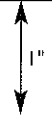


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*Keyword running
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Running head: JAPANESE: LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY

Title

Japanese: Linguistic Diversity

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Abstract

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With ancient Asian roots and contemporary European influences, the Japanese language has continued to change and to reflect cultural change as well. Japanese has developed a sophisticated structure full of honorifics and gender-specific terms that express the respect required within the society. It also has heavily borrowed words that reflect the society's technological adaptation. Despite the complexity of a language that contains two alphabets and continuously incorporates foreign words, many steps during the last century have helped those whose disabilities keep them at odds with language. In such ways, the history of the language remains the history of the country, its culture, and its people.

Main ideas summed up in no more than 120 words

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Title, centered

Japanese: Linguistic Diversity

Japanese, like any other language, has continued to develop for centuries. New vocabulary, pronunciation, spellings, and dialects increasingly flourish in Japanese. In addition, Japanese has developed honorifics and gender-specific terms to express the respect required within the society and has borrowed words to respond to technological innovation from the outside. During the last hundred years, other changes have begun to help those with disabilities that affect language facility.

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Specific page noted

Japanese is rooted in the archaic languages found throughout Asia (Hall, 1968), derived from at least two of the three sections of Mongoloid languages. The linguistic patterns of the Altaic languages, formed in the northern regions of Asia, can still be seen in Japanese. In addition, the origin of Japanese may also lie in the Malay languages which include native Australian and Polynesian (Hall). Similarities between Japanese and both Korean and Polynesian include sentence structure, pronunciation, and classic vocabulary for body parts and nature (Komatsu, 1962). Despite their variety, these archaic languages are not the only ones to influence modern Japanese.

Systems for Written Language

Although Korean is most closely related to Japanese today, Chinese has had the most influence in the development of the written language. China had a written language as early as 4000 BCE (Komatsu, 1962, p. 47) and began keeping written records regarding Japan around the 3rd century. The Japanese continued these Chinese records through the 8th century as they developed their own official written language, Manyo-kana, whose sole purpose was to give already used Chinese characters Japanese meanings (Komatsu).

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Because common people were not educated enough to read Chinese, by the 9th century the Japanese had developed two writing systems and also continued the use of Chinese characters. Hira-kana, consisting of more than 40 characters, was originally for writing Japanese poetry because of its attractive lettering. Kata-kana, a separate system with an equivalent letter for each in hira-kana, was used for transcribing Chinese words that had no Japanese equivalent (Komatsu, 1962). As the two writing systems developed, hira-kana began to be used for writing any native Japanese words and kata-kana for any non-Japanese words (Komatsu). This dual writing system allowed more people to read Chinese characters, otherwise known as kanji, and to write on their own.

Both writing systems consist of more than 40 sounds with 27 consonants and 5 vowels (Komatsu, 1962). Words are composed of one or more combinations of consonant and vowel; however, a word never ends on a consonant (Komatsu). Sentence elements are divided by particles, single hira-kana designated as position markers such as *in* or *at*. These particles are also used in the honorific structure of the language (Komatsu), which reflects the respect required within the society.

Expressions of Respect

Both honorifics and women's language convey respect, yet both have recently evolved to express insults and sarcasm through overly polite language.

Honorifics

The extremely complex system of honorifics in Japanese uses prefixes, suffixes, and dual vocabulary to convey different levels of politeness in speech. While, in English, one is taught to say "please" and call a friend's parent "Mr." or "Mrs." So-and-so, the

Numbers in figures if 10 or above and if grouped with others in figures

First-level heading, centered

Second-level heading, italicized at margin

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Japanese have different familial terms for anyone else's family. A prefix of "O" to begin a name or verb deepens the respect and appreciation for the person spoken to. Another way to imply more respect is to end a statement with a formal "masu" verb suffix (Komatsu, 1962). These extensive honorifics must be used when talking to a person who is older than oneself, better educated, or not well acquainted (Okamoto, 2002). Such people include one's parents, parents of others (with their own honorific names), teachers, family friends, and people one meets on the train. In all other situations, such as speaking to close friends, younger people, and students, honorifics are not necessary.

With its concern for politeness and respect, Japanese includes few insults or ill-mannered statements. Surprisingly, in the last several decades, excessive use of honorifics and overly polite speech has been commonly perceived as sarcasm, insults, or insincerity (Kristof, 1995; Okamoto, 2002). This overuse of politeness is also seen in what is called "women's language."

Women's Language

Japanese women are taught at an early age that they are female, not male. Beginning in kindergarten, young girls are told to use a softer, less insistent version of the language. This development, however, is not new. The use of extreme politeness by women is a traditional part of the Japanese heritage, documented as far back as AD 400 (Inoue, 2002). It stems from the belief that men and women were cosmologically created differently and thus used different forms of language. Soft-spoken women used subtler particles and more feminine forms of words (Abe, 1995). In written language, women used far more hira-kana than men in order to avoid harsh Chinese words (Komatsu, 1962).

Multiple citations grouped in alphabetical order

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Not only does women's speech differ from men's in terms of vocabulary, but in phonology, syntax, and pitch (Inoue, 2002). Certain words are considered feminine, usually referring to household items and jobs. However, women's language extends beyond this, making it nearly impossible for a woman to utter an insult or to make a definitive statement. Mostly, women ask implying questions, which men are able to confirm, instead of making direct statements (Rudolph, 1991). This unique form of speech also affects the way that women are viewed in society, often putting them in a negative light, seen as weak and uneducated (Abe, 1995).

The history of women's speech is just as intriguing as its modern use. During the 13th century, as Buddhism challenged the Shinto religion, women's language was used to avoid Buddhist terms in and near Shinto temples (Abe, 1995). As religious perspectives shifted, women's language, or lack of language, expanded as well. Eventually, this dialect avoided all antagonistic and dishonorable words, leaving women with a submissive and self-degrading vocabulary (Abe). During the Meiji restoration, when Japan opened its gates to outside influence after centuries of seclusion, women received a secondary education. However, instead of learning mathematics and science, they were taught under the "good wife, wise mother" strategy (Abe). Writings from this time portray quiet, obedient housewives and sturdy, pleasant mothers, images that have consistently represented women for decades.

Nevertheless, contemporary women are beginning to dispose of these binding language formalities. As more and more women take on official roles in society, the "good wife, wise mother" foundation is starting to crack. Young women are beginning to use less formal structures when speaking with close friends and

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family (Rudolph, 1991). Inoue (2002) says that more women see and hear women's language on television and in magazines than actually speak it. As the effects of this language are seen more clearly, this demeaning form of speech is being modified, and usage has begun to decline.

Borrowed Words

The Japanese have had their own independent language for thousands of years, but as in any language, an influx of technology leads to a necessity for new words. Influences on Japanese at the time of its earliest development included Chinese, Korean, and Sanskrit (Tomoda, 1999). But the borrowing of words did not stop there. In fact, the Japanese have borrowed so many words that the kata-kana writing system is a designated alphabet just for spelling words from other languages.

All of the words borrowed from other languages, except Chinese, are known as *gairaigo*. *Gairaigo* make up nearly 10% of the Japanese language, while Chinese words make up just under 50% of the language (Tomoda, 1999). Some feel that borrowing so many words is dangerous for the longevity of Japanese itself and may also be a sign of globalization. Others, however, are not worried about the continuing scrounging for words and say that those that aren't needed will be dropped in due time (Tomoda). Despite so many mixed feelings about borrowed words, studies show that only 13% of words spoken regularly are *gairaigo* (Tomoda), though borrowed words present a much larger problem for those who face learning disabilities.

Language and Learning Disabilities

People who are dyslexic, deaf, or blind have disabilities that create language challenges. For such individuals, the complexities of Japanese pose special difficulties.

Writing system (from p. 4) re-viewed to aid reader

Numbers in figures with percent sign

End of one section leads into next section

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Dyslexia

Dyslexia is a common cross-cultural learning disability. This condition creates difficulty reading, writing, and comprehending because symbols often appear backwards or are misinterpreted. In Japanese this can be a crippling problem. Due to the number of characters, over 2,000, and the minuscule dissimilarities between some of them, the language is a challenge even for those without a learning disability. A study of one young boy showed that semantic, visual, and meaning selection errors were prominent in extreme dyslexia (Yamada, 1995). Often, this boy had trouble deciphering kanji, the Chinese characters, and he mixed up hira-kana with kata-kana. Fortunately, dyslexia is not as prevalent a disability in Japan as in other places.

Deafness

Hearing impairment and deafness, on the other hand, are just as common in Japan as elsewhere, and unfortunately not much was done in the past to incorporate people who are deaf into Japanese society. The first school for the deaf was not opened until 1878 (Nakamura, 2002), and a sign language was not created until shortly after that. While other countries have strong sign language programs, Japan has regional versions of sign language, not one language that spans the entire nation (Nakamura). Because of the complexity of Japanese sign language (JSL), which uses different grammar rules than spoken Japanese and includes facial expressions (Nakamura), finger spelling and air writing are far more common than a standard sign language. JSL also is not recognized as an independent language and therefore is not taught in most schools, though there is some progress in teaching a standard JSL. However, the Japanese have another option: simultaneous communication. This process, not yet widely used, is usually reserved for translating and television, similar to America's captions ("For an independent," 1998).

Findings of specific study summarized

Abbreviation introduced and used in place of full phrase

No-author source cited by title

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Blindness

Blindness is also a familiar ailment around the world, eased for many by Braille. In Japanese culture, reading is extremely important, distinguishing one's social and educational standing. Japanese Braille, or Tenji, originated as a distinct writing system in 1890 (Kalyan, 2002) but did not distinguish between hira-kana and kata-kana, making it extremely hard for readers to differentiate meanings. No Braille form of the Chinese characters existed until the recent Hasegawa project created "Tenkanji," a form of Tenji that could incorporate kanji and differentiate hira-kana from kata-kana (Kalyan). Nevertheless, this breakthrough comes at a time when many people who are seeing impaired prefer to use a voice synthesizer with a computer instead of learn the new Tenkanji. Unfortunately, this one-way communication can set one back in social status, as reading and writing are vital for maintaining public standing. With time, however, people who are blind may not be as separated from society as they have been in the past.

Conclusion

The Japanese have proliferated for centuries, becoming an extremely well-populated and technologically advanced nation. As the country has changed, the language has also. With linguistic roots in ancient Asian and contemporary European languages, Japanese has developed a sophisticated structure full of honorifics, borrowed words, and gender-specific terms. Despite the complexity of the language, steps have been made, in the last hundred years, to help those with disabilities that keep them at odds with language. Although it is difficult to understand a language that contains two alphabets and continuously incorporates foreign words, the history of the language remains the history of the nation, its culture, and its people.

Final section sums up main points

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References

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Entries alphabetized

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