

1 Language ideology, planning and policy

This book examines two important issues in language policy in Japan today: first, and most prominently, increasing migration-induced multilingualism which has ramifications both for providing Japanese-language learning opportunities for migrants and for the use and teaching of languages other than Japanese and English; and second, the influence of electronic technologies such as computers and cell phones on the way in which Japanese is written. These two developments, of course, have occurred in many other countries beside Japan. What makes the Japanese case particularly interesting is that Japan does not yet consider itself to be a country of immigration and hence has only recently shown signs of an awareness of the importance of providing both language teaching and multilingual services for non-Japanese workers, so that what policy development does exist in this area is ad hoc and fragmented rather than centrally planned and coordinated at national level. It also has in place a set of longstanding policies pertaining to the officially sanctioned use of the writing system, policies which were arrived at after a great deal of division and debate, that shape the way in which Japanese and non-Japanese children alike learn to read and write in Japanese schools. In both these cases, official and individual views are strongly informed by language ideologies of various kinds.

Any study of a society's language policy must take into account the ideological context within which language functions because language ideologies always mediate and sometimes directly shape the formulation of such policy. To speak of language policy in Japan in isolation from national ideas about language would be to see only a part of the whole picture. Language ideology plays an important role in discussions of issues pertinent to this study, such as the provision of multilingual services for migrants, the current 'tabunka kyōsei' (multicultural coexistence) policy discourse influencing local communities, the teaching of foreign languages other than English and the prominence of non-standard orthographic conventions online. The most strongly entrenched and overarching ideology is a lingering belief that Japan is monolingual.

In this chapter, I will introduce and discuss several definitions of language ideology put forward by scholars in the field, most of which posit links to

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wider social ideologies. Put simply, language ideology can be described as the defining beliefs about language cherished by a society, or by a particular dominant section of a society, as an encapsulation of all that makes the language in question special and legitimates its use as the dominant language of that society. It refers to what members of a speech community take for granted about the language they use, often without reflecting on the culturally and historically specific genesis of such beliefs and with a strong element of justification for the linguistic status quo when the national language is the focus. Dominant ideas about language thus take on the status of everyday 'common sense'.

The nature of language ideology

Language ideologies are commonly linked to political and/or economic themes of power relations. Irvine (1989), for example, arguing the impossibility of understanding the full range of roles played by language in a political economy without coming to grips with cultural systems of ideas, defines linguistic ideology as 'the cultural (or subcultural) system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests' (255). Linguistic ideology, she stresses, is a mediating factor, not necessarily a causative factor, between linguistic phenomena and social relationships, sometimes merely rationalising sociolinguistic differences rather than shaping them, but its influence cannot be ignored. Woolard and Schieffelin (1994) and Woolard (1998) also emphasise this point: language ideology is 'a mediating link between social structures and forms of talk' (1994: 55), because such ideologies are never about language alone but always extend to wider questions of identity (both group and personal), aesthetics, morality and epistemology, which means that they often underpin fundamental social institutions such as schooling and law, gender relations and child socialisation. In Japan as elsewhere, beliefs about language are foundational to such domains in both the public and private sectors, and they legitimate existing practices.

The question of legitimisation in language ideology is particularly important, because legitimating the use of a particular language as dominant also functions to legitimate its speakers as dominant. In Japan, the suppression of the Ainu and Okinawan languages in the service of nineteenth-century nation-building illustrates an ideology of linguistic uniformity used to legitimate the banning of minority languages in favour of the language of the dominant majority as a marker of citizenship and identity, a situation which prevailed until the late 1990s. The 1997 Ainu Cultural Promotion Act, which supports the teaching of the Ainu language and other aspects of Ainu culture, 'can be seen as a cautious step away from official ideologies of Japanese ethnic and cultural homogeneity' (Morris-Suzuki 2002: 171).

As the Ainu example indicates, language ideologies change over time in response to internal and external factors. ‘Like the social makeup of dominant groups themselves, their ideologies are rarely monolithic, nor always stable’ (Gal 1998: 320). Lo Bianco and Slaughter (2009) characterise the continuum of Australia’s shifting language ideology and policy orientations as starting from a comfortably British base and moving through assertively Australian, ambitiously multicultural and energetically Asia-oriented phases to their most recent fundamentally economic incarnation. In the case of Japan, the ideology of monolingualism on which policies were largely based throughout all but the very last years of the twentieth century came to prominence at the beginning of the modern period¹ when it was deemed necessary to prove that the Japanese state consisted of one people with one language in order to stave off territorial encroachments by other powers. This ideology has largely endured, and has been prominently on display in two periods of external promotion of the language, one in Japan’s colonies of Taiwan (1895–1945) and Korea (1910–45) and in other occupied territories during the Second World War, and the other in the promotion of Japanese language and culture overseas which began in the 1970s with the establishment of the Japan Foundation for that purpose. Today, however, it is under siege as local and – increasingly – national government policies seek to respond to the undeniable presence of migrants in Japanese communities once considered monoethnic.

A speech community, either at the national or subnational level, incorporates many different ways of thinking about language, some of them made explicit, others unstated but nonetheless compelling. The dominant ones function to shape the manner in which language is handled, or managed, within that community. ‘Put simply’, Spolsky (2004: 14) tells us, ‘language ideology is language policy with the manager left out, what people think should be done. Language practices, on the other hand, are what people actually do.’ To Shohamy (2006: xv), language practices are ‘de facto’ language policies. Whether and how language policies affect language practices will depend to a large extent on the degree to which dominant ideologies are made explicit through political means such as the implementation of a particular view through the education system. If children in classrooms across the nation are taught to write in a manner laid down by a particular official script policy, as is the case in Japan, then that particular policy – derived from a consensus on what constitutes appropriate handling of the orthography within that society – can be seen to have a significant influence on this aspect of language practice. This is true not only in the overt domain of language policy but also in the covert, i.e., in the domain of the unstated but nevertheless completely understood expectations which frame the use of language in particular situations and are accepted as the prescriptive norm. When a child is continually guided by its parents as to what constitutes appropriate (or inappropriate) use of language in certain

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contexts, then practice here is informed by policy too, this time covert. Thinking in terms of linguistic ideology permits the integration of these macropolitical and microinteractional levels which might otherwise be considered separate and where ‘the difference is only one of scale in that both reflect and are shaped by the implicit unspoken assumptions encompassed by prevailing linguistic ideologies’ (Gal 1998: 318).

Language ideology functions as a powerful mediator of discourse practices. In Japan today, conventions of what language use is appropriate in what situation may seem to be based upon a general consensus as to what makes ‘good’ Japanese. Nevertheless, the rules of ‘good’ Japanese are taught through the classrooms of the nation by teachers working to syllabi based on language policy documents: the script policies and the curriculum guidelines for the teaching of the national language. When parents teach their children how to speak ‘good’ Japanese, they too are passing on what they have been taught, mediated through the same filter of schooling.

Ball (2004) provides two examples of ideology operating in Japanese relating to the use of honorifics and of dialect. In a study of dialectal codeswitching involving the Kansai dialect, he analyses its relationship to the ‘uchi’ (in-group) and ‘soto’ (out-group) dichotomy often used in studies of Japan and notes that metapragmatic rules of use shape how dialect is used and evaluated in conversation.

Speakers organize these normative rules according to linguistic ideologies about the roles and functions of language, self and society. These ideologies are reflexive folk distillations of linguistic, interactional and social information into concepts that fit within wider cultural systems of meaning, and must themselves be investigated critically. (357)

The decision to codeswitch between dialect and standard Japanese, he posits, revolves around the basic linguistic ideology that dialect may be used between in-group members but standard language is for out-group members. ‘Uchi’ and ‘soto’ he describes as ‘linguistic ideological primes’ in Japanese culture which function to construct an appearance of a basic underlying unity in that culture. ‘The circulation of linguistic ideological concepts such as this is often mediated by institutional structures at the national or state level. Academia, medicine, the media and politics are all potential domains of ideological reproduction’ (375).

Similarly with honorifics:

Politeness judgments are the product of a metapragmatic process of evaluation of the efficacy of particular forms in particular situations, calibrated against cultural categorical notions of social hierarchy. Thus, the link from the interaction order to the social order is achieved through linguistic ideological formulations of the use of language and social roles, appropriateness and power. (373)

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The association between ideologies and specific policies is not always straightforward, given that hidden agendas may lurk behind stated policy rationales; also, different language policies may share a common underlying ideology (Ricento 2000: 2–3). At other times, ideology is easily spotted: a simplistic equation of usage with dogma, for example, enables us to recognise a particular politically oriented language ideology through the use of specific vocabulary or phraseology allocated to particular functions. Of the language used by members of the North Korea-aligned Korean community in Japan for organisational functions in their umbrella organisation Chongryun, for example, Ryang (1997: 109) writes that ‘the reproduction of certain forms of words supports the socially significant group that has used them in the past. In other words, the corpus of organisational orthodoxy is supported by individual utterances that effectively legitimate the organisation and secure the social relationships internal to it.’ Here the ideology informing the language use serves to legitimate more than the organisation and its structures: it legitimates the ways of thinking behind them, imparting the sense that such utterances are no more than ‘common sense’ and represent the ways things should naturally be.

‘Successful ideologies are often thought to render their beliefs natural and self-evident – to identify them with the “common sense” of a society so that nobody could imagine how they might ever be different’ (Eagleton 1991: 58). In just such a manner has the ideology of monolingualism in Japan functioned both overtly and covertly, shoring up the myth of monoethnicity and ignoring the realities of large ethnic communities.² The national language is assumed in an ‘it goes without saying’ way to be a powerful marker of Japanese citizenship. But national languages, like nations themselves, are as much ideological constructs as given realities (see, e.g., Lee 1996) and when language is pressed into the service of the state the idealised dicta that result serve the ends of that state. To go back to the Ainu example: when it was decreed in 1899 that all Ainu people were Japanese citizens and would henceforth speak only Japanese,³ that decree was largely tangential to the lived realities of individual people but rather functioned to underpin the image of Japan as a nation-state whose borders encompassed the Ainu homeland of Hokkaido. In this context, language as much as geography was made to serve as an indicator of citizenship and as a result the Ainu language came perilously close to extinction before enjoying its current revival of status.

Linguistic nationalism assumes the existence of a homogeneous speech community, whose language expresses the spirit of that community (see Heinrich 2007: 126 for discussion). Even in variationist studies of the ethnography of speaking, Gal (1998: 320) reports, the speech community has been defined as ‘the locus of shared evaluations and attitudes towards varieties’, a view which ‘explicitly excluded variation from the realm of . . . ideology’. In

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reality, the speech community in Japan, like any other speech community, is far from homogeneous; rather, it encompasses first-language speakers of indigenous, community and foreign languages as well as first-language speakers of Japanese, with each of these groups displaying its own internal variations and crossovers. For the many second-language speakers of Japanese in Japan, the Japanese language is simply a means to an end rather than an expression of a unifying national spirit.

A term used by Coulmas and other sociolinguists with regard to Japan in recent English-language scholarship is 'language regime', which has important commonalities – though not total equivalence – with language ideology. Coulmas (2005: 7) defines a language regime as 'a set of constraints on individual language choices'; those constraints go beyond overt policies to include covert 'common sense' expectations as well:

Just as we speak of political and social regimes, we can also speak of language regimes. That is, linguistic behaviour is in general controlled by a regime consisting of both explicit elements which have the capacity to be legally binding and implicit, customary elements, just as are all political processes and social relations. (Coulmas 2003: 246)

In other words, unstated expectations about how a particular country's language should be used, developed over time by a speech community, are just as influential in governing language use within that country's language regime as any official statutes or policies that may exist, and can carry weight equal to or even greater than such policies in determining aspects of language use. Here ideology is subsumed as one (important) element within the overall language regime.

We turn now from the nature of language ideology in general to a more detailed examination of how this plays out in Japan.

Language ideology in Japan

It is important in discussing language ideology in Japan (or indeed, anywhere else) not to assume that a particular ideology is a uniform cultural given. Rather, as Woolard and Schieffelin (1994: 71) remind us in another context, 'where casual generalization contrasts English and French linguistic attitudes as if they were uniform cultural attributes inhering at the state and individual level, historical studies show that such apparently characteristic national stances emerge conjuncturally from struggles among competing ideological positions'. There are certain clearly identifiable linguistic ideologies at work in Japan today that fit with this caveat in that they are contested positions not universally approved: in 2006, to give one high-profile example, the proposal to introduce English as a formal part of the curriculum in public elementary schools was not endorsed by then Education Minister Ibuki Bunmei, who shared the conservative view that

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elementary schools should concentrate on improving students' literacy in their own language before introducing a foreign language. Nevertheless, ideologies are significant shapers of and contributors to language planning and language policy. As in so many countries, the overarching general ideology informing language management decisions in Japan has been the desire for social cohesion, which over time has been turned to a variety of political purposes such as nation-building, the bolstering of national confidence in times of stress or war, recovery from war or recession, the harnessing of the education system to meet national goals, and most recently the restating of national identity in the face of the effects of globalisation.

The belief that only one language is spoken in Japan, namely the national language, and a nationalist ideology of language, where the language is identified with the people and vice versa, have dominated the modern period. This ideological assumption of monolingualism flows from the overarching assumption that Japan is monoethnic, but this is far from the truth. Ironically, Befu (2009a: 24) points out that at the peak of Japan's imperial expansion prior to 1945, 'the "Japan" of that time was probably the most multi-ethnic and multi-cultural in Japanese history as it included numerous ethnic and racial groups' in the colonies of Taiwan and Korea, the Kuriles and Micronesia, and yet Japanese political and intellectual discourse continued to stress the homogeneity of Japan's people and culture, considering the Japanese residing in the home islands to embody the essence of Japan rather than the wider-flung citizenry of the colonial territories who did not speak Japanese or embody other Japanese cultural traits. 'The essentialised Japan', Befu comments, 'is a standardised Japan with uniform characteristics disallowing internal variation. This Japan is largely the making of the national government since the Meiji Period, bent on creating a unified, uniform, and homogeneous nation. This essentialised Japan is an imagined community far from the reality the country presents' (27).

As we have seen, the ideology of national monolingualism has played a significant role as a foundational factor in nation-building, with the languages of minorities at Japan's southern and northern peripheries (the Okinawans in the south and the Ainu in the north) being suppressed in the late nineteenth century in order to facilitate the myth that all Japanese citizens spoke Japanese as their first (and only) language. Such an assimilationist goal was crucial to defending Japan's borders against possible encroachment by other powers, so that language and statist ideology came together in a confluence of interests that saw the use of other languages repressed. The ideology of monolingualism, in other words, was explicitly employed to suppress difference and to subordinate minorities by assimilating them linguistically into the category of Japanese citizens. The Japanese language became dominant not through historical accident of place alone but through the deliberate subjugation of other

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languages; although those languages posed no real threat to the predominance of Japanese, so intimate did the ideological link between Japanese language and Japanese citizenship become that it was considered necessary to impose linguistic assimilation on those at the peripheries rather than allow continuing difference. Later, in Japan's colonies of Taiwan and Korea, a similar ideology prevailed: all subjects of the Emperor were expected to learn to speak the Japanese language.

Nothing in the Constitution of Japan today specifies Japanese as the official language of Japan, i.e., Japanese is not an official language in the sense that it is defined as such in the highest legal document of the land, unlike, say, German in Austria, where Article 8 of the Constitution specifies that German is the official language of the Republic without prejudice to the rights provided by federal law for linguistic minorities. Japanese is the *de facto* rather than the *de jure* dominant or national language because the majority of citizens speak it as their first language and because it is seen as a defining element in Japanese identity. As such, its legal status, while not enshrined in the Constitution, is unchallenged as the medium for legal documents of all kinds. The authority of the standard language based on the Tokyo dialect is reinforced by the status of Tokyo as the capital, through the education system and by a massive national print and visual media, so that regional dialect use is reserved in the main for private use or for comic purposes in films and television. The only official language legislation in Japan today is the previously mentioned law relating to promotion of the Ainu language, the 1997 Ainu Cultural Promotion Act. To take Japanese citizenship, a certain level of language ability is required, roughly equivalent in terms of writing ability to third grade of elementary school, but this is not to my knowledge specified in any law. Policies relating to language do exist, of course, as do other language control mechanisms: parents instruct their children in what is and is not appropriate language use in particular situations; schools do the same with their students; editors keep a wary eye out for the use of inappropriate language in manuscripts or on television.

The view that an idealised 'Japanese' is the dominant language of Japan overlooks the fact that the language is not monolithic and unchanging but, like any other language, displays a huge amount of internal variation in terms of pronunciation, dialectal differences and grammatical and lexical usage. Likewise, individuals are not constrained by the circumstances of their birth, occupation or education to use the particular kind of language usually associated with those variables on a continuing basis but rather make use of a wider linguistic repertoire, slipping in and out of other varieties as the circumstances of their daily lives require. Inoue (2006), for example, found that the accepted cultural construct of how women should speak bears little relation to how most women in Japan – particularly those outside Tokyo – actually do speak. Further,

as her fieldwork revealed, women use the delimited parameters of ‘women’s language’ actively and often subversively in a variety of performative ways when it suits them to do so. Likewise, the studies presented in Okamoto and Shibamoto Smith (2004) recognise the shifting patterns of use that characterise the standard everyday fluidity of gender roles and individual linguistic practices, investigating the practices of real speakers within the context of and in relation to overarching linguistic ideologies, i.e., showing what kind of language they actually do use rather than what they may be assumed by the ideological models to use.

This leads automatically to the question, then, of how the kind of Japanese which is dominant today became recognised as dominant. Lee (1996) and Yasuda (2000) explicate the roles of linguistic nationalism, language standardisation and linguistic imperialism as factors, with major actors including politicians, bureaucrats, educators and the military driven by a range of motives to ensure that language outcomes served their interests. Decisions about language standardisation, of course, involve a complex web of language, politics and power (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994: 64). There was nothing uncontrived about the manner in which Japan’s language situation was presented in the modern period; rather, it was a carefully orchestrated outcome intended to delineate the contours of the nation, and yet the opposite view remains deeply entrenched, namely that an almost mystic connection binds together Japanese people, language and culture and that this is the natural order of things rather than the outcome of human effort. This view resurfaced volubly after the year 2000 with the debate over the possible adoption of English as a second official language, when opponents of the suggestion fell back on arguments of the same kind as those advanced a century earlier by Meiji Period linguist and educator Ueda Kazutoshi (1867–1937). Ueda’s most widely cited nationalistic lecture is the 1894 ‘Our Nation and Its Language’, in which he referred to the Japanese language as the spiritual blood binding the nation together and as the identifying mark of the state. Reaffirming this tradition of linguistic nationalism, Nakamura (2002: 113), for example, wrote that ‘Japanese are Japanese because they speak Japanese. The Japanese language expresses both Japan’s culture and the essential nature of the Japanese people.’

Politicians espousing this ideology have often taken steps to ensure that what they see as the ‘real’ Japanese is protected. A tradition of political interference in attempts to introduce language reforms was begun as far back as 1907 and continued until the 1980s (Ōkubo 1978: 21). I offer three examples of this here. First, in 1907, an attempt by the Education Ministry’s textbook committee to change the kana used in textbooks from the historical usage then the norm to a more standardised, phonetic usage was derailed when two conservative language protection groups, opposed to this erosion of orthographic tradition and motivated by the belief that the fortunes of the language were closely linked

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to those of the nation, brought the question before the House of Peers, which requested the Education Minister to revert to historical kana usage.

Later, during the years leading up to the Second World War and during the war itself, an especially strong form of this ideology known as ‘kotodama’ espoused by the ultranationalist government prevented any attempts to rationalise the Japanese writing system. ‘Kotodama’ translates loosely as ‘the spirit of the Japanese language’ and the term was used to imply an indissoluble connection between the unique Japanese language and the essence of the Japanese spirit. Kanji in particular, borrowed originally from China, true, but sanctified by many centuries of use in Japan, were seen as sacrosanct, as was historical rather than phonetic kana spelling. With so much tradition attaching to the existing writing system, any attempt to modernise it was viewed with extreme disfavour and attempts at reform were seen as an attack on the national identity of Japan’s citizens. The school system and the press frequently reinforced the link between language and heritage, stressing that using the Japanese language stamped a Japanese person as being an important cog in the ‘kokutai’ (national polity) system. This term was used to refer to a pattern of national unity centred on the Emperor (Mitchell 1976: 20); being part of it meant that the individual Japanese person, speaking the Japanese language, was part of a mystical whole set apart from other peoples and linked back through the ages to the wellsprings of national tradition.

And as my final example: following the postwar script reforms which among other things limited the number of characters for everyday official use to 1,850 and were feared by some to be the thin end of the wedge, Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) politicians played a role in ensuring that kanji were not phased out as a national script by raising questions in the Diet about the validity of the committee process by which the 1946 Tōyō Kanji (Characters for Interim Use) list had been drawn up by the Kokugo Shingikai (National Language Council, 1934–2001), then Japan’s language policy body. Members of the Council who had been opposed to the reforms enlisted the aid of like-minded LDP members to raise questions about them in the Diet and to argue against the idea of state interference with language and script. This resulted in 1966 in the setting up of an LDP committee on language matters, which two years later issued a report which proved instrumental in bringing about the partial reversal of some of the reforms (see Gottlieb 1995, Chapter 5).

Belief in the indivisibility of language, culture and nation and in the monoethnicity of Japan remains strong in political circles today: in October 2005, for example, politician Aso Tarō, who was then Minister for Internal Affairs and Communications and later became Prime Minister (2008–9), described Japan in a speech he gave at the opening of the Kyushu National Museum as the only country in the world having ‘one nation, one civilization, one language, one culture and one race’ (*The Japan Times* 2005). In 2007, then Education