Globalization and Japanese: Online and Off

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This paper discusses the Japanese language in the context of globalization. It examines the presence of Japanese on one of the prime movers of globalization of information, the Internet, concluding that Japanese is for the most part strictly a local player in terms of information technology, and speculates on possible avenues through which Japanese might in the future achieve greater prominence and become recognized as an international language.

Globalization has many definitions, depending on the particular field of interest of the definer. Some focus on economic issues, some on cultural or political; others adopt a wider and more inclusive approach. All, however, stress growth in connectivity as increasingly porous borders permit the passage of ideas, people, money, goods, services, and cultural forms. Media and information technology, in particular, have facilitated a steep increase in the flow of information across national borders.

Sociologist Manuel Castells has argued that it is the contradiction between local identities and global networks that more than anything else shapes international media and communication today. "New electronic media do not depart from traditional cultures," he observes, "they absorb them."[1] In the case of Japanese on the Internet, it is not hard to see that it is the local linguistic identity which wins out in Japan's interactions with this technology. While the availability of Japanese online may have contributed greatly to the globalization of the academic field of Japanese Studies, it has not contributed to the globalization of the language itself, as we shall see. Nor have Japan's economic power, its language promotion activities, and international interest in its popular culture yet led to a position where Japanese can reasonably be called an international language.

Globalization and language

When the term "globalization" is used in relation to language, often interchangeably with the term "internationalization," two particular meanings usually spring to mind. One refers to the influx of foreign loanwords into national languages, which is often held up as a highly visible proof of an increasing internationalization of languages, at least at lexical level. In Japan, concern with the apparently endless adoption of loanwords from other languages (predominantly English) translated in 2002 at Prime Minister Koizumi's request into the formation of a committee at the Kokuritsu Kokugo Kenkyūjo 国立国語研究所 (National Institute for Japanese Language) to provide some suggestions on stemming the flow, particularly as it affected older people who were less likely to understand many of the imports. Following extensive surveys over a four-year period, this group produced four lists of loanwords found to have low comprehension levels along with

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1 Castells 2000, p. 401.

suggested Japanese equivalents. *Anarisuto* アナリスト (analyst), for example, should be replaced with *bunsekika* 分析家, *konsensasu* コンセンサス (consensus) with *gōi* 合意, and *shinkutanku* シンクタンク (thinktank) with *seisaku kenkyū kikan* 政策研究機関, to give just a few examples.[2]

Japan is of course not the only nation to have adopted this stance: most notable among others are France and Russia. The State Duma in Russia in 2003 approved a draft bill defending the Russian language from foreign contamination and prescribing penalties for the use of foreign-derived words where adequate Russian equivalents exist. However, since the drafters of the bill were unable to refrain from using the words they sought to root out, journalists were not impressed and discussion of the proposal was deferred indefinitely.

The second usage of "globalization/internationalization of language," and the one that concerns us in this paper, refers to the process by which particular languages come to function as international languages of wider communication in business, education, and many other fields. The concept of international languages is well entrenched: several languages, for reasons rooted in history, are recognized as such by virtue of the number and spread of their speakers and the number of countries in which they are official or second languages. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recognizes this when it advocates a policy of trilingualism among its 181 member states, recommending that they promote linguistic pluralism such that "when pupils leave school they have a working knowledge of three languages"—their native language, the language of a neighboring country, and an international language—"which should represent the normal range of practical linguistic skills in the twenty-first century."[3]

Nationality joins amicably with globalization in the UNESCO approach to language capabilities, but discussions of globalization sometimes portray the two as locked into an antagonistic binary in linguistic and other terms. Lo Bianco, examining globalization as a frame word for discourses on human capital and other issues, outlines one approach which sees nationality as something transient which will inevitably be overwhelmed by globalization. This view

> assumes that although under the pressures of globalisation multilingualism may remain, language is essentially about communication (not solidarity). In other words, most languages will fade away, minority languages in particular will pass away, and people will be linked by common economic interests. Languages are, by this approach, essentially distractions, remnants of past times when wider communication systems were not possible.[4]

Against this, he juxtaposes alternative views under which nations are seen as "useful, necessary and mostly benign," and national languages provide a sense of identity and belonging.

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2 See Kokuritsu Kokugo Kenkyūjo 2006.
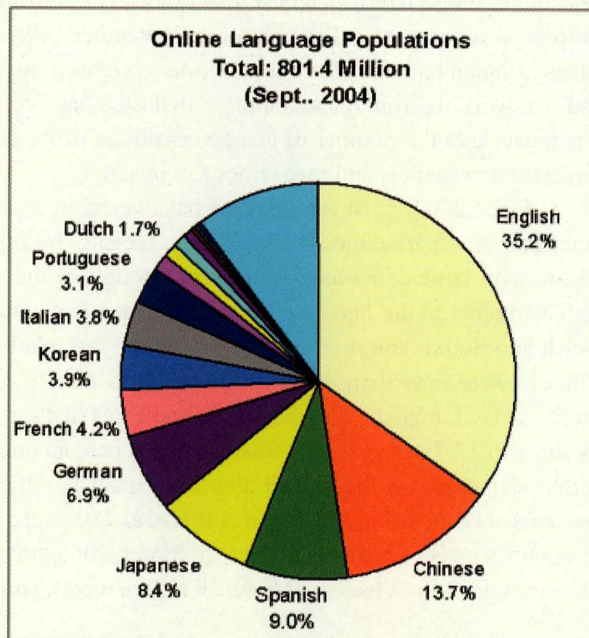3 UNESCO 1999.
4 Lo Bianco 1999, pp. 10–11.

The primacy accorded to economic interest over affective cultural ties in the first approach implies a future wherein only a few languages remain as vehicles of intercultural and international communication and downgrades the emotional significance of first languages to an implausible degree. It ignores the evidence all around us in daily life that communication can occur perfectly well between speakers of different first languages interacting in a language common to them both, i.e. that there is no need to abandon first languages in favor of successful communication in an international or regional language: both can flourish. Strong proponents of the importance of English as a language of globalization include many governments, among them those of Japan, South Korea and China, who naturally evince no interest in abandoning their national languages even as they recognize that English-language skills are an essential part of the profile of a twenty-first century education and portfolio of professional skills. Such governments pour significant amounts of money into ensuring that English is taught well in their countries alongside the national language/languages, not as a replacement. National languages will survive in a globalizing world despite the presence of international languages.

English and other international languages occupy that position as the legacy of imperialism and population flows; in parts of Asia, notably the former Japanese colonies of Taiwan and Korea, the same was once true of Japanese, though over a shorter period of time. Is it possible that the current spread of globalization could in the future make of Japanese, which lacks the wider historical sweep of centuries of colonization/ diaspora, an international language? The remainder of the paper considers this question. The most recent medium for potential diffusion of language internationally, the Internet, is much touted as an icon of globalization; my discussion therefore turns first to the profile of Japanese in cyberspace.

Japanese online

In its initial stages the Internet was seen as likely to increase and entrench the global domination of English, given its North American origins and the fact that in the mid-1990s around 80 percent of web sites were in English. Several years ago, Graddol predicted that although English would remain the major language of the Internet for some time, its stature would eventually decrease to that of just one language amongst

Online Language Populations
Total: 801.4 Million
(Sept.. 2004)

English 35.2%
Chinese 13.7%
Spanish 9.0%
Japanese 8.4%
German 6.9%
French 4.2%
Korean 3.9%
Italian 3.8%
Portuguese 3.1%
Dutch 1.7%

Source: Global Internet Statistics by Language, http://www.glreach. com/globstats/index.php3, accessed 1 June 2006.

many, used in both cyberspace and non-cyberspace alike "in international forums, for the dissemination of scientific and technical knowledge, in advertising, for the promotion of consumer goods and for after-sales services." Email communication would accelerate the use of local languages in cyberspace. The proportion of English on the Internet, Graddol noted, was expected to fall to around 40 percent in the next decade.[5]

This prediction has been borne out. Online English as a share of the total has declined steadily since 1995. The "Global Internet Statistics by Language" website (http://www.glreach.com/globstats/index.php3) calculates that while English speakers still constituted the largest online population in September 2004,[6] their share of the pie was only 35.2 percent (slightly down from 35.5 percent in 2003, and a good drop down from 40.2 percent in March 2002). "Internet Users by Language" (http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats7.htm), last updated 31 March 2006, gives the percentage as 30.6 percent, based on usage data provided by Nielson/Net Ratings, International Telecommunications Union, Computer Industry Almanac, and other sources. While different sampling methods may produce slightly different results, it is clear that the dominance of English on the Internet, at least in terms of ratio of users, is on the wane, even though the functions for which it is used may retain their hold in the prestige domain.

We can see from the diagram above that in late 2004 Japanese was the fourth most widely used language on the Internet. This reflects something of a drop in ranking over the previous three years. By 1998, Japanese had become the third most widely used language on the Internet, after English and Spanish; it soon overtook Spanish to hold the second top spot after English. Japan's take-up of the Internet was comparatively late but very rapid: the source which best illustrates this is a Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications (as it was then called) report in September 1998 showing that the number of web pages in Japan had risen from ten million to eighteen million over a seven-month period, and that working from the assumption that each page contained two thousand characters, this meant that the number of characters online exceeded the total number published in Japanese newspapers and magazines for a year. [7]

Since 2002, however, Chinese has overtaken Japanese as the most used language other than English online, followed more recently by Spanish: both are languages of diaspora with large communities of users throughout the world, unlike Japanese which is spoken mainly in the Japanese homeland with a few communities of heritage speakers in North and South America and Hawaii. While the relative percentages for Japanese and Chinese were only marginally differentiated a couple of years ago, the Global Internet Statistics By Language diagram above indicates that by late 2004 Chinese had increased its share to 13.7 percent, with Spanish at 9.0 percent and Japanese at 8.4 percent. A year earlier, Japanese had been well ahead of Spanish, which despite its greater number of speakers then held only an 8 percent share. The more recent figures published on the Internet Users By Language website in March 2006, however, indicate that Japanese (8.5 percent) maintains a lead over Spanish (7.9 percent), coming in as third after English and

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5 Graddol 2000, p. 61.

6 Latest available figures from this site.

7 Japan MarkeTracker 1998.

Chinese. Whether this indicates an actual change in the proportions since September 2004 or whether it is simply the result of different sampling methods is unclear. Nevertheless, whether its position is third or fourth, Japanese remains near the top of the top ten languages used on the Web.

This relative prominence, however, is due to the availability and uptake of the technology within Japan itself rather than to any putative status of Japanese as an international language. The link between state borders and language remains strong in the case of Japan. The vast majority of Japanese-language pages on the web are accessed by homeland Japanese themselves, more often than not through their cell phones, and by Japanese living abroad. Access by non-Japanese is not frequent, other than by scholars, students of the language, and those savvy enough to have acquired language skills needed in their business or other contacts with Japan. Japanese online therefore has a long way to go before it can be considered a significant player in globalization in terms of outreach beyond Japan itself.

This means that in Japan's case (and that of many others), use of a supposedly borderless technology occurs largely within national boundaries because the language of that nation is not a world language like English, French, Spanish, Chinese or Arabic. Internet contact between Japanese in Japan and people living elsewhere often takes place in English or other languages, sometimes enlisting the aid of not very reliable Internet translation aids. This situation contributed in part to the well-known proposal put forward by an advisory panel to former Prime Minister Obuchi Keizo 小渕恵三 in 2000 which mooted the possible adoption of English as an official second language in the long term. Such a move was stressed as a national "strategic imperative," the argument being that the acquisition of practical English language skills would allow, inter alia, greater communication between Japanese and non-Japanese via the Internet, thereby tacitly acknowledging the fact that Japanese online was a non-starter as a means of international communication. The Internet would bring "many people . . . a direct sense of living in the world even while living in Japan," the report predicted, and increasing the English proficiency of citizens was seen as one of the keys to achieving this.[8]

Japanese online, then, is clearly a local player, without even a particularly strong regional outreach. The one area where this is not true is its application in the area of Japanese Studies around the world, where teachers and students alike benefit from being able to tap into Japanese-language web pages for teaching, learning, and research purposes. Many of today's Japanese as a Foreign Language (JFL) classroom activities incorporate email, chatroom, and Webquest activities using Japanese websites and interaction with school or university partner institutions; such outreach activities foster independent learning and allow easy contact with Japanese students and with authentic Japanese material. Students can readily access information on popular culture, strategies for learning kanji, and most other information needed for their studies. Researchers around the world rejoice at being able to log into Japanese government, newspaper, and other sites and to search Japanese-language databases and library catalogues from their office, home or just about anywhere else they choose where the technology is available. Even the importance of

8 Prime Minister's Commission 2000.

fieldtrips to Japan, once so essential for research based on interviews, has now in theory decreased to a certain extent, given the ready availability of email and the ease of electronically writing in Japanese. Although nothing really replaces face to face contact and discussion, collaborative research in many fields has potentially become as simple as sending an attachment and discussing it by email. For teachers, students and researchers, then, online Japanese has a global outreach which far outstrips the uptake of the language outside those fields, as one would expect. This is, however, the only area for which this claim can be made.

Japanese offline: some possible avenues to globalization

Were Japanese to become a globally significant language, the consequences would be evident in many ways other than on the Internet. Student numbers in public and private language-learning institutions would soar as Japanese began to function more as a lingua franca alongside English both in the region and the rest of the world. Native speakers would welcome the accompanying boost to national pride and prestige as well as experiencing increased confidence in being able to make themselves understood during travel and study abroad. A falling off in the urgency of English-language promotion within Japan could occur. Trade and other negotiations could no longer use language barriers to obscure or explain difficulties. The influence of Japan's pop cultural icons would spread even further than it already has. And Japanese-language pages on the Internet would no longer be accessed by Japanese people alone: the present tension between a global network and local identities would blur, though never fade entirely.

Is there a realistic prospect that this could be achieved? And if so, by what means? What, indeed, makes a language a world language today? Crystal has suggested the number of its speakers and the military power of its users as criteria,[9] a view which Graddol sees as too narrow. He proposes an "engco model" instead which

> weights languages not only by the number and wealth of their speakers, but also by the likelihood that these speakers will enter social networks which extend beyond their locality: they are the people with the wherewithal and ambition to 'go about' in the world, influence it and to have others seek to influence them.[10]

On the basis of projections generated by this model, he speculated in 2000, Spanish would rise quickly but the nearest rivals to English in the table—German, French, and Japanese —would grow much more slowly. Japanese ranked fourth on his 2000 table of "global influence of major languages according to the engco model," with a score of thirty-two, where one hundred represents the position of English in 1995.

Over the last two decades increasing numbers of Japanese people have had both the "wherewithal and ambition" to travel overseas, either for study, tourism, working holidays or long-term employment. The number of people studying Japanese overseas also continues to increase, as Japan Foundation statistics show (2.3 million officially enrolled

9 Crystal 1997a, p. 7.
10 Graddol 2000, p. 59.

in language courses at the time of the 2003 survey).[11] And yet the language remains not particularly visible outside certain well defined spheres. Different trajectories to increased international prominence might include having Japanese accepted as an official language of the United Nations, in general achieving greater take-up of the language outside Japan itself, getting native speakers to accept from others Japanese which is not necessarily perfectly accurate but which successfully achieves the speakers' communication goals, and the perennial chestnut of adopting the western alphabet in place of Japan's current orthography. But how realistic are these suggestions? We will consider each in turn.

The United Nations

Were Japanese to be accepted as an official language of the United Nations, something for which Japan has been unsuccessfully pushing for some time, its international prominence would undoubtedly increase. In the late 1980s the question of whether Japanese should be added to the other official languages (English, French, Spanish, Chinese, Russian and Arabic) in view of the size of the Japanese monetary contribution to the UN was raised but not resolved. The item was still on the agenda of Japan's Kokugo Shingikai 国語審議会 (National Language Council) at the time of its 1995 report, which listed the promotion of Japanese as a language to be used at international meetings and conferences as an important means of reflecting Japan's standing in the world and again flagged the issue of the UN.[12] The Council later noted approvingly that if Japanese were made an official language all treaties would automatically be produced in Japanese as well;[13] and a report from a 1998 Bunkachō 文化庁 (Agency of Cultural Affairs) meeting stressed that adoption as an official language of the UN was essential for Japanese to become an international language and would greatly increase both the employment prospects of graduate students and the number of foreign students studying in Japan.[14] Outside government circles, well known sociolinguist Suzuki Takao 鈴木孝夫 addressed this matter in a 1999 book *Nihongo wa Kokusaigo ni nariuru ka* 日本語は国際語になりうるか (Can Japanese become an International Language?), asserting that Japanese should be promoted as a world language for intellectual exchange and that the push to make Japanese an official language of the UN has been ignored.

Achieving an increase in the number of official UN languages, however, is no easy task, given the infrastructure of interpreting and translation which a multi-language system entails. Arguments have been made for Hindi, Portuguese, and other languages as well as Japanese, and advocates of Esperanto, described by Glossop as "a global ethnically neutral language,"[15] still point in vain to the cost of UN interpreting into the existing official languages which the use of Esperanto as a common language could avoid. Arabic was added as the sixth official language in 1973 because it is widely spoken (220 million people), has extensive political significance as the official language of over twenty

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11 See Japan Foundation 2003.
12 Kokugo Shingikai 1995, pp. 449–450.
13 Kokugo Shingikai 1999.
14 Noyama 1998.
15 Glossop 2001, p. 216.

countries, and is very important in cultural and religious terms. The vast majority of native speakers of Japanese, however, reside in Japan itself, where in 2004 the population was 127.7 million, small beans by comparison. Japanese, therefore, while significant in economic and cultural terms, is restricted in political impact by not having a wide geographical spread of native and secondary speakers. If UN official languages are chosen because they are the most widely spoken, that puts Japan into a chicken and egg situation: Japanese would only become more widely spoken, perhaps, as a consequence of being chosen as one of the official languages, but could not be chosen because it is not already widely spoken.

Wider use outside Japan

For Japanese to become an international language, therefore, greater uptake of the language by secondary speakers outside Japan itself would be necessary. The 1997 edition of David Crystal's *Cambridge Encylopedia of Language* listed Japanese in ninth place in a list of the top forty languages, with 124 million mother-tongue speakers.[16] The number of non-native speakers has increased since the 1980s due to the language promotion activities of the Japan Foundation and of governments which have devoted policy support and funding to increasing the number of people learning Japanese in their countries. The number of overseas learners of Japanese worldwide more than doubled between 1988 and 1993; as we saw earlier, by the time of the Japan Foundation survey in 2003, 2.3 million were enrolled in language courses, with many more than that predicted to be studying informally. Much of this increase, however, including the late 1980s rush of enrolments, was predicated on Japan's status as an economic superpower, which meant that the primary motivation for studying Japanese during that period may have been job-related rather than intrinsic curiosity in many cases. Japan's subsequent recession saw a drop in student numbers, although numbers remained high above those of the 1970s.

The number of secondary speakers of Japanese is not easy to estimate, given that Japanese is not designated an official language in any other country. Weber lists the number of secondary speakers (defined as those who use the language regularly or primarily even though it is not their native language) as eight million. Going by his definition, this figure is unlikely to include the 2.3 million students identified by the Japan Foundation survey, but even adding them only brings the total of secondary speakers to 10.3 million, compared to 190 million secondary speakers of French, 150 million secondary speakers of English, and 125 million secondary speakers of Russian. On the list of languages ranked in terms of the number of countries where each is spoken, Japanese comes in at number eleven, with only one country listed, compared to English (115), French (thirty-five), Arabic (twenty-four), Spanish (twenty), and Russian (sixteen).

Combining his various lists, Weber lists Japanese eighth in a list of the world's most influential languages, based on the following six criteria: number of primary speakers; number of secondary speakers; number and population of countries where used; number of major fields using the language internationally; economic power of countries using the

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16 Crystal 1997b, p. 289.

languages; and socio-literary prestige. The total number of points Japanese scores across these categories is ten, compared with English (thirty-seven), French (twenty-three), and Spanish (twenty).[17] From this it is clear that a strong economy alone does not guarantee international uptake of a language.

Today the language promotion activities of the Japan Foundation, the worldwide appeal of Japanese popular culture (particularly strong in parts of Asia), and the grass-roots connections made by hundreds and thousands of people who form personal connections with Japan through working holidays and similar activities seem the best hope for increasing the international profile of the Japanese language. It is completely unrealistic, however, to think that those factors will suffice to bring it to a level which matches that of languages which have had centuries of exposure through colonialism and diaspora. The advances made through these steps can only be incremental at best.

When "perfection" impedes: native-speaker attitudes to non-native speakers

The speakers of an international language must accustom themselves to hearing others speak and write versions of that language which are not identical to the so-called "pure" version of the originating country, as the World Englishes movement attests. Ownership of English, in other words, lies no longer with the British but has percolated throughout the world to include those places where English has been an official or second language. Local variations widely accepted in their place of origin thus have just as much claim to being acceptable varieties of English as the versions used in Whitehall or Yorkshire: they are part of a family of Englishes, each with its own distinctive characteristics yet all performing the primary function of communication. Coming to accept this reality and being prepared to accept different usages without prejudice has been and continues to be one of the most difficult tasks for native speakers of an international language in its country of origin.

This is just as true for Japanese as for English, particularly given entrenched attitudes to Japanese language in Japan itself. The ethnocentrist Nihonjinron 日本人論 literature (theories of what it is to be Japanese) so influential in both Japanese and non-Japanese thinking about Japan from the 1960s to the 1990s tied race, culture, and language together in its stress on the language as belonging to Japanese alone and being too difficult for non-Japanese to master. In order for Japanese to become an international language, this mindset would need to change in the direction of "World Japaneses," just as in the case of World Englishes. It would be counter-productive for native speakers to expect non-native speakers to speak the same kind of Japanese as they themselves do (or are supposed to, in the ideal formulation, although in practice this never happens).

I am not talking here about the further promotion of the language overseas by the Japan Foundation but rather about the willingness of native speakers to cede a stake in "ownership" of Japanese by those who learn it as a second or foreign language: in other words, to recognize that it is communication that is important and not perfect reproduction of the way Japanese is used in Japan. A few government reports have discussed how

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17 Weber 1997.

to internationalize the language, but only in very general terms which skirt around this aspect. A 2000 report from the Kokugo Shingikai, *Kokusai Shakai ni okeru Nihongo no Arikata* 国際社会における日本語のあり方 (The Ideal State of Japanese in International Society), for example, defined the internationalization of Japanese in two ways: having the use of Japanese spread by achieving recognition of the value of the language to more people around the world, and having the way that Japanese is used become more suited to international communication. The strategies suggested, couched in very vague mother-hood statements, were to use the language to promote knowledge of Japan through the Japanese language itself rather than through other languages; to provide finely tuned and needs-based support for learners; and to clarify what needs to be done to make Japanese an instrument suited to international communication. Globalization-induced structural changes in the world, the report noted, were bringing about changes in the relationships between languages and the roles each language played, with English currently dominant, both as a language of wider communication and on the Internet. Within this framework, positive steps were needed to promote the use of Japanese overseas as well as fostering its proper use at home. So far so good, although immediately after that the Kokugo Shingikai was dissolved during an administrative reshuffle and replaced with the Kokugo Bunkakai 国語分科会 (National Language Subcommittee) of the new Bunka Shingikai 文化審議会 (Cultural Affairs Committee), which has to date shown no interest in pursuing this further.

Although this report demonstrates awareness of the issue of Japanese on the international stage, what is really needed in addition to general strategies is, as discussed above, a different mindset in relation to the use of Japanese by non-native speakers. Katō Hidetoshi 加藤秀俊, former Director of the Japan Foundation's Urawa Language Institute, confronts this head-on in his book *Nihongo no Kaikoku* 日本語の開国 (The Globalization of Japanese). Katō estimates the total number of learners of Japanese worldwide at the time of writing to be around five million, given that the 1998 survey figure of two million refers only to those studying at that time and does not take into account those who had figured in earlier surveys. Once people studying informally or learning to speak on an experiential basis are also factored in, perhaps a total of ten million people are now able to speak Japanese as a foreign language.

Given these figures, Katō suggests, and the fact that Japanese has progressed from being the preserve fifty years ago of a small and select group of scholars to the point where it is now offered as a language elective in schools (including down to primary schools) in many countries, it is time to take a good look at the language. The role and position of Japanese in the world has changed completely: it is no longer a minority language spoken only by those born and raised in Japan, and a re-evaluation of old beliefs is therefore in order.

In much the same way that Phillipson draws a distinction between English as a globalizing language and global English,[18] which exists only as an abstraction, Katō argues that native speakers of Japanese must concentrate not on the mistakes made by non-native speakers but rather on the communication event taking place. Not even native speakers themselves adhere to a consistent ideal standard of perfection in their use of Japanese.[19]

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18 Phillipson 2002, p. 7.

In Katō's view, it is the native speaker, easily able to infer what is meant from the context regardless of grammatical inaccuracies, who holds ultimate responsibility for successful communication, not the non-native speaker. Given that local Englishes are replete with differences from the UK or US version and yet are tolerated, the Japanese propensity to focus on small mistakes will make it difficult to for them to develop a view of Japanese as a world language subject to local appropriations, and this needs to change.[20]

Such a change, of course, is easier recommended than accomplished. A native speaker's sense of ownership of his or her language is not particularly tested by ordinary everyday encounters with second-language speakers of the language; the native speaker expects and accepts that mistakes will occur, indeed are natural, and tailors the communication act accordingly. It is a much bigger leap, however, to regard the non-standard use of Japanese by other speakers not as in some way aberrant but as equal to the home variety of the language.

Romanization

And finally, discussions of the position of Japanese in the world often canvas the perennial question of whether the uptake of Japanese would increase were Japan to adopt romanized script instead of its present character-based writing system. Romanization advocates both within and outside Japan have been arguing for this outcome since the Meiji period on a variety of platforms ranging from educational convenience to technological imperatives.[21] Technological objections have to date been successfully countered by the invention of character-capable input and output which enabled Japanese-language word processing of documents and, eventually, Internet pages. The success of this technology did not, however, put an end to arguments by Japanese scholars such as Yamada Hisao 山田尚勇, former director of NACSIS, and Western scholars such as Unger and Hannas to the effect that before Japanese could become a successful global player online it would need to abandon characters in favor of the alphabet. Yamada consistently argues that the use of characters prevents completely satisfactory communication between computers at international level, despite the adoption of the Unicode and other systems;[22] Hannas posits that the performance gap in terms of speed, applications, storage, retrieval and input between computers using alphanumeric systems and those using characters is such that it is only a matter of time before East Asian language users rebel and romanize.[23] It remains to be seen, however, whether in the future the wider adoption of voice recognition technology for electronic text production will render those arguments superfluous.

Remaining in the present, however: it *is* undeniably faster for an experienced user to type in the alphabet than it is to input Japanese, in a variety of ways. What would be lost by switching to the alphabet, however, is probably much greater than what would be

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19 The issue of the myths and realities surrounding the status of native speakers has been widely discussed in applied linguistics (see, e.g., Davies 2003).

20 Katō 2000, pp. 10–17.

21 See, e.g., Twine 1991, Gottlieb 2000, and Unger 1987 and 1996 for details.

22 Yamada 1994.

23 Hannas 1997.

gained. Hannas' argument does not take into consideration the infrastructure consider-
ations of a move towards romanization in a highly industrialized, highly literate society
such as Japan. The implications for education and the publishing industries in particular
are such that this will not happen, especially when combined with the likely affective or
emotional resistance to such a change. Whether making the Japanese orthography more
accessible (always assuming that the language itself was in fact thus rendered more acces-
sible) would increase the stature of Japanese on the international scene is also moot, given
the issues of spread of speakers and cultural diffusion discussed above.

The influence of kanji on international perceptions of Japanese cannot, however,
be dismissed as negligible. Katō Hidetoshi observes that having to learn two to three thou-
sand kanji contributes to the perception of Japanese as being too difficult, discourages
people from studying the language, and indeed may be used as an argument against doing
so by student advisors. Noting that the development of kanji-capable word processing
capability has contributed to an increase in the numbers of characters used in documents,
Katō accuses the developers of the kana-kanji conversion facility of a grave cultural crime
against Japanese, in that even his voice recognition software, let alone his keyboard con-
version software, throws up an unacceptably large number of kanji at first call.[24] While
he does not, of course, argue for the abolition of kanji, he does see their proliferation as
a major factor impeding the use of Japanese as a global language. Alfonso, too, earlier
predicted that were Japanese to become an international language there would be increas-
ing pressure for a simplification of the writing system.[25] The Japanese orthography, then,
remains in some views an obstacle to the further spread of the language outside Japan.

In sum: globalization cannot be shown to have had a significant effect on the inter-
national standing of the Japanese language except in those minor ways indicated above.
We are still, however, in the (comparatively) early stages of globalization as a current
world paradigm. Should international convergence increase as the dominant method of
interaction (and that is by no means certain), then further years of amplified two-way
flows on a variety of fronts ought in theory to contribute to the spread of Japanese over-
seas. Until the language is widely spoken outside the borders of Japan, however, and until
its prestige factor has increased, it is likely to remain primarily a local player rather than
a major force on the international scene.

24 Katō 2000, pp. 22–25.
25 Alfonso 1989, p. 76.

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