

FROM THE EDITORS

The Linguapax Institute is a non-governmental organization based in Barcelona, Spain that is dedicated to the preservation and promotion of linguistic diversity worldwide. Among its areas of concern are endangered languages and multilingual education. It was formed in 1987 after a UNESCO experts meeting. In 2001, the UNESCO Center of Catalonia (UNESCOCat) continued the project by establishing the Linguapax headquarters in Barcelona.

The papers in this collection present the challenge of literacy issues in Asia. Many places are surveyed: Japan, Vietnam and Australia, the Ryukyu Islands, Guatemala, India and the Philippines. The papers derive from the Symposium on Literacy in Multilingual Societies held on the verdant campus of International Christian University, Tokyo, December 3rd, 2011. The symposium was supported by the ICU Institute for Educational Research and Service (IERS), the ICU Social Science Research Institute (SSRI), and ICU UNESCO Club. Presentations dealt with literacy issues involving: social empowerment, development, the digital divide, language policy, historical perspectives on literacy and writing systems.

The issues are presented in many guises. A robust Tokyo-based study of internet connectedness and civic action in critical situations such as the 2011 Fukushima disaster in Japan (Joo Young JUNG), compares with a study of cyberspace and the possibility of maintenance of a threatened language in the Philippines (Francis DUMANIG and Maya Khemlani DAVID). Multimodal literacy in the Mayan areas of Guatemala and how success is possible in effecting language policy decisions is investigated by Joseph DeCHICCHIS. By contrast, Kayoko HASHIMOTO examines Australia, a quintessential example of a 'new' multicultural society, in the context of the current situation of second language education at the tertiary level and explores the values and meanings underpinning that education. We consider the paradox of (English) language hegemony in foreign language education in schools in Japan and how to introduce a language diversity experience in schools (Atsuko KOISHI). If we are now entering a communication era, as Lachman KHUBCHANDANI argues, where dispersed cultural groups, sharing a common heritage, can explore space through convenient modes of mobility and electronic 'networking' then what are the implications for diasporas? The witness of history in literacy campaigns is crucial as testified by the innovative strategies launched in revolutionary Vietnam to teach reading and writing to the masses while, at a broader level, the rapid attainment of almost universal literacy in North Vietnam: a critical narrative elaborated by Shaun MALARNEY. In the realm of language shift, Patrick HEINRICH reveals how the dominance of one language over others hinges on the extent to which a written tradition existed and how, in the Ryukyu Islands, language activism turns to writing in order to validate the Ryukyuan language.

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