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## 40. Language policy in Japan: Modernity, modernity maintenance, and late modernity

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### 1. Introduction

The sociolinguistic modernization of Japan differs from European experiences as it had to overcome the belief that only Western languages were able to be carriers of modern thought. Despite this pessimistic outlook, language modernization in Japan is generally seen as a success, if widespread competence in the standard language and translatability into other modern languages serves as a yardstick of evaluation. This achievement would not have been possible without language planning and policy (henceforth LPP). This chapter presents LPP in Japan in historical order and discusses modernization, moderni-

zation maintenance, and late modern society. All three parts first give an outline of LPP, and then discuss the consequences of language policy on the margins of society (Lowenhaupt Tsing 1994: 279). For lack of space, discussions are limited to LPP at the state level (for a comprehensive review, see Otomo 2018), and discussions of English language education in Japan and Japanese as a second language are absent (see Mielick, Kubota, and Lawrence 2022). The chapter does not discuss opposition to implemented policies (see Heinrich and Ishihara 2017). Grassroots attempts are only discussed in the last section.

Before we start, it is important to bear in mind that Japan has always been multilingual and culturally diverse. Japan's autochthonous languages are Japanese Sign Language, Ogasawara Creole English which has become extinct through decreolization, and three Ainu Abstand languages in the extreme north of the Japanese Archipelago – the extinct Kurile Ainu and Sakhalin Ainu, and the severely endangered Hokkaido Ainu. The remaining languages are part of the Japonic language family which includes, besides Japanese, the definitely endangered Hachijo language, and then six definitely or critically endangered Ryukyuan Abstand languages: Amamian, Kunigamian, Okinawan, Miyakoan, Yaeyaman, and Dunan. Japan has also long-standing Korean and Chinese communities which are a legacy of its colonial period. Japan expanded its control over Taiwan in 1895, South Sakhalin in 1907, Korea in 1910, and the South Sea Mandate in 1919. Japan's administration of and policies toward its colonies were unlike those of Western colonizers, and LPP in the colonies resembled efforts to spread Japanese among Japanese autochthonous minorities (Heinrich 2014). The percentage of immigrants to Japan currently stands at about 3 million or 1.6% of the total population. Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Filipino, and Brazilian are the most numerous foreign nationalities in Japan. Inter-marriage between Japanese and foreign nationals accounts for 4% of all marriages, and there is a growing number of bilingual children who grow up in multilingual families.

## 2. LPP for linguistic homogeneity (1895–1945)

Modernity is understood here as a period when attitudes valuing universality, homogeneity, monotony, and clarity gained prominence. Such a prioritization is obviously reflected in the nature of LPP. According to Neustupný (2005: 2212), a modernist agenda seeks to ensure that language “must unify the nation”, provides “citizens equal access to language” and “become an important symbol for the nation”. LPP in Japan addressed these issues from 1895 onward, the year when the first chair of linguistics was established at Tokyo University.

### 2.1. Modernist language planning and policy (1895–1945)

The task of modernizing Japanese was enormous and so was the fervor to solve perceived language problems. Hirai ([1948] 1998: 477–497) lists a total of 343 proposals for the Meiji period (1868–1912) alone. These came initially from intellectuals, but LPP gained a whole new quality after the appointment of Ueda Kazutoshi (1867–1937) as

linguistics professor at the University of Tokyo. Ueda had studied mainly in Dresden and Berlin, where he witnessed the language purism of the General German Language Association (*Allgemeiner Deutscher Sprachverein*). In Germany, he also encountered the concept of *Nationalsprache*, a concept he propagated after his return to Japan as *kokugo* (国語, country + language). The idea of a national language serving as a symbol of the nation had been absent before modernity (Lee 2010). *Kokugo* allowed to relate language directly to the Japanese nation and the Japanese state. In 1900 *kokugo* became a unified school subject, replacing the formerly distinct subjects of reading, writing, and speaking.

Ueda was instrumental in establishing a National Language Research Council (*Kokugo Chōsa Iinkai*) in 1902. Tasked to modernize Japanese as a national language, the Council crafted a two-fold research agenda. The first part addressed the language system and writing system and the second part language education. Historians of linguistics have pointed out that the agenda leaves unclear what the policy objectives were (Kurashima 2002: 11–12). What can be stated is that the Council sought to address both spoken and written language with the intention to unify and standardize it.

Modernization requires a lexicon and written style that allows for translatability into other modern languages (see Kristiansen 2019, i.e. Ch. 32 in vol. 1). This proved challenging because Japan had been isolated from the outside world during its closed-country policy between 1641 and 1853. We find no orchestrated LPP on how to fill lexical gaps. Rather, this task was taken up by writers, educators, and translators who coined new Sino-Japanese terms. Chinese characters (henceforth, *kanji*) provide a semantic abstractness and morphological productivity that allow the translation of modern concepts most easily (Heinrich 2021). Much of the modern terminology coined in Japan was later graphically shared with China, Korea, and Vietnam but pronounced according to the respective phonological systems. For example, the term ‘liberty’ was graphically represented as 自由 (self + depend on). It was read in Sino-Japanese as *jīyū*, in Chinese as *zìyóu*, in Sino-Korean as *jayu*, and in Sino-Vietnamese as *tự do*. Due to Japan’s pioneering role in language modernization, Korean, Chinese but also Vietnamese have a large Sino-Xenic (i.e. Sino-Japanese, Sino-Korean, Sino-Vietnamese) vocabulary that has been either coined or acquired its modern meaning in Japan (see Tab. 40.1).

Resolving the large schism between written and spoken language proved to be the second main problem. Written language heavily relied on Classical Japanese, and spoken Japanese featured great regional and social variation. Some modernizers argued that stylistic reform should depart from the pre-modern elegant written styles. Others proposed to depart from contemporary spoken language. What would become modern Japanese was a compromise between spoken and written language. It drew on public speaking. Stylistic reform was largely carried out by fictional writers. They developed spoken language to vividly capture individual experiences while also being aesthetically pleasing. This so-called ‘unified written and spoken style’ (*genbun itchi-tai*) replaced older, more heavily Sinicized written styles first in novels and later in newspapers. By 1910 it was so widely spread that it became simply known as *kōgotai* (colloquial style).

We saw above that the National Language Research Council played no major role in closing lexical gaps or in the modernization of spoken and written style, but it had a strong impact on unifying Japanese grammar. In 1904, it launched a nationwide survey into language variation in Japan. Based on the collected data, the Council published two volumes of a unified grammar of spoken language in 1917. Its author, Ōtsuki Fumihiko (1847–1928), wrote that “in Tokyo, there is the Imperial palace and government. As a

Tab. 40.1: Shared Sino-Xenic vocabulary from Japan

KANJI (IN TRADITIONAL FORM)	SINO-JAPANESE	SINO-KOREAN	CHINESE	SINO-VIETNAMESE
自由 (liberty)	<i>jiyū</i>	<i>jayu</i>	<i>zìyóu</i>	<i>tự do</i>
社會 (society)	<i>shakai</i>	<i>sahoe</i>	<i>shèhuì</i>	<i>xã hội</i>
機械 (machine)	<i>kikai</i>	<i>gihoe</i>	<i>jīhuì</i>	<i>cơ hội</i>
具體 (tangible)	<i>gutai</i>	<i>guchejeog</i>	<i>jùtǐ</i>	<i>bê tông</i>
方法 (method)	<i>hōhō</i>	<i>bangbeob</i>	<i>fāngfǎ</i>	<i>phương thức</i>
科學 (science)	<i>kagaku</i>	<i>gwahag</i>	<i>kēxué</i>	<i>khoa học</i>
原子 (atom)	<i>genshi</i>	<i>wonja</i>	<i>yuánzǐ</i>	<i>nguyên tử</i>
知識 (knowledge)	<i>chishiki</i>	<i>jisig</i>	<i>zhīshì</i>	<i>tri thức</i>
定義 (definition)	<i>teigi</i>	<i>jeongui</i>	<i>dìngyì</i>	<i>định nghĩa</i>
自然 (nature)	<i>shizen</i>	<i>jayeon</i>	<i>zìrán</i>	<i>tự nhiên</i>

result, people of the entire country are beginning to emulate the Tokyo dialect. As such, it is clear that the Tokyo dialect needs to be the target for our spoken language of the entire nation. [...] We took as our target the language of those in Tokyo who are educated” (quoted from Ueda 2021: 96). The first volume of *The Grammar of Spoken Language (Kōgo-hō)* codified Standard Japanese, and the second, supplementary volume (*Kōgo-hō bekki*) listed linguistic forms which were from now on regarded as regionally, historically, or stylistically marked. This newly created standard variety was subsequently spread through the education system, and teachers across Japan subsequently sought to correct local varieties in Standard Japanese. As a consequence, local varieties came to be seen as ‘bad’ and ‘incorrect’ and a ‘dialect complex’ developed (Sibata 1977: 29).

Japanese was also spread as *kokugo* in the colonies (Yasuda 2018). Residents in the colonies were declared to share the same culture and race (*dōbun dōshu*) as the Japanese and sought to be transformed into imperial subjects (Heinrich 2014). The national language, seen as the carrier of the Japanese spirit, played a key role in this endeavor. Japanese language spread was planned both in Tokyo and in the colonies, but a coordinating institution was established only in 1929 with the Ministry for Colonial Affairs (*Takumushō*). Language planners in the colonies often referred to the case of the Ryukyus to underline how the inhabitants of these islands had become part of Japan through linguistic assimilation (Oguma 2002: 131). In the colonies, Japanese was diffused more thoroughly in cities, and it resulted in an overall remarkable level of proficiency. In Taiwan, 71 % of the population was said to have acquired Japanese by 1944 (Chen 2001: 98). In Korea, this rate was said to be even higher (Tani 2000: 85). Just as in Japan itself, efforts were made to spread Japanese also in private domains, that is, to make Japanese the sole language of the colonies. Japanese was also widely acquired in the South Sea Mandate, but the educational standard and the expectations for mastering Japanese were lower there (Tsurumi 1984: 278). How exactly Japanese was spoken in the colonies is less known, though, but Tai (1999: 528) reports that “in the streets of

Taiwanese cities, where Japanese needed to communicate with the local Taiwanese who spoke little Japanese, these two groups of people together invented a pidgin Japanese in which Japanese words were put together in a Taiwanese order”. Among the Indigenous population of Taiwan, Japanese sometimes served as a lingua franca, and in one case it resulted in the emergence of a Creole. The Japanese colonizers treated two Aboriginal communities, the Seediq and the Atayal as one group, and as an effect of increased contact between them, they developed Yilan Creole Japanese. Yilan Creole Japanese has a Japanese substratum and an Atayal superstratum, and it is neither intelligible for speakers of Atayal nor of Japanese (Chien and Sanada 2010). In the Republic of Palau, Japanese remains recognized as a ‘regional language’ and has therefore official status there.

## 2.2. The effects of modernist LPP at the margins

The Japanese language spread in the wake of nation-building and in the colonies is more similar than one might expect. While there are clear terminological distinctions between the Japanese state and the colonies, it is worthy of attention to recall that these distinctions rest on a simple date. All territories that came under Japanese rule before the promulgation of the Meiji constitution on 11 February 1889 became part of the nation-state (Hokkaido, the Ryukyu Islands, Ogasawra), while the territories occupied afterward became colonies (Taiwan, South Sakhalin, Korea, and the South Pacific Mandate). Despite being located within the territory of the nation-state and despite being Japanese nationals, the Ainu, Ryukyuan, and Ogasawara Islanders did not speak Japanese. Nation-building meant an expansion of the Japanese language to non-Japanese-speaking people. Teaching Japanese as a second language started in the Ryukyus in 1879, when the first Conversation Training Centre (*Taiwa denshūjo*) was set up in Shuri on Okinawa Island. Aboriginal education Centers (*Dojin kyōikujo*) followed in Hokkaido soon afterward. Bilingual textbooks were compiled, special school curricula developed, and this resulted in a bilingual generation in Hokkaido and the Ryukyus. However, social bilingualism was never a policy objective, and all Japanese linguistic minorities shifted to the exclusive use of Japanese in the course of the twentieth century. Language shift in the family among Ainu communities took place in the 1910s and 1920s (Okazaki 2018) and in the 1950s and 1960s among Ryukyuan (Heinrich 2015). Decreolization in Ogasawara occurred in the 1950s and 1960s (Long 2007), resulting in the extinction of Ogasawara Creole English. Linguistic modernity in Japan meant that there was no space for autochthonous cultures and languages.

The spread of Japanese across the Japanese Archipelago did not only affect speakers of other languages than Japanese. It also had effects on their languages. The consequences were twofold. On the one hand, these languages stopped being adapted to modern communicative requirements, and there was no lexical and stylistic modernization. No standard varieties or unified orthographies were created. The relation between language and everyday life became fragmented (Tsitsipis 2003). For example, Okinawan-Ryukyuan shares Sino-Xenic words with Chinese and Japanese such as 帆船 (sailing ship) which is *fānchuan* in Chinese, *hosen* in Japanese, and *fusshin* in Okinawan, or 風水 (geomancy) which is *fēngshuǐ* in Chinese, *fūsui* in Japanese and *funshii* in Okinawan. However, the terms given in Tab. 40.1 above do either not exist in Okinawan, or if we find a term, it does not match the modern concept. For example, Japanese *shakai* (society) can be

translated into any other modernized languages (e.g., *Gesellschaft* in German or *società* in Italian), but the Okinawan term *yununaka* (世々中) denotes the broader concept of ‘being part of the world’ and not the modern concept of ‘a large group of people with shared culture and institutions’. The same applies to ‘machine’ which is *yaama* in Okinawan but which refers primarily to a ‘spinning wheel’ and can be used only in a semantic expansion to also denote ‘machine’. A shared Sino-Ryukyuan term of ‘machine’ (機械) which is used across the *kanji* cultural sphere does not exist, because machines in a modern sense were talked about in Japanese and not in Okinawan, nor in any other Ryukyuan language or in Ainu (see Lawrence 2015).

The fragmentation between language and everyday life is part of a larger process that Tsitsipis (2003) calls ‘progressive erasure’, i.e. a process where a dominant language increasingly influences smaller, dominated languages. Fragmentation results in marginalization, which refers to assumptions that the dominant language is superior. Accordingly, it is perceived to be normal to switch to Japanese in some domains. Processes of marginalization also occur in the linguistic system. We can see this, for example, in the case of the infiltration of the Japanese phonological system into other languages of Japan. In the case of Dunan (Yonaguni-Ryukyuan), for example, the nasal velar plosive /ŋ/, which has phonemic status in Dunan, is getting replaced by the non-nasalized/g/. In Standard Japanese, which was spread on Yonaguni Island through school education, /ŋ/ is an allophone of /g/. Thus, even when Dunan is used, it bears a mark of Standard Japanese in that words such as /aŋai/ (east) become pronounced as /agai/ or /u:ŋamun/ (worship) as /u:gamun/. The perceived superiority of Japanese is reproduced in the Dunan language system which is becoming more similar to Standard Japanese. The relexification of Dunan terms such as *naba* (mushroom) by Standard Japanese *kinoko* is another example of marginalization. Fragmentation and marginalization subsequently lead to what Tsitsipis calls sublimation. The use of fragmented and marginalized languages becomes ‘marked’. We see such signs of sublimation in speech events of Japanese autochthonous languages where a stage, a microphone, and an audience are required to have somebody speak an endangered language. Otherwise, the use of such languages is seen to be out of place, i.e. perceived to be marked.

### 3. Maintaining modernity (1945–1990)

The period between the end of WWII and the 1990s was characterized by modernity maintenance. Homogeneity in language continued to be seen as a sign of progress and the effects of LPP before 1945 were maintained or reinforced. Social class, ethnicity, linguistic, and cultural diversity in Japan continued to be ignored. The reform of the written language system received much attention but how people actually wrote and the difficulties they experienced did not. As before, it was taken for granted that all Japanese nationals were linguistically equal.

#### 3.1. The language reforms of the occupation period

Defeat in war led to new attention for LPP after 1945 and the main question was now whether Japan could be transformed into a democracy if it maintained its language as it

was. This policy impetus came from the US occupying forces (Unger 1996). Upon their initiative, a study on literacy was conducted in 1946, and data on the literacy of more than 16,000 individuals was collected. Although this investigation is often cited to claim that Japanese society is 99% literate, a critical examination of its results reveals that the average literacy score amounted to 78% (Yamashita 2011). Reflecting the views of the Allied Forces according to which (written) Japanese was too complicated to allow for societal participation and thus democracy, a National Language Research Institute (*Kokuritsu kokugo kenkyūjo*) was founded in 1947. It was tasked to study how Japanese could be rationalized (*gōrika*) and improved (*kaizen*). Japanese linguists who had been instrumental in the 1946 literacy survey joined the Institute. By applying their newly acquired skills of combining statistics and empirical language surveys, an original Japanese sociolinguistic tradition emerged at the institute (Heinrich 2018). One of the main achievements was the relaxation of language norms. *Hyōjungo* (standard language) gave way to *kyōtsūgo* (common language), a loan translation from the German *Gemeinsprache* (common language). *Kyōtsūgo* emphasized the attempt to orient one's own speech on the standard norm instead of perfectly speaking it (Okamoto and Shibamoto-Smith 2016: 27–73).

Expectations into writing were also relaxed, and a series of written language reforms were implemented (Carroll 2001):

- In November 1946, the List of Characters for General Use (*Tōyō kanji-hyō*) was promulgated. It limited the number of characters to be used in schools and in official administration to 1,850 characters. While progressive language reformers had initially hoped that the *Tōyō kanji* would constitute a first step in a series to further reduce the number of *kanji*, the list was replaced in 1981 by a List of Characters for Daily Use (*Jōyō kanji-hyō*). The latter contained 1,945 characters and has grown to 2,136 after a revision in 2010.
- In November 1946, the Modern Kana Orthography (*Gendai kanazukai*) replaced the historical orthography conventions and presented more transparent rules for the representation of contemporary speech.
- In February 1948, an Additional List of Characters for General Use (*Tōyō kanji beppyō*) was published. It featured 88 additional *kanji* to be used for personal names. The list was revised and expanded several times afterward.
- In February 1948, the List for Sino-Japanese and Japanese Readings of Characters for General Use (*Tōyō kanji onkun-hyō*) reduced the number of Sino-Japanese and Japanese readings that could be mapped onto the *Tōyō kanji*.
- In April 1949, the publication of the List of Character Forms of the Characters for General Use (*Tōyō kanji jitai-hyō*) concluded the reform of the written language. This list simplified the written form and reduced the number of strokes of 131 *kanji*.

These reforms reflect the objective of rationalizing and improving Japanese, but they remain modernist in that they sought to provide one solution for all. As an effect, the problem of literacy did not focus on society or education, nor on diversity or on inequality, but on the writing system itself. Also, the objectives of rationalizing, improving, and democratizing language testify to a continued positivist view on language. Language is always detached from its users, and this allows to imagine them as homogenous.

A reform of Japanese that had no predecessor in prewar LPP was a guideline addressing polite language (*keigo*). The policy document, Polite Language Henceforth (*Kore*

*kara no keigo*), proposed that polite language ought no longer express vertical social relations (*jōge kankei*) but should serve to express mutual respect (*sōgo sonkei*). This initiative represents an attempt to retain the polite language system but to ensure that it reflects an egalitarian and democratic society (Wetzel 2004: 56–57). Such intention notwithstanding, a system of polite language that employs three main categories – polite language (*teineigo*), respectful language (*sonkeigo*), and humble language (*kenjōgo*) – inevitably requires its users to make assumptions about status differences. While also later LPP initiatives on *keigo* in the 1990s and 2000s continued to call for a less hierarchical use, proposals that saw polite language in the service of ‘tuning interpersonal relationships’ (*taijin kankei no chōsei*) or expressing the ‘degree of intimacy’ (*shinso no kankei*) cannot gloss over the fact that *keigo* creates social hierarchies (Wang 2020).

### 3.2. Modernity maintenance at the margin

The monolithic view on language and society characterized also post-war LPP and this meant that the symbolic domination of standard speakers over dialect and minority language speakers continued. Regional dialects continued to decline, and many young and middle-aged Japanese know only dialect tokens today. In many parts of Japan, local residents are unaware that dialects were once spoken in the area where they grew up (NINJAL 2013). Japan’s autochthonous languages shared a similar fate and have fallen out of use. Kuril Ainu became extinct in the 1960 and Sakhalin Ainu in the 1990s. Today, all Hokkaido Ainu speakers are second-language speakers. The Ryukyuan languages are endangered, too, and might face extinction by the mid-century. Language shift and decline are the outcome of unequal relations between autochthonous minorities and the majority (Dorian 1981). Such inequality manifests itself already in the absence of language policies addressing language endangerment (Heinrich and Ishihara 2017).

Literacy problems were neither addressed nor studied after the pioneering survey of 1946. The myth of a 99 % literacy rate in Japan served as a welcome rationalization for such neglect (Yamashita 2011). However, problems in reading and writing remained among many older long-time resident Koreans (*Zainichi*) and Japan’s Chinese overseas community (*Kakyō*) who came to Japan before 1945. Literacy problems also continued for the Deaf who speak Japanese as a second language (Nakashima 2018). Minority language education for migrants remained absent in Japanese school curricula. Compulsory school education did not extend to children of foreign nationality. While most schools accept foreign pupils, they see this as “doing them a favour” (Fujita-Round and Maher 2008: 394). LPP ignored sociolinguistic facts not conforming to its ideals of linguistic homogeneity, and this resulted in language problems at the margins being neither acknowledged nor addressed. This started to slowly change from 1990 onward.

## 4. LPP in late-modern Japan

In a society where it had long been considered “a taboo” (Sanada 2006: 1) to link language and society, late modern priorities such as consideration of pluralism, variety, contingency, and ambivalence came late. However, by the 1990s it had become increas-



ingly evident that claiming homogeneity in a situation of diversity was a key mechanism in reproducing inequality. Diversity started being addressed.

#### 4.1. Towards an acknowledgment of diversity

In this last section, I discuss three fields where we can observe changes from a modern to a late modern agenda in LPP. These are ongoing debates on multicultural coexistence (*tabunka kyōsei*), the emergence of Simple Japanese (*yasashii nihongo*), and efforts to support endangered languages.

*Tabunka kyōsei* (multicultural coexistence) is a concept that evolved in the aftermath of the 1995 Kobe earthquake when new foreign residents had difficulties obtaining information about relief services. The labor shortages of the 1980s led to an amendment of the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act in 1990, which resulted in the immigration of Brazilian and Peruvian *Nikkeijin* (Japanese descendants) and later from migrants from all over Asia. The number of registered foreigners in Japan has tripled since the 1990s. The arrival of these migrants posed new language problems, most notably at schools and municipalities, but also when it came to disseminating information after natural calamities such as earthquakes. *Tabunka kyōsei* became a guiding idea for municipalities that hosted many immigrants, but it was noted that *kyōsei* ('coexistence') was mostly understood only from the perspective of the majority and that *tabunka* ('multiculturalism') was to be aesthetical (food, fashion, festival) but not political or emancipatory (Ueda and Yamashita 2006). By March 2006, the Japanese Ministry of Internal Affairs (2006) released a *Research Report on the Promotion of Multicultural Coexistence*, which encouraged to acceptance of the presence of different nationalities and cultures in Japan. It proved a landmark document in that foreign nationals were no longer framed simply as 'foreigners' but as 'foreigners as residents' (*seikatsusha to shite no gaikokujin*). Yet, discussions on what values multicultural coexistence was to be based on, or what sociolinguistic changes were required to transform into a society of mutual coexistence were never spelled out. *Tabunka kyōsei* remained a metaphor. It also does not pay attention to migrant groups who arrived before 1990, and it ignores the autochthonous minorities of Japan. In a comprehensive discussion of the report, Nagy (2015: 13) concludes that it "does not discuss foreign residents in terms of forming a minority that exists in Japan; rather it inserts foreigners all into one category and consequently marginalises all of their identities and cultures".

*Yasashii nihongo* is usually translated as 'Easy Japanese', but *yasashii* means also 'friendly'. Therefore, I use the Japanese term in the following. *Yasashii nihongo* also originated in the aftermath of the 1995 Kobe earthquake. It was found that neither English nor Japanese worked well as a lingua franca for foreign residents (Iwata 2013: 23–24). To bridge the communication gap, relay translations from one language to the next had to be organized. Follow-up research revealed that syntactically plain Japanese with additional reading indications (*furigana*) mapped above the *kanji* was the preferred medium of written instruction among foreign residents. A survey by the Cultural Agency (2020) revealed that 82 % reported having conversational abilities in Japanese, and 62 % claimed to have no difficulties with Japanese. By contrast, only 44 % reported not having difficulties with English. 76 % stated that their preferred language of information in Japan was *yasashii nihongo* (76 %), followed by English (68 %) and Japanese (22 %).

*Yasashii nihongo* was quickly picked up by municipalities as they had to deal with foreign residents on a daily basis. In 2020, the Immigration Services Agency of Japan (2020) announced an *Easy Japanese Guidelines for Residency Support*, a document that is itself written in *yasashii nihongo*. It recommended, among other things, using short sentences, avoiding *keigo* (honorific language) and using Japanese rather than Sino-Japanese words. It also underlines to not use *yasashii nihongo* toward foreign residents who have high proficiency in Japanese and can be addressed in Japanese *tout court*.

In academic circles, the usefulness of *yasashii nihongo* is hotly debated. Some see it as a new inclusive way to use Japanese in a diversifying population and to curb what they see as an excessive use of English (e.g. Kimura 2019). Others see *yasashii nihongo* as an instance of linguistic discrimination and point out that a large part of the population views *yasashii nihongo* skeptically (e.g. Yasuda 2013). As a matter of fact, a recent survey found that 70% had never heard of *yasashii nihongo* (Cultural Agency 2023). Sociolinguists such as Iwasaki (2022) claim that *yasashii nihongo* constitutes a form of foreigner talk, Hashimoto (2018) reports that foreign language users of Japanese are not being taken into consideration in the debate of Easy Japanese and that too little consideration is given to different types of Japanese second-language speakers. Proponents of *yasashii nihongo* retort that it is the inability to access information that constitutes discrimination and exclusion. The discussion on *yasashii nihongo* has also been expanded thematically as it is now discussed in the context of integration, gender, natural disasters, the coronavirus pandemic, the Deaf, children, public administration, medical services, texting, tourism or school education (e.g. Immigration Services Agency of Japan 2023). As for the moment, the fate of *yasashii nihongo* remains unclear but we can expect that this discussion will continue for several years to come.

Another point where we can see consideration of diversity in late modern Japan is in the new-found support for endangered languages (see Brenzinger 2019, i.e. Ch. 38 in vol. 1), although there is no state-led LPP that addresses endangered language communities. To this day, LPP does not challenge the myth of a homogenous nation. Ryukyuan languages, for example, are referred to as *shimakutuba* (literally, ‘community speech’ in Okinawan) in prefectural policy documents, avoiding thereby the term ‘language’ (*gen-go*) and the political consequences that such terminology would imply. In 2006, Okinawa Prefecture established 18 September as community language day (*shimakutuba no hi*, September 18 can be read *ku-tu-ba* in Okinawan). This was the first-ever LPP initiative in support of Ryukyuan languages on the prefectural level. A range of activities are now annually carried out in support of Ryukyuan languages. In 2017, a Center for the Dissemination of Community Languages (*Shimakutuba fukyū sentā*) was set up in Naha. It currently organizes Ryukyuan language teacher training and develops learning materials. Grassroots activities where Ryukyuan languages are reclaimed have emerged across the Ryukyu Islands, including several language study circles and Master-Apprentice initiatives where intergenerational language transmission is restored (Topping 2023).

We can also find a new wave of activities and new institutions in support of Ainu. Following the enactment of the Ainu Culture Law in 1997, a Foundation for Research and Promotion of Ainu Culture was established. Among other things, the Foundation offers Ainu classes, Ainu teacher training, and develops learning materials. In 2007, a Center for Ainu and Indigenous Studies was set up at Hokkaido University. The Ainu were recognized as an Indigenous people of Japan in 2019, and new legislation has been enacted to protect their language and culture. Ainu language reclamation classes have

been held at the Ainu Museum in Shiraoi since 2010. Scholarships are given to young Ainu within the Urespa project. By 2022, 24 students had graduated from this program (Ohara and Okada 2023). The establishment of a National Ainu Museum in 2020 has led to further promotion of Ainu, including a bilingual Ainu-Japanese linguistic landscape in the museum (Fukazawa 2018).

While there is no shortage of examples showing changing attitudes towards Japan's autochthonous languages, and while fruitful collaborations between communities and researchers are emerging (Hammine and Tsutsui-Billins 2022), there exists no LPP in support of Japan's endangered languages at the state level. We have therefore arrived at a situation of incongruency between LPP, popular attitudes, and the new uses of endangered languages in Japan. Rather than shifting position, Japan's state institutions responsible for LPP have become inactive (Otomo 2018: 310). *Laissez-faire* is the order of the day.

#### 4.2. The margin in late modernity

In late modern settings, linguistic diversity is no longer simply swept under the carpet. We can note three fundamental changes. Firstly, Japanese society continues to diversify through immigration, but there is also a record number of Japanese nationals who temporarily work or study abroad, international marriages are at a record high, and so is the number of bicultural and bilingual children in Japan, and the number of naturalizations. Secondly, attitudes are shifting, and a growing number of Japanese are today embracing hybrid, fluid, and 'cool' identities, that are juxtaposed to the traditional self-image of homogeneity (Maher 2005). Thirdly, precarious employment situations have pushed many young and middle-aged Japanese into the economic margins, and they know how it feels to be (economically) excluded. The margins of Japanese society are growing, and so is a sense of solidarity for them (Heinrich and Galan 2018). Yet, these changes do not directly or easily translate into changing linguistic behaviors. As an effect, it is difficult to reverse a century-long trend of language diversity loss.

At present, the effects of linguistic modernity are stronger than the late modern attempts to counter unwanted effects such as language endangerment or dialect leveling. The offspring of migrant communities also keep shifting to Japanese. Multilingualism and multiculturalism remain mainly aesthetic and ludic in Japan, and is rarely political (Heinrich and Yamashita 2017). Just as in every other advanced economy, literacy remains a problem for many in Japan. Hiding literacy problems means stigmatizing those who experience difficulties, and a singular notion of 'literacy' in a society as diverse as that of Japan and with a writing system as complex as that of the Japanese language does not help to resolve the situation (Nakashima 2018). Transforming LPP in Japan is not easy. It requires a comprehensive awareness of present problems and an acknowledgment that linguistic diversity and not homogeneity is the barometer of equality. It also necessitates the development of institutions that support the process of such transformations, and this crucially includes LPP.

## 5. Summary and conclusions

Japan's success in modernizing its language has often been praised. The first period of modernist LPP has been followed by a long period of modern maintenance efforts. The shift away from modernist views and attitudes has been late and slow (Neustupný 2005: 2216). Japan is at pains to let go of ideologies and policies that successfully solved the problems of a modernizing the country at the turn of the nineteenth century. However, contemporary Japan is a late-modern and sociolinguistically diversifying country, and along with these transformations, popular attitudes and expectations towards language have changed (Otsuji 2018). Japanese is today de-standardizing (Inoue 2011), cities show signs of super-diversity (Heinrich and Yamashita 2017; Wee 2019, i.e. Ch. 28 in vol. 1), endangered languages are being reclaimed (Arakaki 2023), migrant communities are fluid, mobile, and diversifying within themselves (Maher 2022). None of these developments are addressed or supported by LPP.

I have argued here that the margins need to be taken into consideration if Japanese LPP is to be unlocked from its current stasis. Doing so would reveal the economic, communicative, cognitive, and aesthetic potential of Japan's other languages. Change speeds up at the margins. It is the rightful place to depart for LPP in late-modern settings.

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## 41. Language policy in Central Asia

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### 1. Introduction

Central Asia is a complex multilingual region composed of republics established on the basis of specific ethnolinguistic groups but containing high levels of linguistic and cultural diversity. These republics gained independence with the fall of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and have developed language policies to manage local linguistic diversity and respond to the historical legacy of the language policies of the USSR. This chapter will overview the language policy of the five republics that emerged from the USSR at the beginning of the 1990s – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – to examine how each republic has responded to their local multilingual contexts. It will begin with an historical overview of the formation of the republics and the language policies that shaped them prior to independence. This historical overview is relevant for understanding contemporary policy, which has often