"Multilingualism" in the World and Sociolinguistic Study in Japan

Kazuhiro SADAKANE

Research Fellow at the Japan Association for the Promotion of Science
E-mail: kazuhiro8782@gmail.com

1. Introduction

In this presentation, I aim to reveal quantitatively how Japanese sociolinguists have studied the concept of multilingualism by comparing the number of articles, reviews, and lecture texts published in the three academic journals, *Sociolinguistics*, *The Japanese Journal of Language in Society* and *Language Policy*, which are the most representative media among Japanese sociolinguists. Analyzing the article trends in these publications reveals how Japanese scholars have accepted the concept of multilingualism.

It is well known that there have been several variations of multilingual thought and policy throughout history. Canada and Australia have been developing multicultural policies since the 1960s., although there are several significant differences between Canadian and Australian policies. Moreover, the former Soviet Union also implemented a multilingual policy because of the multinational structure of the Union. The European Union (EU) and the Council of Europe (CoE) have been cooperating to protect regional and minority languages since the 1980s. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) also began efforts to raise the literacy rate in developing countries in the 1960s, and the United Nations (UN) designated the year 2008 as the International Year of Languages. In each case, the word "multilingualism" was treated as a symbol of a program. In Japan, on the other hand, "multilingualism" was accepted in the late 1990s, primarily by sociolinguists in the academic sphere. Many books and articles have been published on multilingualism in Japan, and it is difficult to cover all of them. Thus, I limited the subject of my analysis to the three journals mentioned above. At least within the scope of the journals examined in this study, European multilingual policies have often been discussed; however, <u>Canadian or Australian language policies have not been a central topic, although these two states have implemented their own multilingual policies earlier than most European states</u>. This presentation demonstrates this quantitatively.

2. Background of the Study

Some political bodies have individual policies that aim to address and manage a multilingual

situation in its society. For example, Canada and Australia have implemented policies that address languages other than the official language(s). Such language policies have been realized in the framework of multicultural policy, and their degree of realization depends on local governments (provinces or states). However, these two nations have been dealing with societal language issues since the 1960s.[1] Moreover, we should consider Europe. The European NGO European Bureau of Lesser-Used Languages (EBLUL),[2] established in 1982, was officially funded by the European Commission and has taken various steps to protect and promote lesser-used languages. Although the Bureau discontinued its activity in 2010, the multilingualism policy has been realized on a larger scale. In the first half of 1990, the CoE has established two treaties concerning minorities and their languages,[3] which are still in effect. Furthermore, regional and minority languages are included in the EU educational policy framework. Regarding European language policies, the concept of plurilingualism, which is advocated by the CoE, is now widely known internationally. The definition of multilingualism differs from that of plurilingualism—the former is associated with a given society and the latter relates to individuals. However, both concepts have a positive connotation regarding linguistic diversity.

Though it is not the main topic of this study, the differentiation of two concepts are important. In any case, there are some variations of the concept that positively values the diverse usage of languages. The monumental events relating to multilingualism are summarized in Table 1.

[TABLE 1]

Canada and Australia		Others	
1960	The beginning of the Quiet Revolution in Quebec. Criticism against the White Australian Policy.	1983	Founding of the European Bureau of Lesser-Used Languages (EU, CoE)
1969	Official Languages Act (English and French).	1992	European Charter for Regional or Minority

---

[1] For example, the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism published its first report in 1969, and the federal government of Canada called the first meeting of the Non-Official Languages Study Commission in 1971. Discussions of these commissions were followed by various provincial policies, such as the Heritage Language Program in 1990, which was established by the Ontario Ministry of Education (Ontario Ministry of Education 2012: 3). The Australian federal government implemented the policy for non-English languages, Languages Other Than English (LOTE), which is based on the "Galbally report" published in 1978.

[2] European Bureau for Lesser-Used Languages was founded in 1983 in Dublin to protect and promote languages with relatively small speaker populations. In 2010, the Bureau was integrated alongside other organizations with similar aims into the European Language Equality Network (ELEN). Cf. the official website of ELEN: Information. <https://elen.ngo/information/> [accessed: 2019/08/02]

[3] Cf.: The European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (1995) and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (1998).

	Royal Commission on Bilingualism		Languages (CoE)
1971	Multiculturalism Policy (Two languages and the plurality of cultures). Non-Official Languages Study Commission	1994	The new constitution of the Republic of South Africa recognized nine languages as official.[4]
1977	Charter of the French Language in Quebec	1995	Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (CoE)
1978	Galbally report in Australia. The beginning of LOTE.	1999	International Mother Language Day (UNESCO).
1988	Canadian Multiculturalism Act	2010	Founding of the NGO "European Language Equality Network"
2004	"Asian Languages Professional Learning Project" in Australia.	2019	International Year of Indigenous Languages (UN)

Multilingualism has not only a symbolic function but a purpose: addressing specific problems within a given political body. In the case of Canada and Australia, for example, language policies were developed while considering indigenous and immigrant languages.

A large political movement for minority languages began in Europe after 1990. Owing to the end of the Cold War, so-called Communists states (i.e., Poland, Czechoslovakia, and each republic of former Yugoslavia) joined "Europe." This change of the political framework facilitated a shift in focus to European multilingualism for many politicians and scholars. As a result, two treaties were established by the CoE—The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. These treaties influence the contemporary political situation in Europe.[5]

Comparing Canada, Australia, and Europe, linguistic issues have been payed relatively less attention in Japan, particularly at the political level. In Japan, the concept of multilingualism was first accepted at the academic level, specifically by sociolinguists and educationists. In the next chapter, I briefly demonstrate how Japanese scholars accepted the concept of multilingualism, referring to some important studies.

---

[4] According to the Chapter 1 of the constitution of RSA, official languages of the state are: Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu.
[5] Although the CoE and the EU are different organizations, two CoE treaties mentioned above function as criteria of EU membership (called the "Copenhagen Criteria"). Thus, if a state intends to join the EU, it must prepare a domestic act for minority groups according to these treaties.

3. Multilingualism as a Loan Concept in Japan

When considering the discussion on "multilingualism" among Japanese scholars, we should take two facts into account. Firstly, Japanese scholars "borrowed" this concept—that is, it did not originate from the linguistic situation in Japan. This does not mean that there have not been language-related problems throughout the history of Japan. For example, Ainu constitute another ethnolinguistic group in the northern part of Japan, although the majority of this group are bilingual now. Furthermore, the database "Ethnologue," provided by the organization SIL International, regards that there are 15 languages in Japan[6]. According to them, there are seven indigenous languages in Okinawa Prefecture, in the southern-most administrative unit. These "languages" are regarded as Japanese dialects in the field of dialectology. Japan is far from a monolingual state; in general, however, the existence of other languages and linguistic communities have not been heavily considered, even recently. As Kimura Goro-Christoph, a Japanese sociolinguist, mentions, such linguistic minorities in Japan have not yet been a central topic in the Japanese political sphere despite their existence (Kimura 2015: 4).

My observations have indicated that the term *tagengoshugi* ("multilingualism") began prevailing among Japanese scholars in the 1990s. I introduce three important works published from 1997 to 2012 below.

3.1. *What is Multilingualism?* (Miura ed. 1997)

A book entitled *What is Multilingualism?* (Miura ed. 1997), which was published in 1997, is a representative example of foundational literature on multilingualism. This book is a collective work of 17 scholars' research. It is considered by some to have introduced the concept of multilingualism to Japanese academia.[7] The academic value of this book is significant; however, three characteristics of this book are notable:

What is Mutilingualism?

1. The authors describe the bilingual and multilingual phenomena, such as multilingual activity in the field of literature. However, the authors do not examine language policy comprehensively.

2. This book concentrates primarily on Europe, particularly France,

---

[6] Cf.: Ethnologue. Languages of the World – Japan <https://www.ethnologue.com/country/jp/status> [accessed: 2019/07/31]
[7] For example: Kasuya (2012: 135), Yasuda (2014: 4)

and the former French colonies in north Africa, "Maghrib states."

3. This book does not include case studies of Canada and Australia, both of which have implemented bilingual or multilingual policies since the 1960s and 1970s.

3.2. *Multiculturalism and Multilingualism in Present-day* (Nishikawa et al. ed. 1997)
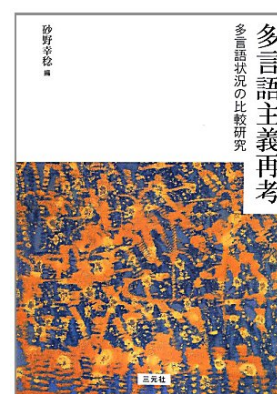
Another important book was published in 1997: *Multiculturalism and Multilingualism in Present-day: Cases of Canada, Australia and Japan* (Nishikawa et al. ed. 1997). This book succeeds in describing actual multiculturalism and multilingualism policies in Canada and Australia while designating their problems. In comparison with *What is Multilingualism?*, the authors of this book are significantly more interested in policies and political issues—e.g., the development of multilingualism in a historical context and the rights of indigenous groups.

Multiculturalism and…

3.3. *Rethinking of Multilingualism* (Sunano ed. 2012)

The book *Rethinking of Multilingualism* (Sunano ed. 2012) consists of 22 articles, and most of the authors specialize in analyzing language policy. Moreover, the authors of this book are interested not only in Europe but also in various regions around the world—for example, Africa, Latin America, the former Soviet Union, and Asia (including Japan, Korea, and Singapore). In the introduction of this book, Yukitoshi Sunano, the editor-in-chief of the book mentions that the concept of "multilingualism" has many European connotations such as standardized grammar, ethnolinguistic territory, and relationships between "language" and "culture" (Sunano 2012: 13).
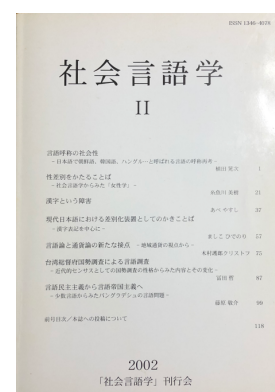

Rethinking of Multilingualism

4. Three Representative Journals among Japanese Sociolinguists

In this chapter, I briefly introduce the most authoritative journals in Japanese sociolinguistics: *Sociolinguistics*, *The Japanese Journal of Language in Society*, and *Language Policy*.

The journal *Sociolinguistics* was first published in 2001. The most frequently discussed topics in this journal include linguistic rights, English education policies in Japanese schools, and braille and sign language use in Japan. Most

Sociolinguistics (vol.2)

articles and book reviews are related to specific language problems, primarily focusing on those that emerge in Japanese society.

The journal *The Japanese Journal of Language in Society* (*JJSL*) is the oldest among the three journals analyzed in this study. The journal, focuses on micro-sociolinguistic[8] issues such as discourse analysis, particularly the analysis of honorifics in the politeness theory framework.

JJSL (vol. 21-2)

The journal *Language Policy* (*LP*) is the most recently established journal of the three, and the first issue was published in 2005. The characteristics of this journal are similar to those of *Sociolinguistics*, although articles published in *LP* have a broader scope, typically examining more regions (or states) than those published in *Sociolinguistics*, which tend to focus on Japan.

Language Policy (vol. 15)

5. Quantitative Analysis

It is worth noting that the period spanning the second half of 1990 to the first half of the 2000 is meaningful for Japanese sociolinguistics. In this period, many scholars began to focus on the concept of multilingualism. As shown in Table 1, various states and political organizations are engaged in multilingual issues. Furthermore, multilingualism itself is a borrowed concept in Japanese academia. These facts lead us to the question, "How do Japanese scholars accept the concept of multilingualism?" This chapter considers this question by examining the three journals mentioned in the previous section.

It is clear that the multilingual issues in European states, the EU, and the CoE are often discussed among Japanese scholars. For example, in *LP*, we can identify seven articles and reports on European multilingual issues in the two latest volumes. However, as mentioned above, other states have implemented multilingual policies as well, including Canada and Australia. Thus, in this chapter, I reveal how often these specific national contexts are discussed in the three journals. To do so, I counted <u>the number of articles, book reviews, research notes, translations, and reports</u>

---

[8] The distinction of macro-sociolinguistics and micro-sociolinguistics is based on Wardhaugh's argument (2006: 13). According to Wardhaugh, both disciplines aim to discover the relationship between language and society, but macro-sociolinguistics (or *sociolinguistics* in the narrow sense) is interested in the structure of language, while micro-sociolinguistics (or *sociology of language*) attempts to understand "how social structure can be better understood through the study of language."

that address Canadian or Australian language policies. The publications subjected to analysis are presented in Table 2.

[TABLE 2]

	From:	To:	Total amount
Sociolinguistics	Vol. 1 (2001)	Vol. 18 (2018)	19 volumes[9]
JJSL	Vol. 1-1 (1998)	Vol. 19-2 (2017)	38 volumes
LP	Vol. 1 (2005)	Vol. 15 (2019)	15 volumes

In total, 855 papers were found in 72 volumes: 264 in *Sociolinguistics*, 446 in *JJSL*, and 145 in *LP*. Among them, only three papers address Canadian or Australian issues. All articles are written in Japanese, including a translation of a lecture in French.

1. **ARTICLE –** Ota, Yuko (2005) "Intercultural language learning" in the new language policy. Implications for LOTE education in Australia. *Language Policy* (3), pp. 19–38.

2. **BOOK REVIEW –** Ryu, Misa (2012) Cummins, Jim & Nakajima, Kazuko (2011) *Empowering Language Minorities Through Education. Language Policy* (8), pp. 63–66.

3. **TRANSLATION –** Germain, Claude (transl. by N. Nishiyama) (2012) La situation linguistique au Canada [The Language Situation in Canada]. *Language Policy* (9), pp. 190–204[10].

Some other works have been published that focus on Canada or Australia.[11] However, papers analyzing Canadian or Australian multilingual policy are few despite the fact that the two states are known in Japan for their multicultural and multilingual policies. Not all Japanese sociolinguists are solely related to these three journals. However, the policies themselves have not been a central topic among Japanese sociolinguists.

This does not necessarily indicate that Canadian and Australian language policies are not studied by Japanese academics. For example, Japanese jurists have studied Canadian or Australian law systems, including their multicultural and multilingual policies. The most representative work among such jurisprudence studies is a book entitled *The Structure of*

---

[9] A separate volume of *Sociolinguistics* (2011) is included. Thus, there are 19 volumes in total.
[10] Germain's lecture was a keynote speech at the annual conference of the Japan Association of Language Policy, which publishes *Language Policy*.
[11] For example, Iwata's book review (1999).

Linguistic Rights (Suzuki 2000), written by Toshikazu Suzuki, who analyzed language problems in Canada, Australia, Ireland, United States, and Vanuatu. Moreover, the newest version of *Constitutions of Nations* (Hata, Komorida ed. 2018) was published in 2018. The constitutions of Canada and Australia are also translated and analyzed there. Canada and Australia are popular sites of analysis in area studies. The Japanese Association for Canadian Studies (JACS)[12] and the Australian Studies Association of Japan (ASAJ)[13] are the most representative organizations among Canadian and Australian area studies, and both organizations publish journals.[14]

6. Conclusion

There are various types of multilingual policies, and each has developed in a specific manner because multilingual policy reflects the language situation of its state context. When comparing Canada, Australia and Europe, it may be observed that the former two states have developed multilingual policies to maintain balance between the majority language (English) and other languages. Europe, on the other hand, has developed multilingualism to balance many "official languages." Thus, it is natural that multilingual policies differ significantly according to linguistic, social, and historical backgrounds. Among these various types of multilingualism, the European form seems to have been the primary focus of analysis by Japanese sociolinguists. Canadian and Australian policies, although they are well-known and have long histories, are not often discussed among Japanese sociolinguists—at least in the three representative sociolinguistics journals, *Sociolinguistics*, *JJSL*, and *LP*. Of course, many Japanese researchers focus on Canadian or Australian multilingual policies, particularly in the field of jurisprudence and area studies. However, such studies do not seem to be connected sufficiently with Japanese sociolinguistic studies.

It is clear that jurisprudence studies and area studies should be more connected with sociolinguistics in the framework of discussion on multilingualism in Japan. According to the OECD International Migrant Outlook in 2018, the number of immigrants in Japan is increasing and now 1.9% of the whole Japanese population (2.38 million) are foreign residents (OECD 2018: 246). This situation demands a new Japanese language education policy. In other words, the language situation in Japan is growing increasingly similar to that of Canada or Australia as these

---

[12] Cf. the official website of JACS: <https://jacs.jp> [accessed: 2019/08/12]

[13] Cf. the official website of ASAJ: <http://www.australianstudies.jp/publish/index.html> [accessed: 2019/08/12]

[14] *The Annual Review of Canadian Studies* (*La revue annuelle d'études Canadiennes*) and *Journal of Australian Studies*.

states have been developing language policies according to the growth of immigrant labor. Recently, Europe has been attempting to adjust to immigrant language influx as well; however, the fundamental aim of European multilingualism is to maintain balance between many "official languages," each of which is a majority language in a given state. Thus, Canadian and Australian language policies seem to be more relevant reference points for constructing a new language policy model for Japan, especially in educational level.

References[15]

Galbally, Francis (1978) *Migrant services and programs: Report of the review of post-arrival programs and services for migrants.* Canberra: A.G.P.S.

Hata, Hiroyuki; Komorida, Akio (2018) *Sekai no kenpo shu* [*Constitutions of Nations*]. Tokyo: Yushindo Publisher.

Iwata, Akiko (1999) Jirei kenkyu: Nikkei kanadajin (nisei) ni yoru nichi-eigo kan kodosuicchinngu no shikumi wo kaimei suru [A Case Study: Why and How Japanese Canadians (Niseis) Code-switch between English and Japanese?]. *Shakaigengo kagaku* [*JJSL*] (1-2), pp. 35–37.

Kasuya, Keisuke (2010) Shohyou. Tagengoshugi saikou [Book revier of *Rethinking of Multilingualism*]. *Shakaigengogaku* [*Sociolinguistics*] (12), pp. 137–148.

Kimura, Goro-Christoph (2015) Shogaigakuteki gengokenron no tenbo to kadai [Linguistic Rights Theory From the Viewpoint of Disability Studies. Its perspective and problems]. *Shakaigengogaku* [*Sociolinguistics*] (15), pp. 1–18.

Miura, Nobutaka (ed. 1997) *Tagengoshugi towa nanika* [What is Multilingualism?] Tokyo: Fujiwara shoten publisher.

Nishikawa, Nagao et al. (ed. 1997) *Tabunkashugi tagengoshugi no genzai. Kanada, Osutoraria, soshite Nihon.* [*Multiculturalism and Multilingualism in present-day: Cases of Canada, Australia and Japan*]. Tokyo: Jinbun shoten publisher.

OECD (2018) *International Migration Outlook 2018*. <https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/international-migration-outlook-2018_migr_outlook-2018-en#page248> [accessed: 2019/08/20]

Ontario Ministry of Education (2012) *Resource Guide. International Languages Elementary*

---

[15] Titles of materials written in Japanese are transliterated to the Latin alphabet. The transliteration herein was performed referring to the rules proposed by the University of Tokyo, Japan: <http://park.itc.u-tokyo.ac.jp/eigo/UT-Komaba-Nihongo-no-romaji-hyoki-v1.pdf> [accessed: 2019/08/12]

(ILE) Program. <http://www.edugains.ca/resourcesILE/ResourceGuide/ MergedResourceGuide.pdf> [accessed: 2019/08/12]

Sunano, Yukitoshi (ed. 2012) *Tagengoshugi saikou* [Rethinking of Multilingualism] Tokyo: Sangensha publisher.

Suzuki, Toshikazu (2000) *Gengoken no kozo* [*The Structure of Linguistic Rights*] Tokyo: Seibundo publisher.

Wardhaugh, Ronald (2006) *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* [5th edition]. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Yasuda, Toshiaki (2014) Tagengoshugi no kako to genzai: Kindai nihon no baai [Past and Present of Multilingualism. The Case of Modern Japan]. *Ritsumeikan gengo bunka kenkyuu* [*Ritsumeikan Studies in Language and Culture*] (26-2), pp. 3–20