

Languages Used at Home

The importance of language at home

What language does the child speak to his/her father and mother now? Is it in his/her father's and mother's mother tongue? Is it Japanese? The language spoken at home is very important for the child. If the child is well brought up in the home language it is believed that he/she will also be well brought up in Japanese. Are you one of those families which ban the use of your own mother tongue at home because you want your child to be fluent in Japanese as soon as possible?

Young children have not been well brought up in their own mother tongue. As there are plenty of opportunities to be in touch with the Japanese language at the school, the child will be able to speak in Japanese better than your own language. Children learn languages quickly, as well as forgetting them quickly. As they encounter more Japanese, they will speak less of their mother tongue.

What happens when a child forgets his/her mother tongue, or cannot fully acquire it?

【You cannot communicate!】

The biggest problem with forgetting or failing to master a mother tongue is that the child loses the words to converse in with his/her parents. What would it be like to lose the language that allows one to converse with one's parents? Do you think it is alright to speak only in Japanese?

A child may be able to understand his/her parents using simple Japanese at his/her early stage. However when the child progresses to junior high and high school, if the child speaks only in Japanese although the parents speak in their mother tongue, they cannot discuss topic like further study and the child's future. This may cause a situation in which the child may become emotionally unstable. For the sake of child's mental balance, please communicate well with the child in your mother tongue on a regular basis.

【Hard to think in the abstract !】

As it is said if the native language is spoken enough at home, Japanese will be grown well. But the other side is if the native language is not spoken enough, Japanese language may not grow enough.

When your child enters in elementary school, there will be a lot of language involvement. They will learn concept and important words. And when the grade gets higher they have to think in the abstract way. If the native language is well grown in the home, if it is hard to think in Japanese, they can exchange in their own language and understand, It is hard for the child to understand the concept even in Japanese or other languages. Even you tell in Japanese they cannot understand, or you tell in native language but still they cannot understand, those cases will be hard to follow the studies in school.

What should we do then?

You should treat both your mother tongue and Japanese with equal importance. It should not be "only Japanese while in Japan" or "only your native language because you will go back your home country eventually". It would be better for the parents to use their most proficient language, which is their mother tongue, rather than force themselves to speak in Japanese. This will in turn enable the child to use both the mother tongue and Japanese as the situation demands.