

## Language Attitudes among Japanese and Japanese-Americans in the Los Angeles Area, California

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The purpose of this project was to discover the language attitudes of Japanese and Japanese-Americans relating to the use of the Japanese language and the English language in the U.S.A. I was interested in finding out their opinions about both the use of bilingual education and about English as the official language in the U.S.A. I collected 63 samples randomly by personally interviewing people or asking my Japanese or Japanese-American friends to pass on a question sheet to their relatives or their friends.

The population in the U.S.A. consists of many races and many immigrants who come from all over the world. Especially in California, many people come from Central America and Asia. Some people come to the U.S.A. legally and others come to the U.S.A. illegally. A high percentage of these immigrants are Hispanics who speak Spanish. If the immigrants came to the U.S.A. illegally before 1998, they or their children could still receive bilingual education. Bilingual education is a system which teaches the students using their own native languages. I had opportunities to observe bilingual education being practiced in some elementary schools. The classes I observed were being taught in English and Spanish: for example, the classroom teacher may use English, but the teacher's aides speak both English and Spanish. After the teacher explains the subject in English, the teacher's aides help the students in their own language with a group or individual. Sometimes the class is divided into two groups. One consists of native English speakers and the other consists of Hispanics. They are taught American history in their own language. Using their own language, they can understand and learn the subjects. Both the U.S. federal government and the government of California spent a huge amount of money on bilingual education. In 1998, bilingual education in California was abolished as the result of public ballot.

There are many Japanese people and Japanese-Americans living in California. I was one of them. I lived in California from April 1980 to December 1990 as a student. In December 1988, I surveyed some Japanese people and some Japanese-Americans, to a total of 63 people, about their language attitudes relating to the use of the Japanese language and the English language in the U.S.A., and their opinions about both the use of bilingual education in the U.S.A. and about English as the official language in the U.S.A.

(A) I classified the 63 people into six groups:

(1) First group (10 people: 1 person=in his/her 20s, 2=30s, 5=40s, 1=50s, and 1=60s):

Japanese who will stay in the U.S.A. for several years and then return to Japan. All of them use only Japanese in their homes. Five of them have trouble communicating with their children and grandchildren in English. All 10 people think that all Americans

should speak English. They also think that all people who are going to stay in the U.S.A. for the rest of their lives should learn English. Four of them feel strange when they see such foreign language signs and advertisements as Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese, and six of them feel that it is helpful to see Japanese signs and advertisements.

- (2) Second group (12 people: 1=20s, 3=30s, 4=40s, 3=50s, and 1=70s):

Japanese or Japanese-Americans who immigrated to the U.S.A. after World War II. Some of them are American citizens and others have a green card which gives them permission to stay in the U.S.A. In their homes, two of them use only Japanese, four of them use only English, and six of them use both Japanese and English. Four of them have trouble communicating with their children and grandchildren in English. Nine of them think that all Americans should speak English and 11 of them think that all people who are going to stay in the U.S.A. for the rest of their lives should learn English. Eight of them feel strange when they see foreign language signs and advertisements, and it is helpful to those eight to see Japanese signs and advertisements.

- (3) Third group (10 people: 4=60s, 1=70s, and 5=80s):

The first generation of Japanese or Japanese-Americans who immigrated to the U.S.A. before World War II. Some of them are American citizens and others have a green card. In their homes, four of them use only Japanese, five of them use only English, and one person uses both Japanese and English. Seven of them have trouble communicating with their children and grandchildren in English. Six of them think that all Americans should speak English, and eight of them think that all people who are going to stay in the U.S.A. for the rest of their lives should learn English. Three of them feel strange when they see foreign language signs and advertisements, and it is helpful to seven of them to see Japanese signs and advertisements.

- (4) Fourth group (11 people: 2=40s, 6=50s, and 3=60s):

The second generation of Japanese-Americans. They were born in the U.S.A. In their homes, 10 of them use only English and one person uses both English and Japanese. Nobody has any trouble communicating in English. Nine of them think that all Americans should speak English, and all of them think that all people who are going to stay in the U.S.A. for the rest of their lives should learn English. Five of them feel strange when they see foreign language signs and advertisements, and only one person said it was helpful to her to see Japanese signs and advertisements.

- (5) Fifth group (10 people: 2 teenagers, 4=20s, 2=30s, and 2=50s):

The third generation of Japanese-Americans. They were born in the U.S.A. In their homes, eight of them use only English and one person uses both English and Japanese. Seven of them think that all Americans should speak English, and nine of them think that all people who are going to stay in the U.S.A. for the rest of their lives should learn English. Four of them feel strange when they see foreign language signs and advertisements, and one person said it was helpful to her to see Japanese signs and advertisements.

(6) Sixth group (10 people: 8 =20s and 2=30s):

The fourth generation of Japanese-Americans. They were born in the U.S.A. All of them use only English in their homes. Five of them think that all Americans should speak English, and eight of them think that all people who are going to stay in the U.S.A. for the rest of their lives should learn English. Two of them feel strange when they see foreign language signs and advertisements, and it isn't helpful to them to see Japanese signs and advertisements.

(B) To find out their opinions about bilingual education in the U.S.A., I asked seven questions.

1. Do you know about bilingual education in the U.S.A.?
2. Did you receive bilingual education in the U.S.A.?
3. Are you in favor of bilingual education?
4. Did (Do) your children receive bilingual education?
5. Did (Do) your grandchildren receive bilingual education?
6. Do you want your children to receive bilingual education?
7. Do you want your grandchildren to receive bilingual education?

(C) To find out all 63 people's opinions about English as the official language in the U.S.A., I asked one question.

1. Do you agree with English as the official language in the U.S.A.?

(D) I set up hypotheses about bilingual education in the U.S.A. and English as the official language in the U.S.A.

(1) First group (10 people):

I expect that all 10 people will be in favor of bilingual education in the U.S.A. because they or their children struggle to communicate in English. They will agree with English as the official language in the U.S.A., because without using one language, how can the United States be united?

(2) Second group (12 people):

I expect that all 12 people will be in favor of bilingual education in the U.S.A. because they use Japanese in their homes and they are afraid their children will not learn adequately if the entire curriculum is in English. Not all of them will agree with English as the official language in the U.S.A. because some of them have trouble communicating in English.

(3) Third group (10 people):

I expect that all 10 people will be in favor of bilingual education in the U.S.A. because from their language experience in the U.S.A., they think that bilingual education educates many students who can't speak or read English. They will not agree with English as the official language in the U.S.A. As they can't speak or read English, it will cause them trouble if English is the official language.

(4) Fourth group (11 people):

I expect that all 11 people will be in favor of bilingual education because they couldn't speak English before they entered kindergarten or elementary school. They might have trouble understanding the curriculum; therefore, they will understand the need for bilingual education, which helps students who can't understand English. All of them will be against English as the official language because even though they are Americans, they couldn't speak English in their early lives and their parents and their grandparents still can't speak English.

(5) Fifth group (10 people):

I expect that all 10 people will not be in favor of bilingual education in the U.S.A. because they didn't have any trouble understanding the curriculum in English. They may think that students whose first languages are not English should study hard to understand English. All of them will agree with English as the official language in the U.S.A. because they were raised using English and educated in English. From their language use and language environment, language in the U.S.A. means only English.

(6) Sixth group (10 people):

I expect that all 10 people will not be in favor of bilingual education because they didn't or don't have any trouble in English; therefore, they may think that in order to understand the curriculum, those students for whom English is a second language should study hard to understand English. All of them will agree with English as the official language in the U.S.A. because they didn't or don't have any trouble in English. They will also never doubt that English should be the official language in the U.S.A.

(E) The results of the survey.

(1) The use of bilingual education in the U.S.A.

Question 1: Do you know about bilingual education in the U.S.A.?

First group	(10 people)	100.0%	yes	(10 people)
Second group	(12 people)	91.6%	yes	(11 people)
		8.3%	no	( 1 person)
Third group	(10 people)	80.0%	yes	( 8 people)
		10.0%	no	( 1 person)
		10.0%	no answer	( 1 person)
Fourth group	(11 people)	81.8%	yes	( 9 people)
		18.2%	no	( 2 people)
Fifth group	(10 people)	80.0%	yes	( 8 people)
		20.0%	no	( 2 people)
Sixth group	(10 people)	100.0%	yes	(10 people)

Question 2: Did you receive bilingual education in the U.S.A.?

First group	(10 people)	100.0%	no	(10 people)
Second group	(12 people)	100.0%	no	(12 people)
Third group	(10 people)	90.0%	no	( 9 people)

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		10.0%	no answer	( 1 person)
Fourth group	(11 people)	9.1%	yes	( 1 person)
		90.1%	no	(10 people)
Fifth group	(10 people)	10.0%	yes	( 1 person)
		90.0%	no	( 9 people)
Sixth group	(10 people)	100.0%	no	(10 people)
Question 3: Are you in favor of bilingual education?				
First group	(10 people)	30.0%	yes	( 3 people)
		60.0%	no	( 6 people)
		10.0%	no answer	( 1 person)
Second group	(12 people)	75.0%	yes	( 9 people)
		25.0%	no	( 3 people)
Third group	(10 people)	30.0%	yes	( 3 people)
		50.0%	no	( 5 people)
		20.0%	no answer	( 2 people)
Fourth group	(11 people)	63.6%	yes	( 7 people)
		36.3%	no	( 4 people)
Fifth group	(10 people)	50.0%	yes	( 5 people)
		30.0%	no	( 3 people)
		20.0%	no answer	( 2 people)
Sixth group	(10 people)	70.0%	yes	( 7 people)
		20.0%	no	( 2 people)
		10.0%	no answer	( 1 person)
Question 4: Did (Do) your children receive bilingual education?				
First group	(10 people)	90.0%	no	( 9 people)
		10.0%	no answer	( 1 person)
Second group	(12 people)	8.3%	yes	( 1 person)
		83.3%	no	(10 people)
		8.3%	no answer	( 1 person)
Third group	(10 people)	90.0%	no	( 9 people)
		10.0%	no answer	( 1 person)
Fourth group	(11 people)	18.2%	yes	( 2 people)
		72.7%	no	( 8 people)
		9.0%	no answer	( 1 person)
Fifth group	(10 people)	70.0%	no	( 7 people)
		30.0%	no answer	( 3 people)
Sixth group	(10 people)	80.0%	no	( 8 people)
		20.0%	no answer	( 2 people)
Question 5: Did (Do) your grandchildren receive bilingual education?				
First group	(10 people)	80.0%	no	( 8 people)

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		20.0%	no answer	( 2 people)
Second group	(12 people)	75.0%	no	( 9 people)
		25.0%	no answer	( 3 people)
Third group	(10 people)	80.0%	no	( 8 people)
		20.0%	no answer	( 2 people)
Fourth group	(11 people)	21.8%	no	( 3 people)
		72.2%	no answer	( 8 people)
Fifth group	(10 people)	50.0%	no	( 5 people)
		50.0%	no answer	( 5 people)
Sixth group	(10 people)	80.0%	no	( 8 people)
		20.0%	no answer	( 2 people)

Question 6: Do you want your children to receive bilingual education?

First group	(10 people)	20.0%	yes	( 2 people)
		70.0%	no	( 7 people)
		10.0%	no answer	( 1 person)
Second group	(12 people)	8.3%	yes	( 1 person)
		91.6%	no	(11 people)
Third group	(10 people)	70.0%	no	( 7 people)
		30.0%	no answer	( 3 people)
Fourth group	(11 people)	27.2%	yes	( 3 people)
		63.6%	no	( 7 people)
		9.1%	no answer	( 1 person)
Fifth group	(10 people)	50.0%	yes	( 5 people)
		40.0%	no	( 4 people)
		10.0%	no answer	( 1 person)
Sixth group	(10 people)	20.0%	yes	( 2 people)
		60.0%	no	( 6 people)
		20.0%	no answer	( 2 people)

Question 7: Do you want your grandchildren to receive bilingual education?

First group	(10 people)	20.0%	yes	( 2 people)
		50.0%	no	( 5 people)
		30.0%	no answer	( 3 people)
Second group	(12 people)	8.3%	yes	( 1 person)
		75.0%	no	( 9 people)
		16.7%	no answer	( 2 people)
Third group	(10 people)	70.0%	no	( 7 people)
		30.0%	no answer	( 3 people)
Fourth group	(11 people)	18.0%	yes	( 2 people)
		45.5%	no	( 5 people)
		36.4%	no answer	( 4 people)

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Fifth group	(10 people)	40.0%	yes	( 4 people)
		30.0%	no	( 3 people)
		30.0%	no answer	( 3 people)
Sixth group	(10 people)	20.0%	yes	( 2 people)
		60.0%	no	( 6 people)
		20.0%	no answer	( 2 people)

Some people explained why they were or were not in favor of bilingual education. A 40-year-old college-educated teacher's aide who immigrated to the U.S.A. in 1971 said, "Japanese children don't understand what the teacher says. They don't want to go to a public school because of English. Japanese children who came from Japan need bilingual education for a few years. After they learn English, they want to go to a public school." A 33-year-old university student, moreover, who is third-generation and works part-time as an equipment attendant at California State University, Long Beach, said, "At my children's school in Ceritos, half of the population are Spanish speakers. They have bilingual programs. In their homeroom, everybody speaks English, but in math class and reading class, they might take these children to a primarily Spanish-speaking class so they can keep up their Spanish language. It is great. I like that." On the other hand, some people explained why they were not in favor of bilingual education. A 68-year-old second-generation farmer who graduated from high school said, "Only English should be taught in American schools. No bilingual teaching in the regular classroom." A 63-year-old second-generation farmer who graduated from college said, "I went to school. First grade, I didn't know how to speak English. I spoke only Japanese. Those days I hardly knew English. It's up to the teacher to explain in English to me how to speak in English so it took a long time but eventually I got to know how to speak English. Teachers explain to kids the proper way to speak English. There are many nationalities. Teachers can't speak in all languages." A 47-year-old second-generation gardener who graduated from college said, "When I entered the school, I didn't know any English but I listened to other kids and the teachers, and I learned English."

(2) English as the official language in the U.S.A.

Question 1: Do you agree with English as the official language in the U.S.A.?

First group	(10 people)	100.0%	yes	(10 people)
Second group	(12 people)	100.0%	yes	(12 people)
Third group	(10 people)	80.0%	yes	( 8 people)
		10.0%	no	( 1 person)
		10.0%	no answer	( 1 person)
Fourth group	(11 people)	90.9%	yes	(10 people)
		9.0%	no	( 1 person)
Fifth group	(10 people)	80.0%	yes	( 8 people)
		20.0%	no	( 2 people)

Sixth group	(10 people)	80.0%	yes	( 8 people)
		10.0%	no	( 1 person)
		10.0%	no answer	( 1 person)

Some people explained their opinions about the official language in the U.S.A. A 40-year-old businessman who graduated from university and has been in the U.S.A. for 4 years said, "They can speak any language but they need one language to unite the country." A 39-year-old university student who will return to Japan said, "To unite the country and the people, one language must be used in the U.S.A. The language must be English because the majority's language is English in the U.S.A." A 50-year-old third-generation pharmacist who graduated from university said, "English should be used mainly to communicate better. It shouldn't be forced on individuals." A 23-year-old university student who is fourth generation said, "Establishing English as the official language in the U.S.A. was bad discrimination in some instances. However, I also believe that all people in a nation must be able to communicate with each other in order to live harmoniously." A 28-year-old university student who is fourth-generation said, "Anyone who opposes bilingual education and wants English to be the official language of the U.S. is being narrow-minded and racist. These same people will often go to a foreign country without learning its language because they expect the people there to speak English. Therefore, this kind of thinking displays an unwillingness and inability to view bilingualism in the U.S. objectively. Also, this type of thinking often indicates a form of institutionalized racism because when people are forced to speak an L2 (second language) and to assimilate completely into the L2 culture, they or their children will lose their L1 (first language) culture and by extension their L1 identity and pride in its heritage. Hayakawa (S.I. Hayakawa was Japanese-American and a linguist. In November 1976, he was elected United States Senator from California) is a traitor to his own people and is not considered to be one of us."

(F) The accuracy of my hypotheses about bilingual education in the U.S.A. and English as the official language in the U.S.A.

(1) First group (10 people):

My hypothesis that all of the first group would be in favor of bilingual education in the U.S.A. was not supported. Only 30% (3 people) were in favor of it. My hypothesis that they would agree with English as the official language in the U.S.A. was supported.

(2) Second group (12 people):

My hypothesis that all of the people in the second group would be in favor of bilingual education was not supported. Twenty percent (3 people) of the group were not in favor of it. My hypothesis that not all of them in the group would agree with English as the official language in the U.S.A. was not supported. All of them agreed with it.

(3) Third group (10 people):

My hypothesis that all of the people in the third group would be in favor of bilingual education in the U.S.A. was not supported. Only 30% (3 people) of the group were in favor of it. My hypothesis that they would not agree with English as the official language in the U.S.A. was not supported. Eighty percent (8 people) of the group agreed with it.

(4) Fourth group (11 people):

My hypothesis that all of the people in the fourth group would be in favor of bilingual education was not supported. Thirty-six percent (4 people) of the group were not in favor of bilingual education. My hypothesis that all of them would be against English as the official language in the U.S.A. was not supported. Twenty percent (2 people) of the group were against it.

(5) Fifth group (10 people):

My hypothesis that none of the people in the fifth group would be in favor of bilingual education was not supported. Fifty percent (5 people) of the group were in favor of bilingual education. My hypothesis that all of them would agree with English as the official language in the U.S.A. was not supported. Twenty percent (2 people) of the group were against it.

(6) Sixth group (10 people):

My hypothesis that none of the people in the sixth group would be in favor of bilingual education was not supported. Seventy percent (7 people) of the group were in favor of bilingual education. My hypothesis that all of them would agree with English as the official language was not supported. Ten percent (1 person) of the group were against it.

Conclusion:

Bilingual education is a system which educates students whose native language is not English. Bilingual education helps both immigrant students and non-immigrants to understand some subjects like math and history.

Even though Japanese students struggle to understand the curriculum in English, and bilingual education is needed precisely for such students, only 30% of their parents were in favor of bilingual education. The students may learn only a little at an American school. The parents expect that their children will learn the subjects sufficiently after they return to Japan. On the other hand, 75% of Japanese and Japanese-Americans who immigrated to the U.S.A. were in favor of bilingual education. They may realize that their children need to learn both English and the curriculum to succeed in the U.S.A. The people who immigrated before World War II still have a lot of trouble communicating in English but only 30% of them were in favor of bilingual education. In contrast, all of the Japanese-Americans who were born in the U.S.A. were raised and educated using English and do not have any trouble communicating in English, but a higher percentage of them were in favor of bilingual education. Especially, of the fourth-generation of Japanese-Americans who never have

trouble understanding English, 70% were in favor of bilingual education.

Because bilingual education in California has been discontinued, the state government of California and the U.S. federal government don't have to spend a huge amount of money on bilingual education. If the immigrants do not receive sufficient education because of an inadequate command of the English language; how will these immigrants influence American society; economically, educationally, and politically? How will not using bilingual education influence both the native English speakers and non-native English speakers in the classroom? Is there any possibility that the non-native English speakers will pull down the educational level in the classroom?

A high percentage of all the groups agreed with English as the official language in the U.S.A. Especially, 100% of the people who are going to stay in the U.S.A. for several years and then return to Japan, and 100% of the people who immigrated to the U.S.A. after World War II agreed with English as the official language in the U.S.A. On the other hand, the second-generation, the third-generation, and the fourth-generation who never have any trouble with English didn't completely agree with English as the official language in the U.S.A. Nine percent in the second-generation, 20% in the third-generation and 10% in the fourth-generation were against English as the official language.

Will any social and political problems be caused by establishing English as the official language?

It will take time to find out the effect on society in California of not using bilingual education and of establishing English as the official language in the U.S.A.