PART V

Research overviews

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LANGUAGE LIFE (*GENGO SEIKATSU*)

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Introduction

The study of language life (*gengo seikatsu*) is a well-known example of a precursor of (western) sociolinguistics (*shakai gengogaku*) in Japan. Its development, objective and results remain helpful for understanding Japanese sociolinguistics today. An examination of language life is also important with regard to how cultural-specific (emic) aspects can be put into perspective with universal (etic) aspects of language and society. In this chapter, I first describe the background from which the study of language life emerged. This is followed by an account of the research conducted before 1945, then by a summary of works that are characteristic for language life studies after 1945. The study of language life gave way to the study of sociolinguistics from the 1990s onwards. This notwithstanding, the legacy of language life continues to influence Japanese sociolinguistics to this day, and this chapter concludes with a brief outlook on this and an assessment of the legacy of language life studies in contemporary Japanese sociolinguistics.

Pre-war studies of language life

Following the establishment of linguistics as a modern academic discipline in Japan at the end of the nineteenth century, genealogy, phonology, grammar (*bunpō*) and dialectology became the first focal points of research. These were pressing linguistic issues for the modernization of Japan, which sought to clarify and demystify its relations to other nations (through the study of genealogy) and needed to unify and standardize its language (Doi 1976). A commission was tasked to conduct basic research for the modernization of Japanese. Between 1902 and 1917 the National Language Research Council (*Kokugo chōsa i'inkai*) conducted a number of surveys where methodologies of descriptive linguistics, philology, dialectology and folklore studies were mixed and applied (MKK 1949: 65–68). These studies testify the high level and innovativeness of Japanese linguistics in the early twentieth century. They were seen to be crucial in order to solve existing language problems, at time widely discussed as *kokugo mondai* (national language problems). Before 1945, a total of 71 books were published on *kokugo mondai*, accompanied by 112 books on problems of script and writing (*mojigaku*) (Yamada 1942; Hirai 1998[1948]). These publications amount for 20% of the total book publications on linguistics before 1945. Concern for social and linguistic problems led to large-scale empirical research initiatives by the

National Language Research Council, and these then came to play a fundamental role for the emergence of the Japanese tradition of *gengo seikatsu*.

Language life studies owe much to the study of Japanese dialects. Japanese dialectology initially limited itself almost exclusively to contemporary and synchronic surveys. These studies subsequently led to examinations on who actually spoke dialect (and who spoke Standard Japanese). The interrelation of macro-sociological categories such as age, sex/gender and educational background, on the one hand, and language use, on the other hand, received increasingly more attention. At the same time when Japanese dialectology turned "more social", the concept of *seikatsu* (life, or livelihood) emerged as an important concept in the social sciences in Japan. Reflecting the liberal spirit of the Taishō Period (1912–1926), *seikatsu* complemented the macro-categories of *kokumin* (Japanese national) or *shimin* (citizen). By focusing on life or livelihood as such, Japanese social sciences sought to detach their studies from nation-imagination ideology and the rights and obligations associated with citizenship. The pre-war life studies in Japanese social sciences focused on mundane, everyday activities that were shaping the lives of ordinary people (Takeda 2013). Language was of course an integral part of such activities, and it was therefore only a question of time until linguistics discovered the appeal of *seikatsu* studies for their own discipline. The first linguist to explicitly use the concept of *seikatsu* and to relate it to linguistic issues was Kindaichi Kyōsuke who wrote:

> Life is one harmonious and congruent unity, and just as one can consider analyzing the economic life, the religious life, the social life, the intellectual life, the aesthetic life, the sexual life etc. in a unified way, one can also consider regarding language life (*gengo seikatsu*) as one such abstract entity.
>
> *(Kindaichi 1933: 35)*

By coining the term *gengo seikatsu*, Kindaichi provided for one of the most important key terms of Japanese linguistics of the Shōwa Period (1926–1989). He established in Japan an indigenous tradition of sociolinguistics, one that predated the start of such studies in the US and Europe by three decades. Two factors were decisive for the success and the prominence of language life studies in Japan before 1945. First, a heightened awareness of language problems in Japan – an effect of the unparalleled quick and thorough modernization of Japanese (Heinrich 2012) – and, second, language problems occurring in the Japanese colonies (Yasuda 1998). Both topics crucially involve research into fields that are today part and parcel of the sociolinguistic research agenda, e.g., language standardization and adaptation, language registers, functional diversification, language contact and spread.

One of the early scholars engaging in language life studies was Kikuzawa Sueo. Kikuzawa had spent considerable time studying language problems of written language, as many others did at that time. In his book on the social and modal stratification of Japanese, Kikuzawa (1933) took a whole new direction. He pleaded that Japanese linguists should not simply apply theories and methods developed in the West, but that they should start to independently innovate their research. He called for a unification of the study of language form and function, instead having descriptive linguistics being detached studies in "meaning" (Kikizawa 1933: 3–9). In order to do so, Kikuzawa proposed to distinguish between the study of *yōsō* (state) and of *yōshiki* (mode) of language. The former approach should be devoted to research on various forms of linguistic realizations (states) within the Japanese speech community. Kikuzawa distinguished thereby between social and local differences but also studied variation due to language change. Kikuzawa devoted most of his attention to the study of language state (*yōsō*) in his book. He also urged linguists to study the differences between written and spoken language along his idea of language mode (*yōshiki*). His call for a differentiated study of written and spoken languages

was later picked up by linguists engaging in post-war language life studies, most famously by Tokieda Motoki (1950, 1954). In a later publication, Kikuzawa (1936: 310–388) engaged in the study of language mode in that he collected taboo words among Shinto priests, and by compiling lists of the specific vocabulary used by merchants, scholars, cosmopolites, prostitutes, former samurai and thieves.

Probably the most remarkable study of language life before 1945 was a study by Kindaichi Haruhiko, the son of Kindaichi Kyōsuke. In his study on the velar plosive in the Tokyo variety, Kindaichi (1967[1941]) studied the variation between the voiced velar stop [g] and the voiced velar nasal [ŋ] by developing what we would call today a variationist approach. In Standard Japanese, we find a complementary distribution between the two variants with the voiced velar stop in work-initial position (e.g., *gin*, silver), whereas the nasalized variant may be used word-internally (e.g., *hiŋasi*, east). In some regional dialects, the voiced velar stop [g] was used in all environments. According to Kindaichi, there were a number of reasons why the nasalized variant in word-internal position had become the standard pronunciation. For one, it was used in the capital city of Tokyo, as well as in a great number of other Japanese local dialects, it was then older of two variants, and it was widely perceived as sounding "beautiful". Kindaichi thought that nobody younger than 30 who had been born and raised in Tokyo would ever use velar stop [g] in word-internal position. To his surprise, however, his little sister started doing exactly this when she entered middle school. Kindaichi therefore expanded his attention to her classmates and found that many were talking in the same way. This was puzzling to him, because all language change that he and everybody else then knew about was the replacement of regional dialects by Standard Japanese, i.e., language change from above.

In order to study the language change in progress he was witnessing, Kindaichi developed a survey through which he sought to clarify how widely this change was currently spread among young Tokyoites, what was motivating this change, what role the social backgrounds of these children were playing. He compiled a list of 13 words and made the children read it out aloud. In addition, he asked them where they currently lived, which schools they had frequented and from where in Japan their parents originated. The results he obtained pointed clearly to language change in progress: 28% used the Standard Japanese pronunciation, 41 fluctuated between [g] and [ŋ] in word-internal positions, and 30% used exclusively the velar plosive [g]. Against his expectation, the origin of the parents played no role in accounting for this result. The only pattern he could find was that those who favored [g] over [ŋ] came from the uptown area of Yamanote, while those from the more working-class neighborhoods of Shitamachi stuck closer to the standard pronunciation. Contrary to what contemporary linguists had predicted, the standard was not spreading everywhere. Quite on the contrary, and somehow shockingly, it was retreating in the most affluent part of the Japanese capital among its youngest speakers. Kindaichi therefore predicted that [g] would replace [ŋ] over time – a prediction confirmed by Hibiya (1988) almost half a century later.

Approaches more centered on the study of society can also be found at this early stage of language life studies. Tanabe Juri published two volumes on the sociology of the Japanese language before 1945 (Tanabe 1936, 1943). The latter book is an expansion and updated version of his first publication on this topic. These publications introduced and familiarized a Japanese readership with works of European linguists such as Marcel Cohen and Charles Bally, in addition to social scientists such as Auguste Compte and Emile Durkheim. Tanabe's work proved an important instructional source for the development of post-war language life studies, as it paved the way for a broader perspective on language. Tanabe (1943: 12) called to expand the range of linguistics and to link it with neighboring fields such as sociology and history. He argued, for example, to study language in relation to illness, to moral or to implied meaning. While such a

call might have looked odd to some at the time, such studies are today commonly conducted around the world in fields such as elderspeech, language ideology or pragmatics. In view of the fact that a sociology of Japanese did not exist then, Tanabe promoted works of western scholars, all the while urging his contemporaries to develop their own theories and methodologies on the basis of their studies on Japanese. Tanabe (1943: 152) was keenly aware that methods developed on the basis of western societies and languages could often not be directly applied on the case of the Japan. Such systematic studies on Japanese language and society would evolve immediately after 1945, as the disastrous effects of the lost war played a key role in triggering a new wave of attention on the role of language in everyday life.

Post-war studies of language life

It is no exaggeration to say that language life was the most prominent topic of linguistics research in Japan in the 1950s. It was accompanied by research into generative grammar from the 1960s onwards and gradually lost its dominating position in Japanese linguistics. It nevertheless remained a highly influential field of research until the end of the Shōwa Period (1926–1989). *Gengo seikatsu* is today widely remembered as a "popular branch" of Japanese post-war linguistics. This image is largely due to the success of a journal by the name of *Gengo seikatsu*. Published by the National Institute of Japanese Language, the journal had at its peak a circulation of more than 10,000 copies per month. *Gengo seikatsu* was popular to the point that it became unclear to what extent it was addressing a popular readership and to what extent it was actually addressing academics. Dhorne (1983: 69) points out that the majority of the readers of the journal *Gengo seikatsu* were amateurs with an interest in language. Between 1951 and 1988, a total of 436 issues of *Gengo seikatsu* were published, looking at Japanese language and society from every conceivable perspective. It published, for example, special issues on the role and the linguistic properties of memos (volume 192), language on the radio in the age of TV (volume 276), or the language life of New Year's Day (volume 337). Always original, easy to read and moderately priced (300 Yen), the journal was widely popular and crucially contributed to a post-war boom of popular interest on language and linguistics in Japan (Matsumura 1956: 17). The study of language life amounted, however, to much more than this popular branch of "language watching". At its peak in the 1950s and 1960s, the study of *gengo seikatsu* featured two distinct approaches, one being driven by theory, the other focusing on the collection and analysis of data. Let us consider both of these directions.

The theory-driven approach to language life

The post-war study of language life is intricately connected to the National Institute for Japanese Language (*Kokuritsu kokugo kenkyūjo*, today called in English National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics). Established in 1948, the institute was tasked by the law to "rationalize" the Japanese language in order that it could become the medium of a democratic society (Wenck 1960). To this end, the institute should provide for basic studies on which new and democratic language policies could be formulated, it should collect material and also publish reference works on Japanese. In the first years, there were various ideas how the institute could best realize these ambitious objectives. Yanagita Kunio thought the study of language life should be connected with language didactics (Yanagita 1951: 8), while the institute's first two directors, Nishio Minoru and Iwabuchi Etsutarō, thought it should contribute to a closer convergence of spoken and written language (Neustupný 1974: 72). None of these issues were to become prominent features of the post-war language life studies, though. At first, a theory-driven approach to *gengo seikatsu* took root.

The initiative to link the study of language life with theory is inseparably linked to the work of Tokieda Motoki. Tokieda had developed a process theory of language (*gengo katei-setsu*), where he proposed a psychological approach to study language. According to Tokieda (1941), language was constituted, first and foremost, by expression acts (*hyōgen kōi*) and by comprehension acts (*rikai kōi*). Tokieda – a staunch critic of Saussure and European structuralism – thought that linguistics should squarely face the heterogeneity of language on the level of *parole* instead of abstracting an empirically non-existent system of homogenous *langue*. The variability of language should be studied by paying attention to the speaker subject (*shutai*), to context (*bamen*) and to the topic of communication (*sozai*). *Gengo seikatsu* should study how these features were responsible for differences and similarities in concrete utterances.

Tokieda's work with regard to *gengo seikatsu* was centered on his ideas of *bamen* (context). Departing from his premise that language was first and foremost an act (*kōi*), he pledged that the study of language should always be linked to the social activities of which these acts were part of (Tokieda 1956: 144). He argued that his process theory of language provided for a theoretical basis to engage in such a kind of study. The individual speakers with their concrete utterances should be the subjects of study. Doing so would require a consideration of the listener, the relation (roles) between the speaker and the listener, the topic of communication, the social situation and the psychological state of all involved. The latter was an important point for Tokieda who distinguished between inner and outer environments of communication. Tokieda was influenced by the work of Husserl and of Humboldt, seeing language as an artifact and as being individually perceived as an activity. The physical and social context aside, Tokieda was therefore also interested in psychology. He claimed that language had an emotional aspect, too, and that this side of communication could be grasped by paying attention to attitudes (*taido*), mood (*kibun*) and emotions (*kanjō*) of individual speakers (Tokieda 1941: 144).

The methods laid out by Tokieda on the basis of his language process theory were applied in a number of studies in the 1950s and 1960s. These works were later collectively seen to be part of a tradition called *bamen-ron* (context studies). An early example of this direction was a work by Uno Yoshikata in which he differentiated between speaker subject, communication topic, listener and the (physical) context of concrete utterances (Uno 1951). Tsukahara Tetsuo studied the relation between speaker and listener by putting the acts of expression in relation to the acts of comprehension, all the while paying consideration to differences between speaking and writing (Tsukahara 1954). Also, in the 1950s, Nagano Masaru summarized the central issues of *bamen-ron* as follows (Nagano 1957: 131): "Who communicates with whom in what circumstances and with what development?" Development (*tenkai*) had developed in another attempt to studying concrete utterances in order to develop a linguistics of *parole*. This approach was then called *bunshō-ron* (discourse studies).

The best-known scholar of *bunshō-ron* was Mio Isago. Mio combined the study of context (called *ba* in his work) with the study of linguistic style. This led him to develop a taxonomy of interactional sentence types (Mio 1948: 81–82). Concretely speaking, he distinguished between *genshō-bun* (phenomena sentence), such as, for example, *ame ga futteiru* (it's raining), *handan-bun* (judgment sentences), such as *Tōkyo wa nihon no shuto de aru* (Tokyo is the capital of Japan), *bunsetsu-bun* (speech tact sentences), such as *Omae wa kono hon o yomeru-ka* (Can you read this book? The person is at the time of utterance not reading it) and *tenkai-bun* (development sentences) such as *Ama da!* (Rain!).[1] Mio claimed that *genshō-bun* would directly refer to the context (*ba*), that *handan-bun* would include the context, that *tenkai-bun* would refer to a limited extent to the context and that *bunsetsu-bun* would be characterized by a reciprocal relation between the utterance and the context. A given speech unit (speech tact) such as *yomeru* (ability to read) could only be understood by considering the context, in this case the observation or

knowledge that the person in question had read the book before. Tokieda, too, developed an interest in "developments" beyond the sentence, arguing to consider text or discourse (*bunshō*) as the third fundamental unit other than word (*go*) and sentence (*bun*) in his grammar of spoken Japanese (Tokieda 1950: 21).[2] Accordingly, the task of linguistics should be to identify patterns and constraints on all these levels of analysis. However, this kind of research did not further develop in Japanese linguistics until the 1970s, and it did then under the influence of western discourse studies and text linguistics (e.g., Hinds 1976).

In the theory-driven approach to the study of language life we can recognize the innovative force of post-war language life studies. Driven by a relatively small group of linguists and centered on Tokieda and his work, this tradition completely disappeared after Tokieda's passing in 1967. It is usually not included in historical accounts of "Japanese sociolinguistics" today. Tokieda's work is touched upon in courses on the history of Japanese linguistics, as he remains to this day the most innovative theoretician of Japanese language. He is also remembered for his controversial involvement of Japanese language spread policy in colonial Korea (Yasuda 1998). Mio is sometimes mentioned by Japanese scholars of pragmatics, who are usually familiar with his work. All of these approaches were, however, overshadowed by a data-driven approach to the study of language life. There can be no doubt that *gengo seikatsu* could have very much profited if these two branches would have been linked. However, none of these two post-war approaches to *gengo seikatsu* left any noteworthy influence on the other branch.

The data-driven approach to language life

The data-driven approach to *gengo seikatsu* is intricately linked to the National Institute for Japanese Language. The research of language life launched at the institute sought to study existing language problems of contemporary Japanese society. What was perceived to constitute "a problem" changed over time. Immediately after the establishment of the institute, literacy and the Japanese writing system was conceived as a pressing problem, albeit only for a very short time. In the 1950s and 1960s attention shifted to Standard Japanese language spread, and in the 1970s, when language life studies were already declining, it shifted to issues of urbanization. Few exceptions aside, there was very little "socio-" in this tradition. It is no exaggeration to say that this particular approach to *gengo seikatsu* merely studied linguistic data in correlation to macro-sociological categories such as age, sex/gender, education or birthplace with the help of statistics. As a matter of fact, linguists and statisticians jointly conducted most of the studies we discuss next.

The very first large-scale study of the National Institute is exemplary for the statistical approach that came to dominate its research. Under the direction of Nomoto Kikuo, a survey into literacy was launched in 1948. Nomoto was then working for the Civil Information and Education Section (CI&E) of the American occupational forces. Americans suspected that low levels of literacy and an overtly difficult writing system had caused the rise of fascism in Japan (for a discussion, see Unger 1996). The objective of the study was to find out whether the literacy among the Japanese population was sufficient to fully participate in everyday life (YKNCI 1951). Towards this end, a massive survey was launched, and 17,000 informants from 270 different localities were surveyed. Literacy among adults was never again surveyed in Japan afterwards as the results were seen to indicate that there was no grave literacy problem in Japan. As matter of fact, this survey is often cited to claim that Japanese society enjoys almost total literacy. The survey indeed found that only 1.7% were "illiterate", but at the same time only 4.4% scored more than 90 out of 100 points. What is more, participants had been invited to take part in this survey by postcard. As an effect thereof, illiterates and individuals with little literacy are most likely excluded in large numbers from the sample. The biased realization and

interpretation of this investigation notwithstanding, the literacy survey had provided a template for how to study *gengo seikatsu* henceforth, and a great number of studies afterwards employed statistics in the study of language in a similar way.

Language life studies from the 1950s to the 1970s were centered on peripheral areas, seeing the periphery as backwards in development. In particular, the spread of Standard Japanese and the use of honorific language (*keigo*) were studied in rural areas. Hachijojima, a small island located 280 kilometers off the coast to Tokyo, served as the first case for a general language survey that took account of macro-sociological data (KKK 1950). Language standardization was at the time seen to contribute to democratization (Lewin 1979), and researchers were interested both in the state of language standardization in peripheral regions as well as the novel impact of radio and TV broadcast in these regions (see also Shioda 2011). This particular study subsequently functioned as a template for a series of similar large-scale surveys that combined descriptive linguistics and statistics in order to study the standardization process in rural regions across Japan. In this way, aspects of the standardization process across Japan were studied, for example, in Shirakawa City in Fukushima Prefecture (KKK 1951), Tsuruoka City in Yamagata Prefecture (KKK 1953), rural areas in Kanagawa Prefecture (KKK 1954), all the way up to Hokkaido (KKK 1965) in the extreme north of the Japanese Archipelago. These studies paid due attention to the influence of then rapidly spreading TV and radio broadcast in Japan. The boom of American structuralism at the time and its focus on phonology crucially fanned such research, and it ensured that the linguistic descriptions reached a new level of accuracy (Hattori 1951, 1953). Pronunciation and, in particular, accent were studied in great detail.

Another methodological novelty at the time where the so-called "24-hours surveys" (*nijūyon jikan chōsa*). First conducted in Shirakawa (KKK 1951) and later repeated in Tsuruoka City (Yamagata Prefecture) and Iida City (Nagano Prefecture), these surveys used the then new technology of portable recording devices. They reveal the great enthusiasm and methodological boldness of language life studies at the time. They also neatly illustrated that the focus was squarely placed on the collection and statistical analysis of data with very little theoretical foundation or set objectives. The data collected was used to demonstrate the actual situation (*jittai*) of language use and attitudes, and how they differed from a society where everybody would speak standard language, and where all would be confident in their use of Standard Japanese and honorific language. Selecting various localities as case studies, and also the repetition of single surveys such as the case of Tsuruoka City (KKK 1953, 1974, 1994, 2013), served to illustrated how far the standardization process had evolved when and where. The work was interdisciplinary in that it involved researchers from the Institute of Statistical Mathematics (*Tōkei sūri kenkyūjo*). However, we find no consideration of sociological work or theories in these studies. The discussion of "linguistic variation" was one of studying the use of dialect and standard along the lines of sociological macro-categories provided by the statisticians (age, sex/gender, regional background). The use of dialect and standard was simply seen to be caused by these macro-categories. It was thought that one spoke the way one did because one was, for example, "a middle-aged woman from Tsuruoka in 1951". Language life studies saw such characteristics to be inseparably linked to individuals, who therefore inescapably and somehow predictably were believed to produce a specific kind of speech. The surveys engaged in what we call today a "sociolinguistics of distribution" (Blommaert 2010: 5), that is to say, a view that speakers and language occupy a fixed geographic or social space. This orientation towards the study of linguistic variation is unsurprising given the fact that the language life scholars at the Japanese Institute of National Language were trained in dialectology, and dialectology is exactly about the distribution of linguistic variation over time and space. Language life studies were large-scale dialectological surveys that collected data following methods of human statistics and put

the data into the context of the standardization process (Hara 2007; Tokugawa 1994). While the collected data was impressive, we find less theorization and less attention to society than in both the pre-war approach and the approach based on Tokieda's process theory.

Attention on and enthusiasm for language life studies started to wane in the 1960s, and the number of studies in language life ceased to grow from that period onwards (Grotaers 1982: 346; Sibata 1985: 84). Many researchers who had formerly been involved in language life surveys now devoted their full attention to the compilation of a new Japanese dialect atlas that evolved at the National Institute for National Language between 1955 and 1975. More importantly, perhaps, the sense of urgency that Japan was plagued by linguistics problems such as a lack of standardization, a difficult writing system or a lack of proficiency in honorific speech had weakened. In accordance with this new sentiment, the study of "language problems" in Japanese society declined. The 1960s and 1970s saw a boom in dialect geography, where insights, experiences and methods of the language life studies proved helpful (e.g., KKK 1966–1974).

The reception of western sociolinguistics

In 1976, the term *shakai gengogaku* (sociolinguistics) was coined and it quickly spread across the Japanese academic world (Grootaers 1982). The introduction of western sociolinguistics coincided with the fading influence of the post-war wave of *gengo seikatsu* studies. Due to the many language life studies that had been conducted, works on western sociolinguistics fell immediately on fertile grounds and received much attention. Already in the 1970, a number of books were translated that stirred Japanese interest, in one way or another, in the reception of *shakai gengogaku*:1974 saw the Japanese translations of Robbins Burling's *Man's Many Voices* (*Gengo to bunka – gengo jinruigaku no shiten kara*), Peter Farb's *Word Play* (*Kotoba no asobi – hito ga hanasu toki nanika okoruka*), Joshua Fishman's *The Sociology of Language* (*Gengo shakaigaku nyūmon*); in 1975 Peter Trudgill's *Sociolinguistics* (*Gengo to shakai*) was translated; in 1977 Herbert Landar's *Language and Culture* (*Gengo to bunka*); in 1978 John Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* (*Gengo to kōi*); and in 1979 Dell Hymes' *Foundations in Sociolinguistics* (*Kotoba no minzokushi*). These works were widely read and studied, making it difficult to distinguish from the late 1970s onwards what was to be seen as studies in "language life" and what was to be seen as studies in "sociolinguistics".

Students of linguistics who experienced the introduction of sociolinguistics recall the excitement with which the western approach was greeted. Inoue Fumio (personal communication) has talked to me several times about a desire among young scholars at the time to turn to the real problems of contemporary Japanese society – an attitude that had crucially been fanned by the student unrest of the late 1960s. Inoue also recalled Czech-Australian sociolinguist Jiří Neustupný giving a lecture on *shakai gengogaku* at the University of Tokyo in the early 1970s to a packed auditorium. Others have noted the larger scope of sociolinguistics in comparison to language life. Sanada Shinji (2006: 1), who was a student in the 1970s, starts his book on Japanese sociolinguistics by writing that:

"It is not such a long time ago that the field of sociolinguistic research was established in Japan. […] It was on an early summer day in 1972 […] that I saw by accident a flyer of a presentation of a dialectological research circle. Even today, I cannot forget the powerful impact this announcement had on me due to the fact that the subtitle read "seeking a nexus between language and society". […] Even though the term "geography" existed in linguistic research at this time, "society" did not. Seeking a connection to society was considered a taboo in linguistic research then.

(Sanada 2006: 1)

At the same time, many proponents of language life studies claimed that such a research trad-ition already existed in Japan, and that sociolinguistics (*shakai gengogaku*) was basically identical with language life (*gengo seikatsu*). Sibata Takesi, for example, stated the following:

> I have already said that sociolinguistics is booming in the United States. Just because it is booming there, must we panic as if to say if we don't hurry we shall be late getting it started in Japan? […] The reason is that we have had in our backyard; the National Language Research Institute of Japan has since 1949 been steadily engaged in investigations, on large scale of just precisely what is now called sociolinguistics.
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> *(Sibata 1975: 161)*

As a result of such claims, we find from the mid-1970s onwards often a synonymous use of the terms *gengo seikatsu* and *shakai gengogaku*, as if they were indeed one and the same trad-ition. Those engaging most obviously in western approaches, e.g., Hibiya with a PhD thesis under the supervision of William Labov on the velar plosive in Tokyo (Hibiya 1988), but also a number of western sociolinguists active in Japan, e.g., Jiří Neustupný, Leo Loveday or Florian Coulmas, were seen as the "international branch" (*gairai-ha*) of sociolinguistics in a Japanese context.

In hindsight, however, we can notice a number of significant differences between language life and sociolinguistics. The lack of a theoretical foundation in *gengo seikatsu* made it impos-sible to put its research results in context with insights from other languages and societies. Language life was entirely emic. Language life was also utterly uncritical of the language and power nexus. It was blind to issues of inequality and also to issues of linguistic diversity. We can find no single contribution addressing, for instance, Japan's multilingualism, its often oppressive language polices, or a critical review of its colonial past and its legacy. The short-lived tradition of Tokieda-style language life studies aside, we also do not find research questions derived from theoretical considerations that would develop insights how language and society related to one another. Language life studies were particularistic or "atomistic", simply providing rich lin-guistic details – and leaving it at this. In particular in this aspect, we can see how similar it was to dialectology. The initial stance that there was nothing to be learned from sociolinguistics proved wrong (Minami 1997: 602), and mainly for this reason the study of language life gradually gave way to the more interdisciplinary, cross-linguistically and theoretically oriented sociolinguistics. Before language life studies would disappear, some calls were made to integrate the skills of collecting and handling data of the language life tradition with the theoretical consideration of sociolinguistics (Ide 1988; Shibuya 1990), but these plans never went beyond the proclamation of good intentions.

Today, there is a clear consensus that *gengo seikatsu* gave way to sociolinguistics at the end of the 1980s. *Gengo seikatsu* was the study of Japanese language and society of the Shōwa Period (1928–1989). In 1988, the last of over 400 issues of the journal *Gengo seikatsu* appeared. The fact that today's leading sociolinguistic journal in Japan claims to engage in the study of the "socio-linguistic sciences" (*shakai gengo kagaku*) underlines how much the field has shifted from emic study of language problems on issues such as democratization and standardization, and later on also urbanization (e.g., KKK 1981, 1982). The indigenous tradition of language life studies was responsible for the collection of a great number of data that is still being discussed in contem-porary Japanese sociolinguistics (e.g., Sanada et al. 2010). It also developed a number of meth-odologies that are still applied today. In this way, there can be no doubt that *gengo seikatsu* has been a success story in the Japanese study of language and society.

The legacy of language life in Japanese sociolinguistics

All countries in which we find research in sociolinguistics today have a slightly different development and orientation to the study of language and society (Smakman and Heinrich 2015). In European context, sociolinguistics mainly emerged from discussions on the role of the school system reproducing social class differences. It studied the ways in which language was in the service of power and cultural elites, and how it served to sanction and control everybody else (e.g., Ammon 1972). European sociolinguistics also studied the important social functions of non-prestigious language varieties (e.g., Milroy 1979). In the US, sociolinguistics was an emancipative endeavor, restoring the recognition of language varieties such as African–American Vernacular English and showing its systematicity, functionality and creativity (e.g., Labov 1972). Concern for how to maintain linguistic diversity was present in both traditions from the very start (e.g., Fishman 1966 for the US; Gal 1979 for Europe). Both traditions were also predominantly urban. Japan, too, has its very own trajectory in that the study of language in society reflected the concerns of the day. In the case of Japan, these were first the role of language in various forms of everyday life in the pre-war tradition, then the role of variation and style in processes of communication in the Tokieda-tradition, and the social and geographic cartography of the standardization process at the Japanese Institute for National Language. In a word, Japanese society in the Shōwa Period was interested in other issues than the European and US societies at the same time, and we therefore find, unsurprisingly, differences between sociolinguistics and language life studies at that time, too.

While the study of language life is no longer pursued in present-day Japan, we can still see reflections of its tradition in the contemporary research agenda of Japanese sociolinguistics. To this day, language endangerment and revitalization remain marginal fields of study in Japanese sociolinguistics, and so do urban studies. Much emphasis in Japanese sociolinguistics remains on the collection and analysis of data, and it is not an exaggeration to say that too little theorization is conducted on the basis of the many excellent Japanese case studies conducted year after year by Japanese sociolinguists. The study of language and social class has largely remained a taboo. While addressing the linguistically diversifying society (*tagengo shakai*) has now become mainstream in Japanese sociolinguistics, the disparate society (*kakusa shakai*) or the relationless society (*muen shakai*) of the Heisei period (1989–2019) has not, despite the fact that language plays a central role therein. Japanese sociolinguistics remains surprisingly narrow in its scope, even 30 years after the end of the *gengo seikatsu* tradition. Sociolinguistics in Japan could also be socially more engaged. There is no neutral way to approach language in society as all discourse and all interactions are vested with conflict and competing interests. Language plays a central role in social inequality and its continued perpetuation. Conflict and inequality are part and parcel of language diversity and variation, and there exists no way for researchers to step out of this conflicted field. *Laissez-faire* means nothing else but siding with the strong and dominant. Language life was predominantly descriptive and illustrative, and so is Japanese sociolinguistics today. Herein, we probably find the strongest influence of language life studies on contemporary Japanese sociolinguistics.

Notes

1 *Bunsetsu* (literally "speech tact", a syntagmatic unit) is a concept developed by Hashimoto Shinkichi when creating a school grammar (*gakkō bunpō*) of Japanese in the 1930s. It is defined as smallest unit within a sentence (*bun*) that can be identified on the basis of pauses in speech, i.e., on the basis of on "speech tact".

2 Note in this contact that the study of phonology was not firmly established in national linguistics (*kokugokaku*) at the time. Scholars still worked with the unit of syllable (*onsetsu*) then. The morpheme was also introduced only afterwards with the reception of American structuralism in the late 1950s.

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