


Reviews


This collection of papers demonstrating the actual linguistic diversity of Japan is a special double issue of the Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development (1995) in book form. It complements an earlier collection of papers describing the diversity of Japanese society (Maher & Yashiro, 1991). Now they have compiled a work more comprehensive in scope and more representative in content.

Multilingual Japan is a deceptively thin volume, dense with historical information, linguistic data, critical observations, and references for further exploration. Following the introduction come papers on the Ryukyuan, Ainu, Korean, and Chinese languages in Japan, loan words from English, returnees, and bilingualism in international families. Moreover the sole official language, Japanese, is involved with all the rest.

In the introduction, Maher and Yashiro survey the linguistic diversity of this archipelago. Yet to admit this officially would open the door to the more politically dangerous recognition of cultural diversity. They debunk the notion of "the Japanese," arguing that the inhabitants of these islands must be seen anew as just people, without the overlay of myths and stereotypes from second-hand accounts.

The authors discuss the development and standardization of the Japanese language, versus its dialects, sign language, and various minority languages. They deconstruct ideologies of monolingual-monocultural homogeneity and harmony as invented traditions. They see Nakasone's denial of the existence of minorities Japan as a symptom of the statism that, since the Meiji Era, has suppressed both minority aspirations and the sociolinguistic frameworks through which language diversity could be investigated.

The first paper on a specific language, "Ryukyuan: Past, Present and Future" by Akiko Matsumori, makes extensive references to vernacular
research. "Ryukyuan" is preferred to describe the language group spoken in the formerly independent kingdom of Ryukyu, today's Okinawa Prefecture and some islands in Kagoshima Prefecture.

Matsumori details the history and geography of the Ryukyus in addition to analyzing the relationship between Ryukyuan and Japanese. Ryukyuan dialects are related to Japanese and have provided some diachronic clues in reconstructing the elusive history of Japanese. Matsumori observes that Ryukyuan is commonly called the Okinawan dialect of Japanese for reasons more political than linguistic.

In a typical case of language shift, Okinawans below the age of 40 are losing their Ryukyuan fluency and almost everyone speaks standard Japanese or rather interdialects resulting from interference during accommodation. Okinawans themselves have embraced language standardization to the detriment of local dialects, while schools have been draconian in stigmatizing non-standard Japanese usage. Ryukyuan have often been forced to change their social identity, to emphasize their common heritage with mainland Japan either in preference to American rule or for economic reasons.

"English in Japanese Society: Language within Language," by Nobuyuki Honna, does not deliver the sociolinguistic analysis promised, but does provide a valuable introduction to loan words from English. The strength of the paper is a taxonomy of seven types of borrowing patterns that involve semantic and/or structural changes. Since daily Japanese speech includes about 13 percent loan words, mostly from English, knowledge of loan words is necessary if EFL teachers in Japan are to develop strategies toward the variety of English with which the students were raised.

Honna may be listening too much to purists, though, when he writes that loan words alarm many people. An Asahi Shimbun ("Honsba," 1996) poll found that among the 77 percent who feel that Japanese usage is degenerating, only 6 percent cited an excess of foreign words, while 28 percent blamed youth slang. Yet Honna makes the redeeming observation that, lest people see compulsory English education as a failure, it has borne fruit by enriching the Japanese language.

"Bilingualism in International Families," by JALT Bilingualism N-SIG co-founder Masayo Yamamoto, summarizes research on bilingualism in Japan along with her own survey findings. She confines the data in this paper to families with one English and one Japanese native-speaking parent. She explains the choice of English between spouses is due to the greater English proficiency of the native Japanese speakers in most cases.

Yamamoto explains that in language use from parents to children at home, the L1 is used most often with one's children for emotional bond-
ing or to consciously impart the language. The force of the societal language, however, is such that more Japanese is heard from the children than is spoken by the parents to them. Bi-literacy is difficult to attain, with bedtime reading by the minority language parent a necessary but not sufficient condition. Physical or linguistic conspicuousness in Japan can result in children resisting English to minimize their differences from the norm. But Yamamoto concludes, those who do become bilingual are generally admired.

Turning from the conspicuous to the partly submerged minorities, Maher and Kawanishi co-author "On Being There: Koreans in Japan." They recount the colonial history of forced labor that resulted in a million residents of Korean heritage. As Korean-medium schools were forbidden among those who stayed after the war, Korean language proficiency among the second, third, and fourth generations is rapidly declining. Today the Soren (North Korea-affiliated) and Mindan (ROK-affiliated) organizations operate school systems with a bilingual curriculum in Korean and Japanese.

As Korean schools are not accredited, 86% of Korean students attend Japanese schools in order to have any chance of entering national universities. However, many Korean-Japanese attending Japanese schools also receive materials on ethnic education which lovingly portray the culture of the homeland. One text by Mindan exhorts all Koreans in Japan to have ethnic consciousness, to live in dignity, and to be true internationalists (kuk'cha'ën = kokusaijin). Soren textbooks, on the other hand, tend to be more ideological, singing praises of the North Korean leaders. The lack of consensus among ethnic Koreans also appears in the contentious issue of maintaining Korean names or not in face of the mainstream society.

In "The Current State of the Ainu Language," Joseph DeChicchis's 164 references in several languages illustrates the extensive research on this minority and its language, both termed "Ainu." The number of officially registered Ainu is only 24,000, a result of their historical experience as a downtrodden and partially assimilated minority.

Ainu representatives' petition to the United Nations to recognize them as an indigenous minority treated unjustly, led to a bizarre government statement that the Ainu were Japanese. Similarly, Japanese scholars tend to emphasize Ainu-Japanese linguistic similarities. On the other hand, early reports creating the image of Ainu as Caucasian exaggerated their differences from Japanese. DeChicchis speculates that the Ainu language is non-Altaic but with much Altaic vocabulary, plus later borrowings from Japanese and the northern Asian languages of peoples they contacted.
John Maher then sheds light on “The Kakyo: Chinese in Japan.” There are at least 50,000 stable residents of mostly inner-city communities using Cantonese and some Mandarin along with JSL. In the second to fourth generations there is a trend toward dominance in Japanese. Post-War Shin-Kakyo tend to start with Taiwanese or other dialects.

Another nearly 50,000 speakers of Chinese are neither well-established nor are they called Kakyo. Since 1980 there has been an influx of Mandarin-speaking students and laborers speaking various dialects, JSL, and pidgin. In addition, there are returnees from China wishing to be repatriated with their Japanese families.

Schools for Hua-chi’iao (Kakyo) exist in the port cities of Tokyo, Yokohama, Kobe and Nagasaki. In Yokohama with 300 pupils from kindergarten through middle school, instruction is in Chinese and Japanese by mostly Japan-born Chinese. Some Japanese children attend as well, analogous to those sent to English- or French-language international schools. At the Tokyo Chinese School, from primary school on, English further augments Mandarin Chinese and Japanese instruction. Maher thus regards the Chinese schools as a model for bilingual education in Japan.

In “Japan’s Returnees,” Kyoko Yashiro notes the shift from regarding returnees as problem children in need of re-acculturation to a valuable human resource in the search for internationalization. University-age returnees receive privileged quotas at many prestigious universities and enjoy an advantage in being hired by big businesses that send employees abroad. Various government and private sector organizations support them or their networking among each other. Very few returnees now have serious problems of linguistic or cultural readjustment.

However, while Japanese schools have been set up abroad to maintain L1, L2 maintenance has been neglected in Japan, particularly by public schools. Yashiro refutes each rationalization for this neglect. Her surveys of kikokushijo have shown that over 90% wish to maintain their L2, virtually all who have anything significant to maintain, regardless of the second language. Returnees thus warrant L2 maintenance as agents of internationalization and diversity in Japanese society.

A weakness of this collection is the lack of final editing, for which the publisher must bear some responsibility. The introduction is strident in tone and a bit disorganized in its laudable attempt to cover disparate issues not treated in the other papers. The typos may unfairly discourage readers from continuing to papers by non-native writers of English though these present relatively few obstacles to understanding.

The collection represent a reliable sociolinguistic study for scholars abroad, while language teachers in Japan can derive applications from a
deeper understanding of our social context. Teachers can combat the unjust portrayal of Japanese students as a monolith and avoid blunders with submerged minorities by learning the variegated particulars beneath the ideology of sameness. For L2 pedagogy, the book suggests ways loan words could be a valuable aid to study, while for the hundreds of JALT members with international families, it provides the sketch of a road map for bilingual child-raising. The more deeply teachers are committed to Japanese society, the more useful this book will be.

References