

THE NINE LANGUAGES OF JAPAN

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Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita, Mi ritrovai per una selva oscura, Che la diritta via era smarrita. Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, Canto I, lines 1-3

Abstract: Multilingualism in Japan involves the interplay of territory and community, language and dialect, people and history. Community languages in Japan have hybrid configurations. Some are bound to ethnicity – like Ainu. Some are coterminous with territory – like Ryukyuan/Okinawan. Some are held in vigorous social networks like Japanese Deaf Sign, or historically linked to urban neighbourhoods like Chinatowns and Koreatowns. Some languages are located in migrant-newcomer industrial towns, such as Brazilian Portuguese and Spanish. What paradigm is appropriate for a ‘multicultural Japan’ in which languages flourishes is still uncertain. There is currently a lack of clarity deriving from the absence of a national language policy that engages concepts of multilingualism or language plurality. This is advantageous: there is space for new thought and dialogue. Elsewhere, in Europe and North America, ‘multiculturalism’ – and its corollary ‘multilingualism’ is controversial. For some the concept is a demographic social reality involving linguistic interrelation and judicious cultural tolerance. For others multiculturalism is both a political project promoting separatism not integration, and a particularist philosophy legitimizing moral relativism and abhorrent practice masquerading as ‘tradition’. Multilingualism and multiculturalism in Japan need not symbolize the guardianship of ethnic and cultural ghettos but rather the gateway to cultural openness and creative transformation of all ghettos and narrow mentalities.

Key Words: Japan, multilingualism, society

KEEPING THE STORY GOING

Languages do not rise above grave repression, rather they outlast it by being perfectly still. This is also how we sustain our personhood. A person’s identity involves, not merely a set of contingent properties that change over time, but also the capacity to keep an internal and particular narrative of the self going. Likewise, languages and language communities keep going. Parents’ desire to raise literate and thoughtful children in more than one language (a parent’s language) keeps going. Our relation with language, over time, over life involves persistence. The task may seem obscure, painful even, like Dante’s journey, starting in a dark wood that turns out to be hell. Those with good fortune find a guide – as Virgil served well for Dante. Our guide to knowing what to do about language’s persistent voice may be a book or a lecture or introspection on the nature of language or perhaps the people we meet in life.

My own early experience of language and identity was in a 1950s industrial town in Northern England. The little girl was small and thin with black tangled hair and her

name was Mary Rose. She lived in a neat caravan surrounded by dangerous dogs on dismal scrubland on the edge of town. In the primary school class, Mary Rose was scorned as an unwashed, impoverished child. As an Irish-named ‘minority’ boy who was made to learn Irish dancing and wear a kilt on trips to London I was eager to join the mockery of another who was even further down the scale of contempt than me. Mary Rose spoke (West Riding) Yorkshire dialect with her classmates. She talked funny as well. Her father, whom we said smelled of horses, met Mary at the school gate. Sometimes it was her mother. She plied the local housing estates selling heather and curses and false teeth. They both spoke to their daughter in a strange mixture of Yorkshire and ‘something else’. They were Gypsy and spoke Anglo-Romani (Hancock 2002). The family braved our mockery of the dirty Gypsy Princess and her gypo talk. They were patient. Over the years, in my dreams, I remember them and have begged forgiveness of Mary for our cruelty and tried to catch her voice. Where are you now little Mary Rose?

There is more strength than sentimentalism in multilingual communities. Witness the spirit and adaptations, all over the world, displayed by multilingual children and their good teachers when confronting the lacquered armour of the state. What spirit! What skills! Too frequently educators and linguists assume the irrevocable imposition of the powerful on the powerless. At the same time, albeit sympathetic linguists write premature obituaries for languages that are alive (Shibatani on Ainu, 1990). It is familiar posture. It is a dreary picture. An innocent minority submits itself to imperial thuggery and exploitation. THE PEOPLE chug like a sad line of Butoh dancers, dreamlike and silent, across a stage. Their speech first humiliated then crushed. No. This assumption accords too much prestige and power to the powerful. It is enough to stop and listen. The sounds of many languages, like ambient music, stream through the interstices of the monolingual, tectonic voice of state and government. Look at the agency of people, the power of the ‘powerless’ to strive and assert and overcome. Look at the ability of men, women, children to make choices and impose those choices on their world? We imprison ourselves in cliché and the rhetoric of binary opposites: the ‘powerless’ and the powerful, real people and the ruling class, the indigenous and the colonized, big killer languages and small innocent languages. There is need to challenge simplifications.

AINU: THE RETURN OF THE REPRESSED

The solitude of spirit that sustains language communities, all undone, renews itself in language revival. In the post-war, sub-tropical south, when a battered Ryukyus returned to Japan and when Tokyo’s language policies were set to ‘language destruction’ mode, the end of the Ryukyuan languages was safely predicted. It did not come. In the 21st century, we romance at the constancy of an enduring Okinawan culture - cool, idealized, desirable: amazed at renewed efforts at language maintenance in communities and Okinawan music.

When we choose to silence the languages that surround us, those that live with us, they will take vengeance. They will. Freud named this: ‘the return of the repressed’ that the forbidden thing or idea will always try to dodge the mechanisms of repression and discharge and seek access to the surface – even in disguise. And when we look north we notice that the Jezzo Spruce has been replanted in Hokkaido and with its wood the Ainu

tonkori rebuilt. This musical instrument, its brittle rhythmic sound electrified for Ainu pop music is now played by Ainu-Japanese rockers in the clubs of Tokyo and London and Paris. No language is dead as long as its poems and songs live. The repatriation of the repressed charts its journey through the sounds of the guitar.

The call for Ainu language rights, which gained momentum in the 1980s, was not a matter of permission for linguistic difference but involved a revisiting of the history of centre and periphery. Ainu is primordially an indigenous language of the far north. The territory of Hokkaido was the site of pioneer struggle, of the felling of trees and the clearing of forests, of snow and ice, of settlement and struggle. Long controlled by independent Matsumae clan rather than Edo-Tokyo the north was a site of suspicion and at the centre of this suspicion lay resided the Ainu language: curiosity and nuisance.

Many recognize that an effective retooling of the Ainu language requires a remaking of history. Historians select, emphasize and exclude in order to further the interests of the state, “sometimes not even conscious of the fact that they further the interests of the state because they are so much part of the power system from within which they write” (Macdonald 1995:301). A language revival project, whether Saami or Manx or Ainu, is also the taming of history. As Macdonald writes of Japan, “in contemporary Japanese mythology, the past is revered, the nation glorified, and contradictions and conflicts, including discrimination, are concealed. Vast social and economic differences are obliterated. Certain practices are selected to symbolise “traditional Japanese culture” (Macdonald 301, see also Giddens 1991). Japan’s idealised culture finds its highest expression in Kyoto - an elegant city that played court to Imperial culture - rather than Sapporo - the new and cold ‘far north’. The logic is inevitable. When we hear that a nation has “lost its culture” we know this means the routine peripheralization of ‘Other’ cultural experience.

MULTILINGUALISM: A MICRO-DEFINITION

Multilingualism occurs when several languages are used in a particular location or society. There are approximately 5000-6000 languages in the world divided among 193 countries. Multilingualism is the social norm, globally, despite the fact that most nations recognize only a small number of ‘national’ languages and (differently) ‘official’ languages (de Varennes 1996). Japan, like many other countries, modernized itself whilst routinely ignoring domestic language diversity. Easy come, easy go.

Languages function in different social domains (e.g. temple, school, workplace) and show different social distributions in the population (the deaf, ethnic/regional minorities). The mere presence of one or two languages within an individual speaker is termed ‘individual bilingualism’ whilst the nature of ‘societal bilingualism’ is indicated in Fishman’s (1965) question: *who chooses to speak to what language to whom and when?* Bilingual theory can be found at play on the streets of most cities in the world. It is visibly present in the written signs of cityscapes in Tokyo (Backhaus 2007). Languages happen. Contact takes place. The result of languages in contact is multilingualism - a society that possesses several languages. Languages are not all equal but vary according to power and prestige. They involve factors such as geographical spread, ‘socio-economic’ importance, cultural significance, number of native speakers and foreign

language learners. It is likely that no society can be called 'monolingual'. We normally distinguish between 'official' multilingualism (e.g. Switzerland, South Africa) and 'de facto' multilingualism (e.g. Japan). The issue of multilingualism touches nationalism, politics, history, identity and education and ranges from attempts to revive and preserve languages such as Irish and Basque, to the argument over French and English in Canada and the 'US English' campaign (Edwards 1996). Where does Japan fit in this picture?

MONOLINGUALISM IN THE MODERN STATE

The Tokyo (Yamanote) dialect of Japanese was officially designated by the Government of Japan in 1916 as the official language of Japan (*hyojungo*) following research by the National Language Research Council (*Kokugo Chosa Inikai*). The Tokyo declaration coincided with similar declarations throughout the world (Denmark 1899, Germany 1901, Turkey 1929). The purpose of these government declarations was to:

- (a) Promote one 'mainstream' language
- (b) Assist the modern nation-state building
- (c) Designate minority status to other (side stream) languages and dialects.

The need for language manifestos seemed logical to the governments of 1900. Societies are multilingual consisting of competing linguistic entities. Languages are associated with cultural power and territory that can threaten central authority. Therefore, official language declarations were typically accompanied by a package of other laws like the Meiji government's (1899) *Hokkaido Kyu Dojin Hogo Ho* (Hokkaido Former Aborigines Protection Act). The regulation, in word and deed, declared Ainu communities, language and history, as things of the past not the future. This was not vicarious ideology. Language laws in Britain, France, Korea, Japan, and India were normally accompanied by explicit or implicit belief systems of ethnic superiority-inferiority, cultural uniqueness, and worth or 'capital' (Coulmas 2001).

A century after the Meiji laws, the arguments for multilingualism have now shifted to a higher postmodern ground. The ideologies that embodied the concept of a national language, following quickly on the heels of the French revolution and European nationalisms, have weakened. Now diversity, pluralism and 'the right to choose' have come to challenge old certitudes in the social matrix: from gender and sexuality to language maintenance. Referring to unequal meshing of language and migrant (rights) across the world Coulmas succinctly summarizes the new arguments thus:

Grace Period Immigrants cannot be expected to quickly gain fluency in the national language of their new country and should not be cut off from information and services, at least for a grace period that allows them to learn the language.

The Right to Non-discrimination Immigrants should have the right to use their language amongst themselves and to transmit it to their children

Promotion of International Understanding A reservoir of bilingual citizens can be seen as beneficial to the state, as these citizens can help promote international understanding.

Responsibility Upon admission, the state accepts responsibility for the well-being of

immigrants, which includes unimpeded use of their language.

Human Rights ... recognizing immigrant languages is a matter of human rights. Specifically posited in this discussion is the right to freedom of expression, the right to non-discrimination, and the right of linguistic minorities to use their language with each other.

Japan is now shifting from Meiji's draconian anti-Ainu laws to the enactment of positive principles and laws on Ainu language and culture (Maher 2001). Likewise, with the recognition of non-Japanese/migrant children's rights to language in Japan's public schools, little worlds move forward.

We return, however, to the importance of the re-presentation of history. The Japanese archipelago was migrant and linguistically diverse in ancient and pre-modern history. Migrant contact lines across the ancient Asian-Pacific trade routes are well described. There is much evidence of (Eurasian) continental language contact. Minority languages and continuous migration from the continent created language contact situations. A sociolinguistic description of Japanese suggests that Japanese emerged as the product of a mixture of migrant languages: a hybrid or *Mischsprache* (Polivanov 1960 and Murayama 1974) rather than from a single source. This early linguistic diversity would entail Malayo-Polynesian as well as Altaic varieties mixing and re-mixing under the continuous migration of peoples from the south and continental Eurasia throughout the periods notionally termed Jomon (8000-300 BC), Yayoi (300 B.C.-300 AD) and Kofun (300-7th c.). Early literary records indicate that Japan possessed fairly distinct cultural and language communities such as 'Emishi' in the north. In Heian Period *Tale of Genji* (11th century novel by Murasaki Shikibu) the heroine escapes from Kyushu, a wild country across the sea, the land of the Hayato, Kumaso and Azuma tribes. Japan - migrant country. Japanese - boat people. Let us consider in more detail the language situation of Japan.

NINE

The Japanese archipelago consists of approximately 1000 islands. A variety of languages and dialects are used by a population of 127,000,000 who mostly live in the densely populated coastal areas along four main islands of Honshu, Kyushu, Hokkaido and Shikoku. Cultural and linguistic diversity is part of the heritage of the Japanese-speaking populations.

What is multilingual Japan? A proper answer to this question requires us to abandon the category of a fixed and unchanging monolingual Japan (Morris-Suzuki 2001) around which 'other' languages are included or excluded. Japan's multilingualism involves interplay between people and history, territories and communities, 'languages' and 'dialects'. Languages in the community are not coterminous with ethnicity – such as Ainu – but spread across other configurations such as social communities (e.g. Deaf Sign), territorial communities (Ryukyuan), migrants and newcomers (Brazilian Portuguese).

In 21st century Japan, we can observe various languages such as Korean, Ainu, Chinese, Ryukyuan, South-east Asian, Deaf Sign and others (Maher and Yashiro 1995, Noguchi

and Fotos 2001). Japan also displays a vigorous tradition of pidgins and creoles, some hitherto overlooked, as demonstrated in the elucidation by Long (2001) of Bonin. Some are extinct (Yokohama Pidgin, Nagasaki Pidgin, Hamamatsu Pidgin) whilst others are re-emergent such as the Gastarbeiter Pidgins (Maher 2003) in the metropolitan areas of Kanto and Kansai.

The indigenous language isolate of possibly Altaic affiliation, Ainu, is spoken as a native tongue by a handful of the estimated 50,000 Ainu people who live mostly on the northern island of Hokkaido. It is probably the oldest of Japan's heritage languages. Ainu is divided into three main dialect groups: the Kurile group, the Sakhalin group and the Hokkaido group. The Ainu language is not taught in schools and suffered from the assimilation policies of successive Japanese governments following the Meiji Restoration (Maher 2005, DeChicchis 1995). Since the 1980s, efforts have been made to increase the ethnolinguistic cultural vitality of Ainu. The United Nations' declaration on language rights in the 'Year of the Indigenous Peoples' (1993) was a landmark in the history of language maintenance among the peripheral language communities in Japan. Supported by many language minorities, the Ainu are achieving significant progress in their struggle for language recognition.

The Ryukyuan language, a close relation of Japanese, comprises "by no means a single language but a conglomeration of different dialects, many of them mutually unintelligible" (Matsumori 1995:25). It is spoken, though in decline, throughout the Ryukyu Islands which are situated at the south-western tip of Japan. The independent Ryukyuan kingdom was established in the 15th century and came under the control of Japan in 1609. Despite official discouragement of the language, Ryukyuan was widely spoken, the standard variety being the Shuri dialect of Okinawa. There are emergent *shin-hogen* or new dialects and pidgin-like sociolects spoken among the younger generation.

Chinese is found in the various Chinese communities, with a total population of approximately 50,000 mostly in the urban centres of Tokyo-Yokohama, the Kansai region, and parts of southern Kyushu. Language support ('Saturday') classes serve this community but Chen's study (2005:179) of Chinese families in Tokyo-Yokohama points out the "fluid and loose" ties between language loyalty and Chinese identity". This 'fluidity', Chen summarized thus: (a) language learning (Japanese) is essential, (b) language affiliation (Chinese) is desirable, (c) code-mixing is normal, (d) learning English as an international language is essential

The Korean language has been spoken in Japan for several hundred years from the time when monks, artisans and immigrants from the southwestern Korean state of Paekche came to Japan in the 6th century. The presence of a large number of Koreans (about 700,000) in Japan is the legacy of Japanese colonialism when Japan annexed Korea in 1910. The main concentrations of Korean speakers are in urban areas such as Kanto (Tokyo) and Kansai (Osaka) regions. In the Ikuno-ku district (Koreatown) of Osaka, for instance, there are second, third and fourth generation speakers of Korean and considerable code-switching between Korean-Osaka dialect and Standard Japanese. The younger generation shows decreased fluency in Korean and, broadly speaking, less enthusiasm for language maintenance. The *Chosen Soren* (association of North Korean

residents in Japan) operates a separate system of schools in which Korean is the language of instruction.

The Nine LANGUAGES OF JAPAN

Ethnic and Social Communities, Migrants, Territorial Communities

- 1. Ainu (Ainu itak):** Hokkaido. Almost no remaining native speakers. Ethnolinguistically important as heritage language.
- 2. Chinese.** Nationwide. Community concentrations in 'Chinatowns': Yokohama, Kobe, Nagasaki.
- 3. English.** Nationwide: Semi-official status: media, government publications, higher education, business, scientific publication, postal services, street signs, public announcements. Erstwhile Bonin English Pidgin in the Ogasawaran Islands.
- 4. Japanese.** Nationwide (national) language. Population of 127 million. Dialects: Tokyo-type (*Tōkyō-shiki*) and Western-type (*Keihan-shiki*): in the central region. Kyushu-type dialects are a smaller third group. Shikoku dialects are Western-type. Peripheral region dialects: Tohoku, Tsushima, Kagoshima.
- 5. Japanese Sign Language (Nihon no Shuwa).** Nationwide. 'Shuwa' a generic term for traditional and Japanese-related varieties with dialectal variation. Special schools. Semi-official status in public services.
- 6. Korean.** Nationwide. Especially Kansai (Koreatown).
- 7. Portuguese (Brazilian):** nationwide, especially Kinki/Kansai.
- 8. Ryukyuan: various dialects, some mutually unintelligible.**
 - 8.1. Amami-Oshima (North)** Northwestern Okinawa; northern Amami-oshima Island.
 - 8.1. Amami-Oshima (South)** Northern Okinawa; southern Amami-oshima, Kakeroma, Yoro, and Uke islands.
 - 8.3. Okinawa; (North)** southern Amami-oshima, Kakeroma, Yoro, and Uke islands.
 - 8.4. Okinawa (Central).** Central Okinawa, southern Okinawa Island, Kerama Islands, Kume-jima, Tonaki, Aguna islands, and islands east of Okinawa Island.
 - 8.5. Miyako.** Southern Okinawa; Miyako, Ogami, Ikema, Kurima, Irabu, Tarama, Minna islands.
 - 8.6. Yaeyama.** Southern Okinawa; Ishigaki, Iriomote, Hatoma, Kohama, Taketomi, Kuroshima, Hateruma, Aregusuku islands.
 - 8.7. Yonaguni.** Southern Okinawa; Yonaguni Island.
 - 8.8. Kikai.** Northeastern Okinawa; Kikai Island.
 - 8.9. Kunigami.** Central Okinawa; central and northern Okinawa Island, Iheya, Izena, Ie-jima, Sesoko islands.
 - Oki-No-Erabu.** North central Okinawa; Oki-no-erabu Island.
 - 8.11. Yoron:** North central Okinawa; Yoron Island.
 - 8.12. Toku-No-Shima.** Northern Okinawa; Toku-no-shima Island.
- 9. Vietnamese-Cambodian.** Kansai community.

There is a native-English-speaker population in Japan comprising permanent or temporary residents. This population is served by several English-language newspapers and magazines. English is widely studied, virtually as a compulsory subject, in secondary schools and also in higher education. The importance of attachment to one spoken variety or 'model' (usually British or American) has declined in recent years. Multi-accented English, including Asian Englishes, is increasingly acceptable (Honna 2005). Meanwhile, English, especially in its written form, is a working language of some occupations and educational areas: science, technology, business, higher education and there is English-medium university education. The volume of research reports and articles published in English in Japan accounts for more than the combined amount published in Canada, Australia and New Zealand (Maher, 2006). As mentioned earlier,

English and its pidgin variety was the native language of inhabitants in the Ogasawara (Bonin) islands but numbers have declined drastically in recent years. Ogasawaran English is perhaps the most 'perfect' example of language attrition in Japan in recent times (Long 2007).

Japanese Sign Language (JSL), the language of the deaf, is used by an estimated 400,000 signers and is subject to dialectal and sociolectal variation. From the 1980-90s onward, there was an influx of Vietnamese-Chinese and Cambodian refugees and foreign workers from Asia and South America. Settled communities of Portuguese-speaking Brazilian Nikkeijin (ethnic Japanese) residents now form a significant population in some areas in Aichi prefecture and elsewhere. There is an increase in speakers of Filipino in rural areas like Yamanashi and Tochigi (Oyama-city) and there are distinct inner-city *quartier* languages of newcomers like the Indian community in Edogawa (Kasai) or the Brazilian communities in Fujisawa, Oizumi-cho. These communities pose serious questions about the dynamics of family bilingualism and language maintenance in the next generation of Japanese citizens.

MULTILINGUAL LANDSCAPING

Multilingual landscaping by administrative agencies in Japan (e.g. metropolitan, city, town and village offices) has led to increased multilingualism. Starting with Japanese-English bilingual signs in the 1960s Olympic era, Chinese, Korean and Braille are now commonplace. International traffic throughout the country and laws relating to barrier-free transport have also contributed to multilingual landscaping (Backhaus 2007). The enactment of the Transport Accessibility Improvement Law (2000) led to widespread bilingual supplementation on Japanese signs in railway stations, etc. The Japanese writing system is hybrid and reflects the same historical, trans-cultural flows that characterize spoken Japanese. It employs three main scripts: Kanji ideographs from Chinese characters, Kana a pair of syllabaries, consisting of Hiragana used for native Japanese words, and Kana used for foreign borrowings. *Hentaigana* (historical variants of standard hiragana) are used occasionally and the Latin alphabet is used widely, for example in advertising and public signs. Romanized Japanese, called *rōmaji*, is frequently used by foreign students of Japanese, and by native speakers for computer input. Braille (*tenji*) is employed nationwide in consumer products, train/bus information, government /city publications.

CONCLUSION: DECOLONIZING THE SPIRIT

Awareness of the role of language in society (i.e. 'sociolinguistic awareness') is a precondition for understanding multilingualism. Ignorance about language diversity makes for bad tuning. As a young student from England in Michigan in the 1980s, I had brought a suitcase of negative stereotypes about 'American culture' but on arrival found congenial town and country filled with decent people who displayed courtesy, tolerance and conscience and who spoke many languages. In American cities, I saw appalling exploitation of working people, Third World poverty, desperation housing and the vulgar display of wealth. It was very comforting. It was just like home. One day I joined an anti-racist protest in Detroit. After being pushed into a doorway of the Polish quarter, by a policeman, I sat on the street with a fellow-demonstrator who introduced herself as

Shelly. She explained that she was 'Ojibwa' and spoke the language. I remarked that I had never been to Nigeria myself but my uncle Patrick had, for many years, run an Irish pub in neighbouring Zaire and spoke French. Shelly explained patiently that, in fact, Ojibwa/Chippewa, also known as Anishinaabemowin, is a major Native American language of the Algonquian linguistic group with a substantial number of speakers in Canada and the USA and with no government support. Really. For Shelly, anti-racist protest that day was not a one-off but an event linked to her own *habitus* and history. Her education, she said, had been in English and French; Ojibwa was learned partially at home and among friends. Ignorance about language diversity takes time to overcome and it may not be wilful or malign. My new Ojibwan friend knew that in matters of language intolerance, as in life, we must not assume malevolence that which may be mere ignorance.

A depiction of the Ojibwa, or the Ainu, starts from a void that requires colonization. The void is the Other. The void was Hegel's depiction of Africa which teemed with cannibals, dervishes and witchdoctors but also which, paradoxically, occupied "no historical part of the world" (quoted in Hall, 2000:329). The Other is the void. No part of the world. Representations fill such space with myths and objects. It is a world of representations like a field of scarecrows half-human and lonely puppets twisting in the wind. The spectacle of the Other is founded upon a stereotypical Ainu man in a field in Hokkaido, in beard and headband. We bear no relation to him. A better picture would be an indistinguishable Ainu-Japanese woman, dressed in workclothes, running a bicycle shop in Nagoya. The spectacle of the stereotypical Other falls into the category of what philosophers term 'the scandalized pattern of desire' (Alberg 2007) whereby we are at once entranced and repelled by the same object. We cannot make up our mind. We want 'minorities' to go away or become just like us...or...no.. wait a minute...just stay as you are. A double-bind. And minorities are welcome on condition that they conform to the orthodoxy. Are we forever to be caught in the prism of "the subtle ways in which we have structured our world into an order that gives recognition to some and withholds it from others"? (Alberg 2010:77).

The presence of various languages in the contemporary nation-state poses serious issues for government policy that has been traditionally committed to the historical ideology of the monoracial and monolingual. Indeed, as Tollefson and Tsui have note in the Asian context, "the positioning of language and identity has profound political importance and is one of the key mechanisms by which an imagined community may be (re)created" (2007:264). The socio-psychological template of Japan is changing. Nevertheless, as is noted with regard to the decline of Ryukyuan languages, "language shift driven by language nationalism, the loss of local languages is the victory of uniformity and of cultural and linguistic intolerance. A state and its inhabitants not valuing the linguistic and cultural plurality within the confines of its own borders cannot convincingly claim to be just doing that with regard to international languages and cultures" (Bairon, Brenzinger, Heinrich 2009:17; see also Heinrich 2009).

In 1986 Prime Minister Nakasone made a notorious speech to the Liberal Democratic Party in which he comforted his listeners that Japan was and always would be a "racially homogeneous nation." In the week that followed, in search of irony, I looked for versions of the speech as reported in local community language newspapers Chinese,

(Brazilian) Portuguese, and English. Japan offers a range of multilingual media from newspapers in Portuguese, English and Chinese to radio programmes (e.g. Inter FM, Yokohama FM, J-Wave, etc.) offering mini-programmes in Tagalog, Korean, English, Spanish and Portuguese. Japan's progress towards a multilingual consciousness is not uniform but incongruities are instructive. The myth of the homogeneous and monolingual nation has diminished but issues of cultural and linguistic homogeneity are alive particularly when the question becomes "Should Japan open up to substantial immigration?" Discussing educational implications, Hashimoto (2007) has linked the careful separation of English from a 'core' Japanese cultural identity to the wider problem of linguistic and cultural homogeneity, "denying bilingual education for children of linguistic minorities converges with the denial of individual bilingualism in Japan in the English as a second official language proposal" (p.34).

Multiculturalism and its accompanying vapour trail 'multilingualism' is suspect in many parts of the world. It is viewed by some as an authoritarian political project, promoting separatism not integration, legitimising moral relativism, fostering a culture of victimhood that creates expectations of entitlement and special treatment (Malik 2008, 2009). In this narrative, multiculturalism carries a health warning. It perpetuates a racist definition of culture. It essentializes origin, cultural difference, religion. It leads to stigmatization and the lessening of freedom for individuals. The fear is that multiculturalism is the Trojan horse for an attack on personal freedom, women's rights – the creation of parallel societies. However, there are plenty of examples all around, and in Japan, where languages, dialects and local cultures maintain a presence in benign ways. Moreover, hybridized social identification, among youth in particular, is pushing out the essentialist agenda that some ethnic groups have hitherto pursued (see Maher on metroethnicities and metrolanguages, 2010) Multilingualism and multiculturalism are not the twin guardians of self-contained cultural ghettos. On the contrary, multilingualism – exemplified in the nine languages of Japan – can embody cultural flows, openness and creative transformation of all ghettos and their mentalities.

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