

Outcomes of multilingual resilience in contemporary Japan

Prof. Patrick Heinrich
Ca'Foscari University of Venice

Prof. Ruriko Otomo
Hokkaido University

Prof. Emi Otsuji
The University of Technology Sydney

This panel examines emerging roles of minoritized languages in the contemporary sociolinguistic environment. Endangered languages have been often considered as a victim of modernity, an emblem of resultant forms of colonialization and continuing symbolic domination (Dorian 1981), while the ever-increasing and diversifying presence of migrant languages around the globe has been framed as a result of accelerated human mobility (Kymlicka 2001). By flipping such oft-claimed relationships between language and the modern socio-political, technological, economic changes, we regard minoritized languages in the panel as a catalyst of more complex changes that bring about “unsettling” effects on ways which people use, learn and understand language. These effects could allow for the cultivation, affirmation, dignity, well-being and self-esteem of language learners/speakers, and sustain and develop linguistic communities and multilingualism in innovative manners.

For endangered languages, we examine cases where language revitalization projects and individual heritage language speakers/learners themselves “unsettle” (or attempt to “unsettle”) dominant national/communal/academic/policy discourses about language in the context of Japan, more specifically, Ryukyuan languages and Ainu. For migrant languages, we address how and to what extent the presence of migrant language and migrant language speakers themselves can challenge powerful and often disempowering discourses about language, language learning and identity in varying institutions from workplace to school. Throughout the panel, we consider the extent to which we – as researchers, educators, community members – can do and cannot do in order to “unsettle” the old ideologies and elitist discourses about language.

Dorian, Nancy C. (1981) *Language Death: The Life Cycle of a Scottish Gaelic Dialect*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Kymlicka, Will (2001) *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism, Citizenship*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Keywords: Japan, language endangerment, human mobility, migration, language ideology

1. New speakers and new-speakerism in the Ryukyus

Prof. Patrick Heinrich
Ca'Foscari University of Venice

The sociolinguistic study of language endangerment is traditionally focused on the interruption of natural intergenerational language transmission, more specifically on the ideological, socio-political and economic changes that trigger this interruption. The study of language revitalization, on the hand, is traditionally centered on the restoration of language transmission in the family. Just like the study of language endangerment, it also focusses almost exclusively on the last full speakers of a language. In this presentation, I change focus and report on new speakers of an endangered language. New speakers are faced with a great number of obstacles – most prominently lack of proficiency, truncated language registers and language purism. I show how new speakers of Ryukyuan languages in Okinawa (Japan) deal with this situation, what support they find and what networks they build. Particular attention is given to polite registers of Ryukyuan languages and the challenges that a lack of proficiency therein involves. I show that there is no unitary sociolinguistic situation and reaction to new speakers and their language use in the Ryukyus. Language is unsettled, renegotiated and adapted for doing things and being someone in ways which differ between local communities and individuals. Languages might become mixed, communication might break down or be avoided, polite registers may be simplified or disappear completely. By focusing on new speakers of an endangered language, we can also find new uses, attitudes that are often in stark conflict with implemented language policies, but also with attitudes and practices of linguists documenting endangered languages.

References

Jaffe, A. (2015) Defining the New Speaker: Theoretical Perspectives and Learner Trajectories. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 231: 21–44.

O'Rourke, Bernadette and Anik Nandi (2018) New Speaker Parents as Grassroots Policy Makers in Contemporary Galicia: Ideologies, Management and Practices. *Language Policy*. Online available at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10993-018-9498-y>

Keywords: language endangerment, language revitalization, language purism, new-speakerism

2. Ainu language as a resource for tourism

Ms. Saana Santalahti
University of Helsinki

In this presentation, I will discuss my ongoing doctoral dissertation project on tourism's role in Ainu language revitalisation in Hokkaido, Japan. Ainu is the heritage language of the Indigenous Ainu people.

The recent Ainu Policy Promotion Act (2019), was the first law to acknowledge the Ainu as an Indigenous people of Japan, but it has been criticised for not recognising the Indigenous rights of the Ainu people. Tourism promotion is specifically mentioned in this Act. Like many Indigenous peoples around the world, some Ainu communities and individuals are also involved in cultural tourism, and the contemporary use of the Ainu language has previously been linked with several cultural activities which are also utilised in tourism services.

As currently no concrete language policy or other official blueprints for Ainu language revitalisation exist, I seek to find out whether tourism could be considered a contemporary domain for Ainu language use, and discuss what could be, or already is, tourism's role in challenging the current linguistic situation in Hokkaido.

The National Ainu Museum is a part of *Upopoy*, a national cultural facility opened in 2020 as a part of the concrete measures of the new law. *Upopoy* has been declared a "site for Ainu cultural revitalisation", and the Ainu language has been announced as the first language of the facilities.

The work-in-progress article manuscript I'm presenting on today explores how the Ainu language is used and displayed at the museum, and whether this is in line with the museum's language policy. As the museum is a national facility aiming to play its part in Ainu language revitalisation, these observations can also be tied to broader discussions of language policies and linguistic ideologies in Japan.

Keywords: language revitalisation, tourism, Ainu, language in museums, linguistic landscape

3. Everyday conversation for participation in Japanese society

Dr. Nobuyuki Tukahara
Kyoto University

In 2010, the Residential Policy Section of the Fukui City Council established an administrative regulation to request the rental of municipal housing. The regulations have a section that requires some competence of the Japanese language for foreign applicants. Concretely speaking, Article 8, paragraph 4 states: "Applicants must be able to have a conversation in Japanese with neighbors for everyday communication." In a press conference on these regulations and in order to justify the limitation of access to public housing for immigrants, the mayor of Fukui City said "It is natural for immigrants to speak the local language". The mayor believes that some competence in a language of the host community may be a requirement to have access to their rights for public housing. The context in which this discourse developed offers no basis for such a view, though. For example, there exists no definition or framework about the linguistic level that is necessary to carry on an "everyday life conversation". However, this type of discourse, which considers linguistic competence as a duty to be obtained in order to have access to rights and services is, in my opinion, not rare in Japanese society. In this talk I will present the logic at work.

Keywords: Migrants, Japan, everyday conversation, participation

4. Languages and the Muslim community in Japan: Being local and transnational

Dr. Rika Yamashita
Kanto Gakuin University

Minority language issues in Japan have been previously discussed with critical stances towards ideologies of standardization and homogenous nation; e.g. through indigenous groups and their language revitalization (Heinrich 2012) and unequal access to bilingualism (Kanno 2008, Motobayashi 2018). Increased public awareness toward migrants and their languages is observed in increasing visibility of campaigns for educational assistances in Japanese and the heritage language for migrant children (or '*gaikoku ni rutsu wo motsu kodomo*'—children with foreign roots). However, despite being well-intended, such awareness is still based on the idea of dichotomy between the majority (Japanese) and the minority (heritage/foreign) language. Such dichotomy is far from what many migrants face, refer to, and aspire, while living their community lives in Japan. The power-relationship among different languages is far more dynamic and complex, especially for migrants with transnational familial networks or in an ethnolinguistically heterogeneous religious community, such as the case of South Asian (and other Asian) Muslims in Japan.

Drawing from offline and online fieldwork, this paper analyzes metalinguistic comments and the social media engagement of the leaders and the youth of the expanding Muslim community in Japan, which are not unidirectional. As part of the non-indigenous religious community, they engage in a complex and unsettling relationship with Arabic, Japanese, English, and other languages. What is more, the community members lives are further affected by abundance of opportunities for transnational communication and travels or migration, based on its religious or familial network.

Heinrich, Patrick (2012) *The Making of Monolingual Japan. Language Ideology and Japanese Modernity*, Bristol, Multilingual Matters.

Kanno, Yasuko (2008) *Language and education in Japan*. London, UK: Palgrave.

Motobayashi, Kyoko (2018) State management of bilingualism: a comparative analysis of two educational language policies in Japan. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*.

Keywords: Japan, migration, religion, globalization, Islam