

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. Sato2004).

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 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 TOP women to kind He TOP women to kind
- He is kind to women.
- (3) *Kanojo wa yasashii koe de hanasu.* (彼女は優しい声で話す)
- She TOP soft voice in speak She TOP soft voice in speak
- 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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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
- →× For the majority of foreign residents living in Japan, English is less accessible than Japanese (Iwata, 2010)

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?
- Candidate 2: "standard" (or uncontrolled) Japanese
- →~~x~~ 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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5.3 *Yasashii nihongo* as a basis for grammatical syllabi for Japanese language teaching in local communities

- 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.

5.3 *Yasashii nihongo* as a basis for grammatical syllabi for Japanese language teaching in local communities

- 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)

6. The functions of *yasashii nihongo* (2): bypass for children having a handicap for Japanese language learning

- 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

6. The functions of *yasashii nihongo* (2): bypass for children having a handicap for Japanese language learning

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6.1 Yasashii nihongo as a bypass for foreign-rooted children(FRCs)

- 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>)

6. The functions of *yasashii nihongo* (2): bypass for children having a handicap for Japanese language learning

- Our study is focusing on type 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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- 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 increasing.
- 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).

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- As the Japanese population should be decreasing in number, the debt will surely 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.

7. Sustainable multicultural society and *yasashii nihongo*

- 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.

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Thank you for listening.