

## Chapter 54

# International Family Configurations in Tokyo and Their Cross- Cultural Approaches to Language Socialization

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### ABSTRACT

*For children raised in a primarily monocultural setting, where their passport or “home” and their residential or “host” countries are the same, the knowledge/skills developed in one area may be applied in the broader contexts of their lives in a gradually more complex and fulfilling manner. Some of the knowledge/skills learned by “cross-cultural children”, however, may be applied in a restricted range of settings and may be of limited use in “other” contexts of living. A prime example relates to “language” proficiency. This may be well developed in the particular language of one context (e.g., English), but not yet acquired in the language needed for a different context (e.g., Japanese). For this exploratory study, face-to-face interviews were conducted with “international parents” residing in Tokyo, Japan. Of the four themes that emerged from the qualitative data, this chapter is specifically focused on one—Language Socialisation—of cross-cultural child(ren).*

### INTRODUCTION

Japan has a reputation for being one of the most ethnically homogeneous populations in the world (Kim, 2002; Lu, Menju, & Williams, 2005; Tarumoto, 2002, 2003; Willis, 2002). Tsuneyoshi (2004), however, has claimed that this image is more “simplistic than realistic” (p. 56). According to Kubota (1998), during the 1960s and 1970s, Japan’s economy began to surge ahead, increasing the amount of contact among Japanese and foreign people (p. 296). Additionally, there has been an influx of other Asian and South

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American foreigners to Japan in the form of workers, immigrants, refugees and spouses (Tsuda, 1998, 2003, 2004). Since the 1980s, the slogan *kokusaika* or “internationalization” has become prevalent in Japanese businesses, national and local government offices, schools and communities. New social categories have been, and continue to be, constructed or deconstructed as the majority of Japanese society attempts a “re-examination of mainstream assumptions”, particularly with regard to foreigners living in Japan (Lu, et al., 2005, p. 132). The resultant diversification and co-existence of different cultures has prompted the rearrangement of group relationships and brought to the forefront issues such as Japanese citizenship, nationality and identity.

The context of this chapter is cosmopolitan Tokyo, which is discussed as the city of residence for *three* groups of international families as depicted in Figure 1.

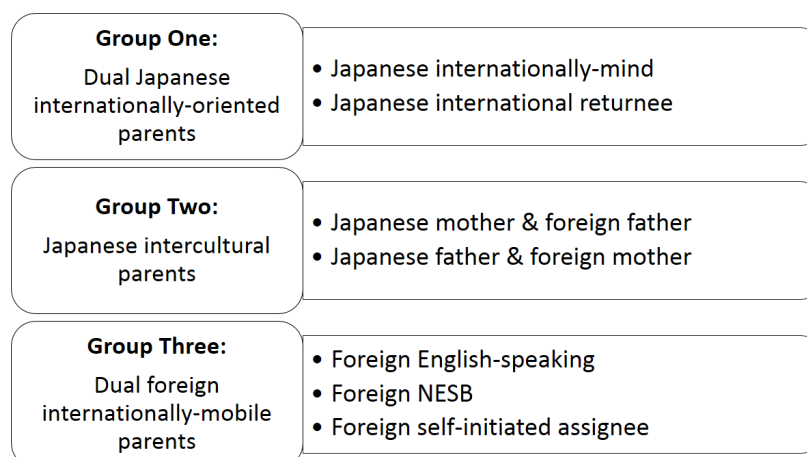
While cross-cultural children from these three groupings may be advantaged by exposure to a wider world perspective and/or the opportunities of travel, at the same time, they may have limited experience of their homeland’s social, cultural and educational practices (Velliariis, 2010).

## **BACKGROUND: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY**

International parents were recruited throughout the 23 wards of Tokyo, but predominantly from the expatriate and high foreign population areas in and around “Minato” ward (Minato City, 2014). For the qualitative elements of this research, “face-to-face” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Gillham, 2000) and “semi-structured” (Kvale, 1996) interviews were conducted. A total of 17 parents (Group One: n=4; Group Two: n=7; and Group Three: n=6) engaged in dialogue individually, and on behalf of their spouses and children (see Table 1).

Parents ranged in age from 29-57 years; mothers (n=9) totalled 53% and fathers (n=8) totalled the remaining 47%. The original research plan was to interview both parents simultaneously. The intended approach stemmed from a desire to obtain commonality of response from both the mother and father. In the majority of cases and for a variety of reasons, this was not possible (e.g., concerns about finding

*Figure 1. Three Types of International Parents, and their Subgroups, in Tokyo, Japan (Velliariis & Willis, 2014)*



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