

BOOK REVIEW

Reijirō Aoyama, Tomoko Akashi & Sosei I (eds.), *Ringafuranka to shite no nihongo* [Japanese as a Lingua Franca]. Akashi Shoten, 2020. 202 pp. ISBN 978-4-7503-5051-6

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Japanese as a Lingua Franca is an edited volume that advances practical and theoretical contributions to the reconceptualization of Japanese language education in response to intensifying sociolinguistic diversity and accelerated social change in Japan and elsewhere. It pays particular attention to the diversification of speakers, new language functions and practices, and recent pedagogical models. Adopting the analytic lens of lingua franca, the contributors collectively seek to deconstruct and rearticulate prevailing understandings of Japanese, which in modern Japan has been predominantly construed as a national language (*kokugo*).

The volume consists of eight chapters, an introduction, and a concluding discussion. Authored by scholars working in Japanese language education and sociolinguistics, it elaborates selected papers first presented at an international symposium on Japanese language education held in Hong Kong in 2018. *Japanese as a Lingua Franca* underscores the continued global expansion of Japanese as an academic subject: approximately four million students are enrolled in Japanese courses at any given time, and many more have completed such programs. Concurrently, Japan is home to roughly four million immigrants, a figure expected to rise further in the context of unprecedented demographic decline. As a result, the period in which Japanese could be unproblematically equated with the language of Japanese nationals, and the Japanese nation-state has largely elapsed. Japanese language education is therefore increasingly oriented toward international and multilingual practices, both within Japan and in overseas settings. This epistemological reorientation creates new directions for pedagogy and research, which the volume examines in detail. The book further situates itself within debates on multicultural coexistence (*tabunka kyōsei*), a central theme in Japanese migration discourse over the past decade. Given the contributors' international profiles and the circulation of their work also in Anglophone scholarship, I adopt the Anglophone name order (given name followed by family name) throughout this review, notwithstanding that naming conventions in Japan, Korea, and China commonly reverse this sequence.

The introduction, co-authored by the three editors, articulates the volume's principal objective: to analyze "the current state of multilingual Japanese language

education both domestically and internationally, and to explore the possibilities of how Japanese taught and spoken in Japan and abroad may diverge from native-speaker norms” (p.10; translation mine).

In Chapter 1, Ikuko Nakane interrogates dominant ideologies in Japanese language education that position native speakers as the primary arbiters of linguistic correctness, an orientation that often continues to inform the teaching of Japanese as a foreign and second language. She problematizes this configuration by juxtaposing it with multilingual pedagogical practices in Australia, where classroom interaction routinely draws on both English and Japanese resources and thereby mirrors the broader sociolinguistic ecology of Australia. Nakane contends that globalization, immigration, and technological change are intensifying linguistic diversity and reshaping learner profiles in Japan, developments that collectively call for a reconsideration of prevailing pedagogical models. On this basis, she advocates an expanded approach to Japanese language education grounded in the critical examination, and where needed, the revision of established approaches and practices.

In Chapter 2, Hyogyon Kim and Kaoru Kadowaki examine an Australian school that adopts a biliteracy approach to foster learners’ development in both English and Japanese by integrating content and language learning across curricular subjects. The analysis of teacher interviews presented in the chapter offers a point of reference for analyzing collaboration between language educators and science teachers in multilingual educational contexts. The authors observe an increasing diversification of Japanese language teachers’ roles, reflecting emergent instructional formats and their associated professional roles. They accordingly argue that effective pedagogical models must be context-sensitive and cannot be straightforwardly extrapolated from a single universal approach.

In Chapter 3, Tomoko Akashi draws on questionnaire data to examine Japanese heritage-language education within expatriate communities in Hong Kong. In contrast to foreign- or second-language instruction, heritage-language education is shown to depend on sustained and intensive collaboration between teachers and parents, thereby foregrounding differentiated responsibilities across these groups. The chapter discusses the deployment of scaffolding and genre-based pedagogies in this setting and argues for the systematic dissemination of effective instructional models and practices, particularly in light of the likely growth in global demand for Japanese heritage-language education.

In Chapter 4, Elhadedy Abdelrahim analyzes the ways in which Japanese-language proficiency mediates processes of community formation among individuals engaged in mosque administration in Osaka, Japan. The chapter contributes to our understanding of Japanese as a lingua franca within an increasingly heterogeneous and internationalized religious landscape by detailing how foreign

and Japanese Muslims allocate linguistic responsibilities and negotiate interaction with local interlocutors. Framed as a contemporary sociolinguistic inquiry, the analysis attends to both what speakers do to language and what languages does to them.

In Chapter 5, Yoshiko Satō and colleagues investigate the relationship between collaborative learning and intercultural communication in higher education, situating their analysis within Japan's so-called internal internationalization (*uchi no kokusaika*), a development largely associated with the increasing presence of foreign residents, students and tourists. Drawing on data from two universities in Aichi Prefecture, the authors examine interactional dynamics between international and Japanese students in collaborative learning settings. They argue that sociocultural diversification entails more than “simply about talking to people from diverse backgrounds” (p.122; translation mine). Rather, it presupposes respectful dialogue, recognition of difference, and the capacity to negotiate misunderstandings. They argue that these competencies can be cultivated through communication education that seeks to foster self-reflexivity and the ability to adopt an analytically distanced perspective of oneself.

In Chapter 6, Hartmut Haberland interrogates the assumption that English constitutes the sole legitimate international language and considers why Japanese has seldom been recognized in comparable terms. Focusing on Japanese as a foreign and second language as well as a lingua franca, he traces the diversification of its forms and functions in connection with processes such as colonization, the remigration of overseas Japanese communities, immigration, the return of Japanese expatriates, and international student mobility. Haberland notes that, within Japan, interactions with non-Japanese interlocutors frequently unfold in Japanese rather than English. On this basis, he argues that the conventional division of communicative labor, whereby Japanese is presumed to mediate interaction among Japanese speakers and English is designated for exchanges with foreigners, is increasingly difficult to sustain from both internal and external perspectives.

In Chapter 7, Nobuyuki Hino critiques the persistence of native-speaker ideology in English education in Japan. He proposes reorienting curricula toward International English as a means of legitimizing Japanese L1 users and enhancing their agentive participation in global communication. The chapter further recommends that teacher recruitment avoid institutionalizing distinctions between native-English-speaking and native-Japanese-speaking staff. Drawing a comparative perspective across English and Japanese as international languages, Hino suggests that pedagogical principles developed in International English education may also inform the teaching of International Japanese. In particular, he argues that native-speaker status should not be treated as an intrinsic professional advan-

tage and that the target groups for International Japanese should be understood as encompassing both non-native and native speakers of Japanese.


Finally, Chapter 8, by Reijirō Aoyama, delineates potential avenues for future research on Japanese as a lingua franca. Aoyama poses the question of whether it “would not be beneficial for everyone who speaks Japanese to critically re-examine the ideology that only native speakers embody correct Japanese language and culture” (p.187; translation mine). Aoyama argues that such essentializing assumptions reproduce linguistic inequality and calls for surmounting such unnecessary constraints. From this perspective, both native and non-native speakers are urged to engage with Japanese as a lingua franca in ways that cultivate respect for diverse multilingual and multicultural backgrounds.

In the concluding chapter, Reijirō Aoyama articulates a set of post-Covid-pandemic desiderata for online language teaching, noting that the Hong Kong symposium on which the volume is based took place prior the pandemic while the chapters were written during the lockdown periods. The chapter addresses challenges associated with online pedagogy in instructional settings mediated by videoconferencing platforms.

Overall, the chapters are unified by an epistemological concern with what Japanese ought to be in the twenty-first century, and the contributions pursue three interrelated objectives: they document and discuss language-education practices in and outside Japan; they integrate these case studies with insights from critical research in Japanese language education and sociolinguistics; and they argue for a diversification of pedagogical approaches that can more adequately address the needs of heterogeneous learner populations across a range of contexts world-wide. Collectively, *Japanese as a Lingua Franca* offers concrete recommendations for stakeholders in Japanese language education and a synthesis of research that approaches these issues from theoretical and critical perspectives. In doing so, the volume represents a sustained attempt to reframe the Japanese language and language education under conditions of intensified mobility of speakers and a diversification of language functions and available linguistic resources. The analytic concerns of the chapters resonate with, and build upon, a substantial body of prior scholarship that has interrogated speaker legitimacy and language ideologies, often with reference to multilingualism and mobility. The volume’s distinctive contribution therefore lies less in introducing wholly novel claims than in bringing critical theoretical discussions into productive dialogue with empirically grounded analyses of specific educational settings. This positioning also indicates that the book will be of particular value to practitioners seeking to deepen their understanding of shifting language-education ideologies, frameworks and practices.

The volume engages only minimally with Japan's autochthonous linguistic diversity. However, as Maher (2022) notes, approaches that treat Japanese as the lingua franca of the Japanese archipelago risk marginalizing the historically enduring multilingualism of linguistic, ethnic, and cultural minorities, including Deaf communities, Ryukyuan, and Ainu in Japan. Such a framing can, moreover, tacitly reproduce the ideology of Japanese as a national language (*kokugo*), that is to say, an ideology that assumes that Japanese is equally shared by all Japanese nationals. What is distinctive in the present conjuncture is not the emergence of diversity itself, but rather the increasing erosion of the belief that Japanese is uniformly owned and legitimately possessed by all who speak it. The value of the book under review lies in its productive examination of Japanese language education in the wake of this epistemological shift and its considerations for instructional arrangements, language ideologies, and pedagogical practices. In doing so, it outlines important directions for future research and teaching.

References

-  Maher, John C., ed. 2022. *Language Communities in Japan*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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