

Korean Language Maintenance in Japan: an Osaka Study

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Introduction

This paper outlines the current sociolinguistic situation of the Korean minority in Japan. I focus on the role of the Korean language in Japanese society and in particular efforts to maintain its vitality. I shall draw upon some preliminary findings from an investigation which I am conducting among the Korean community of Ikuno-ku a district of Osaka. I have visited and observed two schools: one primary school and one junior high school in which the Korean language is now being taught, conducted interviews with 4 junior high school students, two women over the age of 70 and two 'activists' (30-40yrs old) involved in language maintenance.

I have found two language issues to be of interest and concern in the Korean speech community: the Korean language maintenance and the restoration of Korean names. The concept of bilingual education is not yet established as important not even among the Korean community as a whole and certainly not in the Japanese official bodies such as local education boards.

The most dense concentration of Korean speakers in Japan lies in the Ikuno-ku ward of metropolitan Osaka. It was noticeable that all of the Korean informants interviewed were strongly marked speakers of Osaka dialect (Osaka-ben). Preliminary findings appear to suggest a link, from the point of view of ethnolinguistic solidarity between the Korean language and Osaka dialect. Identification with the Korean language must also be placed beside identification with Osaka dialect. Both of these speech varieties are consciously contrasted with standard Japanese (Hyojungo) which is identified geographically with Tokyo rather than Osaka and psychologically as the language of power, centralization and the source of discrimination against the Korean language and community.

Cultural Pluralism in Japan

What is the current nature and future prospects for cultural pluralism in Japan? This remains a crucial issue to those language minorities seeking popular and official support for their languages. Honna urged that "Japanese people achieve drastic attitudinal changes in order to become sensitive and compassionate towards minority groups" and that "many people are persistently suspicious about learning other languages as a means of attaining intercultural understanding. They are afraid that their children's sense of national identity will be diluted, weakened or destroyed by their exposure to influential foreign culture" (1979: 53). Japan, together with many other countries, fully accepted the 19th century ideas of nation, cultural assimilation and linguistic conformity. Thus, a vigorous cultural and linguistic assimilation policy has operated in Japan since the 19th Century. To give an example, regarding the native Ainu people the 1899 'Law for the Protection of Native Aborigines' seriously damaged many aspects of Ainu culture including the removal of access to and the right for Ainu people to speak their native language. This law is still in force. Assimilation policies have continued to affect other distinct linguistic communities such as Okinawans, Ogasawaran islanders, deaf-signers and Chinese.

The fastest growing linguistic minority in Japan is Tagalog-speakers. In 1980, they numbered 5547 and constituted 0.7 of the registered alien population. By 1988, they increased to 32,185 an increased fivefold to 480.2%. It is not unusual to hear Tagalog speakers even in the rural areas although it is a low prestige language and Tagalog speaking mothers are routinely forbidden by families from using this "useless" language with their children. Cultural and linguistic assimilation is assisted by a powerful government-sponsored myth that Japan is ethnically homogenous: one race and one language. This ideology of racial uniqueness and separateness pervades many aspects of intellectual and cultural life in Japan and influences both its view of international relations but also its internal affairs (for example, the reluctance to accept refugees, the refusal to give legal and social rights to foreign workers and the selection of foreign labour from South America according to racial categories, i.e. selecting only workers with Japanese 'blood').

Japan and Korea: the Historical Background

Japan and Korea have a long history of close contact including linguistic exchange stretching into Prehistory when language and culture crossed the narrow straits separating the Korean peninsula and the Japanese archipelago. In the Yayoi era, rice and metal tools of bronze and iron were transferred to northern Kyushu from the southern Korean peninsula between 300 B.C. and 2,000 B.C. In the 5th century, members of the Japanese dynasty (the Yamato Imperial Court) located in Nara learned Chinese from Korean scholars and employed them to record history and write official administrative documents. In the early sixth century, Buddhism and Confucianism along with religious art and the writing of scriptures were conducted by Korean envoys who came to settle in Japan. Metalwork, religion, literature, printing, weaving, medicine and pottery are all activities in which the peoples of the Korean peninsula brought to Japan.

The Korean language has been functionally part of the diglossic situation in Japan for a long period of time. Up until Japan's postwar period and lasting over a period of several hundred years the country was in a state of diglossic bilingualism. As is usually defined, diglossia is a relatively stable language situation (Ferguson 1959) in a society which has two functionally separate language codes. One code is used in one set of circumstances and is a highly codified, more complex, superposed variety and is usually the vehicle of written literature. In Japan, this has been the H (High), namely Chinese, variety. In another entirely different set of circumstances, an L (Low) variety operated through spoken language and was the language of ordinary conversation. The L variety has been used by the Korean population even by those cultural ambassadors whose role it was to transmit Chinese culture.

The Korean community is conscious of the historical connections between the two cultures and among teachers of Korean it is an omnipresent background theme and source of pride (Kim 1991). Studies of Korean in Japan, excepting the teaching of Korean as a foreign language in university, is dominated by research on the historical links between the early Japanese and Korean languages. The British diplomat W.G. Aston published his pioneering 'A Comparative Study of the Japanese and Korean Languages' in 1879. From his analysis of 100 pairs of words, Aston concluded that Korean and Japanese were related to the same extent as two distant languages in the Indo-European family.

Meiji scholars continued to research the etymology of Korean elements in Old Japanese. Hattori (1898) supported this view with a study of 200 lexical items. Kanazawa (1910) as much with eye towards political hegemony as towards linguistics concluded in 'The Common Origin of the the Japanese and Korean Languages' that both Korean and Ryukyuan were both "branches of our Great Japanese Empire." The Finnish scholar Ramstedt was guardedly affirmative regarding the connection between Japanese and Korean using historical-comparative linguistics to compare *sima 'island' and *pai 'boat' in his paper 'Two Words of Korean and Japanese' (1926). The Koreanist Ogura Shinpei in his 1920 study remarked that between these two languages "in some points greater or lesser differences are present, but anyone could see the predominance of similarities" (1920:31-32 quoted in Lewin 1976). This statement is probably still an accurate summary of the today's state of opinion regarding the two languages.

The Current Situation

There are approximately one million Korean people residing in Japan including nationals of North and South (700,000), those who have voluntarily taken Japanese nationality (120,000) and mixed immigrants (between 20,000 and 10,000). 86.2% of all resident foreigners. 70% of the Korean residents in Japan are married to Japanese nationals. Most of the Korean community are descendants of the hundreds of thousands of forced labour brought to Japan during the war following Korea's annexation by Japan in 1910. The 2.5 million Koreans in Japan at the end of World War II were forced to work at coal mines and construction sites for military facilities. The 36-year colonial rule made Koreans Japanese subjects but abandoned them as aliens after the war.

Japan's Korean Speech Communities

A linguistic map of Japan's Korean speech community is fairly uncomplicated. Closer to South Korea than Kyushu, the island of Tsushima at the southernmost tip of the Korean peninsula (53km away) is probably the only place in Japan where Hangul is used widely as a daily language of communication. It is part of Nagasaki Prefecture. On the mainland, Koreans in Tokyo are much more dispersed than in Osaka and tend to concentrate in the downtown (shitamachi) wards of Arakawa, Adachi, Edogawa, Taito and Koto, to the south of the city in Ota-ku or in Kawasaki-city in neighbouring Kanagawa

Prefecture. Koreans living in Osaka, a large commercial area in the West of the main island of Honshu numbers approximately 200,000.

Although specific concentrations of Korean people go mostly unnoticed in Ikuno-ku, Osaka there are constant signs of the Korean language and culture. In Ikuno-ku one can see a number of outside shop signs in Hangul: a bridal shop, barbecue chicken shops 'yakniku', a herbalist, a tea shop, two banks, a printing shop, flower arrangement house, night classroom for Korean language instruction, a kindergarten and a community centre. There is a kilometer long food market in which many of the food shops display hangul labelling.

Korean Language Education

The issue of whether Koreans are "happy bilinguals" or "sad bilinguals" has been discussed among some Japanese sociolinguists notably Honna (1980) who writes "Today, many Koreans are socially functional bilinguals, but they are not happy about their bilingual situation...Korean living in Japan are discriminated against in many ways and they are forced to learn Japanese in order to get along well with in Japanese society. Naturally, they are not happy about their bilingualism. They frequently ask themselves, "What makes us have to speak Japanese?" Bilingualism is an institutional disgrace to their integrity" (1980:49-50). Although the former observations concerning the insecurity or Durkheimian 'anomie' of bilingual Koreans is undoubtedly accurate in many cases in my interviews with Koreans of Ikuno-ku, I also found an identification with Japanese as (one of) their mother tongues - in a way which I shall expand on later. The bilingual Korean's antagonism or at least ambivalence towards the Japanese language I did not perceive at all among my informants.

Regarding what is being done about Korean language maintenance in Japan is accurately summarized by Honna as follows:

The Japanese government and its educational agents have done nothing so far to support the language and culture maintenance efforts of Korean people. This is partly because the Koreans have not expressed an interest in ethnic education publicly to Japanese authorities. Korean parents are so confident that their request for, say, bilingual education will be immediately rejected by Japanese school systems that they never dreamed of making such a request public. More regrettably, Japanese authorities have not recognized

their historical, moral obligations to advance the educational opportunities of Korean children in every way (Honna 1980:51).

Whilst the first generation of Koreans, about 15% of all Korean people in Japan, are Korean speakers language proficiency among the second, third and emerging fourth generations having decreasing contact with Korean culture, continues to decline dramatically. Kan writes: "On the whole, Koreans born in Japan are increasing at a rate of 8% in ten years, so it may not be long before 100% of the Koreans in Japan will be Japan-born". In an attempt to maintain the Korean language and culture and avoid the historical bias against minorities found in the school curriculum in Japanese schools, the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (Chongryun) and the Korean Residents Union (Mindan) run their own highly developed school system. These schools employ a mixed bilingual curriculum Japanese and Korean. The school system operated by the Association includes a four-year university in Tokyo and 153 primary, senior and junior high schools throughout Japan enrolling 40,000 pupils. The Union has 4 schools and 2,000 students. The Japanese government refuses to accredit these schools and therefore pupils are unable to take the entrance examination to national universities. Given this important consideration, 86% of Korean students attend Japanese schools (Raik 1991: 26).

Bilingual Education in Osaka

87% of Korean people in Osaka go to Japanese schools where only Japanese is taught and no provision is made for bilingual education. In fact, to even suggest the possibility of government-sponsored bilingual education for the Korean community in Japan is unthinkable. Full or partial immersion programmes, withdrawal classes or supplementary language programmes for ethnic communities in present-day Bradford or Toronto or Helsinki are as yet inconceivable in Japan. The guiding concept of cultural pluralism which positively welcomes ethnic and linguistic diversity such as the Koreans in Japan hardly exists in Japan. The absence of a social consensus which may support Korean bilingualism in Japan may be attributed to two sets of factors firstly the systematic attempt both in Japan and Korea during the colonial era to eliminate the Korean language and culture, secondly a still-prevalent obsession with racial homogeneity, uniqueness and racial purity and a fear that ethnic diversity will upset the social order.

Among the many socio-political issues which affect the lives of Koreans in Ikuno-ku, one which has increasing profile is the community efforts currently being made to maintain the Korean language. Among the densely populated Ikuno-ku district in Osaka where many Koreans live, seven schools are experimenting with new approaches towards the Korean language. Some prefectural schools in Osaka are starting to establish programmes whereby children learn some basic Korean through simple conversation, songs, games and dance. Higashi Osaka primary school, which I have been looking at closely, is just one of 8 primary schools which offer extracurricular Korean language classes. Forty percent of the 478 pupils at Higashi Osaka are of Korean heritage. The desire to maintain the Korean language as a heritage language exists. A recent survey conducted by Kyoto University of 1,600 Korean parents in Osaka found that 44% of parents believed Korean cultural maintenance necessarily involved education in the Korean language and 40% asserted that language implementation depends upon individual wishes. Only 1.8% said no Korean language education is necessary (Japan Times 1990). Kim Tong Hun, professor of law at Kyoto Ryukoku University, argues for a formal language curriculum established by Ministry of Education: "We were deprived of our language and names while Korea was a colony of Japan. I think ethnic education for Korean children by Japanese authorities would be a first step towards internationalizing the country" (ibid).

In Osaka area as in some other urban areas, there are adult literacy classes (yakan gakko) for the many older Koreans who have never learned to read and write in Japanese. Classes have been established also at community centres to teach basic Korean. These classes are attended by younger Koreans and even by some Japanese. Teaching materials have been specially developed by Japan-born Korean instructors. One such text is Hajimete no Chosen-go (Beginning Korean). The first lessons describe basic pronunciation comparing it with Japanese, the second section deals with a comparison of the Japanese and Korean grammar, the next section practises Korean conversation and the last section introduces the history of contact between Japan and Korea and the situation of the Koreans in Japan. The aim of the book is to teach Korean in the first instance and also to increase awareness about the many shared characteristics between Japanese and Korean. Interestingly, this particular textbook published by the recently established Tokyo Metropolitan Night Schools and The Board for the Promotion of the Korean Language.

Names and Human Rights

The selection and use of names is important issue. Each year almost 8,000 children are born to Korean and Japanese parents. Under the 1985 revision of the Nationality Law children with one Japanese parent born after January 1, 1985 are allowed dual nationality up to the age of 22 but those wishing to register both nationalities must register with a Japanese name only. Paradoxically, under the Nationality Law, however, it does not stipulate that a child has to have a Japanese name in order to obtain Japanese nationality.

According to a 1983 survey of 2,000 Korean and Chinese pupils in Kanagawa Prefecture near Tokyo about 90% said they used a Japanese name at school to avoid verbal and physical abuse. Choi Yung Ok was born in Osaka and at primary school experienced bullying on account of her using her Christian name Lois. When she went to secondary school, the Vice-Principal looking at the Chinese character for her name asked her how she pronounced it. When she said "Choi" he then asked her if the Japanese reading of the name "Sei" would be all right. Teachers would make efforts not to pronounce her name. In the maths class they would avoid the issue by not calling on her to give answers.

Naturalization is a difficult process in Japan. Although it is not clearly written in the law unless you adopt a Japanese name your application for citizenship is likely to be rejected. In 1982, a Vietnamese successfully had his name Tran Din Ton restored after being given a Japanese name. His original name was written in katakana, the angular form of the Japanese syllabary. Since that time, in 1983, 4 members of the Ikuno-ku community requested the Family Court to regain their Korean names they or their parents had changed in order to avoid discrimination. Their requests were initially dismissed. There are two reasons for the rejection. The first is the stability of the language of naming. If a name can be changed easily it creates social confusion. Secondly, nationalism is not an acceptable reason for the changing of names. In 1987, the local Family Court did permit the change of a name from Arai to Pak. The reason for acceptance was twofold. Firstly, the name Pak is socially established and secondly in the Kokuseki Hoo (the Registry of Names) the phrase "Japanese name only") has been eliminated from the administrative guidance on naturalization. Three other people have regained their ethnic names. Of the four children I interviewed all had both Japanese names and Korean names. They switched names according to whom they were talking to. None of them were able to

speak Korean fluently except for one or two basic sentences of greeting. Among the adults all used Korean names.

According to a 1990 survey by the Conference of Education for Foreigners in Osaka and the Osaka Human Rights Study Group, at junior high schools 23% of Korean students use their real names. 52% of children using Japanese names said they did not want to use their real names. In the study conducted above by the Faculty of Education of Kyoto University, 64% of Korean parents have their children use Japanese names. The survey also pointed out that the use of ethnic names has increased since 1979.

The Osaka Identity

It has not been sufficiently emphasized that Japan's largest and most densely-concentrated Korean community is located in the centre of one of the country's most distinctive urban dialect areas. Osaka is at the epicentre of the Kansai region is also the centre of the Western Dialect system. Geographical characteristics have helped to create the East-West division with the political, military and bureaucratic power centred around Tokyo and with commercial, cultural and trading power in Kansai. Tokugawa (1981), a leading dialectologist, says that there are important socio-cultural differences such as eating habits, the shapes of tools and utensils, the consumption of fish, soy beans and other foods. Tokugawa has demonstrated that when food maps are placed beside linguistic maps they correlate very closely.

Let me proceed, therefore, to a conclusion. In my interviews with Koreans in Osaka what is noticeable is that every one of them was a fairly strong Kansai dialect speaker. This may, of course, be simply a coincidence or a reflection of their socio-economic situation as part of the Osakan working class. However, what I noticed was that Osakan Koreans showed a strong bond with the Osaka dialect. No person have I ever heard speak so-called Hyoojungo or Standard Japanese. In the Korea Town food market during buying and selling, Kansai dialect is mixed with Korean. This code-switching was both inter-sentential and intra-sentential. Informants speaking with me did not apparently modify their Kansai dialect at all.

From the viewpoint of the social-psychology of language, it seems to me that for the Korean community of Ikuno-ku, Kansai language has replaced the

Korean language. Korean speakers of Kansai dialect can identify with the strongly distinctive features of a city which is in itself in opposition to Tokyo. Of course, metropolitan Tokyo has its dialects. However, the presence of Tokyo, as the seat of government and bureaucratic power, is symbolized by Standard Japanese (Hyoojungo). The Tokyo government's attempt to remove regional dialects on a Japan nationwide basis after the 1871 Meiji Restoration can be compared to the attempt to eliminate the Korean language and ethnic names from Korea and Japan only a few years later. The efforts to maintain Korean must also be set beside ethnic Koreans affiliation to the Kansai dialect with its strong community ties both to urban Osaka and Ikuno-ku. What is remarkable and requires more investigation is the ethnolinguistic solidarity between Korean language and Kansai dialect.

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