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## **Political Outcomes of the Slips of the Tongue of Japanese Ministers**

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### **SUMMARY**

“Slips of the tongue” of Japanese cabinet ministers have attracted the attention of scholars. But, focusing mainly on the backgrounds of these slips, the scholars have not paid sufficient attention to the outcomes. The present paper is an attempt at empirical identification of the political outcomes of such slips of the tongue. We distinguish two levels of outcomes: the personal level and the government or party level. At the personal level, acknowledgment of individual responsibility is the most important of the outcomes. The ministers in question have to bear responsibility for their verbal missteps in one of three ways: resignation, apology or explanation. If they have to resign from the ministerial posts, they will never be appointed again to the post of a minister. Nevertheless, most of them will be successful in holding their seats in the Diet even

after the slips of the tongue. At the government or party level, there are three major outcomes, two or all of which frequently occur simultaneously. First, slips of the tongue may cause a split in the diplomatic relations of Japan with other countries. Secondly, they may threaten the stability of a coalition government. Thirdly, they may be used as a means of attack against the government or government party by the opposition parties. It seems that the main objective of such an attack against the government or ruling party is to achieve support expansion and vote acquisition for the opposition(s). But, the examination of the results of national elections does not give us any definitive conclusion about whether these objectives are attained or not.

## 1 Introduction

Speeches of Japanese Diet members or cabinet ministers sometimes become a domestic and/or a diplomatic issue and are problematized by the press and the Diet. That is what we call a “slip of the tongue.” The following examples are fresh in our memory:

Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori’s remarks “Japan is a divine nation centering on the Emperor” (*The Japan Times*, May 17, 2000) and “I hope undecided voters will remain uninterested in the election and sleep through it” (cited in *The Japan Times*, June 26, 2000);

Chairman of the Financial Reconstruction Commission, Michio Ochi’s “Please inform us of any complaints about the inspection, if it's severe ... I will give it the utmost consideration.” (*The Japan Times*, February 24, 2000);

“[The] Diet should consider the fact Japan may be better off if it armed itself with nuclear weapons” (*The Japan Times*, October 20, 1999) by Shingo Nishimura, Parliamentary Vice Minister of the Defense Agency.

The ministers in question sometimes have to resign from the ministerial positions bearing the responsibility for their remarks.

“Slip of the tongue” or “verbal misstep” can be defined very broadly as a politician’s remark which becomes a political problem or which negatively affects the politician. The remark in question is usually a public or official one, but, as in Ochi’s case cited above, it may be an informal or off-the-record one. In this paper, however, we will focus upon verbal missteps of Japanese cabinet ministers, and limit our examination to the cases where the ministers in question bear political responsibility for their verbal missteps by resigning, apologizing, or offering explanations. Here it is worthy of note that a cabinet minister is expected to respect the Japanese Constitution and the official view of the Japanese Government. If a minister betrays that expectation in his speech, therefore, it may become a slip of the tongue.

Kawano (2001) gives the following answer to the question ‘what are political factors constituting slips of the tongue of a minister?’ There are three conditions. First, the speech of a minister falls into one of the four categories: (1) it justifies Japan’s military activities in the Sino-Japanese War and in the Pacific War, (2) casts doubt upon the necessity of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, (3) comments favorably on the nuclear armament of Japan, or (4) discriminates against Asian people or minorities in the United States. Secondly, the speech becomes a domestic and/or a diplomatic

problem. Thirdly, the speech is picked up and problematized by the press. If these conditions are met, the speech of a minister is considered a slip of the tongue and the minister has to bear political responsibility for it.

A cabinet minister who commits a slip of the tongue bears responsibility for it personally. But the political outcome of a slip of the tongue is not limited to this. Besides the personal responsibility of the individual ministers in question, which we call the political outcome at the personal level, there are other important political effects at the level of the government or the political parties. A slip of the tongue may cause diplomatic problems between Japan and other countries. Or it may cause instability in the coalition government. Finally, the opposition parties usually take advantage of these slips of the tongue and use them as a “means of attack” against the governing party or parties. This is also a political outcomes of a slip of the tongue. Why do the opposition parties use such slips by ministers as means of attack? Support expansion and vote acquisition for the opposition parties will be plausible answers. Thus, this paper attempts to show whether these two objectives of support expansion and vote acquisition are achieved or not. To see this, it examines the results of national elections, especially the relative rates of votes (hereafter “rate of vote” or “vote rate”) and the number of elected persons, of the House of Representatives.

So far this kind of study has been considerably neglected. Little attention has been paid to the relation between ministers’ slips of the tongue and the opposition parties’ responses to them. The present paper seeks to contribute to the better understanding of language used by politicians by empirically analyzing the effects of slips of the tongue.

In the next section, Section 2, we will briefly examine the previous studies on the slips of the tongue of the Japanese ministers, and show that most of them do not explore the actual outcomes. Accordingly, in the following sections, Sections 3 and 4, we will discuss the actual effects of the slips of the tongue. For the sake of convenience of discussion, we will distinguish two levels of outcomes: personal and government/party levels. In Section 3, we will examine the forms of personal responsibility of the ministers in question, including their subsequent political career and the personal results in the national elections. In Section 4, we will discuss three of what we call government/party outcomes: diplomatic problems, instability of coalition

governments, and the oppositions' attack and its effect. The present paper is concluded by a summary of what outcomes slips of the tongue of ministers bring about.

## **2 Brief sketches of previous studies**

Slips of the tongue by cabinet ministers have been a repeated phenomena in the post-war Japan, as is shown in Table 1. Despite their frequency, Japanese political scientists have not paid much attention to verbal missteps of the ministers. It is true that a few textbooks of Japanese political history mention slips of the tongue of the ministers<sup>1)</sup>. The mentions are, however, only an enumeration of historical events at best. They never try to scrutinize political outcomes of the slips of the tongue. In addition, the vast majority of historical research concerning Japan's war responsibilities treat slips of the tongue in a similar vein<sup>2)</sup>. Although research of Japan's war responsibilities pays much attention to Japanese politicians' remarks on Japan's military activities in the Sino-Japanese War (1931-1945) and in the Pacific War (1941-1945), the remarks are touched upon or cited only as illustrations of deplorable or dangerous cases which represent their (wrong) historical interpretations, political beliefs and political thoughts. In sum, scholars have paid little attention to the political outcomes of ministers' slips of the tongue.

There are a few books and articles which deal directly with verbal missteps of Japanese politicians. Because they were discussed already (Kawano 2001: 19-21), this essay looks only at those aspects directly related to the political effects of slips of the tongue. Yoshiyuki Wakamiya's *Sengo Hoshu no Ajia Kan (Japanese Conservative's View of Asia in Post-war Japan)* clarifies the view of Japanese conservative politicians toward Asian countries and peoples, by an analysis of slips of the tongue. Wakamiya examines political beliefs and political thoughts of politicians who made slips of the tongue. On the basis of this study, Wakamiya argues that the historical view of the Sino-Japanese War and the Pacific War which regards them as wars to liberate Asian countries from Western powers is typical of the view of conservative Japanese politicians toward Asian countries and peoples.

In analyzing slips of the tongue, Ofer Feldman employs the distinction between *Honne* (the honest feeling) and *Tatemaie* (the obverse), which he regards as one unique

characteristic of the political culture of Japan (Feldman 1996 and Feldman 1998). Both Wakamiya and Feldman clarify the background for the slips of the tongue. But, neither discusses their political outcomes.

The preceding review of literature may not be exhaustive. Some more works may be regarded as dealing with slips of the tongue <sup>3)</sup>, and there are many more studies of political language in general than those which explicitly discuss slips of the tongue<sup>4)</sup>. But one thing is clear. We have shown that the previous research has paid little attention to the political *outcomes* of ministers' slips of the tongue. Though it focuses upon slips of the tongue, the present paper does not aim to explore their background, including political thought or political belief. Instead, it focuses upon major political outcomes of the minister's speech that is called slip of the tongue. It is true, in political science, slips of the tongue have not been a major research theme, but it is by no means an unworthy study area, as their political outcomes will show.

### **3 Political outcomes at an individual level**

This and the next sections will discuss political outcomes of slips of the tongue. Ideally, details of each case of the slips of the tongue should be introduced and examined, but it is impossible to dwell upon all the cases of slips of the tongue. Therefore, the details of each slips of tongue are given in Table 1.

Political outcomes of slips of the tongue will be conveniently discussed at two levels: personal level and governmental/party level. This section will examine political outcomes of slips of the tongue at the personal level. Primarily, it will focus on political responsibilities of the ministers who themselves bear personal responsibility for their slips of the tongue. We will try to identify their personal political responsibilities in terms of their major career development after their verbal missteps and in terms of the results of general elections. First, we will examine their subsequent career after the slip of the tongue.

Table 2 shows the main career of the ministers who bore the most serious political responsibility, that is, resignation from their ministerial posts. The table shows their personal records in the Cabinet, the Diet and the party after their verbal missteps. Their career in Table 2 are taken mainly <sup>5)</sup> from the handbook edited by Miyagawa <sup>5)</sup>, but

other references <sup>6)</sup> are used in order not to miss any career positions. From Table 2, we can see the personal political responsibilities of the ministers in question.

First, they have never been again appointed to the post of a minister after the slips of the tongue.

Second, they have not been reappointed to an important post in the Diet or in the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan (LDP) such as chairman of the Committee on Budget of the House of Representatives and the Secretary-General of the LDP.

The former is perhaps the most important personal political outcome of a slip of the tongue. But this is true only of the ministers who lost their ministerial positions because of their slips of the tongue. If the ministers can escape resignation for their slips of the tongue, then they may be re-appointed to a ministerial post. Ryutaro Hashimoto, Minister of International Trade and Industry, made a slip of the tongue in 1994 and had to explain his real intention, but he did not resign and was elected as Prime Minister in January 1996 (see Table 1). And this responsibility of a slip of the tongue contrasts sharply with that of the other kind of scandal. Ministers who step down from their ministerial positions because of other scandals have an opportunity to be reappointed to a ministerial post. For instance, Kiichi Miyazawa, who was the Vice-Prime Minister and the Finance Minister, resigned from the posts because of the Recruit Co. bribery scandal in December 1988, but he was appointed to Prime Minister in 1991. And Ryutaro Hashimoto, Minister of Finance, resigned from the post owing to a series of securities and banking scandals in 1991, but he was selected as Prime Minister in 1996.

Let us now consider the results of elections, to see whether or how much the ministers in question bear responsibility to the electorate for their slips of the tongue. Table 3 shows that most of the ministers were reelected as members of the Diet after the slips of the tongue. As far as the election was concerned, slips of the tongue had no negative effect upon their career as Diet members. It may be because the slips of the tongue become hardly the point at issue in the electoral district of the ministers concerned (Yamada 2000: 258). We can observe that the slip of the tongue leads to the resignation from the cabinet post, but not to the loss of a seat in the Diet. In other words, political responsibility for the slip of the tongue at the personal level is a responsibility as a cabinet minister but not as a Diet member.

However, there are two exceptions. One is the case of Shingo Nishimura, who

was Parliamentary Vice Defense Minister when he made his slip of the tongue. Table 3 shows a sharp decline in his vote rate before his verbal misstep and after it. Although this result may be viewed as the reflection of the voters' critical attitudes toward his remark on nuclear armament of Japan, a further investigation will be required to confirm it.

The other is the case of Michio Ochi. He made a slip of the tongue when he was Chairman of the Financial Reconstruction Commission. He was defeated in the 42nd election in the single-member electoral district, though, in the previous election on October 20, 1996, he had been elected in the proportional district, but not in the small district. His rate of votes declined slightly from 26.2% in 1996 to 22.2% in 2000. His slip of the tongue may have negatively influenced the voters.

Our brief examination of the results of the elections shows that most of the ministers who made verbal missteps were reelected. It does not seem that, as far as the elections are concerned, the slips of the tongue affect them negatively. But this conclusion is not definitive at present because we have not taken important factors into consideration. For example, we should consider such factors as the time lag between the slip of the tongue and the election, the character of their constituencies<sup>7)</sup>, and the contents of the slip of the tongue.

#### **4 Political outcomes of governmental/party level**

There are three important political outcomes at this level. They are: a split in the diplomatic relations between Japan and the countries concerned; destabilization of the foundation of coalition government; a "means of attack" against the Government parties by the oppositions. Actually, these outcomes are often related to each other, and brought about simultaneously. But we will discuss them separately in this order.

##### **4.1 Diplomatic issue**

The slips of the tongue may cause a split in the diplomatic relations between Japan and the countries concerned. For instance, China or South Korea makes a strong formal protest against speeches of the ministers that justify Japan's military activities during the Sino-Japanese War and the Pacific War. An example is a speech by Takami Eto,



Director of the Management and Coordination Agency. He said in 1995 that “the Japanese colonial rule over the peninsula in the period of 1919-1945 had some positive impacts”(The Japan Times, November 9, 1995). The Government parties attempted to send Foreign Minister Yohei Kono to South Korea to explain the Government’s official view (Mainichi Shimbun, November 11, 1995). On November 11, 1995, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of South Korea made a formal protest against Eto’s speech and requested Japanese Government parties to appropriately solve Eto’s issue. In addition to this protest, the South Korean Government refused to accept the proposal of Kono’s visit to South Korea. It was clear that South Korea demanded Eto’s discharge from the ministerial position. Finally, on the 13th of the same month, Eto stepped down from his ministerial position facing these strong protests. The cases of Shigeto Nagano, Minister of Justice, and Shin Sakurai, Director General of the Environment, are similar ones. Moreover, they also threatened the stability of the coalition government and incurred attacks from the opposition parties.

A different kind of slips of the tongue may also incur a split in a diplomatic relations with foreign countries. The speech which discriminates against minorities in the United States was strongly criticized by the American public. Seiroku Kajiyama, Minister of Justice, said “it’s like in America when neighborhoods become mixed because blacks move in, and whites are forced out” (The Japan Times, January 21, 1992). The Foreign Affairs Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives passed a resolution demanding Justice Minister Seiroku Kajiyama be reprimanded for his remark. Kajiyama had to resign<sup>8)</sup>.

#### **4.2 Coalition disruption**

The second political effect at this level is the destabilization of the foundation of coalition government. The example is Keisuke Nakanishi, Director General of the Defense Agency, who cast doubt upon the necessity of Article 9. Nakanishi’s resignation was demanded by the Japan Socialist Party (JSP, now Social Democratic Party (SDP)), one of the major parties of the coalition government at the time. The coalition government feared that it might incur the disruption of the foundation of the coalition because the JSP strongly opposes any revision of the Constitution. (Yomiuri

*Shimbun*, December 3, 1993) For this reason, the coalition government decided upon Nakanishi's resignation. Cases of Shin Sakurai, Takami Eto and Shigeto Nagano also brought about similar results (see Table 1).

### **4.3 A means of attack by the opposition**

Slips of the tongue can also be a "means of attack" against the government and government parties by the opposition. The "attack" primarily means both verbal criticism of the government and interruption in the discussion of committees or sessions in the Diet.

The criticism and the interruption are political outcomes themselves. But we can safely assume that support expansion and vote acquisition are real objectives of such attacks by the opposition parties. Therefore, we will try to find whether these objectives are attained or not. This requires an examination of the results of various national elections.

There are many examples where slips of the tongue by ministers are utilized as a means of attack by the opposition parties, as is shown in Table 1. The opposition stages a boycott of Diet sessions, demands the resignation of the minister concerned, demand the political responsibility of the prime minister who has appointed the minister, or charges that the prime minister lacks qualifications. Through such tactics, they seek to shake the government. In fact, slips of the tongue of ministers have provided the opposition with many such opportunities. Here we will take up just one case, that of Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori's slip of the tongue, "Japan is a divine nation centering on the Emperor" in May 2000. On 17 May, four major opposition parties, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), the Liberal Party (LP) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP), agreed to form an united front in a bid to jointly force Mori out of office. They charged that Mori lacked the qualifications to be prime minister. They also demanded Mori's resignation through Diet deliberations and debate sessions (*The Japan Times*, May 18, 2000). Under such a severe attack, Mori held a press conference for the explanation of his remark on May 26. He apologized for having caused a misunderstanding with his remark, but he refused to withdraw it (*The Japan Times*, May 27, 2000). Not satisfied with Mori's apology, the opposition parties strengthened the attack against the coalition government. Opinion polls showed a sharp

decline in public support for the cabinet (for example, *Asahi Shimbun*, May 30, 2000).

Now, it remains to be seen whether support expansion and vote acquisition aimed at by the opposition are actually attained or not. For this purpose, we will examine the results of national elections, especially the rates of votes and the number of elected persons, of the House of Representatives.

Researchers of political language usually take up a particular speech employed by politicians, including slips of the tongue, and infer a particular political effect from it. But they have never attempted an empirical validation of alleged political effects (Matsuo 1987: 181, Kawano 2000: 41). In what follows, we will try to see whether we can empirically identify the political effects of slips of the tongue in terms of the results of elections.

Certainly, as long as elections are concerned, there are several methods for demonstrating the effect of slips of the tongue. For instance, the methods of an exit poll, a questionnaire or an interview with voters might be effective at the time of a national election. They will help to clarify whether voters are influenced or not by slips of the tongue. But such methods cannot be applied to the past cases of political speech in general and slips of the tongue in particular. Therefore, we will focus upon the change of vote rates and the number of winners.

We will make three comparisons of the rates of votes and the number of elected persons of major political parties in consecutive general elections before and after slips of the tongue. First, the results of two national elections - the 38th election on July 6, 1986 and the 39th election on February 18, 1990 - will be compared. Between these two elections, there were slips of the tongue by such ministers as Masayuki Fujio and Seisuke Okuno <sup>9)</sup>. As is shown in Table 4, in the 39th general election, three opposition parties, Komeito, the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) and the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) decreased in the vote rates and lost approximately ten seats in the House of Representatives. Among the opposition parties, the JSP alone raised its vote rate from 17.2% to 24.4% and won 136 seats, an increase of 53 seats. In sum, the opposition parties as a whole raised the vote rate by 1% and the number of winners by 8 seats. In contrast, the LDP decreased the vote rate by 3 points, and lost 25 seats. As we saw above, the rise of the opposition parties was due to the JSP's "victory," which was ascribed to a "boom of Takako Doi, (chairperson of the JSP)," brought about by the

party's strong stand against a sales tax (Tanaka 1996: 330). Thus, in this case, we cannot decide whether slips of the tongue had an effect upon the vote rates and the numbers of winners of government and opposition parties.

We will next compare the results of two national elections: the 40th on July 18, 1993 and the 41st on October 20, 1996. Between the elections, Shin Sakurai, Ryutaro Hashimoto and Takami Eto made slips of the tongue. It is, however, difficult to make a precise comparison of the results obtained in the two national elections, because of two factors. First, the election system was changed. The 40th election was conducted under the multi-member constituency system, but the next one was in the parallel systems of single-member constituency and proportional representation. Secondly, Japanese political parties were actively and rapidly being reorganized during the time <sup>10)</sup>. For example, New Party Sakigake and Shinseito left the LDP just before the 40th election, and then Shinseito was reorganized as a new party, Shinshintō.

As is shown in Table 5, the LDP obtained 36.6% in the 40th election under the multi-member constituency system, and 38.6% in the small electoral district, and 32.8% in proportional representation, in the 41st national election. The number of winners was 223 in the 40th and 239 in the 41st (169 in the small electoral districts and 70 in the proportional representation district). The LDP raised its number of Diet seats. This means that the opposition parties did not make any great advance. Considering the factors mentioned above, it is safe to refrain from drawing a clear conclusion from this case about the effect of slips of the tongue.

Judging from the two comparisons above, we cannot say definitively whether the slips of the tongue of the ministers influence the support expansion and the vote acquisition at the party level, either positively or negatively. But there is one case where slips of the tongue had an effect on the election result at the party level. It is the case of a series of the slips of the tongue of Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori. As we saw above, he made several verbal missteps. But he crowned his slips of the tongue with the statement that "I hope undecided voters will remain uninterested in the election and sleep through it" on June 20, 2000 just before the national election on June 25 (*The Japan Times*, June 26, 2000). The opposition parties criticized this remark of his. The DPJ ran an advertisement in the newspapers to criticize Mori's remark. This advertisement clearly shows that the opposition took advantage of Mori's remark to try to achieve vote

acquisition and support expansion. Were these goals achieved?

To see their effect, let us compare the results of the two elections: the 41st election on October 20, 1996 and the 42nd election on June 25, 2000. As is shown in Table 6, the LDP's loss in the proportional representation system is clear both in the vote rates and in the number of seats, even if we consider the fact that in the 42nd election the total number of seats was reduced by 20. Their rate of vote was 28.1%, down by some 4.5% and the number of elected persons was 56, a decrease by 14 seats. The loss contrasts with the gain of the LDP in the single-member constituencies. The rate of vote of the LDP in the small electoral district rose a little from 38.63% to 40.97%. The number of elected persons also increased from 169 to 177. In the proportional representation district, major opposition parties except the JCP raised their vote rates and the numbers of winners. The DPJ raised their vote rate from 16.1% to 25.2% and their seats from 35 to 47. The SDP also raised the rate of vote from 6.4% to 9.4% and the winners from 11 to 15. As far as the single-member constituencies are concerned, the slips of the tongue of Mori hardly worked for the change of the vote rate and the number of elected persons. But in the proportional representation, the LDP suffered a loss. The series of Mori's speeches may have had a negative effect on the voters. For example, several ex-ministers of state and so-called important persons of the party were unsuccessful in this election. They regarded Mori's verbal missteps as the cause of their defeats (*Asahi Shimbun*, June 29, 2000). The series of Mori's slips of the tongue perhaps had an effect on the behavior of voters at least in the proportional representation district especially on the behavior of what Ikuo Kabashima calls "buffer-player"<sup>11)</sup> and on the behavior of undecided voters.

To sum up, we cannot say for sure from the examination of the election results whether slips of the tongue of the ministers have an effect on election behavior of voters toward political parties. It seems, however, that the apparent goals of opposition parties, support expansion and vote acquisition, are not achieved except in the proportional representation result in Mori's case. The case of Prime Minister Mori's verbal missteps should be treated as a special case, both because they were made by the prime minister, and not by an ordinary minister, and because they were made just before the election.

## 5 Conclusion

The present paper tried to identify major political outcomes of slips of the tongue of the cabinet ministers. The political outcomes can be divided into two levels: personal level and governmental or party level.

First, at the personal level, the ministers have to bear responsibility for their slips of the tongue, usually in one of the three ways: resignation, apology and explanation. The ministers who have resigned from the ministerial posts due to their slips of the tongue suffer in their future career in the following ways. But if the ministers escape resignation, the slips of the tongue have little impact for their future political career.

- (1) The ministers in question have never again been appointed to ministerial posts.
- (2) They have never been reappointed to an important Diet posts.
- (3) They have never been reappointed to important posts in the LDP.

They have, however, never lost their positions as members of the Diet. Most of them were reelected after their slips of the tongue even though they resigned from the ministerial posts. Thus, slips of the tongue entail the responsibility as a minister but not as a member of the Diet.

Second, the present paper identified three major political outcomes in the governmental/party level. They (1) cause a split in the diplomatic relations between Japan and the countries concerned, (2) destabilize the foundation of a coalition government, (3) become a means of attack against the government and government party or parties by the opposition. These three political outcomes can be found simultaneously in most cases of slips of the tongue of the ministers. As for the third outcome, we also examined whether support expansion and vote acquisition of the opposition worked or not as a result of the attack in terms of changes of the vote rates and the number of elected persons. But we could not reach any definitive conclusion on this point.

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## Notes

- 1) For instance, *Sengo Seijishi (Political History in the Post-war Japan)* by Masumi Ishikawa and *Sengo Nihon Seijishi (Political History in the Post-war Japan)* by Hiroshi Tanaka mention the following verbal missteps of the ministers: Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida's remark, "The idiot!" in 1953; "an unsinkable aircraft carrier" by Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone in 1983; the statement in 1986 by Educational Minister Masayuki Fujio which defended Japan's 1910 annexation of Korea; and Prime Minister Nakasone's remark in 1986 about discrimination against minority groups in the United States.
- 2) The vast research literature on historical interpretation concerning Japan's war responsibility are represented by Yutaka Yoshida *Nihonjin no Sensokan (Japanese View of War)* and *Gendai Rekishigaku to Senso Sekinin (War Responsibility in the Study of Contemporary History)*, Tetsuya Takahashi *Sengo Sekininron (Essays on War Responsibility)*, Keiichi Eguchi *Nihon no Shinryaku to Nihonjin no Sensokan (Japan's Aggression and Japanese View of War)*, Atsushi Koketsu *Shinryaku Senso: Rekishi Jijitsu to Rekishi Ninshiki (An Aggressive War: Historical Reality and Historical Interpretation)*.
- 3) Murata (1999: 207-209) discusses, from the viewpoint of diplomacy, cases where slips of the tongue of the ministers caused a split in the diplomatic relations between Japan and China, South Korea, or the United States. We may also include Arthy Iain's *Oeragata no Nihongojuku (Bigwigs' Japanese Lesson)*, although it is regarded as a satirical novel.
- 4) See Kawano & Matsuo (2000: 25-29). It provides a select list of literature dealing with language and politics.
- 5) Miyagawa (ed.) No.12-No.37
- 6) Jiji Press (ed.) (1999) and Seisaku Jiho Co. (ed) (1999).
- 7) Their constituencies are not in urban areas but in rural areas and they have a strong basis of support from the voters.
- 8) There were other examples though they did not cause resignation. In 1986, Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone made a discriminatory remark against minority groups in the United States (See Table 1). Though it was not the case of minister, Yoshio Sakurachi, Speaker of the House of Representatives, said in 1992 that "U.S. managers cannot issue written orders because about 30 percent of American workers cannot read". (*The Japan Times*, January 21, 1992).
- 9) Though he was not a minister, Koichi Hamada made a slip of the tongue during the time (See Table 1).
- 10) See Kusano (1999) and Otake (1999) for the political situation.
- 11) According to Kabashima, the Japanese buffer player is someone who is basically in favor of having the LDP run the government but wants the ruling and opposition parties to have fairly equal power (Kabashima 1998: 14).

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**Table 1 Cases of Slips of the Tongue and Their Outcomes  
Discussed in the Present Paper**

**Yasuhiro NAKASONE, 1983/01/19, Prime Minister, Explanation**

Details: The Washington Post reported Nakasone said Japan should be “like an unsinkable aircraft carrier” to defend against Soviet Backfire bombers and mentioned the need to control the “four straits” to block the passage of Soviet submarines in times of war. (*The Japan Times*, January 21, 1983)

Responses:

Government party: Nakasone explained his remark.

Opposition parties: criticized Nakasone’s remark.

**Masayuki FUJIO, 1986/07/25- 1986/09, Minister of Education, Resigned**

Details: In a press conference, Fujio said “Has the fellows who complain (about historical textbook) never attacked against any countries?”(1986/07/25) In a monthly magazine interview, Fujio defended Japan’s 1910 annexation of Korea, the 1937 Nanjing Massacre, the Tokyo Tribunal on war criminals, and the Nakasone Cabinet ministers’ official visit to Yasukuni Shrine, dedicated to Japan’s war dead. The concrete contents are as follows. In the interview, Fujio said “there was no invasion by the Japanese Government and it was based on a mutual agreement between Japanese Prime Minister Hirobumi Ito and Go Jong, the Korean representative.” Referring to Japan’s military actions in China before and during World War II, he said that it was not the only country that had invaded other countries and that atrocities of war existed worldwide. He also expressed doubts about the Nanjing Massacre, in which thousands were said to have been killed by the Japanese Imperial Army during the war. He commented that there is no way to know exactly how many people were in fact killed in the incident. He referred to the Yasukuni Shrine issue, too. He said “Why did he (Prime Minister Nakasone) have to give up his official visit to the shrine just because some outsiders complained about it?” As for the A-class Japanese war criminals enshrined there, he said that the blame should be put on the state. It is questionable to put the blame (of the war) on the war criminals who were executed, he said. He argued that the textbook and the Yasukuni Shrine issues stem from the Tokyo War Crimes Trial. Furthermore, he insinuated that it was an unfair policy of the U.S. occupation. (*The Japan Times*, September 6-7, 1986. *Daily Yomiuri*, September 6, 1986) (1986/09)

Content: Historical interpretation

Responses:

Foreign countries: The South Korean and the Chinese Government made formal protests.

Government party: Prime Minister Nakasone and Foreign Minister Kuranari expressed their regrets. When Nakasone visited South Korea, he apologized for Fujio’s remark.

**Yasuhiro NAKASONE, 1986/09/22, Prime Minister, Explanation and Apology**

Details: In a party seminar of the LDP, Nakasone made a remark about discrimination against minority groups in America. He said that Japan’s average of education is higher than America’s because of many minorities groups in America.

Content: Discrimination against minorities in the U.S.

Responses:

Foreign countries: A draft congressional resolution demanding an apology was laid in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Government party: Chief Cabinet Secretary Gotoda explained Nakasone’s remark and later Nakasone sent a message for apology to the U.S.

Opposition parties: criticized Nakasone’s remark.

**Koichi HAMADA, 1988/02/06,**

Chairman of the Committee on Budget of the House of Representatives

Details: Hamada called Kenji Miyamoto, supreme boss of the Japanese Communist Party, a “murderer” during a committee debate session. (*The Japan Times*, February 7, 1988)

Content: Slanderous remarks on a specified person

Responses:

Foreign countries: None.

Government party: Committee head director Okuda expressed regret.

Opposition parties: The JCP demanded Hamada’s dismissal and other opposition parties criticized Hamada.

**Seisuke OKUNO, 1988/04/22, Director General of National Land Agency, Resigned**

Details: In a press conference, Okuno justified Japan’s military actions against Asian countries during World War II. He said that “Japan fought the war in order to secure its safety” and that “Asia was colonized by Caucasians at that time. Japan was by no means a nation of aggression.” He also expressed regret that Japanese people had been “twisted around” by the remarks of China’s top leader Deng Xiaoping. (*The Japan Times*, April 23, 1988)

Content: Criticism of Deng Xiaoping and historical interpretation

Responses

Foreign countries: The South Korean and the Chinese Governments made formal protests.

Government party: Prime Minister Takeshita and Foreign Minister Uno expressed their regrets.

Opposition parties: Major opposition parties demanded Okuno’s resignation and criticized the Takeshita cabinet.

**Seiroku KAJIYAMA, 1990/09/21, Minister of Justice, Apology**

Details: Kajiyama made a remark concerning discrimination against black Americans. He said “ it’s like in America when neighborhoods become mixed because blacks move in, and whites are forced out.” He made the remark to explain to reporters his impressions after observing a police crackdown on foreign women allegedly soliciting customers on Tokyo’s streets for sex. (*The Japan Times*, September 23, 1990)

Content: Discrimination against minorities in the U.S.

Responses:

Foreign countries: The U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee passed by voice vote a resolution demanding Justice Minister Seiroku Kajiyama be reprimanded for his remark.

Government party: Prime Minister Kaifu expressed his regret.

Opposition parties: The JSP demanded the political responsibility of the Kaifu Cabinet.

**Keisuke NAKANISHI, 1993/11/18-1993/12/01, Director General of the Defense Agency, Resigned**

Details: Nakanishi referred to the necessity to discuss amendments to Article 9 of the Constitution. He made the remark to urge the adoption of Japan’s U.N. Peacekeeping Cooperation Law. Some of his remarks are as follows: “it cannot be said that the Peacekeeping Cooperation Law is perfect,” “it has aspects in which what is common sense for Japan is not so for the rest of the world,” and “at a time when the world is changing rapidly, it is no good to stick to the war-renouncing Constitution, which was drafted half of a century ago,” and so forth. These remarks were made in a committee of the Diet, a press conference, and a study meeting of his party. (*Yomiuri Shimbun*, December 2/3, 1993. *The Japan Times*, December 3, 1993)

Content: Remark casting doubt upon the necessity of Article 9.

Responses:

Foreign countries: None.

Government party: The JSP demanded for Nakanishi's removal.

Opposition parties: The LDP and the JCP requested Nakanishi's resigning.

**Shigeto NAGANO, 1994/05/04, Minister of Justice, Resigned**

Details: In a *Mainichi Shimbun* Interview, Nagano denied the 1937 Nanjing Massacre happened and said it is wrong to say Japan's invasion of neighboring Asian states before and during World War II was an act of aggression. Main remarks are as follows; "I believe the Nanjing Massacre is a fabrication. I went to Nanjing directly afterward," and "It's wrong to say the Pacific War was waged with the aim of aggression. They were serious about liberating the colonies, liberating the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere." (*Mainichi Shimbun*, May 5, 1994/ *The Japan Times*, May 5, 1994.)

Content: Historical interpretation

Responses:

Foreign countries: The South Korean and the Chinese Government made formal protests.

Government party: Prime Minister Hata and Komeito criticized Nagano's remark.

Opposition parties: Major opposition parties showed a pose to force the Prime Minister to dissolve the Diet and call a general election. The JSP and the JCP called for Nagano's removal. The LDP demanded the political responsibility of Hata as Prime Minister.

**Shin SAKURAI, 1994/08/12, Director General of the Environment, Resigned**

Details: In a press conference, Sakurachi made a remark that Japan had no intention of waging a war of aggression in the 1930s and 1940s. He also said that as a result of the war, Asian countries became independent, education is now widespread and literacy rates are high. (*The Japan Times*, August 13, 1994)

Content: Historical interpretation

Responses:

Foreign countries: The South Korean and the Chinese Government made formal protests.

Government party: Prime Minister Murayama expressed his regret. Some important members of the JSP voiced strong demands for Sakurai's resignation.

Opposition parties: The JCP demanded Sakurai's resignation. Other opposition parties demanded that the Murayama Cabinet should bear political responsibility.

**Ryutaro HASHIMOTO, 1994/10/24, Minister of International Trade and Industry, Explanation**

Details: Hashimoto said in a Diet session that Japan tried to fight the United States and Britain, not Asian countries, and thus it is a matter of subtle definition as to whether Japan waged wars of invasion against Asian nations in the past. He said "Japan took action against the Korean Peninsula that could be denounced as colonialism and I have said that there had been acts of aggression against China." But he also said that doubts remain whether Japan's war against the U.S., Britain and the Netherlands should be defined as a war of aggression. He added that he felt sorry for the people in the Asian-Pacific region where Japan fought the war. (*The Japan Times*, October 26, 1994)

Content: Historical interpretation

Responses:

Foreign countries: The Chinese Government criticized Hashimoto's remark and the South Korean Government made a formal protest. But later the South Korean Government accepted the explanation of the Japanese Government.

Government party: The Government parties defended Hashimoto's remark but Wataru Kubo, secretary general of the JSP criticized his remark.

Opposition parties: The JCP demanded Hashimoto's resignation.

**Takami ETO, 1995/11/09,**

Director General of the Management and Coordination Agency, Resigned

Details: Eto told Japanese reporters in an off-the-record meeting that the 1910-1945 period of the Japanese colonial rule over the peninsula had some positive impacts, such as construction of schools, railroads and ports. He also said that not every Korean was required to adopt a Japanese name. The South Korean newspaper, Dong-A Ilbo carried an article on Eto's remarks. (*The Japan Times*, November 9/10, 1995)

Content: Historical interpretation

Responses:

Foreign countries: The South Korean Government made a formal protest.

Government party: The JSP showed displeasure at Eto's remark and Sakigake criticized it. The LDP did not accept Eto's resignation.

**Shingo NISHIMURA, 1999/10, Parliamentary Vice Minister of the Defense Agency, Resigned**

Details: In the Japanese weekly magazine *Playboy*, he commented that "the Diet should consider the fact Japan may be better off if it armed itself with nuclear weapons." (*The Japan Times*, October 20, 1999)

Content: Comment on the nuclear armament of Japan

Responses:

Foreign countries: The South Korean and the Chinese Government made formal protests.

Government party: The Government parties agreed to the resignation at once.

Opposition parties: Opposition parties demanded the political responsibility of Obuchi who appointed Nishimura and tried to move a vote of nonconfidence in the Cabinet.

**Michio OCHI, 2000/02/19,**

Chairperson (Minister of State) of the Financial Reconstruction Commission, Resigned

Details: During a meeting in Shiobara, Tochigi Prefecture, that was organized by his LDP colleague, Susumu Hasumi, who represents the prefecture, and brought together 40 executives from local financial institutions, Ochi was saying that "Please inform us of any complaints about the inspection, if it's severe ... I will give it the utmost consideration if you make a written request to Mr. Hasumi and he passes it to me." (*The Japan Times*, February 24, 2000)

Content: Remark of "making allowance for the inspection"

Responses:

Foreign countries: None

Government party: The Government parties confirmed Ochi's removal.

Opposition parties: Opposition parties stopped the session of a Diet committee and required Ochi's removal.

**Yoshiro MORI, 2000/05/15, Prime Minister, Explanation and Apology**

Details: Mori said in a gathering of lawmakers belonging to Shinto Seiji Renmei, a political group of the Association of Shinto Shrines, that "we (have made efforts to) make the public realize that Japan is a divine nation centering on the Emperor. It's been 30 years since we started our activities based on this thought." (*The Japan Times*, May 17, 2000)  
He was an adviser of the association.

Content: Remark of "divine nation centering on the Emperor"

Responses:

Foreign countries: The Chinese Government showed displeasure at Mori's remark.

Government party: New Komeito showed displeasure at Mori's remark.

Opposition parties: Four major parties agreed to form a united front in a bid to jointly force Mori out of office over his remark. (*The Japan Times*, May 18, 2000)

**Yoshiro MORI, 2000/06/03, Prime Minister, Explanation**

Details: During a lecture in Nara, he said “The Japanese Communist Party says it will not change its principles. It does not recognize the Imperial system.” “The party calls for dissolving the Self-Defense Forces and does not approve of the Japan-U.S. security arrangement.” “How could we possibly secure Japan’s *kokutai* (polity) and ensure public safety with such a party.” (*The Japan Times*, June 5, 2000)

Content: Using the term of “*kokutai*”

Responses:

Foreign countries: The Chinese Government showed displeasure at Mori’s remark.

Government party: The LDP and New Komeito defended Mori’s remark.

**Yoshiro MORI, 2000/06/20, Prime Minister,**

Details: In Niigata, Mori said that “I hope undecided voters will remain uninterested in the election and sleep through it.” (*The Japan Times*, June 26, 2000)

Content:

Responses:

Foreign countries: None

Opposition parties: Opposition parties criticized Mori’s remark.

**Table 2 Career of the Ministers Who Resigned after Their Slips of the Tongue <sup>(1)</sup>**

year/month/day	Speaker and Status (at the time)	Career
1986/07-09	Masayuki FUJIO Minister of Education	Chairman of Research Commission on Oil, Resources and Energy of the LDP, Chairman of Committee on the Kinki District of Japan of the LDP
1988/04-05	Seisuke OKUNO, Director General of National Land Agency	Chairman of Research Commission on Public Administration and Finance of the LDP, Chairman of Liaison Committee on Education of the LDP, Chairman of Deliberative Council on Political Ethics of the House of Representatives
1993/11	Keisuke NAKANISHI Director General of the Defense Agency	Chairman of Election Campaign Committee of the LP, Chairman of Land and Construction Policy Research Council of the LP, Chairman of Okinawa and Hokkaido Policy Research Council of the LP
1994/05/04	Shigeto NAGANO <sup>(2)</sup> Minister of Justice	None
1994/08/12	Shin SAKURAI Director General of the Environment	Chairman of Special Committee on Political Ethics and Election Law, Chairman of Research Commission on the Promotion of Electric Power Plant Production of the LDP
1995/11/09	Takami ETO, Director General of the Management and Coordination Agency	Chairman of Committee on the Development of the Chugoku Region of the LDP, Chairman of Special Committee on Water Resources Development, Leader of a major faction of the LDP (the group name is Eto-Kamei faction)
1999/10	Shingo NISHIMURA Parliamentary Vice Minister of the Defense Agency	Chairman of Standing Committee on Discipline of the House of Representatives, Chairman of Law Policy Research Council of the LP
2000/02/19	Michio OCHI Chairperson of the Financial Reconstruction Commission	None

(1) Official English translations of committees or commissions here follow those provided by the websites of the LDP (<http://www.jimin.jp/>) (March 2, 2002), by Foreign Affairs Division, International Affairs Department, Secretariat House of Representatives and by International Affairs Committee, Liberal Party.

(2) He stood as a candidate only once.

**Table 3 Relative Rates of Votes of the Ministers Concerned**

Year/Month /Day	Speaker and Status (at the time of the slip of the tongue)	Vote rates (%) and the election date		Change of placing among winners, (S):won (D): lost	Electoral district (number of seats, "S" for the single-member constituency)
		before slip of the tongue	after slip of the tongue		
1983/01/19	Yasuhiro NAKASONE Prime Minister	23.8 (1980/6/22)	30.1 (1983/12/18)	2 2 (S)	Gunma 3 (4)
1986/07-09	Masayuki FUJIO Minister of Education	18.6 (1986/7/6)	15.8 (1990/2/18)	1 2 (S)	Tochigi 2 (5)
1988/04-05	Seisuke OKUNO, Director General of National Land Agency	19.2 (1986/7/6)	14.6 (1990/2/18)	1 3 (S)	All Nara (5)
1990/09/21	Seiroku KAIJYAMA Minister of Justice	34.1 (1990/2/18)	31.2 (1993/7/18)	2 1 (S)	Ibaragi 2 (3)
1993/11	Keisuke NAKANISHI Director General of the Defense Agency	26.4 (1993/7/18)	35.1 <sup>(1)</sup> (1996/10/20)	3 1 (S)	Wakayama 1 (3) Wakayama 1 (S)
1994/05/04	Shigeto NAGANO <sup>(2)</sup> Minister of Justice				
1994/08/12	Shin SAKURAI Director General of the Environment	14.1 (1993/7/18)	40.8 (1996/10/20)	3 1 (S)	Niigata 3 (5) Niigata 2 (S)
1994/10/24	Ryutaro HASHIMOTO Minister of International Trade and Industry	28.4 (1993/7/18)	68.0 (1996/10/20)	1 1 (S)	Okayama 2 (5) Okayama 4 (S)
1995/11/09	Takami ETO, Director General of the Management and Coordination Agency	35.1 (1993/7/18)	55.5 (1996/10/20)	1 1 (S)	Miyazaki 1 (3) Miyazaki 2 (S)
1999/10	Shingo NISHIMURA Parliamentary Vice Minister of the Defense Agency	42.7 (1996/10/20)	15.9 <sup>(3)</sup> (2000/6/25)	1 4 (D)	Osaka 17 (S)
2000/02/19	Michio OCHI, Chairperson (Minister of State) of the Financial Reconstruction Commission	26.2 <sup>(6)</sup> (1996/10/20)	22.2 (2000/6/25)	2 2 (D)	Tokyo 6 (S)
2000/05/15-06/04-06/20	Yoshiro MORI Prime Minister	51.7 (1996/10/20)	64.4 (2000/6/25)	1 1 (S)	Ishikawa 2 (S)

Source: Adapted from Miyagawa (ed.) No.12-No.37

Notes

- (1) The single-member constituency system was introduced from the 41st general election on October 20, 1996. The numbers indicate the rates of votes in the single-member constituency after the 41st.
- (2) He ran for proportional representation of the House of Councilors only once.
- (3) He lost the election of the single-member constituency, but was elected in the proportional representation district.

**Table 4 The Results of the 38th and 39th Elections of the House of Representatives**

The figures are vote rates and the number of winners  
 The number of nonpartisan winners is not included.  
 indicates that the party in question did not run for the election

	The 38th election (1986/07/06) second Nakasone Cabinet		The 39th election (1990/02/18) first Kaifu Cabinet	
	<b>government party total</b>	<b>51.3</b>	<b>306</b>	<b>46.1</b>
Liberal Democratic Party	49.4	300	46.1	275
New Liberal Club	1.8	6		
<b>opposition parties total</b>	<b>45.1</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>46.0</b>	<b>215</b>
Japan Socialist Party	17.2	85	24.4	136
Komeito	9.4	56	8.0	45
Japanese Communist Party	8.8	26	8.0	16
Democratic Socialist Party	8.8	26	4.8	14
Social Democratic Federation	0.8	4	0.9	4

Source: Adapted from Miyagawa (1993), No.28, p210

**Table 5 The Results of the 40th and 41st Elections of the House of Representatives**

The figures show vote rates (upper line) and the number of winners  
 The number of nonpartisan winners is not included.  
 indicates that the party in question did not run for the election

	40th election (1993/07/18)		41st election (1996/10/20)				
			single-member constituency		proportional representation		total of winners
<b>government parties total</b>	<b>36.6</b>	<b>223</b>	<b>42.1</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>40.16</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>256</b>
Liberal Democratic Party	36.6	223	38.6	169	32.8	70	239
Social Democratic Party <sup>(1)</sup>			2.1	4	6.4	11	15
Sakigake			1.3	2	1.1	0	2
<b>opposition parties total</b>	<b>56.3</b>	<b>274</b>	<b>51.1</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>57.2</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>234</b>
Shinshinto			28.0	96	28.0	60	156
Shinseito	10.1	55					
Democratic Party of Japan			10.6	17	16.1	35	52
Japan Socialist Party	15.4	70					
Komeito	8.1	51					
Japan New Party	8.1	51					
Japanese Communist Party	7.7	15	12.6	2	13.1	24	26
Democratic Socialist Party	3.5	15					
SDF <sup>(2)</sup>	0.7	4					
Sakigake	2.6	13					

Source: Adapted from Miyagawa (1999), No.35, p234

(1) Formerly, Japan Socialist Party), (2) Social Democratic Federation



**Table 6 The Result in the Proportional Representation of the 41st and 42nd Elections of the House of Representatives**

The figures show vote rates and the number of winners  
indicates that the party in question did not run for the election  
In the 42nd election, the total number of seats was reduced by 20 seats.

	41st election (1996/10/20)		42nd election (2000/6/25)	
<b>government party total</b>	<b>40.2</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>41.69</b>	<b>80</b>
Liberal Democratic Party	32.8	70	28.3	56
Komeito			13.0	24
New Conservative Party			0.4	0
SDP	6.4	11		
Sakigake	1.1	0		
<b>opposition parties total</b>	<b>57.2</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>568</b>	<b>100</b>
Shinshinto	28.0	60		
Liberal Party			11.0	18
Democratic Party of Japan	16.1	35	25.2	47
Japanese Communist Party	13.1	24	11.2	20
Social Democratic Party <sup>(1)</sup>			9.4	15

Source: Adapted from Miyagawa (2000), No.37, p206

(1) Formerly, Japan Socialist Party

