

Changing the Name of the Society of Japanese Linguistics: From Kokugo Gakkai to Nihongo Gakkai

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Introduction

The board of the Society of Japanese Linguistics conducted a vote regarding the change of the name of the Society from Kokugo Gakkai 国語学会 to Nihongo Gakkai 日本語学会 in January 2003. The result was as follows:

All votes	1170
Agree	776 (66.3%)
Disagree	367 (31.4%)
Blank ballots	7
Invalid	20

Thus the name change was approved by the majority of the members of the Society of the Japanese Linguistics. The new name Nihongo Gakkai will be in use from 2004 when the Society commemorates its sixtieth anniversary. As a linguist residing in Japan, I am quite surprised by this decision although I am not a member of this Society being a member of the Linguistic Society of Japan. Why did the board members suggest the vote for the name change? And why did the members of this Society agree with this proposal? Is it an impact of globalization? Or is it nothing but an old bottle with a new label? In this paper I will try to analyze the reasons why the Society of Japanese Linguistics decided to adopt this new name.

1. The beginning

The 1997 annual meeting of the Society of Japanese Linguistics was held at the University of Yamagata. At that meeting the board distributed a questionnaire on the management of the Society of Japanese Linguistics including the proposal of the name change. There were only 152 responses. Interestingly enough, 75% of all scholars who filled in the questionnaire, indicated their intention to keep the current name, Kokugo Gakkai. But the board members were resolved to have another look at this issue. According to the board report, the questionnaire contained a space for free response, where twenty-seven members strongly objected to the present name Kokugo Gakkai, because the word “*kokugo*” (national language) means not Japanese but their own national language for foreigner. In addition to the ambiguity of the name *Kokugo*, the Japanese language is not a study object exclusively for Japanese scholars alone, many foreigners are members of Kokugo Gakkai.

It seems very strange to me that just twenty-seven members of 152 objected to the usage of name Kokugo Gakkai and the 75% of 152 supported the same name Kokugo Gakkai in 1997. But only six years later, in 2003, as I have just demonstrated above, almost two thirds of the 1170 members consented to the proposal to change the name of the Society of the Japanese Linguistics, from Kokugo Gakkai to Nihongo Gakkai. Why did the board of the Society of Japanese Linguistics conduct the vote for changing the name in the first place? And why did the members of the Society of Japanese Linguistics agree to the proposal?

2. Background

I think that we should take into consideration a socio-political background of this situation. According to my observations, there are at least three main forces working in this background. The first one is the adverse reaction to the term *koku* or *kuni* (meaning “nation” or “national”) after the Second World War in Japan. The second one may be attributed to the influence of renaming the name from the Japanese Society of Ethnology (Nihon Minzoku Gakkai 日本民族学会) as the Japanese Society of Cultural Anthropology (Nihon Bunka Jinruigakkai 日本文化人類学会). Finally, the third one may be due to the practical reason that universities in Japan are accepting many foreign students, mainly from other Asian countries.

It is well-known that Japan was called the Empire of Great Japan (Dai Nippon Teikoku 大日本帝国) before the end of Second World War. At that time the official academic name in Japanese for Japanese history was *kokushi* “national history.” *Kokushi* was based on the Emperor-centric view of history (*kōkoku shikan* 皇国史観). After the Second World War, Japan became a democratic country. In the heyday of the democratic enthusiasm, the basic view of history was changed from the Emperor-centric to the people-centric (*minshū shikan* 民衆史観 or *jinmin shikan* 人民史観) apparently under the impact of Marxist ideas. Therefore, it was very natural that the term *kokushi* “national history” had been changed to a new democratic and neutral term *nihonshi* “Japanese history.” But this terminological change in the field of history had no impact on philology as the terms *kokugo* (national language) and *kokubungaku* “National Literature,” were still in use during the decade immediately following the Second World War (1945–54).

As far as the term *kokugo* is concerned, Kamei Takashi 亀井孝, who was one of the leading Japanese linguists in the twentieth century, already suggested the term Nihongo gaku instead of *kokugogaku* in 1938. However, nobody took his proposal seriously at the time. But in 1996 Lee Yeounsuk イ・ヨンスク, who was a student of Kamei at Hitotsubashi University, presented a historical analysis of the term *kokugo*, which was introduced by Ueda Kazutoshi 上田万年 as the only acceptable designation of the standard Japanese language around 1900. It is very important to note that the negative aspects of the term or concept of *kokugo* have been emphasized by several scholars such as Yasuda Toshiaki 安田敏朗, Osa Shizue 長志珠絵 and Komori Yoichi 小森陽一, as well as Lee Yeounsuk イ・ヨンスク, since the mid 1990s. It is quite apparent that their publications had a strong influence on the members of the Society of Japanese Linguistics.

I would like to suggest that there was also another reason for changing the name

of the Society of Japanese Linguistics. A precedent for a change of a name for an academic society in Japan has already been previously created by the board members of the Japanese Society of Ethnology under the leadership of Aoki Tamotsu 青木保 who was the chairperson of that society in 1994. His proposal involved the name change from the Japanese Society of Ethnology (Nihon Minzoku Gakkai) to the Japanese Society of Cultural Anthropology (Nihon Bunka Jinrui Gakkai). Although almost all the board members agreed with this proposal, they decided it was necessary to obtain support from the members of the Society. But the members did not accept this proposal. Thus in 1997 the board decided that the name change should be postponed until the more appropriate occasion. However, this occasion occurred just four years later. Namihira Emiko 波平恵美子, the chairperson of the Japanese Society of Ethnology at this time, has again proposed the name change in 2001 due to the drastic changes in the higher education system in Japan; namely, the introduction of agency system (*hōjinka*) of national universities and the priority given to the top-thirty universities in the budget, etc. At this time, the members of the Japanese Society of Ethnology accepted the name change with the 573 votes in favor out of 648 (88.4%) although only 30% of the members voted. Eventually the new name, the Japanese Society of Cultural Anthropology, started to be used from April 2004. The process of the name change for the Japanese Society of Ethnology was almost simultaneous with the similar case at the Society of Japanese Linguistics, although their backgrounds are slightly different. However, it seems to me that the same motivation was hidden behind the name change process in both cases. It has been done, I think, under the external pressure.

In my opinion, the above-mentioned external pressure towards the name change has been the most influential and crucial for members of the Society of Japanese Linguistics. Apart from the reaction against the ideological bias of the term *kokugo*, as I have already pointed out, there is a practical reason against the term *kokugo*. There have been many foreign students mainly from Asian countries enrolled at Japanese universities since 1990s. For foreigners, the term *kokugo* “national language” is ambiguous, because the *kokugo* for Korean students means the Korean language, and for Chinese students it means the Chinese language. It is significant that the names for the Japanese language departments at universities around Japan have a clear tendency to be changed from Kokugo Gakka 国語学科 (Department of National Language) to Nihongo Gakka 日本語学科 (Department of Japanese Language). I present below the following statistics:

	Kokugo Gakka	Nihongo Gakka
1992	65 universities (66%)	34 universities (34%)
2002	29 universities (28%)	74 universities (72%)

This trend is different from the name change from *kokushi* to *nihonshi*, which is based on the internal motivation in the heyday of democracy in the postwar years. In other words, it is due to an external factor. Therefore, we may consider this kind of change to be a result of the globalization impact, which is the main theme of this symposium.

3. The debate

The starting point for the name change, as I have mentioned above, was the annual meeting in 1997. There was a long discussion on this issue in the Journal of the Society of Japanese Linguistics, *kokugogaku*, since 1999. It seems to me that there are two main issues which are closely related with each other. First, is *kokugogaku* identical to *nihongogaku*? And second, can *nihongogaku* be used as the comprehensive term for the Japanese language studies instead of *kokugogaku*?

Generally speaking, *kokugogaku* is, on the one hand, a philological and diachronic study of the Japanese language; e.g., a study of the Japanese language in the Nara period or Heian period. On the other hand, *nihongogaku* is a descriptive and synchronic study of the Japanese language; e.g. a study on the usage and difference between the particle WA and GA in Modern Japanese. Shibata Takeshi 柴田武, Professor Emeritus of the University of Tokyo, who conducted research mainly on the Japanese dialectology, suggested the need for two different organizations; i.e., one for Japanese Linguistics and the other for Japanese Philology. I personally supported his suggestion as a rational solution to this problem. But the members of the Society of Japanese Linguistics have never accepted this suggestion because of the decline in numbers of Japanese philologists.

For the ordinary Japanese people, *kokugo* is an essential subject in primary school, middle school and high school. Therefore, the ordinary Japanese people feel the difference between *kokugo* for a Japanese student and *nihongo* for a foreign student. This attitude still remains largely unchanged. I have never heard that the board member of the Society of Japanese Linguistics advocates a change of name from *kokugo* to *nihongo* in the primary and secondary levels of education in Japan. Although this situation continues in the Japanese educational system, the members of the Society of Japanese Linguistics chose the term Nihongo Gakkai. It seems to me that the members succumbed to the international Globalization pressure.

4. Conclusion

During the process of globalization, the principle of competition has been introduced to academe. According to this principle, the academic field in which the number of scholars declines should be either eliminated or merged into the more comprehensive study field. As a result, changing names of universities, faculties and departments occurred frequently in the Western countries. For example, in Australia, departments of Japanese Studies were merged either with departments of East Asian Studies or with departments of Asian Studies. Nobody can stop this current trend in academe, and Japan is no exception to this general rule of development.

I think that the members of the Society of Japanese Linguistics including board members clearly understand the contrast between *kokugo* and *nihongo*, and the differences between *kokugogaku* and *nihongogaku*. But none of them wanted to split the present Japanese society into two parts. Furthermore, all members also realize the negative aspect of the term *kokugogaku* in the historical perspective. If one supports strongly the term *kokugogaku*, the other members, especially comparatively young members who

were born after the end of Second World War, would consider this person as an ultra-conservative and even an imperialist. Moreover, the private universities are actively recruiting foreign students in order to survive in the era of the declining population of eighteen years old in Japan who would be prospective students. Under these circumstances the members did not want to demonstrate their overt support for *kokugogaku*. Therefore, there was no alternative choice—and this is my inevitable conclusion.

What is the next target? It is likely understandable that the next target will be *kokubungaku* “Japanese Literature.” Can you imagine that the name change from Kokubun Gakkai to Nihonbun Gakkai would also occur in the near future?

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APPENDIX

(1) The results of the board members' vote in December 20, 2002 are provided here. There are altogether 50 board members of Kokugo Gakkai. The board's decision to conduct a vote was made on November 9, 2002.

Vote	48
Agree	35 (70%)
Disagree	11 (22%)
Other	2
Non-voter	2

(2) A chart showing the chronology of name change by the Japanese Society of Ethnology (JSE). 1994 The chairperson, Tamotsu Aoki proposed the name change at the board meeting. November 1994. The first vote for name change has been conducted. The result was as following:

All votes	876
Agree	632 (72%)
Disagree	131 (15%)
No decision	113 (13%)

October 1995. In the special meeting of JSE dedicated for the name change, Mitsuo Nakamura 中村光男, Professor of the Chiba University at that time, proposed the suspension of voting until the planning committee for future of JSE would be set up and pursue a solution for this problem. Nakamura proposal was approved by the member's vote 147 out of 249.

February 1997. The planning committee for future has conducted a vote regarding the name change. The result was as following:

All votes	670
NIHON MINZOKU GAKKAI 日本民族学会	244 (36.4%)
NIHON BUNKA JINRUI GAKKAI 日本文化人類学会	243 (36.3%)
NIHON MINZOKUGAKU-BUNKAJINRUIGAKKAI 日本民族学文化人類学会	103 (15.4%)
NIHON-SHAKAIBUNKAJINRUIGAKKAI 日本社会文化人類学会	43 (6.4%)
Others	37 (5.5%)

According to this result, the name change was not approved.

February 2003. The board of JSE conducted a vote for name change again. The result was as following:

All votes	594
NIHON-BUNKAJINRUIGAKKAI 日本文化人類学会	343
BUNKAJINRUIGAKKAI 文化人類学会	141
BUNKAJINRUIGAKU-MINZOKUGAKKAI 文化人類学民族学会	74
Others	29
Blank ballots	7

Consequently, the members of JSE approved the name change at the annual meeting in May 2003, as I mentioned above.

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