. *Intercultural Communication Studies* (Kingston, U.S.A.), vol.2, no.1. <[web.uri.edu/iaics/files/04-Kyoko-Yashiro.pdf](http://web.uri.edu/iaics/files/04-Kyoko-Yashiro.pdf)> [Accessed: 2019.6.26]

- YE Shaoyu and UCHIDA Erika (2017). Japanese Students' Group Identification, Social Tolerance and Motivation for Intercultural Communication. *International Journal of Culture and History* (Las Vegas, NV). vol.3, no.2. <[www.ijch.net/vol3/089-LM0022.pdf](http://www.ijch.net/vol3/089-LM0022.pdf)> [Accessed: 2019.6.26]
- YOSHIDA Tomoko, HAYASHI Yuko and UNO Mayumi (1999). Identity Issues and Reentry Training. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* (Amsterdam, Netherlands), vol.23, no.3. <[www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0147176799000073](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0147176799000073)> [Accessed: 2019.6.26]
- YOSHIDA Tomoko, MATSUMOTO David, AKASHI Satoko, AKIYAMA Tsuyoshi, FURUIYE Atsushi, ISHII Chikako and MORIYOSHI Naoko (2009). Contrasting Experiences in Japanese Returnee Adjustment: Those Who Adjust Easily and Those Who Do Not. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* (Amsterdam, Netherlands), vol.33, no.4. <[www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0147176709000364](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0147176709000364)> [Accessed: 2019.6.26]