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# LITERACY PRACTICES AMONG SPANISH-JAPANESE CHILDREN IN CATALONIA: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF THEIR USES AND MOTHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD THEM

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**Abstract:** This ethnographic study aims to analyze writing tasks, attitudes, roles and social practices of 11 students from grades one to nine who attend the Japanese Saturday school in Barcelona, Spain (Hoshuko Barcelona Educaci3n Japonesa), in each of their four surrounding languages (Spanish, Catalan, English and Japanese). We conducted 22 interviews with their Japanese mothers and collected 32 students' writing samples in multiple languages. Our participants have different language backgrounds because they belong to bilingual families and all go to local schools. In addition they all attend the Japanese school on Saturdays in order to maintain Japanese as a heritage language. We found that these children use four different languages both constantly and actively. With regard to Japanese, the most common literacy activity performed by them is keeping a diary, which is an assignment from their school. They occasionally write seasonal cards and send messages to their extended family in the appropriate language for the readers. From a sociocultural perspective, the literacy practices and the use of technology across the four languages were analyzed, with a special focus on the interactions and the appropriation of two significantly different writing systems (Spanish, Catalan and English versus Japanese).

**Keywords:** multilingualism; heritage language; literacy practices and attitudes.

*ALFABETIZACI3N DEL ALUMNADO  
HISPANO-JAPON3S EN CATALUNYA:  
UN ESTUDIO ETNOGR3FICO DE SUS USOS Y DE  
LAS ACTITUDES DE LAS MADRES HACIA ELLOS*

**Resumen:** Este estudio etnogr3fico analiza las tareas de escritura, actitudes, roles y pr3cticas sociales de 11 estudiantes de primaria, que asisten a la escuela japonesa de Hoshuko (Barcelona), en cada uno de los cuatro idiomas presentes en su entorno (espa3ol, catal3n, ingl3s y japon3s). Hemos realizado 22 entrevistas con sus madres japonesas y hemos recogido 32 redacciones de los estudiantes. Nuestros participantes cuentan con diferentes trasfondos lingüísticos porque forman parte de familias bilingües y todos asisten a una escuela local. Además, acuden a la escuela japonesa con la intenci3n de mantener el japon3s como lengua de herencia. Nuestros datos muestran que utilizan los cuatro idiomas constante y activamente. Con respecto al japon3s, la actividad m3s comün es escribir un diario. Ocasionalmente, escriben tarjetas de felicitaci3n y envían mensajes a sus familiares en el idioma apropiado. Desde una perspectiva socio-cultural, hemos analizado las pr3cticas de literacidad y el uso de las tecnologías en los usos letrados de los cuatro idiomas prestando atenci3n a las interacciones y a la apropiaci3n de dos sistemas de escritura significativamente diferentes (espa3ol, catal3n e ingl3s frente al japon3s).

**Palabras clave:** multilingüismo; lengua de herencia; pr3cticas de literacidad y actitudes.

*ALFABETITZACI3 DE L'ALUMNAT  
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ACTITUDS DE LES MARES VERS ELLS*

**Resum:** Aquest estudi etnogr3fic pret3n analitzar les tasques d'escriptura, les actituds, els rols i les practiques socials d'11 estudiants de primer curs de prim3ria fins a nov3 de l'escola japonesa d'Hoshuko (Barcelona, Espanya), en cada un dels quatre idiomes presents en el seu entorn (espanyol, catal3, angl3s i japon3s). Hem dut a terme 22 entrevistes amb les seves mares japoneses i hem recollit 32 redaccions dels estudiants. Els nostres participants tenen diferents entorns lingüístics perquè formen part de famílies bilingües i tots són alumnes d'una escola local. A més, assisteixen a l'escola japonesa amb la intenci3n de mantenir el japon3s com a llengua d'her3ncia. Les nostres dades mostren que utilitzen els quatre idiomes constantment i activa. Pel que fa al japon3s, l'activitat m3s comuna és fer un diari que es tracta com deures de l'escola japonesa. A vegades, escriuen targes de felicitaci3 i envien missatges als seus familiars en l'idioma apropiat. Des d'una perspectiva socio-cultural, hem analitzat les pr3ctiques de literacitat i l'ús de les tecnologies en els usos lletrats dels quatre idiomes fent atenci3n especial a les interaccions i a l'apropriaci3 de dos sistemes d'escriptura significativament diferents (espanyol, catal3 i angl3s enfront del japon3s).

**Paraules clau:** multilingüisme; llengua d'her3ncia; pr3ctiques de literacitat i actituds.

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## Introduction

Due to globalization and the increasing number of international marriages in Japan, research focusing on bilingual and multilingual education has become increasingly popular in the past 10 years. In particular, the research regarding acquisition of language skills, effective language teaching or language use has been investigated profoundly. Increasing numbers of students now have some degree of bilingual proficiency in the nonnative language that they are studying. Also, more school-aged children face the daunting challenge of becoming literate in two languages, often simultaneously. As a result, much recent attention has been given to the issue of heritage language instruction (Cummins, 2005). Compared with English-Japanese and Chinese-Japanese bilinguals, there have been few ethnographic studies focused on Spanish-Catalan-Japanese children from an emic perspective.

Our perspective of research focus on the New Literacy Studies (NLS) tradition that has not been introduced in Japan. We consider that it has the potential to reveal more about children's literacy activities and practices. Gee (1991) and Street (2003) portray that NLS is a new tradition in considering the nature of literacy, focusing not so much on acquisition of skills, as the dominant approaches do, but rather on what it means to think of literacy as a social practice. This entails the recognition of multiple literacies, varying according to time and space, but also contested in relations of power. Furthermore, they continue to explain:

NLS, then, takes nothing for granted with respect to literacy and the social practices with which it becomes associated, problematizing what counts as literacy at any time and place and asking "whose literacies" are dominant and whose are marginalized or resistant.

Barton & Hamilton (1998:1-5) consider NLS is a new view of understanding the nature of reading and writing as a social practice rather than a universal social cognitive skill. During the 1980s, NLS started with Sylvia Scriber and Michael Cole's ethnographies research in their book called *The psychology of literacy* as well as with Shirley Brice Heath's book, *Ways with words*. They argued the dichotomised vision of spoken versus written culture derived from the use of speech and writing. Other more recent scholars in this field are David Barton, Brian Street, James Paul Gee, etc. Cassany (2012:4) describes this approach as follows.

The NLS considers the historical, social and cultural particularities of each reading practice, which allow us to explain in a more detailed and clearer manner the tight bonds established between language and culture and the particularities of each community in relation to their reading and writing practices. With this approach, the fact that we find different and particular reading practices in each community of speech that are appropriate to the idiosyncrasies of every human group makes more sense and shows more coherence.

He also continues that this sociocultural orientation of reading has three characteristics:

- 1) It offers a more global theoretical framework for understanding writing.
- 2) It takes into account in a more detailed and plausible manner the variations in the usage of written texts in a more plurilingual and multicultural era.
- 3) It neither rejects nor disputes the importance of cognitive and linguistic components in the task of reading and writing.

Up until now, sociocultural studies have focused on literacy practices in the mother tongue (Kalman & Street, 2010; Poveda & Sánchez, 2010), in current digital environments (Lankshear & Knoble 2006) and in educational or academic environments in multilingual and multicultural contexts (Poveda, Palomares-Valera, & Cano 2006; Zavala & Córdova 2010). However there have been no studies published on the Spanish-Japanese plurilingual and pluricultural field.

As Barton & Hamilton (2004) mention, like all human activity, literacy is essentially social, and it is located in the interaction between people. This is a study of what people, in our case Spanish-Japanese multilingual and multicultural children, do with literacy: of the social activities, of the thoughts and meanings behind the activities, and of the texts used in such activities. It is about how this particular group of people use reading and writing in their day-to-day lives. Our research explores contemporary uses and meanings of literacy in everyday life and the ways in which these are changing. It is based on an ethnographic study which documents in detail literacy practices at one point in time and space: from 2015 to 2017 in Barcelona, Spain.

Gee (2000) shows the example of different social languages at work that a young woman uses a distinctive grammar to enact the situated identity when she talked to her parents and her boyfriend. Apparently, she used different grammar and vocabulary depending on who she is talking with. In a similar way, multilingual children differentiate in school formal academic writing and vernacular informal writing. Cassany (2008) also addresses the important gap of vernacular and academic practices, that is, what students do at home or in the street as opposed to at school. In addition to that, he created a clear list to show some principal features of vernacular and academic practices, namely inside and outside of the school.

In terms of literacy learning, Kalman (2003:44-45) presents four steps to adapt the use of a learning device mentioned below. A theory which Cassany (2010) applies in his book *Aproximación a la literacidad crítica*. Based on Kalman's principle, the first step is *availability*, which means communities have to have writing devices such as books, cell phones, computers, etc. The second step is *access*. Communities should create proper social conditions such as those in libraries so that the learner can access the learning device and practice. The third step is participation. Learners get involved with a group that uses the learning device in their regular interactions. The final step is *appropriation*. Learners use a learning device themselves so as to be able to integrate in communicative practices and give their personal voice.

Furthermore, Barton (2010) introduces four approaches to the study of literacy. In our opinion, one of the four approaches, *educational perspective*, is appropriate for our study, as our focus is on writing as an activity or as something students do. What students do with written texts does certainly relate to the abilities they have. However, the focus in this study is not on measuring students' skills or levels, but we investigate writing in a great variety of social, cultural and home contexts beyond education. He highlights that primarily an anthropological perspective on writing means to examine writing as both cultural and social practice. Hence, we take this ethnographic and emic approach to discover how their bilingual and bicultural backgrounds shape their writings. This study addresses the following questions:

- 1) What kind of literacy practices, particularly writing activities do multilingual children participate in inside and outside of school?
- 2) What form do the students' writings take and how much do they write?
- 3) What language did the students use in their writing samples? And did they write about Japan or Japanese culture?

### 1. Research site

We conducted our research at the Japanese Saturday school in Barcelona (below the word Hoshuko is used). These types of schools are known as Hoshuko in Japanese. As the author has been a teacher at this school for four years, she has had access to these multilingual children for an extended period of time. Consequently, she believed that, having already established a good level of familiarity with the children, they would find it easier to talk to her during interviews and, as a result, increase the likelihood that useful insights will be identified. The committee members kindly allowed us to carry out our research, and in exchange, we would share our findings and any suggestions for improvement we had identified. In 2017 there were 150 children at the school, with ages ranging from 4 to 14 years old. However, a close look at the number of students per grade level (Table 1) shows that this number decreases as students grow older.

Grade level	Age	N. of students	N. of teachers
Kindergarten	4	20	3
Kindergarten	5	15	3
Elementary grade 1	6	22	2
Grade 2	7	19	2
Grade 3	8	18	2
Grade 4	9	16	2
Grade 5	10	16	2
Grade 6	11	7	1
Secondary grade 1	12	9	1
Grade 2	13	7	1
Grade 2	14	1	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>150</b>	<b>20</b>

Table 1. Distribution of students by school years.

Currently, there are 20 teachers including eight assistant teachers. This school was founded in 1981 with three teachers and 32 students. Since that time, it has been supported by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in Japan. Although there is no principal at

this school, five committee members who were chosen among parents organize this school. Prior to each academic year, parents choose new committee members, though normally two committee members will retain their position. The reasoning is that the previous experience of those two committee members can be used to help with the integration of the new members.

This school is seeing a steady increase in the amount of students, mainly children of mixed families or permanent residents who attend regular school in Catalonia, or students from international schools (Fukuda, 2010:231-235).

As with the other 203 official Japanese schools in 56 countries, this Hoshuko follows the Japanese academic calendar, which starts in April and ends in March. They also use official textbooks which are provided by the Ministry of Education in Japan, which children in Japan also use. These 150 Spanish-Japanese children study Japanese in three classes (45 minutes each) every Saturday morning. This number of classes is surprisingly limited compared with Japanese classes that children in Japan have to attend, which is five to eight classes a week. Teachers at this Saturday school have a responsibility to cover the whole curriculum with official textbooks and extra workbooks. This is a demanding objective not only for teachers but also parents, and keeping up with the required standards is challenging for the students (Fukuda, 2010:234). While the school was not always successful in keeping the children motivated, those students who had developed relationships and had enriching experiences in Japan showed themselves to be strongly motivated to continue learning Japanese despite the pressure of the schoolwork involved.

Although this type of heritage language school has, over the years, become very common in North America, Australia and Asia, not much research about them has been conducted in Europe. For this reason, the development of this Hoshuko within the particular bilingual context of Catalonia (with Catalan and Spanish as community languages, English as a L2 or foreign language, and Japanese as a heritage language) needs to be investigated.

### 1.1. Participants

When we presented our research at this school in front of all parents, 11 mothers raised their hands to volunteer to participate in our study. To begin with, we asked them to read and sign the consent form, so they are aware how the information they provide will be used. These 11 children comprise one six-year-old, four seven-year olds, one eight-year-old, three nine-year-olds, one eleven-year-old and one fourteen-year-old. They all have different ages and backgrounds (age of arrival in Spain, length of residence, the amount of Japanese learning taking place, the school they go to on weekdays, etc.). The only characteristic that they have in common is that they all have a Japanese mother and all go to the same Japanese Saturday school. During weekdays, they all go to different types of school. In terms of their school, we can divide them into four groups. Six of them go to a local public Catalan school. Two go to an American school which is called an international school and another two go to a trilingual school where they learn Spanish, Catalan and English. One child goes to a French school. As can be seen in Table 2 below, their linguistic backgrounds are diverse.

Name	Sex	Age	Father	Mother	School language	Birth place	Length of residence in Spain (years)	Length of attendance at the Hoshuko (years)
Hitoe	F	6	Spanish	Japanese	Catalan	Spain	6	2.5
Kandai	M	7	French	Japanese	Catalan	Australia	4	3
Kaisuke	M	7	Spanish	Japanese	English Spanish Catalan	Spain	7	3
Mizuki	F	7	Spanish	Japanese	French	Spain	6	3
Naoto	M	7	Spanish	Japanese	Catalan	Spain	7	4
Naoya	M	8	Spanish	Japanese	Catalan	Spain	8	5
Aki	M	9	Spanish	Japanese	Catalan	Spain	9	5
Kazuo	M	9	Spanish	Japanese	English	US	5	5
Nina	F	9	Spanish	Japanese	English	China	4	4
Natsuki	F	11	Spanish	Japanese	English Spanish Catalan	Spain	11	7
Asuka	F	14	Spanish	Japanese	Catalan	Spain	14	8

Table 2. Students' backgrounds.

One key characteristic evident amongst Japanese parents is their desire to be very involved with their children's education. This can be observed in several ways. For example, in most European cities such as Barcelona, it is unusual for parents to send their children for additional education during the weekend. However, the parents of students at the Hoshuko believe sending their children to school on Saturday to be of great importance. In addition, as this school is situated outside of Barcelona, getting there via public transport is very inconvenient, resulting in the need for parents to take the students there themselves, and remain there until the lessons have been completed.

#### 4. Japanese writing systems and calligraphy

The modern Japanese writing system is a combination of three character types: 1) idiographic Kanji, which are adopted Chinese characters; 2) syllabic Hiragana, used for native or naturalized

Japanese words and grammatical elements such as particles; and 3) Katakana, used for foreign words and names, loanwords, onomatopoeia, scientific names, and sometimes for emphasis. Almost all Japanese sentences contain a mixture of Kanji, Hiragana and Katakana. Because of this mixture of scripts, in addition to a large inventory of Kanji characters (2136 regular-use Kanji), the Japanese writing system is often considered to be the most complicated in use anywhere in the world. Children in Japan begin to learn the most basic character which is Hiragana at home and kindergarten at the age of three or four and they are supposed to know all 46 Hiragana letters before entering elementary school (at the age of six). Some eager parents start to teach their children Katakana before going to elementary school. However, elementary school teachers teach 46 Katakana letters in the first or second semester of grade one. Then, at the same time, they introduce four to five Kanji every week (in the case of the Hoshuko they learn four Kanji every Saturday) and by the end of grade one, children (six years old) are supposed to read and write 80 Kanji correctly. 1006 Kanji are learnt over the six years of elementary school. What might be surprising is that this number is still half of everyday (regular-use) Kanji. That is to say, they continue to learn Japanese letters in junior high and high school.

Calligraphy in Japan is the art of writing beautifully. It is an elementary school subject in the mandatory education system of Japan. What is more, some parents send their children to calligraphy class after school. In high school, it is one of the choices among art subjects, along with music or painting. It is also a popular high school club activity. This demonstrates how important calligraphy is and how profoundly it is embedded in the Japanese educational system.

## 5. Methodology

We used several ethnographic techniques, with an ecological and emic approach, focusing on the different points of view of the subjects of our field (learners, their families and teachers). The methodology consists of three parts; 1) questionnaires about students' linguistic background; 2) interviews; and 3) writing samples that the participants submitted.

The first method we implemented for our study is questionnaires, which are common in sociocultural studies. We distributed them to the participating parents in September 2015. The return rate was 100%. In them, we asked 25 questions in order to understand the language use at home, literacy practices inside and outside of school, proficiency of each language, their needs and requests to the school, their future plans, etc. There were 10 multiple questions and 15 open-ended questions. We asked further to participants if their answers were not clear.

One of the most important methods for ethnographic case studies is an interview, which is the second method we used. We conducted three interviews with eleven Japanese mothers and four teachers. This article, though, focuses on the interviews with Japanese mothers. The first in-depth multi-situated interview with parents was explorative and diagnostic to gather information about the student's profile, whilst the second one determined their literacy practices, activities, and attitudes, with a particular focus on their digital literacy practices. The third interview was based on collected writing samples. The first interviews (November 7<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>, 2015) lasted between 45 and 64 minutes and constituted between 4000 and 7000 translated words each. The second series of interviews (December 5<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015) lasted between 50 and 61 minutes

and constituted between 5000 and 8400 words each. The final interviews (February 6<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>, 2016) lasted between 48 and 77 minutes and constituted between 5100 and 8300 words in English. All of the interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, translated and later analyzed. The language spoken during the interviews was Japanese because we interviewed both Japanese parents and Japanese teachers whose mother tongue is Japanese. In order to get as much useful information as possible, we decided to use the language in which the interviewees would be most proficient. The interview questionnaires were designed with open-ended questions so that participants are able to answer freely. These are four key questions of the interviews with the mothers.

- Could you explain what you are doing at home/weekday school in order to improve your child's writing in Spanish, Catalan and Japanese? What are the strategies, methods or techniques you are using?
- Please make me a narration of the last two activities you did at home with your kid.
- Which language do you think is the most important for your child to write in? And why?
- Does your child write a diary? Does he/she enjoy writing or feel obligated to write due to homework? Does his/her weekday school assign a homework task of keeping a diary?

In January 2016, we conducted interviews with four teachers, with the aim of discovering how they teach multilingual children and how they deal with the typical problems which multilingual children face when learning multiple languages simultaneously. Two of them are from the Hoshuko, one is from a private school in Japan and the other one is from a public high school in Japan. These two teachers in Japan both have more than 20 years of experience in working with Japanese children who used to live outside of Japan. We chose the two teachers from these schools primarily because their schools accept Japanese students which have lived abroad in the past, they are also multilingual and are likely to have an inferior command of the Japanese languages when compared to Japanese students of the same age who were raised in Japan. The interviews lasted between 90 and 115 minutes. We used Skype to speak with teachers who are currently in Japan. The following are the main questions for teachers.

- Please, tell me with detail a normal class you do with your students to improve students' writing. What are the strategies, methods or techniques you are using?
- How often do your students have authentic situations, audiences (responses) and purposes that they write in your class? What do you think about a difference between children that have them and not?
- Which language do you think is the most important for your students to write in?

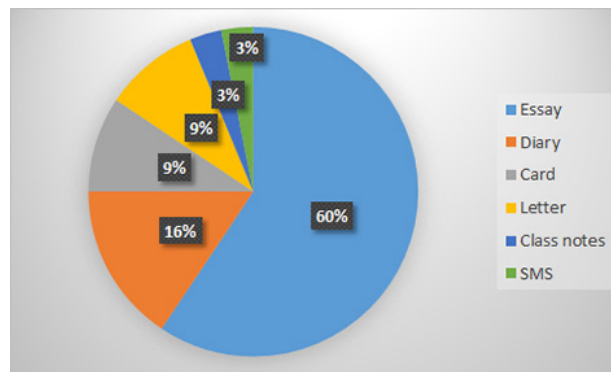
Data analysis was structured around qualitative, iterative and inductive interpretation of audio data supported by interview transcripts, field and diary notes and analysis of inclusion indicators. The Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software package ATLAS.ti was used to identify patterns in the data, to select key episodes for more in-depth analysis and to enhance the semantic, rigorous scrutiny of the complex multimedia data set. Broad categories of emerging themes were identified across the data sets. Observational and interview data were then further



coded according to literacy practice type, activity type, language use, genre type, and the use of technology or absence thereof.

We carried out content analysis to analyze the interviews with 11 Japanese mothers. Due to the fact that it can be applied to examine any piece of writing or occurrence of recorded communication, content analysis is currently used in a dizzying array of fields, ranging from literature and rhetoric to ethnography and cultural studies, gender and age issues, sociology and political science, psychology and cognitive science and so on. Furthermore, content analysis reflects a close relationship with socio- and psycholinguistics. To do content analysis effectively with ATLAS.ti we translated from English to Japanese.

The final method was collecting writing samples that our participants produced. In January 2016, our participants were requested to submit some writing samples they created in order to reveal what kind of literacy practices they exhibit whilst inside and outside of school. Some of them were academic and formal writings and others were not. Moreover, some of them were in Spanish and others were in Japanese, English, Catalan or even French. Graph 1 illustrates the types of writing and Table 3 shows the language they used for this writing activity.



Graph 1. Types of writing samples submitted.

Name	Hitoe	Kandai	Kaisuke	Mizuki	Naoto	Naoya	Aki	Kazuo	Nina	Natsuki	Asuka
<b>Spanish</b>	1 x C	*	*	1 x C	*	*	1 x C	*	1 x E	1 x E	Whatsapp messages
<b>Catalan</b>	*	1 x D	*	*	Letter	*	*	*	1 x E	1 x E	*
<b>English</b>	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	Class notes, 1 x E	1 x E	1 x E	Email
<b>Japanese</b>	2 x D 1 x E	1 x D 1 x E	1 x E	1 x D 1 x E	1 x D	1 x E Card games	1 x E	2 x E	1 x E	1 x E	1 x E
<b>French</b>	*	*	*	1 x D	*	*	*	*	*	*	*

Table 3. Languages used for different types of writing activity. \* No sample submitted  
C = Card, D = Diary Entry, E = Essay.

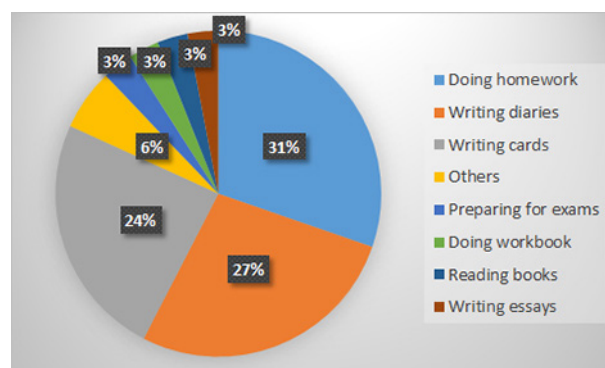
## 5. Analysis of interviews with Japanese mothers

From the interviews conducted with Japanese mothers of this school, we discovered three interesting themes as follows from the Spanish-Japanese families living in Barcelona, with children who are learning several languages simultaneously.

1. The kind of literacy activities that were done at home by the students and parents recently.
2. The most common literacy activity they partake in on a regular basis.
3. The language that the mothers think is the most important for their children.

### 5.1. Recent literacy activities

For the purposes of this article, we have defined 'recent activities' to be a period of up to two weeks. During the interviews, we asked the mothers what the last two or three literacy activities they did recently at home with their children were. When we asked this question, the language use of the activity was irrelevant because we were focusing on what kind of academic and vernacular activities are happening outside of the school, as Cassany (2008) proposed. The following graph illustrates their recent literacy activities at home.



Graph 2. Two or three literacy activities done recently.

The category of "others" seen in Graph 2 comprises of creating picture books and card games, memorizing poems, watching movies with subtitles and chatting with other players in online games. These are all various literacy activities done by the students and all of them are diverse in terms of the language used.

The result shows that completing their homework for the Hoshuko was the most common literacy activity that they did most recently. It was not surprising to see that they do their homework with their mothers because this Japanese school asks parents to check their children's homework. In other words, it is almost mandatory and a clear responsibility of the parents to check their homework before the children bring it to school on Saturdays. One teacher who has 17 years of teaching experience at the Hoshuko mentioned the reason this school has this policy during her interview.

Children come to our school only once a week, on Saturdays. You know it is hard to acquire languages just by going to the language school once a week. Therefore, homework has very important role because children can study and practice during weekdays by doing their homework at home. Our school website says home is the first school and that school is the second school. It means that children are able to learn a lot of things at home as well as at school and school is not the only place where children can study and learn. Certainly, parents are teachers at home. Also we believe that if children make mistakes with their homework, it is better to correct on the spot rather than waiting until the teacher points it out on Saturdays. That is why, we ask parents to check their children's homework at home and correct them at home. At the Hoshuko, teachers revise their homework and highlight common mistakes in class.

That is why, 10 out of 11 participants answered that their most recent writing activity at home was doing their homework for the Hoshuko. One participant who does not do her homework with her mother is the oldest participant, she is 14 years old. She has been coming to the Hoshuko since she was four years old. She knows exactly what she is supposed to do with her homework. Therefore, she prefers to do her homework by herself.

From Graph 2 above, we can see that the third most common literacy activity the participants did recently was writing letters and cards. Probably due to the fact that we conducted these interviews in December, eight out of 11 mothers answered that the writing activity they most recently did with their children was writing Christmas cards or New Year's cards to their friends and family members in other countries. We do not think they write cards and letters on a regular basis. Namely, if we had conducted this interview another month, they would most likely have answered differently. Compared to the previous literacy activity, we found that participants use different languages when they write cards and letters. This shows that they use three or four languages at home depending on the purpose of a given literacy activity. As Gee (1991) and Street (2003) pointed out, this activity is considered as a social practice that they perform. Figure 1 and 2 are examples of cards and letters.



Figure 1. A New Year's card by Mizuki.

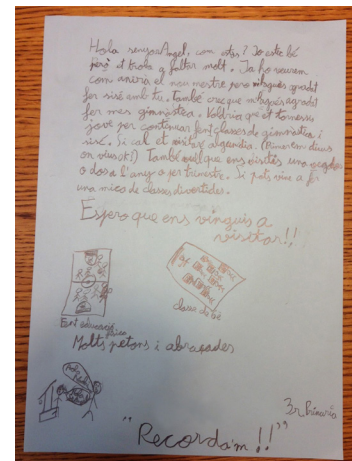


Figure 2. A letter by Naoto.

Figure 1, a New Year's card in Japanese was written by Mizuki, who sent it to her grandparents in Japan. Although she just wrote "Happy new year" and the sending address, her artistic talent caught our attention as she had drawn a picture of a monkey on the back of the card (2016 was the year of monkey according to Chinese zodiac). Moreover, as New Year's cards in

Japan are different from the ones in Spain, it was a great experience for her to learn about them and actually write one by herself. In fact the Hoshuko offers Japanese culture class (two hours) per year and she created this Japanese style New Year's card in that class which was organized by volunteer parents and not by teachers. Depending on the children's age, these keen parents provide various cultural classes, for instance, Japanese traditional calligraphy, martial arts, tea ceremony, flower arrangement, Japanese crafts and traditional cooking. This event is one of students' favourite events at school. It is ethnography of a set of cultural practices (Barton, 2010).

Figure 2, a letter to a retired teacher, was written by Naoto in Catalan. He expresses how much he enjoyed the class with that teacher and how much he misses him. He was not obligated to write this, instead he wanted to tell his previous teacher something and decided to write it. He is not shy nor afraid of writing to teachers not only in Catalan but also in Japanese. He enjoys writing in any language thanks to his very keen Japanese mother who happens to be a teacher at the Hoshuko.

## 5.2. Keeping a diary as a common literacy activity

The first thing worth noting is that nine out of 11 participants keep a diary regularly in Japanese because it is their homework from the Hoshuko. We could say that this writing habit is a typical activity in Japan, much more than in other countries like Spain. We asked these mothers if their children have their homework of writing diaries in their weekday schools. Only two of them said yes: Furthermore, one of them commented that when her daughter was six or seven years old, she had this kind of homework in Spanish once in a while, but not anymore. She is 11 years old and her teachers do not force students to keep a diary because it is a private activity. Moreover, the mother of a nine-year-old girl commented during her interview how strange it was to her that the optional homework of keeping a diary and submitting it to the teacher at school was something that only her child completed:

A few years ago, there was the optional homework of keeping a diary in her school. It was supposed to be focused on writing about the winter break. My daughter was the only one who wrote it and it seemed that her teacher did not expect that anyone would do this additional homework. It is a diary but we know that we have to show it to the teachers. So, we do not write things we do not want to tell anybody. At the same time, I suppose teachers do not expect private stuff either.

On the other hand, "Diary education" has an important role in Japan, where all elementary school teachers assign this homework on a regular basis. In other words, all Japanese children are used to writing diaries at school as well as at home as an assignment. That is to say, it is not considered a private activity, rather it is an academic writing in Japan. In contrast, it is treated as a personal and private writing experience in Spain and, therefore, no one is in the habit of showing it to anyone else. To be sure, some students might not express themselves freely because they know they have to show it to their teacher, parents or friends later. In addition to that, some adults have their personal diaries which are full of secrets and will never be seen by others. The following additional interview with a current elementary school teacher in Japan, she explained to us how important keeping a diary is for children.

I think depending on the teacher, they have different perspectives toward diary education in Japan. In my opinion, when I give an assignment of keeping a diary, I want to see what the students are feeling and thinking. Therefore, I try not to correct spelling mistakes or grammar mistakes.

Rather I comment on the events that happened to them. I want them to express their feeling freely without paying too much attention to Kanji or the correct Japanese. That is why when I give this assignment, I provide a sheet which has only lines as opposed to the one which has many grids to practice Japanese letters. I believe with this paper they can express and write what they want to convey. In conclusion, diary education is not only language learning but also psychological and moral education which students and teachers construct trust relationships and bonds.

When it comes to writing in Japanese, there are three major aspects that teachers are interested in and check: 1) organization of contents; 2) orthography, in particular Kanji skills; and 3) beauty of calligraphy. This interviewed teacher wants to pay attention to the student's organization of the writing rather than other two principal viewpoints. The reason explained by her is that there are too many teachers and even parents in Japan who just pay attention to typography and calligraphy when they check and evaluate students' writings because it is easy to correct and this kind of orthographic mistakes appear on the surface and are easily observed. Any Japanese adult can correct them without professional knowledge nor experience. She was this kind of teacher before. However, as she gained experience whilst teaching multilingual children, she changed her mindset to pay attention to the organization and writing aspects themselves. Presently, she prefers to look at the content of the writing and let other errors go because the strict correction might discourage them from expressing themselves.

### **5.3. The mothers' attitude regarding the most important language**

Finally, we would like to highlight the Japanese mothers' perspective towards the most important language for their children. During the interviews, we asked the mothers "Which language do you think is the most important for them to write in? And why?" Unsurprisingly, 10 out of 11 mothers answered that the language which is used at their children's weekday school is of the highest priority. For example, the mothers of the children who go to an English school on weekdays believe that English is the most important language for their children, whereas the mother of the child who attends a Spanish school on weekdays believes Spanish is the most important one. It appears normal for the mothers to think this way and these 10 mothers gave us the same reason, as follows:

Spanish is the most important language for my children because they will live here for the rest of their lives.

From my perspective, Spanish and Catalan are more important at the moment because they are community languages. These are basic and crucial.

However, there was one mother who answered that Japanese is the most important language for her child to learn. In her interview, she explained this in more detail:

Certainly, all languages are important, but if I have to choose one, Japanese is the most important. I myself learned various languages (English, French, Spanish and Italian) because I left Japan for the US when I was 16, but the more difficult language skills to acquire are "independent languages" like Japanese, Korean, Finnish, Hungarian, etc. I want her to try difficult ones, not easy ones. This experience is significant not only for her languages, but also for other difficulties she will have in her life. Consequently, I want her to learn not only languages but also critical thinking, creative skills, etc. by learning Japanese.

Meanwhile, a research about language use of Japanese - Catalan / Spanish families in Catalonia conducted by Fukuda (2017) revealed that the parents in said families adopted a mostly

monolingual use of Spanish; however, this practice did not affect the families' Catalan and Japanese use. Since some of her 29 participants had exactly same background as our participants, the mothers' perspectives and the language use of the families are coherent.

Consequently, 90.9% of our participants, the mothers think that the language used in the weekday school is more important than Japanese, which is their heritage language. Even if they all go to the Hoshuko every Saturday, travel to Japan to enter Japanese school in summer, and try to maintain the conversation with children in Japanese at home, the weekday school language and the studies there are the most important for their multilingual children.

## 6. Analysis of writing samples

We collected writing samples from 32 students, comprising 19 academic writings and 13 informal writings in five languages, Spanish, Catalan, English, Japanese and French (Please refer to the Graph 1 and Table 3). All of them were handwritten except for the oldest student who handed in hers using emails and WhatsApp messages. Based on Cassany's concept (2008), it is essential to investigate vernacular writings from a sociocultural perspective.

The collected writings show sophisticated quality for the age of the kids. Figures 3, 4, 5 and 6 are good examples of showing multiliteracy skills by Nina. However, it was not strange that they can express themselves much better when using their school languages (Spanish, Catalan or English) as opposed to Japanese, which is a heritage language, because they have more exposure to their school language. Having said this, they maintain and develop Japanese skills even though they go to the Hoshuko only once a week. Needless to say, they use several languages depending on the situation and context. For example, some choose to write in Spanish when they send cards to Spanish grandparents, relatives and friends. Others choose to use English when they do their English homework.

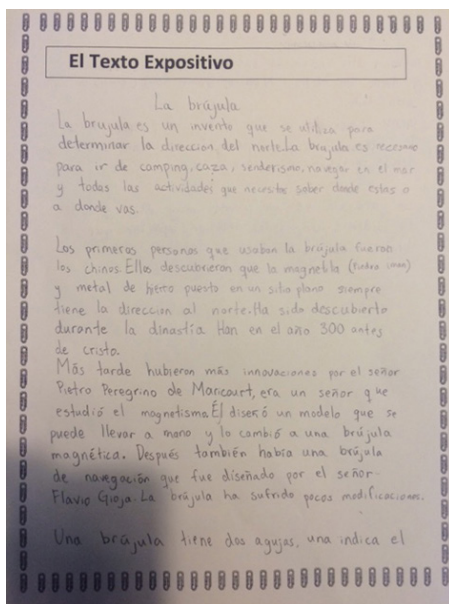


Figure 3. Spanish writing by Nina.

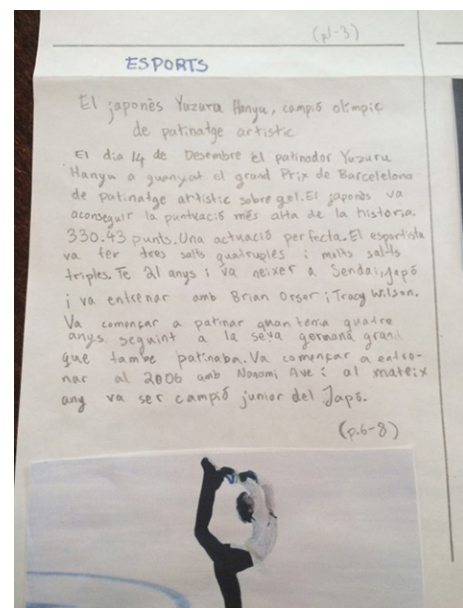


Figure 4. Catalan writing by Nina.

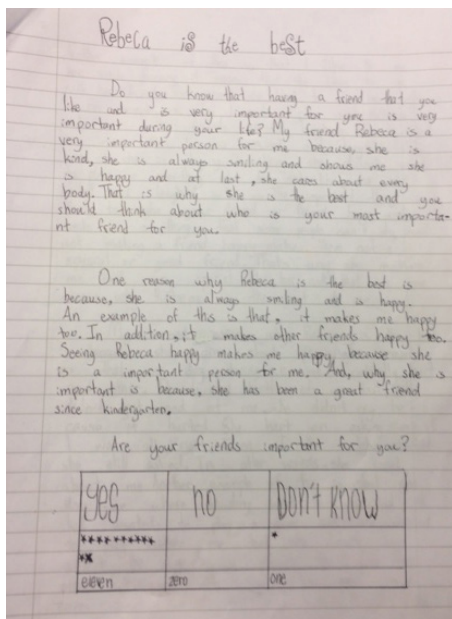


Figure 5. English writing by Nina.



Figure 6. Japanese writing by Nina.

[Translation]

THE THING I DID “MY BEST” THIS YEAR

On December 29<sup>th</sup>, I was skiing in Font Romeu, France. I took a lift with my coach. The place we reached was a steep slope and I thought, I cannot do this. But after following him for a while I became able to turn curves and jump. I slipped only three times.

When I took a lesson for the first time last year, I could not those things that well and came to dislike skiing. But this year I tried patiently my best and feel that skiing is fun. This year when I tried the skiing jump for the first time, I fell to the ground, but I tried it once more and managed to do it. I thought I got it! Also when I tried to turn curves, I would repeatedly fall. But after the coach taught me, I quickly mastered it. After the lesson, I showed my skills to my family. My father said I had improved since last year and my mother said I was now better than my older brother. My brother who was also there said to me that he had seen someone who was skiing very well and that person turned out to be me! After hearing all of these positive comments, I felt that I want to become even better next and the following year through practice.

Nina’s mother told us that she had helped her daughter with her Japanese essay. Despite not having lived in Japan or receiving any formal schooling in Japan, Nina’s Japanese skills are phenomenal. Nina’s mother added that she loves writing in all four languages to the extent that she and her friend got a English novel published in 2017. According to Nina, her strongest language is English, followed by Spanish, Japanese and Catalan. This order is evident in her level of writing proficiency presented above.

After the content analysis of these writing samples, we would like to highlight one point. Three out of 11 students were talking about Japan, Japanese culture or Japanese family in their homework from the weekday schools. In other words, they wrote about them in languages other than Japanese. One student wrote about her vacation in Japan and explained Japanese culture, food, costume, weather, school life, sightseeing spots, etc. in English. Another student wrote about

the famous Japanese ice figure skater called Yuzuru Hanyu, also in English. At that time, it was big news in Japan that this young man, 21, won the World Figure Skating Championships and many Japanese fans swooned including Japanese people who live outside of Japan. As she was no exception, she talked about him in her English essay. The other student wrote a short diary in Catalan about Japan. He is just seven years old and cannot write many things, so he drew some pictures on the top of his diary. In his 20 word text, he expressed in Catalan how exciting it was to go to Japan that summer. As a result, there is no correlation between the chosen language and the content of the text. When they write essays or diaries at the Hoshuko in Japanese, they have freedom to choose their topic which does not need to be in relation to Japan.

Throughout the content analysis of these three writing samples we identified positive words used to describe connecting to Japan. Table 5 illustrates the positive words they used towards Japan in their writing using Catalan and English. Please note that there are spelling mistakes because it displays exactly what they wrote.

Name	Total number of words	Fragment which can be identified as positive words
<b>Kandai</b>	20 words	Jo e anat el sur de japo. I e puigat cinc bagades en tren. I vaig ana a beura peixos.
<b>Natsuki</b>	960 words	We went to Japan 2 months and a little. For one side I was sad because I wouldn't se my father for 1 month and a bit. But for the other side I was very excited because there is my family, friends and all the people that I love.
		When I saw my grand father I was very happy.
		I was very happy to see my friends again.
		One of the thing that I liked was the bag. You have to go with that bag to school. It's obligatory to all the schools of Japan.
		I began to play an instrument of Japan very knowed for the people. It's name is "Taiko".They are a type of drums very difficult, but there were very interesting.
<b>Nina</b>	111 words	El japonès va aconseguir la puntuació més alta de la historia. 330.43 punts. Una actuació perfecta.
		Va començar a patinar quan tenia quatre anys seguint a la seva germana gran que tambe patinaba. Va començar a entrenar al 2006 amb Naomi Abe i al mateix any va ser campió junior del Japó.

Table 4. The positive words toward Japan.

From these positive expressions in English and Catalan used in their writings, we can observe that they are proud of being Japanese and they enjoy having a connection to Japan.



## Conclusion

This study focuses on a small group of Spanish – Japanese – speaking families who try to transmit Japanese to their children. We have documented the Japanese mothers' attitudes and perspectives as well as literacy practices, particularly writing activities among these children through quantitative data. As a case study with a relatively small sample size, the findings are not generalisable. Nevertheless, it is worth exploring the mothers' attitudes and perspectives as well as their children's literacy practices, inside and outside of school in this multilingual context of Catalan-Spanish-English-Japanese, which has rarely been studied.

The current study has observed that:

- 1) Spanish-Japanese families in Catalonia have different points of view in terms of language use among their children;
- 2) these multilingual children use four different languages constantly and actively;
- and 3) the most common literacy activity in Japanese among them is keeping a diary which is an assignment from their Hoshuko.

First of all, even though we investigated only 11 families who have slightly different backgrounds, we got relatively similar answers to questions we asked about literacy practices and events at home. Regarding research question one, these multilingual children engage in several literacy practices at home, for example, doing their homework, keeping a diary, reading books, writing cards and letters, sending instant messages, preparing for exams, etc. Some of the activities are done with parents, but others are done alone. It is normal to see that younger children tend to do their homework with their parents. In fact the Hoshuko recommends that younger children do their homework with their parents because they can be corrected by their parents on the spot where necessary. The following answer by the mother of a nine-year-old boy explains how she helps with her son's writing.

As my son's Spanish skills are much better than his Japanese, when he has writing homework I suggest that he write it in Spanish first. After that, I help him translate from Spanish to Japanese. But sometimes literal translations do not work, so it becomes challenging. Also, this way of doing is time consuming because he is actually writing two essays instead of one. Ideally he can write it in Japanese without my help nor translation. But with his current proficiency it is difficult.

The other thing we found out from the interviews with Japanese mothers is that their children do not carry out any additional literacy activities other than doing their homework. One exception of seven-year-old boy reported us that he and his mother do extra literacy activity after doing his homework. They practice Kanji every day, read books, do workbook, and write essays on the weekend. However 10 out of 11 students do not do some special things other than doing their homework. Evidently, they continually use three or four languages at home to communicate with their parents and friends, do their homework, read books, play games and watch Youtube and so on.

In terms of diary education, it is true that keeping a diary is a part of the Japanese educational system and from childhood, everyone learns how to write a diary at school. However, there seem to be differing points of view regarding the keeping of a diary between cultures in Catalan and Japanese. In Catalan schools, a diary is considered personal and so normally the

contents are not shown anybody. It is written at home and teachers, parents and siblings do not read it. It is a private activity, it is written for oneself, not for others. Certainly, the concept of a personal diary exists both in Spain and Japan, in which you can write your personal things and which is normally kept for secret. However, this paper deals with keeping a diary as an academic literacy activity in Japanese educational system. In Japan, especially in elementary school and junior high school, diary education has been quite common for many years. According to the Education Ministry's curriculum guidelines in Japan, teachers must include the following aspects when teaching students about how to keep a diary.

- What they've done on a day-to-day basis, described in practical terms;
- Factual accounts of things that they did, people they met and what they said, books or papers that they read;
- Ideas that they might want to remember;
- Reports of observations, experiments, events; and
- Personal views and opinions.

As the Hosuko follows the curriculums and guidelines created by the ministry of education, all of the participants have homework of keeping a diary, and it turned out that this is the most common literacy activity at home.

With regard to research question two, we reached the conclusion that the weekday schools which our participants attend are shown to have a strong influence over what the mothers think is the most important language for their child. These schools can be divided into four different type of school; 1) local Catalan public school; 2) *concertado* (private but with public funding help) school; 3) international (English) school; and 4) French school. No matter which type of school their children go to, all the mothers we interviewed consider that the school language is the most important language for their children except for one mother, who thinks that Japanese is the most important language for her daughter to learn. Four out of 11 mothers answered during the interviews that indisputably all surrounding languages (Spanish, Catalan, English and Japanese) are important, but if they are asked to choose one, they would choose Spanish and Catalan because these are the local languages where they live, and they will live for the rest of their lives.

In conclusion, this research reveals what kind of literacy activities and events are happening in bilingual/bicultural families and what the Japanese mothers' perspectives are in terms of the most important language for their children. As this small empirical research project does not include the fathers' perspectives, which we believe to be equally important to foster and boost their children's literacy skills, this aspect would have to be taken into account in further research.

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