Yasashii Nihongo (Easy Japanese) and its implication for the education of immigrants’ teenage children in Japan

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1. Japan as an upcoming multicultural society

- Foreign residents in Japan: 2.1 million (1.8% of the population)
- They are growing in number.
- Low birth rate
- High longevity
1. Japan as an upcoming multicultural society

- Foreign residents in Japan are growing in number.
- It seems impossible to maintain Japanese society without foreigners, in such areas as agriculture, fishery, convenience stores, newspaper delivery etc.
- However, the Japanese government has never officially adopted to encourage immigration.
- →The topic of how to guarantee human rights to the increasing number of foreign residents is gaining importance.
1. Japan as an upcoming multicultural society

- It seems impossible to maintain Japanese society without foreigners.
- The topic of how to guarantee human rights to the increasing number of foreign residents is gaining importance.
- Our research group tries to address this issue from a linguistic viewpoint, in which *yasashii nihongo* is a key concept.
2. The origin of *yasashii nihongo*

- The Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake: 1995.1.17
  - More than 6,000 people were killed and about 250,000 houses were destroyed.
  - Many people were obliged to have hard days;
  - cut off the critical infrastructure
  - Those foreign people who have little command of English or Japanese were “doubly” suffered because it was difficult for them to access to necessary information published in English or Japanese.

- Researches started to study how, in a disaster, to give necessary and vital information in a simplified style of Japanese.

- *Yasashii Nihongo* (Easy Japanese) was used as a technical term for the first time (cf. Sato 2004).
3. From “in disasters” to “in daily life”: Yasashii nihongo in the context of our research

- Yasashii nihongo can serve as a useful tool in a disaster.

- However, information related to daily life is equally indispensable, and foreigners must be able to access this information in order to live comfortably in Japan.

- →The aim of our research is to examine “yasashii nihongo” in the context of daily life.
4. The multiple meanings of *yasashii* in Japanese

- *Yasashii* has two types of meaning in Japanese.
- Type 1: Easy
  - (1) *Kono tesuto wa yasashii.* (このテストは易しい。)
  - This test TOP easy
  - This test is easy.
  - *TOP: topic marker.*
4. The multiple meanings of *yasashii* in Japanese

- *Yasashii* has two types of meaning in Japanese.
- Type 2: Kind, gentle; soft (voice)
- (2) *Kare wa josei ni yasashii.* (彼 は 女性 に 優しい。)
  - He is kind to women.
- (3) *Kanojo wa yasashii koe de hanasu.* (彼女 は 優しい 声 で 話す)
  - She speaks in a soft voice.
- *Note that *yasashii* in (2) and (3) are written in the same way (優しい), which means that *yasashii* in (2) and (3) are synonyms in Japanese.*
4. The multiple meanings of *yasashii* in Japanese

- *Yasashii* has two types of meaning in Japanese, “easy(易しい)” type and “kind(優しい)” type.

- The two types of meaning represents, as you will see later, the two aspects of our research, so I decided to use in our project *yasashii* (*nihongo*), in stead of *wakariyasui* (easy to understand) which lack the “kind” type meaning.
5. The functions of *yasashii nihongo* (1): safe places for foreign residents

- *Yasashii nihongo* has two functions: one is a function as safe places for foreign residents and another is one as a bypass for children who have a handicap in Japanese language learning.

- We call the former function “*yasashii nihongo serving as safe places*”, or “*ibasyo tosite no yasashii nihongo*” in Japanese, and the latter “*yasashii nihongo as a bypass*”, or “*baipasu tosite no yasashii nihongo*” in Japanese.
5. The functions of *yasashii nihongo* (1): safe places for foreign residents

- *Yasashii nihongo* should function for providing safe places, or *ibasho* (居場所) in Japanese, for foreign residents, who face many stressful situations when living in a foreign country.

- This aspect of *yasashii nihongo* has the three roles:
  1. *Yasashii nihongo* as a syllabus of official primary Japanese language education programs for immigrants
  2. *Yasashii nihongo* as a common language in local communities
  3. *Yasashii nihongo* as a basis for grammatical syllabi for Japanese language teaching in local communities
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5.1 Yasashii nihongo as a syllabus of official primary Japanese language education programs for immigrants

- The Japanese government has not announced the official reception of immigrants.
- It is, however, clear and inevitably needed that Japan should receive immigrants officially.
- It is also clear that language and language education play a very important role in the immigration of foreigners.
- →Our group recognizes this importance of Japanese language education in the immigration policy and has built up a syllabus of official primary Japanese language education programs for immigrants, which have not been realized but needed in a very near future, based on the concept of yasashii nihongo.
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What kind of language can serve as a common language between foreign and Japanese residents in local communities?

- Candidate 1: English

   → × For the majority of foreign residents living in Japan, English is less accessible than Japanese (Iwata, 2010)
What kind of language can serve as a common language between foreign and Japanese residents in local communities?

Candidate 2: “standard” (or uncontrolled) Japanese

→× This has been the default candidate amongst native Japanese; it has been taken for granted that any foreigner who wants to join local Japanese communities should master a native-like level of Japanese.

However, this leads to evaluate foreign residents only by his/her language ability, which is apparently inappropriate.

→This position should be abandoned.
5.2 Yasashii nihongo as a common language in local communities

- What kind of language can serve as a common language between foreign and Japanese residents in local communities?
  - Candidate1: English→×
  - Candidate2: “standard” Japanese→×
  - →Candidate3: yasashii nihongo
  - It is the only logically possible candidate but it does not mean that yasashii nihongo will become a common language by itself.
5.2 Yasashii nihongo as a common language in local communities

- How can *yasashii nihongo* become a common language?
- **Japanese residents**
  - ↓ adjust “standard” Japanese, grammar and vocabulary,
  - when speaking to foreign residents
  - ↓ translate “standard” Japanese into *yasashii nihongo*
- **Yasashii nihongo <Common language>**
  - ↑ acquire minimum grammar (steps 1 and 2) and vocabulary
- **Foreign residents**
  - This is an ideal scheme, which **will have never been realized without the change of Japanese residents’ mind toward *yasashii nihongo***.
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There are two types in Japanese language teaching;

1) school type and 2) local type

1) is conducted in universities and Japanese language schools.

2) is taught in local Japanese classrooms, mostly conducted at public halls in local communities.

There are some notable differences between the two types.

The most notable difference is the time spent in each lesson;

1) standard school-type lessons are for 20 hours per week.

2) local-type lessons are conducted for 2 hours per week.
The most notable difference between the two types is the time spent in each lesson.

This apparent difference strongly suggests that the two types should be managed differently and that different syllabi and materials should be used.

Bearing this in mind, we created a new grammatical syllabus and materials.

→See the list of the grammatical items of Step1.

*Nihongo koredake 1, 2*(based on this grammatical syllabus)
The second function of *yasashii nihongo* is one as a bypass for children who have a handicap in Japanese language learning.

- Our study is focusing on type types of children;
  - 1) foreign-rooted children (FRCs)
  - 2) deaf children

- Our study is focusing on type types of children;
- 1) foreign-rooted children (FRCs)
- 2) deaf children
Our research started from the question of how, from a linguistic perspective, to guarantee human rights to foreign residents: thus, the target of our research has been adults.

However, as our research progressed, we became aware that our objective would not be fulfilled without considering the problems of the children of these adult foreign residents.

These children (foreign-rooted children (FRCs)) will need the most support if Japan is to become a sustainable multicultural society, or tabunka kyousei shakai in Japanese, since, in contrast to their parents, they did not choose to live and grow up in Japan.
6.1 Yasashii nihongo as a bypass for foreign-rooted children (FRCs)

- The biggest problem on FRCs’ language education is that their education is not compulsory, which means that they are not officially guaranteed to receive compulsory education.

- This situation makes FRCs’ Japanese language education stay in an insufficient level;

- They are picked up from the classes in primary or junior high schools in which they are enrolled, and collected in pull-out classes, where they are taught Japanese by teachers who have little knowledge and experiences on Japanese language teaching.
6.1 Yasashii nihongo as a bypass for foreign-rooted children (FRCs)

- One of the apparent problems for FRCs caused by such undesirable situations is a **very low level of high school going rate** (less than 30% compared to more than 90% in their Japanese peer; actually, no official statistics on this problem is existed).

- In modern Japanese society, the graduation from high school is one of the most basic conditions to get a better career in his/her later life and the lack of the qualification easily leads to a hopeless career.

- In order to improve the situation, the realization of compulsory education for FRCs is indispensable.

- However, in Japan where official discussion on immigration remains to be a big taboo, it may not be realized soon.

- → Our group set up a research project, which aims to make a better syllabus for FRCs and textbooks based on it.
6.1 Yasashii nihongo as a bypass for foreign-rooted children (FRCs)

- Many things need to be considered when examining the problems concerning FRCs from linguistic points of view.

- There is, however, one thing that is incontrovertible: FRCs are apparently disadvantaged in their acquisition of Japanese, and thus, their educational materials must be designed to help overcome this disadvantage.

- This reality demands a method to enable FRCs to bring their Japanese language ability to the same level as their Japanese peers as quickly as possible. I refer to such a method as a "bypass" (for Japanese language acquisition).

- It is said to take about 20,000 hours for an L1 Japanese child to acquire Japanese. This situation may be described as a Japanese child being 50 meters ahead of his/her FRC peer in a 100-meter dash.
6.1 Yasashii nihongo as a bypass for foreign-rooted children (FRCs)

- Any proposed bypass for FRCs needs to have the following characteristics:
  a. It follows consistent syllabi from the basic to advanced levels.
  b. Modules are designed so that their target content items can be learned in a limited time.
  c. Content items are categorized and introduced differently according to whether its production or recognition is more important.
  d. Materials for e-learning, which supplement classroom interactions, are supported.

→ We are making new textbooks based on these criteria.  
(http://www12.plala.or.jp/isaoiori/yomiuri170714.pdf)

- Our study is focusing on types of children;
- 1) foreign-rooted children (FRCs)
- 2) deaf children
6.2 Yasashii nihongo as a bypass for deaf children

- Yasashii nihongo is not only necessary as a bypass for FRCs, but also for deaf children learning the Japanese language.

- For deaf children whose parents are native Japanese and whose L1 is Japanese sign language, written Japanese is a second language in the same way English is.

- This fact is, unfortunately, not widely appreciated, so deaf children are furnished with few chances to learn written Japanese as an L2 in the same way adult foreign learners are (See Iori & Oka 2016 for a more detailed discussion).
7. Sustainable multicultural society and yasashii nihongo

- There are some necessities for a sustainable multicultural society.
- The most basic requirement is that foreign residents should never be regarded as a “regulating valve”, whether for production or social life.
- “regulating valve in the context of production”
  - when they are employed as needed and fired if business conditions fall into recession, as occurred after the Lehman shock
- “regulating valve in the context of social life”
  - when they are forced to engage in jobs which Japanese do not want to do, stigmatized as “3K” jobs, for low wages.
- 3K refers to the initial letters of the Japanese words kiken (dangerous), kitanai (dirty), and kitsui (hard).
7. Sustainable multicultural society and yasashii nihongo

- Even when the Japanese government take a positive position for the reception of immigration officially, the problems on immigration will not be solved if immigrants remain in "regulating valve" positions.

- The reason is not "humanitarian" but rather "realistic".

- Japan has an unprecedentedly large amount of national debt; more than ¥1,000 billion ( £7.7 billion), or about ¥8.4 million ( £60 thousand) per capita and it is still increasing.

- ¥1,066,000,000,000,000 (national debt. At the end of 2016)
  - = £ 7,700,000,000,000
  - ¥ 8,400,000 (per capita)
  - = £ 60,000
7. Sustainable multicultural society and yasashii nihongo

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- As the Japanese population should be decreasing in number, the debt will sure become a burden in a near future.

- And the population decreasing will cause many problems in local cities and make the cities unsustainable (Menju 2017).
7. Sustainable multicultural society and yasashii nihongo

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- The reason is not "humanitarian" but rather "realistic".
- As the Japanese population should be decreasing in number, the debt will sure become a large burden for Japan in a near future.
- And the population decreasing will cause many problems in local cities and make the cities unsustainable (Menju 2017).
- → In order for Japan to remain a sustainable country, immigrants are necessary not as "regulating valves" but as "co-supporters" of Japanese society (including a role of stable "tax-payers") and the education of FRCs is, therefore, fundamentally important.
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- In order for Japan to remain a sustainable country, immigrants are necessary not as “regulating valves” but as “co-supporters” of Japanese society (including a role of stable “tax-payers”) and the education of FRCs is, therefore, fundamentally important.

- →Yasashii nihongo should play an important role in making a sustainable multicultural society in Japan.
Bibliography


Thank you for listening.