

## European Approaches to Japanese Language and Linguistics

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# Introduction

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The study of language does not occur in a social vacuum. Scholars are part of society and for this reason their work reflects the period of time in which they live and the places where they work. The European tradition in the study of language has made many seminal contributions - theoretical, descriptive, or applied. While language and the study of language have been taught in academia for as long as universities have existed in Europe, it is generally agreed that linguistics only came into existence as a discipline in its own right with the posthumous publication of Ferdinand de Saussure's lectures on the study of language in 1916. Setting out from his seminal *Cours de linguistique générale*, students of language started looking at language as an autonomous and systematic whole where linguistic changes would need to be accounted for with reference to the overall systematic relations that constitute a language. This was a milestone for the development of philology and linguistics, and it was achieved in a European context. In Japan, the establishment of such a systematic and comprehensive study of language was greeted with much enthusiasm, and Saussure's *Cours* was published in a Japanese translation as early as 1928. Hideo Kobayashi, then professor of National Language at the Imperial University of Seoul, translated this work as *Gengogaku genron*, literally 'Principles of Linguistics'. What is more, he published new editions of his translation in 1940, 1941 and 1950 in order to share new insights gained from philological studies into Saussure's ideas on language. There are two lessons

to be learned from this brief review for our present volume. Firstly, the study of the Japanese language in Japan was largely influenced by European linguistic theory, and secondly, the foundational linguistic theory was developed on the basis of European languages. It is thus unsurprising to find that this kind of linguistic theory was criticized for the limitations resulting from such developments. Again, Japan was among the first countries in which criticism emerged. The criticism was twofold. To start with, it was argued that a European language theory could not be forced upon non-European languages, and another point of criticism was directed at Saussure's abstract idea of *langue*. In 1941 Motoki Tokieda published a linguistic theory that was based on the Japanese language, departed from the Japanese tradition of language study, and that tackled language on the level of concrete utterances, i.e. on the level of *parole*. It is hardly a coincidence that the title of his book was *Kokugogaku genron* (literally 'Principles of National Linguistics'), which was then translated into French as *Cours de linguistique japonaise*.

The above introduction serves to illustrate one important point. The study of language needs to be based both on linguistic theory and on the particularities of the given language under investigation. Having said that, it is also clear that European approaches to the Japanese language make for a welcome occasion to reflect on the nexus between linguistic theory, on the one hand, and on linguistic structures and data, on the other hand. It is no exaggeration to state that scholars of Japanese in Europe have different accesses to linguistic theory, developments and discussions and that they have particular data from Japan to feed into such discussions and developments. Likewise, European scholars act as knowledge brokers that enable the critical exchange of insights between Japan and Europe. It is unsurprising, therefore, to find that European scholars have made many important contributions to the study of Japanese since linguistics was established as an independent academic discipline. The list of names is long and only a few can be mentioned here, by way of example. The work of Yevgeny Polivanov, Nikolay Nevskiy, Günther Wenck and Jiří Neustupný come to mind, as well as - in a more contemporary setting - those of Alexander Vovin, Bjarke Frellesvig, Florian Coulmas and André Włodarczyk. Many researchers in Europe are following in these scholars' footsteps and the present volume features both already established figures and the latest newcomers to this tradition. We should also note in this context that 'European' today no longer refers to having a 'European nationality'. There are a great number of Japanese nationals employed in European academia and their work, too, is part of the European tradition.

Where, then, does the field of Japanese linguistics stand in 2020? We believe that there are two clear trends. For one thing, the field is extremely small, probably as an effect of the rise of social sciences

in Japanology and of the limited positions that Japanese Studies can offer. Often, there exist only a handful of specialists per country. Given the ongoing and increasingly in-depth specialization in linguistics, this means that large areas within linguistic studies are not (well) represented in Europe today. At present, Japanese syntax, discourse linguistics and pragmatics come to mind as examples of understudied sub-disciplines in Europe. This is a problem, as the fields in question constitute important and thriving areas of language study. The second trend is ongoing professionalization. European scholars no longer simply serve as knowledge brokers between Japan and Europe, but make important contributions in Japan and in Europe. This professionalization is also reflected in the fact that specialists in Japanese Studies are increasingly and prominently publishing in journals dedicated to linguistics rather than Japanese Studies. However, it will take time for this professionalism to trickle down to all levels of academia and to be clearly felt in all teaching activities at European universities and in the European school system. Therefore, we may be well advised to keep track of how the study of Japanese language and linguistics continues to evolve in Europe, to further the many positive developments we see at the moment, and to point to tasks that have yet to receive the attention they deserve.

The volume comprises two sections: “Research Papers”, in which different levels of linguistic analysis have been considered, including phonetics, phonology, morphosyntax, second language acquisition, pragmatics, translation studies, discourse analysis and sociology of language; and “Miscellaneous”, whose papers provide new insights into the philosophy of language, sociolinguistics and language teaching.

In the first section, Giuseppe Pappalardo, in his contribution *Linguistic Factors Affecting Moraic Duration in Spontaneous Japanese*, analyses the phonetic level and provides quantitative data about the influence of linguistic factors on mora duration in spontaneous Japanese, using a large corpus of spoken language. The results of his analysis suggest that the notorious mora-timed rhythm cannot be maintained in spontaneous speech, since potential compensation effects are inevitably prevented by the linguistic factors considered in the paper.

The phonological level is analysed in Connor Youngberg’s paper entitled *Syllable Weakening in Kagoshima Japanese: An Element-Based Analysis*. The author proposes the use of the Element Theory representational framework in order to describe the phenomenon of syllable weakening in Kagoshima Japanese.

Some insight into the morphophonology and morphosyntax of the Ainu language is offered in Elia Dal Corso’s paper entitled *The Interaction of Relativization and Noun Incorporation in Southern Hokkaidō Ainu*, which thoroughly describes indirect evidential constructions and suggests new perspectives on their syntactic and pragmatic analysis.

In their paper *Thinking-for-Speaking to Describe Motion Events: English-Japanese bilinguals' L1 English and L2 Japanese Speech and Gesture*, Noriko Iwasaki and Keiko Yoshioka examine how learning a foreign language may restructure bilingual speakers' thinking-for-speaking, using as informants thirteen English-speaking learners of L2 Japanese describing motion events both in English and Japanese. As a result, lower-proficiency informants showed a L1-to-L2 influence in speech and L2-to-L1 influence in gesture, while higher-proficiency participants did not show any L1-to-L2 influence.

The pragmatic level is considered in Paolo Calvetti's paper entitled *Strategies of Impoliteness in Japanese Spontaneous Talks*, in which the author presents and classifies different phonetic and lexical mechanisms to render impoliteness in Japanese, providing evidence to show that the Japanese language shares impoliteness strategies common to other languages.

An interesting perspective on audiovisual translation is provided by Francesco Vitucci in his paper *Ideological Manipulation in Interlingual Subtitling: The Japanese-Italian Translation of a 'nyūhāfu' Genderlect in the Movie "Close-Knit" by Ogigami Naoko*. He analyses the Japanese speech of the transgender protagonist of the movie and discusses issues related to the translation of her genderlect into Italian.

Berhard Seidl uses a corpus of 1,200 Japanese newspapers for a study in the fields of discourse analysis and metapragmatics in his paper titled *Corpuslinguistics as a Tool for Metapragmatics in Japan*. He statistically investigates pragememes on 'language decline' and demonstrates how many of them can be correlated with one or more of the main groups of discourse actors.

This section is concluded by an original study in the field of sociology of language entitled *Stirring the 'Language Policy Soup': Japanese in Language Education Policies in France and Finland* by Christian Galan and Riikka Länsisalmi. Japanese language education is illustrated through a culinary metaphor, by comparing it to Japanese restaurants: just as the number of restaurants offering a Japanese menu remains low and geographically dispersed – leaving potential customers dissatisfied – the number of schools and universities offering a Japanese language program is low. The paper offers an overview on language education policies in France and Finland.

The first paper of the "Miscellaneous" section is *L'esprit de celui qui parle: Wilhelm von Humboldt on Japanese and its Speakers* by Patrick Heinrich. He describes the notes produced by Humboldt on the Japanese language, based on the documents produced by Catholic missionaries. Through the study of the Japanese language, Humboldt tried to depict its perception by speakers, analysing some peculiar linguistic aspects.

*New Approach to Teaching Japanese Pronunciation in the Digital Era: Challenges and Practices* by Motoko Ueyama discusses the im-

portance, necessity and effectiveness of teaching prosodic aspects of Japanese pronunciation and prosody from an early stage of acquisition. Her essay describes the typological rarity of Japanese prosody and suggests new teaching strategies.

Laura Pani's *The Role of the Japanese Language in Venice: A Multi-disciplinary Perspective on Japanese Linguistic Landscape* describes and analyses the Japanese linguistic landscape in the historic centre of Venice, shedding light on the role that the Japanese language plays in creating and modifying the linguistic context of the city.

Lastly, Aldo Tollini's contribution *A Consideration About Competence in Kanji and their Teaching* deals with learning and teaching Japanese kanji from an empirical point of view. Tollini suggests a new approach, based on the contextualization of kanji education in the actual learning process, focusing on the learners and on their difficulties.

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